

edited by FRANK WYNNE

OUTER

LGBTQ writing
from Ancient Times
to Yesterday

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FIVE POEMS

Yau Ching (1966–)

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Yau Ching is a writer, poet, filmmaker and installation artist. While best known in the English speaking world for her films and installations, she is also the author of many books of poetry. Translations of her poems have appeared in *World Literature Today*, *Asymptote*, and other literary reviews. Yau Ching is a parrionate educator, and co-founded an educational organization for sexual minorities in Hong Kong, and the Asian Lesbian Film Festival in Taiwan, among other initiatives.

APRÈS GENET

As I sit here in this stately country manor, my thoughts reach out to you. I write: The world is filled with all these things I do not want, whereas I am filled with you. In *The Thief's Journal*, Genet says, I had a simple elegance, the easy bearing of the hopeless. My courage consisted in destroying all the usual reasons for living and unearthing whole new ones. The discovery came slowly. Like Genet, I too have labored to find a reason for living, but in contrast to what so many believe I found mine not in love but in what love cannot accomplish. A longing laced with sweat and tears that spills across the tree tops and scatters on the plains to become fodder for the birds. The sheer waste and hopelessness of love. And yet this very hopelessness forces me to confront my life. It forces me to live. At times like this, when things begin to fall apart—the final rallying call at Waterloo, Hitler in his Führerbunker beneath the Reich Chancellery, the long-awaited hour when the glory and the

grandeur that were Germany and England and France crumble into dust—one must feel a certain joyful release and lightness of being in which death itself seems ethereal as down. Xiang Yu, the hegemon-king whose strength could pull down mountains, turns to bid farewell to his beloved concubine and is felled by the knowledge that love cannot conquer all, that life and death and love and hatred are neither glorious nor grand. It is only at such moments that I can love even in the face of what love cannot accomplish; if the former makes me feel alive, the latter gives me reason for living.

A BEAUTIFUL CRISIS

I am my mom's
exemplar of a beautiful life
this fills me with suspicion of myself and the world
that represents me I quickly scoot sideways around and past
a series
of rectangular objects
and lug back a basket of small round Japanese
angel apples

they are crunchy and gone in five minutes
sometimes I remember to look up and trim the dead branches
when I got back from holiday the bougainvillea had half withered
it committed suicide by leaping off the balcony when the branch
broke

during the typhoon
the cats fight every day one is obese one is excessively thin
because
one keeps stealing the other one's food and the other one lets it
keep eating

until it throws up
and the cats never mop the floor
how can anyone maintain a semblance of so-called
peace and quiet in this kind of life never mind the content
a beautiful life is humanly impossible
all afternoon I'm stuck in a meeting to discuss fifteen new classes
for
the associate degree
financial fitness surgical enhancement the cerebrum and
cerebellum of
the employee

crisis management I'd like to enroll in a school like this the
parents I rely on to keep me alive moment by moment to keep my
sense of crisis alive how beautiful
how can I tell my mom your mom the world's moms that
I indeed am
the exemplar of a beautiful life
unsure if this is the fall of the beautiful or of the exemplary

I AM A FOOT

I have to turn in a one-line biography
which forces my presbyopic middle-aged eyes to take a hard
look at
what Yau Ching is
I am always over-acting the part
some things some tasks some likes and dislikes
on limited repeat
unlike wind flowers cats or even grass
I am not therefore I have no limits
a foot cannot step twice into the same river
before it steps out it has already become a different foot
how is it possible to become this foot
how is it possible to bear each stepping in and out in each
moment
the river is different
every inch of the foot
has already become the river

THE TEMPTATIONS OF EDEN

We are orphans
we don't belong in Asia
we've never had neighbors friends or brothers
all our lives we've been chased by monsters
we're chronically oxygen deprived
we can't even take a deep breath
when the past became now
when the lost was found
the angels filled in the holes
threw us onto the rubble of the city's ruins and locked the gate
so we'd slaughter each other
so we'd despise each other and cling to each other
blast ourselves into the void
at the speed of the fastest maglev
past endless mountains and rivers waiting
to be taken over
yet again by neighboring regions
this is Eden

ISLAND COUNTRY

There's this island
that used to have many languages now they've become
one called English
another called Chinese
you're not allowed to ever use
your own language
if your name is not an English name
the island will give you one

There's this island
that keeps imagining it's a country
keeps shouting about its honor and dignity! dignity! dignity!
shouting only makes it that much sadder and streaks its face with
enough tears
to drown five thousand years of grievances
the island makes a stack
of TV channels its howls quake the Great Wall

There's this island
that only has walls no doors
no one can leave so it's decided
it's a multinational corporation so it shouts about being
international!
international! international!
to leave the island you must be extra patriotic: shout
go north! go north! go north! then shout
national shame! shame! shame! The more it yells the more hate it
has
it rues being born in times like these it bemoans its wasted talent
resents the rich despises the poor and banishes all the beautiful
people

it can't poison itself fast enough with the MSG it puts in roast
duck

There's this island that
is hurrying to build a wall
to barricade itself
no exit no entry
except on a private jet
because the people on the island
have long since stopped believing
this island (or two) exists

*"Après Genet" is translated by Steve Bradbury and the remaining poems
by Chenxin Jiang.*