

**FRED MARCHANT**  
**Quang Tri Elegies**

—*for Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung*

**Route 9**

I am pretty sure that I would have died here  
    maybe here in the rain that comes down to pick at  
the red clay hardness of a long snake-road upward,  
    and I am pretty sure I would have killed here,  
and wanted to, or had to, or tried to, or didn't mean to,  
    with no god, and few others, to forgive me.

**Joss**

As I bow so that I and the burning sticks bow,  
    and my spine, my complex, pliable inner organs  
bow with me, each filled with a sorrow I hardly  
    know I have but which the honeyed, musky scent  
calls out, a sorrow that curls and rises like a dragon  
    before which all I am bows, and then bows again.

**Batteries**

Double A's die on the road heading west, near rubber  
    tree plantings the Swedes donated to bring back  
the land, miles of trees in rows so straight my camera  
    orders me to change the batteries, but I let the cells rest,  
and they recharge for more, one or two at a time so we  
    can get through the rows of graves, acres limed by them.

**Dug In**

Mist holding to the trees as if it didn't want to leave,  
    stones engraved with provinces the dead came from,  
my legs unsteady on the wet gravel, mind wandering  
    to what the nights were like, what lights shone across  
the valley, what smoke wisps would rise over the trees,  
    what low clangs, or whispers I wouldn't understand.

**Combat Base**

Practically nothing there, a sandbag bunker restored,  
plus a one-room museum on stilts, into which we walk  
empty handed, no straps over the shoulder, no mirror lens  
to zoom and widen, nothing to hide the face with,  
nothing to see with but retina, cones, and rods, the wires  
to the brain cells running for cover, huddled, shaking.

**Museum Pieces**

Still I love the web belt, its brass eyelets and cloth  
strong enough to hang a pair of canteens on,  
a bayonet, first aid pack, ammo pouches and holster,  
the thick fiber in the bottom of the display case,  
this durable gear, the stained canvas of jungle boots,  
a green helmet cover that belonged to someone.

**Quang Tri River**

Next day coming down from Lao Bao, you tell me  
you would sometimes swim here, the snipers asleep,  
old farmers and women working the fields, river children  
eager to bathe with you, your body given to this cold  
mountain stream, sweat falling away, pure flesh left,  
your open hands, your fingers, your mother's own.