

Poems

Marilyn Chin



Marilyn Chin is an award-winning poet and author. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Portland, Oregon, she writes Asian American classics that are taught in classrooms internationally. Marilyn Chin's books of poems include *A Portrait of the Self as Nation*, *Hard Love Province*, *Rhapsody in Plain Yellow*, *Dwarf Bamboo*, and *The Phoenix Gone*, *The Terrace Empty*. She also published a book of magical fiction called *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen*. In addition to writing poetry and fiction, she has translated poems by the modern Chinese poet Ai Qing and co-translated poems by the Japanese poet Gozo Yoshimasu. Chin has won numerous awards, including the United Artist Foundation Fellowship, the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship at Harvard, the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship at Bellagio, the Anisfield Wolf Book Award, two NEAs, the Stegner Fellowship, the PEN/Josephine Miles Award, five Pushcart Prizes, a Fulbright Fellowship to Taiwan, and the Ruth Lilly Prize for the Lifetime Achievement in Poetry. Chin is featured in a variety of anthologies, including *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* and *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, *The Penguin Anthology of 20th Century Poetry*, and *The Best American Poetry*. She was featured in Bill Moyers' PBS series *The Language of Life*, and *Poetry Everywhere*, introduced by Garrison Keillor. She has read and taught workshops all over the world. Recently, she was guest poet at universities in Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manchester, Sydney, Berlin, Iowa, and

elsewhere. She is Professor Emerita at San Diego State University and presently serves as a Chancellor at the Academy of American Poets.

Beijing Haiku (Series 1)

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A creepy ghoulish moth a good-for-nothing-cat
rubs against my leggings

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Half a life is not an unfinished life she murmurs

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Migrant sparrow on bamboo scaffolding coughs

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I sit and sit until my ass is rotten
(can't sanitize my mind)

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She's addicted to "Dae Jang Geum"
I've succumbed to "Moonlight Resonance"

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She says *I love you I hate you You have wasted my life!*
我愛你，我恨你，你浪費了我的生命！

*

At Yonghe Gong I burnt incense at the Great Buddha's toenail

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Perfume of sick mother bleach of departed fa-
ther

A scent like sea cucumber

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Death haiku

Won't you change your strategy

The Ballad of Student X

In TJ he downed eight shots of mezcal, ate the worm.
Two prostitutes and a hellhound
Stole his skateboard and hundreds in cash,
Stabbed his friend, while he blacked out in a ditch.

His mother wired me five thousand to bail him out.
He's an animal, a jackass, but he's my student,
If he dies in a TJ prison, he'll be on my conscience.

She said, "He got straight As and decent SATs.
Captain of the football team in Junior High.
After my divorce, he went through a bad patch.
Could've been All-American, he's exceptional. Give him a break."

He wrote from rehab, "I found God."
A tweet from a half-way house, he saw Krishna
At a dude ranch, he shouted Allah on a mountain top.

He cried for salvation, world peace and love.
Some 12-step blather, don't believe a word of it.

Spring break—
He smashed into a tuk-tuk in Changmai,
Maimed an old pedestrian in Phuket.
Plied them with cash,
No questions asked.

"Can you give me an incomplete and comment on my poems?
There's one about my grandmother who died of Covid."
We shared a virtual hug, teared up on Zoom.

Next week, he drove his Beemer off a cliff.
Lucky, he landed on a giant banyan tree,
"Got away without a scratch."

Instagrams of Frat parties, sake bombs at Yuki's,
Arms around bronzed girls in bikinis and sunsets.

"Please, Professor, two more days,
I'm blogging about MLK, writing an opus.
Hand-rolling Maui Wowie
For social justice."

Last week, he came to me in a dream
Dressed for Mortal Kombat, lizard green.
After decapitating a jihadist
And three cleaver-wielding ghouls,

He emerged from a flaming school bus
Showered and shaved.

How we heal this nation, I do not know.
Primal sins erupt through tortured souls.

He graduated with his brothers, Magna cum laude,
Chanting “Liberté, égalité, fraternité! Or death!”

Folksongs, Revisited

Eggplant

Your mother’s eggplant
You kept on the vine too long
It is black now, cracked and overripe
Should I throw it out?

Please don’t, let’s make use of it
For the autumn equinox
We’ll dry the belly in the sun
And replant the seeds

Suzie Asado

Suzie Asado, bitter green tea
Please add honey and make it sweet
She was afraid of radiation, upstream
So she threw out the *Sencha*
Matcha, and *Kombucha*
And kept the *Jasmine Green*
But Suzie, it’s laced with arsenic!
The Chinese earth, too, is mean
Now Suzie has recycled her tins
And drinks plain water from a Sippy Cup