

Dragons

for Krista, Minh & Chari

Isabela BANZON

Are there really dragons
in the nondescript
solid block of rock quarried a thousand years ago?
No matter what the angle,
no matter that we tilt our bodies
forward, sideward, backward to where the tiger-
and the snake-like hills are sentries,
I don't see the dragons.

Nine dragonscatting a pearl, our guide
from Hanoi says.
Does he mean *sitting* or *eating*? What's in a pearl?
I still don't see the dragons.
Dragon, power.
Use imagination.
He's memorized his English;
beyond the guidebook, nothing else.

The hills surround and fortify the absent palace,
the lake is like a moat;
but what is strategic planning to we
who merely backpack to seek the unfamiliar?
Perhaps it's almost
knowing what to trek, where to camp
when like the sun,
our restlessness turns imperious.

This remnant of a dynasty, of Le,
is geomancy consulted,
a perfect land and water complement.
Perhaps we travel to pause,
for balance.
Perhaps then I will see the dragons.