

Disorientation

A Novel



Elaine Hsieh Chou

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*To Hsieh Hsiu-Hua, who hid in the mountains, eating raw cabbage, and
survived the bombs*

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PART I

Fall Quarter

The Curious Note

On September ninth, Ingrid Yang could be found cramped over a desk, left foot asleep, right hand swollen. She had Xiao-Wen Chou on the mind, so much so, she felt his allusions and alliterations leaking from her every orifice and puddling beneath her. She was sucking on the ends of her hair, then sniffing the damp locks, before picking at the eczema patches on her ankles. Her aching eyes were marbled pink from a sleepless night, punctuated by unnecessary trips to the bathroom. She simply idled on the toilet with her eyes closed, nothing going out of, or into, her body.

Even on the rare occasions sleep visited, Ingrid was plagued by a constant, pinching pain in her stomach. Sometimes she imagined, hopefully, that she was developing ulcers. No one could fault her for failing her dissertation because of stomach ulcers, could they? Pneumonia, then? What about mono? But how to contract these illnesses was another question entirely. The black market was the obvious choice—but then again, so was an undergrad frat party.

Pulling her laptop close, she searched “fastest way to contract mono,” followed by “top ten deathly illnesses.”

No, Ingrid Yang was not doing well.

She was twenty-nine years old and in mounting debt from her undergraduate degree. Four years ago, she had passed her comprehensive exams and started her dissertation. This year, the eighth and final year of her PhD, her funding would run out—an unhappy situation in any circumstance, but compounded by the expiration of her student loan deferral. Somehow, in spite of all this financial doom and gloom, this was also the year she had to produce two hundred fifty pages on Xiao-Wen Chou. And not just any two hundred fifty pages—they had to be shockingly original *and* convincing! Enough to pass muster with her exacting advisor

and an even more exacting dissertation committee. Enough to secure her the prestigious postdoc fellowship established in Xiao-Wen Chou's name.

But after hundreds of hair-pulling hours spent at the archive, all she had accomplished was fifty pages of scrambled notes on Chou's use of enjambment. Plus an addiction to antacids.

Make no mistake, it wasn't like she hadn't *tried*. She had come up with ideas of her own! The eternal inner conflict between eastern selflessness and western individuality in Chou's poetry. The immigrant's assimilation into American society as endless negotiation in Chou's poetry. Chou's poetry and the impossibility of cultural translation. Chou's poetry and the longing for irretrievably lost motherland and mother tongue, etc.

The problem was some other scholar had, of course, snatched up the idea first. No other Chinese American poet had been so widely read in America, had been so consistently reprinted year after year. The so-called Chinese Robert Frost was taught to students in high schools and colleges all across the country (and occasionally in gifted middle school classes). In every bookstore and library, a good twelve inches of space was reserved for his prolific work. Even those who wanted nothing to do with literature, who couldn't tell you Chou's name much less how to spell it, had bumped into his poems. In dentist offices, middle-class homes and ethnic restaurants, his quotations adorned boxes of tea, wall decorations and watercolor calendars. Xiao-Wen Chou was beloved—more so after he passed away from pancreatic cancer seven years ago.

What could Ingrid possibly offer on the late canonical poet that no one else had? She had memorized Chou's poems backwards and forwards, riffled through innumerable archive boxes, worn out her copy of his biography, read incomprehensible secondary sources, read them a third time. She had even attended a pricey international conference in New York in the hopes of gently plagiarizing some Argentinian or Swedish scholar's paper. When she was still a TA, she had surreptitiously assigned her undergrads essay prompts that fed directly into her own research. She had let her other interests fall to the wayside, not to mention healthy eating and exercise. She had postponed her wedding for another year. From the moment she woke up to the moment she pretended to sleep, Chouian sonnets, villanelles, odes and elegies consumed her. What more could she do? Hire a ghostwriter?

Alas, Ingrid was approaching the problem as though it held a logical solution, but her dissertation woes were preordained from the start: she had never wanted to research Chou in the first place.

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE student at Barnes University, Ingrid had waffled over choosing a major. She plodded along in her general education classes, dozing off in Physics of Music and floundering in Beginning Russian, all while fretting over her aimless, and expensive, academic taste testing. Then, to fulfill a writing requirement, she enrolled in Early 20th-Century Poetry taught by Professor Newman.

Judith Newman didn't walk into a room; the room opened up to accommodate her. She had terrifying pale blue eyes and cropped silver hair and dressed like she was heading to an avant-garde art exhibit in Berlin. She made the auditorium erect with attention. Even the boys in Ingrid's other classes, who always shoehorned an obscure philosopher into every single discussion in a bid to win their professors' respect, were awed into submission. Judith taught without notes, for one thing, and without the crutch of technology (she pitied her colleagues who relied on Word Art to dazzle and distract). She paced back and forth in front of the blackboard, stopping only to call point-blank on a trembling student. When Judith lectured on modernist poetry, Ingrid was convinced she'd yanked back the curtain of reality. What was once a poem was now an ideological stance on language, war, life, death! She was seduced by the modernist obsession with form over content, the abstract over the concrete (suffice it to say, classes on postcolonial and feminist lit made her feel . . . uncomfortable).

And so Ingrid fell into the arms of her first great love. She spent hours in the library fashioning a poem into something greater than itself. While her roommate performed a halfhearted hand job on a lacrosse player in the top bunk, she hid under her covers with a flashlight in the company of Stein and Mallarmé. Analyzing poetry was *cool*. Did some people *actually* believe a poem about a red wheelbarrow was about a red wheelbarrow when it was *obviously* about existential dread? Like a literary detective, Ingrid derived no greater satisfaction than from spotting what swam beneath the surface of words.

And she was good at it. Her paper “Waste, Différance and the Loss of Center in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*” had nabbed an elusive A from Professor Newman. At the end of the semester, she invited Ingrid along with four other students to dine at her house. And what a house it was! Professor Newman’s interior design scheme was in fact modeled after an avant-garde art exhibit in Berlin, unlike Ingrid’s parents’ house, which was cluttered, tacky and had *zero* stainless steel bidets.

Judith was married to a bearded philosophy professor who possessed dual Italian citizenship and, from what Ingrid could tell, excellent calves. For that evening’s dinner, he whipped up homemade clam pasta and a tiramisu that somehow tasted . . . erotic. They were parents to twins who sagely commented on the day’s foreign policy scandals, as if they weren’t still dependent on training wheels. Gazing at the perfect family before her, woozy with thirty-year-old wine and imported shellfish, Ingrid knew then: she was meant to be a professor of modernist literature. Just like Judith Newman.

Becoming a professor would resolve several of Ingrid’s hang-ups, one of which was the intellectual shortage she felt the moment she’d stepped onto campus. While her classmates compared notes about reading Melville and watching Truffaut, she stared down at her lap. Her parents had never bought her such books or rented her such movies. She arrived at college missing half the baggage they’d been prepackaged with.

Then, too, was the latent fear someone like her was not supposed to be good at English. In first grade, she’d been placed in remedial English not because it wasn’t her native language, but because she’d been too shy to speak up in class. Then, in sixth grade, her English teacher had accused her of plagiarizing her *Of Mice and Men* essay on the grounds it was “suspiciously articulate.”

Added to that, Ingrid was obsessive and neurotic, traits well suited for academia. The real world, or nonacademic world, frightened her with its largeness and unknownness—far better to cozily burrow into old texts, to safely engage with dead authors who couldn’t talk back. To live inside the past was to debark from contemporary events and concerns, floating away until she landed on a minuscule, highly specialized planet where only a dozen other beings spoke the same language. Ingrid could conceive of nothing better. She even imagined a new wardrobe to complement her future title as Professor Yang: brooches, practical but devastatingly

fashionable eyeglasses, perfume that reminded people of their great-aunt (in a good way).

But when she asked Judith to be her senior thesis advisor, she was met with a cruel shock: Judith was leaving the English department for the Comparative Literature department.

“C-Comp Lit?” she stuttered.

“Don’t look so surprised, Ingrid. Modernism and deconstruction and post-structuralism—it’s all a dying field,” every other word punctuated by a quick half smile. “Now comparative literature, on the other hand. Being able to move between mediums, be it film or graphic novels—that’s where the future of academia lies. You have to think past the degree, consider what job opportunities are out there. Academia is a tough game. You’ll need a unique . . . angle.”

Judith squeezed her hands together, and, Ingrid imagined, her thighs under the desk.

“And your particular background is so *unique*. It doesn’t have to be a disadvantage—it can be an *advantage*. Do you understand what I mean?”

Ingrid nodded enthusiastically and jotted down the words “unique” and “advantage” in her notebook.

“Good. I’m glad we’re on the same page. In fact, you’d be just right for a new project I’m working on.” Judith chewed on the end of her glasses as she studied Ingrid. “Research assistantships are usually reserved for graduate students, but I could make an exception for you.”

And so Ingrid, being neither Japanese nor interested in Japan, wrote her thesis on 1920s Japanese silent film. Afterwards, the jump from Comp Lit to East Asian Studies was a relatively short one. When Judith was poached by a more well-endowed university, she left Ingrid with a parting gift: a new academic advisor, Michael Bartholomew, a “dear colleague” of hers.

“I know you’re interested in pursuing a PhD,” she said. “Talk to Michael. He’ll know exactly how to help.”

B_{ARNES} **U**_{NIVERSITY MADE UP} the center of Wittlebury, Massachusetts. The private research university was home to roughly one thousand undergraduate students and nearly double the amount of graduate students. Founded in

1889, Barnes was not a top-tier nor a lower-tier university, but a firmly middling institution, propped up by alumni donations, nepotism and one illustrious (former) professor: Xiao-Wen Chou. The campus was attractive, with redbrick buildings scattered between virile green lawns, clusters of neatly groomed trees and a quad designed to discourage protests.

Inside the main library's basement was the Xiao-Wen Chou archive. Acquired after his death, it housed all the distinguished poet's books, journals, manuscripts, reviews, letters and other miscellany. In addition to the archivist's desk were eight others, each furnished with a globe lamp. The dark mahogany walls were accented with photos of Chou and prints of traditional Chinese paintings, characterized by plum tree blossoms, mountains, cranes and peasants bent over rice paddies. Chou's book covers looked more or less identical, though they also featured flowery fans, silhouettes of dark-haired women and chopsticks resting delicately on porcelain bowls.

Ingrid got up from her desk, left foot still asleep, and hobbled to the archivist's desk. She planned to check out box number fifteen, the same one she'd examined yesterday, and guessed it would be an equally fruitless endeavor, but what other choice did she have? She needed to kill time, as if it had a neck she could wrap her hands around until it produced, say, an original and convincing idea.

She stood before the archivist, smiling widely, hoping Margaret Hong would smile back at her. They had never exchanged many words, but Ingrid liked to imagine they shared an unspoken intimacy since she spent significant time studying her instead of the archive materials.

Margaret only ever wore thick brocade embroidered with vulgar-looking peonies, peacocks or pagodas. After stalking her online, Ingrid learned she sewed them herself and sold them for exorbitant prices. In her desk drawer, she kept a packet of salted dried plums she discreetly sucked on and indiscreetly spat out, and yet her ruby-red lipstick never strayed. Ingrid often saw her wriggle her shoes off to stretch her plump toes in their sheer stockings. When she thought no one was looking, she'd reach around to the back of her skirt to unglue her underwear from between her derriere. Word around the archive had it that Margaret was a former martial arts grandmaster but because the rumor reinforced a cliché, no one dared confirm the truth with her.

Most recently, Ingrid liked to picture Margaret and Daryl Abrams-Wu entangled in an illicit affair. Daryl, the lanky archive intern, habitually wore a spiked dog collar, painted his nails black and maintained a long slick of hair strategically placed over one eye.

“I said, did you reserve the box online,” Margaret repeated.

The image of her straddling Daryl on the accessible toilet evaporated.

“Uh, no. Sorry.”

Margaret sighed heavily, as if Ingrid were the most useless archive visitor she’d ever encountered. She walked to the back and returned with a gray box and a pair of white cotton gloves.

“Thanks!” Ingrid said with a forced smile.

Margaret didn’t smile back. Perhaps the affair with Daryl had soured.

Ingrid carried box number fifteen to her desk and yawned. For an hour, her gaze alternated between her laptop and legal pad. She wrote one sentence, then crossed it out. Typed another one, then deleted it. Clicked undo, changed a preposition, then deleted it again.

Yes, writing a dissertation was its own level in hell.

She paused her self-flagellation to check her email: yet another message from Michael asking to “discuss the progress of your dissertation.” A sharp pang stabbed the lower left corner of her stomach. She junked the email.

After her meetings with Michael, Ingrid always left discombobulated, as though he’d taken her apart and put her back together slightly awry. Their first meeting was indelibly inked into her mind. That spring morning had been muggy, with thin clouds crisscrossing the sky. She was dressed in an ankle-length skirt, an oversized sweater and worn brown oxfords. A tortoiseshell clip at the nape of her neck restrained her tangled and unwashed hair. She was twenty-two years old, nearing the end of her undergraduate degree, and, though exhausted, the prospect of conducting her own research seized her with an excitement second only to the time she’d given herself an orgasm.

She had known Judith would guide her in the right direction. But who was this Michael Bartholomew? She checked her notebook again for directions to his office, located in the East Asian Studies department on the fourth floor of the Humanities Block. She knew little about the department—only that it had come under controversy a few years ago for subsuming the short-lived existence of the Asian American Studies department.

Ingrid pushed open a heavy door and stepped into a dim hallway overseen by twitching fluorescent lights. The walls begged for a fresh coat of paint; the carpet, an aggressive steam clean. She knocked on Michael's door and found him bent over a whistling kettle.

"Gao shan tea?"

A tall, striking man in his sixties, with long gray hair tied in a loose ponytail, he appeared to look down on her even when they were sitting face-to-face.

Ingrid took the red clay cup he offered and blinked. Michael's office wasn't in a state of disrepair; it was bright, open and modern. She felt a sudden, intense desire to urinate and searched for the culprit: by the window squatted an artificial bonsai zen garden fountain.

"So, Ingrid, I hear you've decided to torture yourself by doing a PhD?" Michael asked good-humoredly.

Ingrid smiled as though constipated.

"Excellent, excellent," Michael beamed. He leaned back in his silk-upholstered chair. "What do you plan to specialize in?"

"Well, I was thinking modernist poetry. Ezra Pound's translation of Chinese—"

Michael gasped. Ingrid looked around in a panic—had she spilled her tea?

"Oh, Ingrid, Ingrid, Ingrid. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but the English department has claimed Pound. They've made that very clear over the years." When he smiled, his broad teeth loomed over the crags of his face. "I would think twice before writing on one of *their* poets. The English department has proven itself to be, I'll go ahead and say it, a xenophobic department. They're very . . . traditional."

"But my senior thesis, in addition to Japanese silent film, references the overlap with modernist poetic aesthetics—"

"Tsk, tsk, tsk! Why delve into that painful past? If you ask me, the English department behaved shamefully, awarding first place in the Humanities Honors Awards to who was it—oh, yes, Quentin Ferguson—after Judith told me *you* had worked so diligently."

Ingrid glanced at the calendar on his wall: two koi fish intertwined like yin and yang.

"Every department is being defunded. In a few years, I doubt the English department will even exist." Michael chuckled and reached for two silver

Baoding balls nestled in an engraved wooden box. “Do you know what department receives *more* funding year after year?”

“Er—STEM?”

“No, Ingrid—*my* department.”

“Well, I wouldn’t even know what to—”

“Oh, I know what you’re thinking: everyone’s done everything. Right? Sure, you could write a dissertation about this or that censored Beijing installation artist or the newest documentary filmmaker who went undercover in North Korea. But that won’t get you *tenure*. Sure, you could bounce around from adjunct to adjunct position across the country, with no healthcare or benefits.” He checked Ingrid’s expression before continuing. “A former student of mine once pulled out her own molar.”

Ingrid swallowed.

Michael leaned closer. “You know what *does* get you tenure?”

She shook her head solemnly.

“The canon.”

“The canon?” Ingrid whispered.

“Xiao-Wen Chou.”

“But he’s been researched to death!” Without meaning to, she had risen from her chair. She coughed and sank back down.

Though Ingrid didn’t particularly like or dislike the father of Chinese American poetry, their first encounter was a supremely uncomfortable memory she’d prefer to forget. In ninth grade, as her teacher lectured on Chou, she repeatedly stopped to ask Ingrid questions like how to pronounce “Xiao-Wen Chou” (er—the way you said it?), where Wuyuan Village was located (somewhere inside China?) and lastly, if she had any firsthand knowledge of “the Chinese American experience” (is this going to be on the test?) while the other students snickered.

“The same could be said for Shakespeare, no? Let me ask you something. What poet is taught to freshmen at this university every year? That Beijing installation artist no one will remember in a few months? Or Xiao-Wen Chou?” Michael let the Baoding balls roll to a standstill and leveled her with his full gaze, partially hidden beneath a low brow.

“I—I just thought I could try something different—”

“Listen, Ingrid, I’m watching out for your best interests. And I’m going to let you in on some confidential information.”

She held her breath.

“Professor Zhao is retiring soon. The university’s been pressuring her for a while now. They won’t fill her position immediately, but they’ll be looking for another Chouian scholar in a few years. They’ll want someone young and energetic. Someone who’s shown her dedication to this department. Do you get my meaning?”

Ingrid nodded rapidly. She understood, as did all her fellow PhD candidates, the endangered species status of a tenure-track position. The very mention of the word “tenure” transformed otherwise respectable students into cannibalistic fiends, ready to slaughter each other over the remaining scraps in academia. And once she obtained tenure, she’d finally be afforded the freedom to study whatever she wanted—

“—and I have no doubt researching Chou will prove fulfilling in more ways than one,” Michael was saying. “Many students have told me they feel more . . . connected to their Chinese heritage by delving so deeply into Chou’s poetry.” He paused. “Wouldn’t you like that?”

“I suppose so,” Ingrid said, though it came out more a question than a statement.

“I know you have what it takes to turn a fresh lens on an old poet. Judith said you were her brightest student. You have a gift, Ingrid—don’t let it go to waste.”

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“So, what do you say?” Michael poured her another cup of tea.

She drank it in one gulp and smiled weakly.

“Welcome home,” Michael grinned.

Was it a coincidence that, a few weeks prior to this conversation, the East Asian Studies department had come under criticism for being “89 percent white, 9 percent Asian and 1 percent other”? Well, it didn’t matter. That spring, Ingrid applied to the PhD program and was accepted for the following fall semester, somehow bypassing the usual nine-month application period. For three years, she was inundated with East Asian literature, history and philosophy. When it came time to pass her comprehensive exams, she surprised herself, and her professors, by performing half-decently. She waded into her dissertation first with tempered optimism, and then as the years dragged on, with increasing despair, until her research consisted primarily of scratching and sniffing at herself. By then, seven years after her first meeting with Michael, the tracks leading her from the past to the present had all but been erased. Writing her

dissertation on Xiao-Wen Chou was like waking up in a doorless, windowless room without knowing how she'd gotten inside.

Two hours in the archive passed as though they were two whole days. An obscene noise startled Ingrid; she looked around before realizing it was her stomach. She stood up and walked unsteadily towards the lockers. Tucked inside her backpack was a bottle of extra-strength antacids. Her mouth watered at the memory of their chalky sweetness. For Ingrid, the pastilles incited the same religious ecstasy that others got from snorting real drugs.

The sliding glass doors parted, revealing Vivian Vo. She was dressed in all black, accented with a short asymmetrical haircut and dark lipstick. Though Vivian was only younger by a few years, Ingrid felt doddering and geriatric in comparison, which made her want to trip Vivian whenever they crossed paths. Ingrid readied herself to walk briskly past her, delivering only a detached nod in her direction, when, to her horror, Vivian breezed by her as if she were a potted plant.

Vivian was a fifth-year PhD student and, in that time, had attracted the kind of attention Ingrid had always longed for but had never enjoyed. She had scooped up a coveted fellowship, one Ingrid had unsuccessfully applied for as an incoming student, and had already authored *five* peer-reviewed articles. Ingrid had written only one paper forthcoming from *BUGR*, the *Barnes University Graduate Research Journal*.

The two women were not particularly friendly with one another. To begin with, they hailed from different departments: while Ingrid was in East Asian Studies, Vivian was over in Postcolonial Studies. From what Ingrid had gathered, Vivian's dissertation did not consider Chou's work from a literary perspective, like hers did, but from an "anthropological" one. Ingrid refused to ask her for more details at the smattering of university events they'd attended together; Vivian, too, never solicited details about her research. Perhaps she was simply uninterested, but as for Ingrid, the mere acknowledgment of her only direct competition in the field of Chouian studies at Barnes was enough to suggest Vivian's research was legitimate, which, Ingrid had decided, it wasn't. And yet, she was fixated on proving

she was just as intelligent, just as relevant, as “the darling of Postcolonial Studies.”

In the drafty hallway, Ingrid rummaged around in her backpack for the bottle of antacids. She chewed three pills and texted her fiancé about his day (hers was going horribly as per usual, she reported). She anxiously stared at her phone until he responded (he was fine, had she remembered to book a doctor’s appointment about her stomach pain?), then reluctantly towed herself back inside the archive.

Yet another wasted morning.

She was debating between fried chicken or chili cheese fries for lunch when she finally pulled out the first manila folder and shook out its contents. Eleven pages, instead of ten, spilled onto her desk. Her first reaction was annoyance—lately, she’d noticed archive boxes with misplaced or nonexistent catalogue items. She blamed it on Daryl’s inefficiency.

Then, as Ingrid unfolded the yellow piece of paper, she recognized it as one of her own. Her heartbeat rattled. She must have left one of her legal pad notes in there by accident. She glanced around, relieved Margaret hadn’t found it; no doubt she would have scolded Ingrid in her maddeningly monotone voice.

On one side was a poem copied out by hand:

“The Ancestral Hearth”

*The ancestral hearth is lost and so, I only visit
in my dreams.*

*Here the houses sink into the sloping mountainside,
nestled between rock and tree.*

*To the north are gentle verdant farms, tea leaves bobbing
in the rain.*

*To the west, a crane perches on a water-smoothed rock,
watching silvery fish flash by.*

*To the south, sturdy yak pull carts until dusk,
straining their hooves into the mud.*

*And there, where pearly stream meets ocher forest,
while the eastern wind whispers for five full moons,
lies the origin of things past.*

NOTES

Formally, Chou relies on couplets, one tercet. Free verse. Lots of enjambment, again. What does it mean? Note to self: look up if enjambment has any similarities with Chinese grammar.

The lost ancestral hearth = Chou is unable to give back his Americanness

Sloping mountainside = Impending disaster

Tea leaves = ???

Crane fishing = Sustenance and survival . . . The Chinese American must adapt to his surroundings . . . That's not half bad!

Yak stuck in mud = Life is a boorish, endless struggle

Is the poem about how humans are ripped from the comfort of the home, thrown into cruel and unpredictable environs, until they die and are buried into the earth again?

Don't be so juvenile, Ingrid.

Concatenation of protohybridity. Hypertextual palimpsest. Cultural estrangement, cultural perambulation, cultural dissemination. Parsing a bricolage of a disintegrated self. Liminal translocality. Investing the text with refracted syncretism. Mapping of interdiscursive historiography. Transpacific cross-fertilization. A caesura of the self. Imbricated transitoriness.

Oh, shut up, Ingrid.

More literally, where “houses sink into sloping mountainside” must be Baoshan Stone City.

The origin of things past = Conception? Maternal figure? Yes!

A poem about migratory patterns . . . A decomposed compass . . . The speaker is unmoored . . . He travels across the map of China . . .

Stanza three has sixteen syllables. Stanza four, twenty-one. Stanza five, nineteen.

If the speaker moves north sixteen degrees, then west for twenty-one degrees, then south for nineteen degrees . . . Chou’s mother must be from Shangluoshui!

The other side of the page was hogged by lopsided circles and slanted annotations jammed into the margins. Her notes looked like the ramblings of a lunatic stalking a victim, which in this case was an innocent poem. In the middle of the page, a zigzagging line bridged Baoshan Stone City to Shangluoshui. Chou’s poetry contained numerous references to his paternal family’s home in Baoshan Stone City, but only obscure nods to his maternal “ancestral hearth.” Ingrid had felt pleased by this modest discovery, however hypothetical or useless it was. Trying to siphon meaning from Chou’s poems was like pulling teeth. When a red lacquered box appeared on the page, it was just that: a red lacquered box. No deeper meaning lurked around the poem’s corners for her to expose. Unlike the poets she’d *wanted* to study, with their untethered blank verse that sent words tripping across the page, Chou’s poetry had a flat, tidy quality to it. Put plainly, he was boring. This made it all the more difficult to pass off an uninteresting and simple poem as an interesting and complex poem—a sleight of hand that determined the foundation of her academic career.

Truthfully, Ingrid was also beginning to understand Chou had fallen out of fashion. His traditional forms were not daring or experimental. Even his subject matter was quickly gathering dust. The new generation of Asian American poets were writing about the texture of their genitals, gentrification, the gig economy. Chou was, clearly, not the most flashy of subjects.