



W O R L D
P O E T R Y
S A L T O N

poet Victoria Chang
yuniya edi kwon musician
host Patricio Ferrari

date

JUN
17

location

**Stavros Niarchos
Foundation Library**

LIMELIGHT POETRY & NYPL PRESENT

World Poetry Salon II:

Victoria Chang,
yuniya edi kwon
and
Patricio Ferrari

June 17, 2025

Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library



Limelight Poetry is a 501(c)
(3) nonprofit organization
dedicated to promoting world
poetry, founded in 2024 in New
York City by poet Wang Yin.
It invites outstanding poets
and artists from around the
world to share their work in
various forms, with the goal
of showcasing poetry in under-
represented languages. Drawing
on the city's rich cultural
resources, Limelight Poetry
connects poetry with other
art forms, fostering a global
exchange of poetic expression.
It welcomes audiences into a
vibrant and inspiring world of
poetry, music, and beyond.



Victoria Chang

Victoria Chang's most recent book of poems is *With My Back to the World*, published in 2024 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the U.S. and Corsair/Little Brown in the U.K. It received the Forward Prize in Poetry for Best Collection and was named a finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. *OBIT* (Copper Canyon Press, 2020), received the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in Poetry, and the PEN/Voelcker Award. It was also a finalist for the Griffin International Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, as well as longlisted for the National Book Award. Other recent books include *The Trees Witness Everything* and her nonfiction book, *Dear Memory*. She has written several children's books as well. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Chowdhury International Prize in Literature, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. She is the Bourne Chair in Poetry at Georgia Tech and Director of Poetry@Tech.

MY MOTHER'S TEETH

My Mother's Teeth—died twice, once in 1965, all pulled out from gum disease. Once again on August 3, 2015. The fake teeth sit in a box in the garage. When she died, I touched them, smelled them, thought I heard a whimper. I shoved the teeth into my mouth. But having two sets of teeth only made me hungrier. When my mother died, I saw myself in the mirror, her words around my mouth like powder from a donut. Her last words were in English. She asked for a Sprite. I wonder whether her last thought was in Chinese. I wonder what her last thought was. I used to think that a dead person's words die with them. Now I know that they scatter, looking for meaning to attach to like a scent. My mother used to collect orange blossoms in a small shallow bowl. I pass the tree each spring. I always knew that grief was something I could smell. But I didn't know that it's not actually a noun but a verb. That it moves.

OPTIMISM

Optimism—died on August 3, 2015, a slow death into a pavement. At what point does a raindrop accept its falling? The moment the cloud begins to buckle under it or the moment the ground pierces it and breaks its shape? In December, my mother had her helper prepare a Chinese hotpot feast. My mother said it would probably be her last Christmas. I laughed at her. She yelled at my father all night. I put a fish ball in my mouth. My optimism covered the whole ball as if the fish had never died, had never been gutted and rolled into a humiliating shape. To acknowledge death is to acknowledge that we must take another shape.

AMBITION

Ambition—died on August 3, 2015, a sudden death. I buried ambition in the forest, next to distress. They used to take walks together until ambition pushed distress off the embankment. Now, they put a bracelet around my father's ankle. The alarm rings when he gets too close to the door. His ambitious nature makes him walk to the door a lot. When the alarm rings, he gets distressed. He remembers that he wants to find my house. He thinks he can find my house. His fingerprints have long vanished from my house. Some criminals put their fingers on electric coils of a stove to erase their fingerprints. But it only makes them easier to find. They found my father in the middle of the road last month, still like a bulbless lamp, unable to recall its function, confused like the moon. At the zoo, a great bald eagle sits in a small cage because of a missing wing. Its remaining wing is grief. Above the eagle, a bird flying is the eagle's memory and its prey, the future.

THE BEES

The Bees—268 million years old from the Philippines, passed away on April 26, 2217 in Nome, Alaska. The detaching icebergs crushed the bees who used to fly over conference rooms. Once I nearly died in a small plane with a CEO, CFO, and COO during their IPO. On the ground, the CEO glared at me, as if I had caused the storm. As if the yellow lights had come from my mind. As if the buzzing had come from my shaking. As if the lightning were a box I had tripped over. Maybe he was right. Maybe I had become estranged from a part of myself that wanted to stay alive. That wanted them to remain alive. In the same way I had become estranged from my mother forever, but not from her death.

To Age

When the stars hit the
windows now, they turn into
flies. Who knew they would come down?

Fly

What happened to the
eagle that lost its wing and
lived in the small cage,
feral like silence.
We stood there with our futures,
filming with our phones.
I wonder if the bird felt
me replay it on the plane.

Calling Late

The men used to call
at all hours, but what I miss
most are the late-night
talks, ones where I held the phone
so close, it pressed like a gun.

Little Soul

I rode on your back
until your knees broke and now
one mile left, I must toss you.

When the War Is Over

I once saw the deer.
They were all wearing blue scarves.
We have finally finished
killing everything.
We are now looking ahead
but have killed past the future.

Turning

My mother is dead.
The lemons still turn yellow,
the trout still stare emptily,
desire is still free.
We still love many people,
eat peaches as if kissing.

The Lovers

There is a wildfire
starving on top of a lake.
See how the water holds fire
but cannot end it?
We insist on love
when all we want is mercy.

The Gods

The fact that leaves can't
be put back on trees makes me
think that you do not exist.

On a Clear Day, 1973

On a clear day,
the horses

across the field
and had

people who
hunched over

a clear day, all the
sounds fit

What if our
thinking was

When out, it
becomes

of thinking but all
the thinking

only 48. On
clear days

And 48
apples.

6 dead
Asian women who

morning, I lean in
closer to the

both the
outline and the

disappeared. Just
the apples

become
rectangles. When

their apples were
far away.

into the boxes.
On any clear

never meant to
come out?

weapons, takes
on different

is divided
into portions.

there are only
48 birds,

I keep counting
grids.

don't fit into
48 boxes.

mirror and
someone has

outlined. That
lines are

they had been
fed were left.

people found them,
they still

But the sounds
of their

. day, all my
thinking fits into

If it only
remains thinking

shapes with
sharp points.

Today, I am hungry
but all the

48 people,
and 48

But no
matter how

All night, my
thoughts are

drawn lines
across my face.

not meant
to hold in

The apples
were strewn

gathered and
ate them. The

chewing were
over here. On

boxes that can't
be opened.

within
boxes?

Today, there is
no shortage

portions are gone,
there are

houses. And
48 wars.

I try, I still
get

shaped like
birds. In the

I realize that
failure consists of

our
emptiness.

WITH MY BACK TO THE WORLD, 1997

This year I turned my back to the world. I let language face the front. The parting felt like a death. The first person ran away like a horse. When the first person left, there was no second or third person as I had originally thought. All that remained was repetition. And blue things. This year I stopped shaking the rain off of umbrellas and nothing bad happened.

The terror of this year was emptiness. But I learned that it's possible for a sentence to have no words. That the meaning of a word can exist without the word. That life can still occur without a mind. That emptiness still swarms without the world. That it can be disconnected from the wall and still light up. The best thing about emptiness is if you close your eyes in a field, you'll open your eyes in a field.

FRIENDSHIP, 1963

I came to the city so I could see gold. When I arrived though, the leaves were gold too and I became confused. I called the front desk four times and Angel answered each time. By the third call, he ended with talk soon. In the morning, a different man answered and I burst into tears. On 53rd Street, small children kept on running into me. A father yelled so loudly at the boy on the scooter that I thought he knew I was carrying death on my back. By the time I arrived at the museum, there was a long line. The bald man in front of me kept turning around to look at me. I could tell by his forehead that he could hurt me. When I finally found the room, I was the only one in there. Everyone else was below me, in the Picasso room. While I stared at the gold rectangles, two attendants talked about whether to work overtime and get paid time-and-a-half. I wanted to tell them that there's no such thing as time, just time and a half. Sometime in the night, Etel Adnan had died. I had just seen her paintings the day before. The crowds were large and I wondered whether our looking had accelerated her death. When I took a photo of Agnes's piece, I saw my dark reflection on the gold. I started counting the grids but the bald man came up next to me. Suddenly there were two dark shadows on the gold. I asked him to step away but when he said, No, it was Agnes's voice.

PEAR TREE

This squirrel has a dark patch on its face. I doubt that it is the same squirrel from yesterday. Maybe we're not

meant to be anything but many people at once. Our selves at odds with our other selves. On the best day,

their sullen backs to each other. I face the other living eucalyptus in the backyard. Aware of my back to the

missing tree. I have never once written something slowly, due to a fear of being corrected by my own

thinking. I know my overwriting has something to do with the tree and its absence. A new desire to grow

light. What am I if I no longer need my dead parents? I have lived a thousand lives since then, exterminated

two thousand stones. I now have love all to myself. When you have love all to yourself, you have so much

of it that it's no longer just a premonition of itself. It starts to mingle. Like Klimt who gave the Pear Tree

to his mistress, Emilie Flöge, but continued to visit the painting, filling in all the bare spots. So that

what remained was love on top of love and more pears, all the sunlit pears.

ODE TO JOY

Where double-breasted cormorants fly back and forth. On a highway of lack and joy. Mouths empty one way, full of dying fish on the way back. The fish is grief but the bird flying back to the tree is joy, meaning grief is inside the mouth of joy. Lately, all I can look at is the dark green covering the gold. Maybe joy and grief are the same electric wire. We watched the cormorants go back and forth all morning. In that moment, my mouth tasted like dead fish. I thought of how my father always gave the fish eyeball to an honored guest. The long dinners, large round tables where the fish's eye would stare, glassy and open. Of how life is a long series of being looked at and looking. I always thought that being looked at was the goal. We talked about the cormorants and the fish. Then the sun came up. The bird froze in the middle of the sky. Nothing moved but the fish's eye in the bird's mouth. Some days, gold is inside green. Other days, green is inside gold. There must be a reason why we can see all of it at once.

BOARD OF ADVISER

Adonis
Forrest Gander
Jeffrey Yang
Robert Currie
Shen Wei
Bin Ju
Du Yun

BOARD MEMBER

John Tsung
Xiao Yu
Fangming Shi
Wang Yin
Jiaoyang Li
Yueyue Wenren

WORK TEAM

Patricio Ferrari – Host & Academic Advisor
Shangyang Fang – Host & Academic Advisor
Leonard Schwartz – Host & Academic Advisor
Matt Turner – Translation Consultant and Editor
Cleo Li-Schwartz – Translation Consultant and Editor
Qingqing Cai – Translation Consultant and Editor
Cléo Charpantier – Newsletter Editor
Qixin Zhang – Visual Concept Designer
Ruoyun Chen – Photographer & Documentarian
Peng Yu – Photographer
Yuling Zhang – Designer

**THE LIMELIGHT POETRY
STAFF AND BOARD OF
DIRECTORS EXTEND OUR DEEP
GRATITUDE FOR THE GENEROUS
SUPPORT OF OUR DONORS:**

Forrest Gander

Yu Fu

Anonymous

Joe Morra

Xu Bing

Yueyue Wenren

Yang Ming

Xiaoxia Li

Ruogu Liu

Yan Ci

Zhaohui Peng & Jun Jun

Ling Zhang

JEDIDIAH PUBLISHING INC

Bin Ju

Malena Zhang

Feng and Chen Partners Design LLC.

Qi Wenhua

Jian Liu

Hongling Zhang

Hong Chen

Bei Dao

Julia Du

Tang Yinjiu



limelight
poetry



New York
Public
Library



limelightpoetry.com



DONATE TO LIMELIGHT POETRY