

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tracy Chen: Two Poems

Tracy Chen · Saturday, July 18th, 2026

ode to peeling oranges

after Ross Gay's "Ode to Sleeping in My Clothes"

And though she never gives me a hug or professes her love to me,
 I always wake up in the morning to a fresh bowl of porridge
 sitting on the kitchen table and my work lunch neatly packaged
 filled to the brim with my favorite bok choy and braised pork,
 rice grains neatly stacked on top of each other molded to the side of my glass bento,
 the way our bodies never mold and our hands never linger,
 and there always seems to be a disconnect in our brain waves because I am never filial enough
 never diligent enough never *enough*,
 so she tells me I never made it on the path she painstakingly built
 the weight of my failure the burden of her hopes dreams and aspirations are dashed
 when broken daughters are only broken daughters
 and as she breaks me, she returns with a bowl of freshly
 peeled oranges that sits next to me until the perspiration of the circle inks itself
 into the paper of my worksheets,
 and I cry and cry and cry about
 how I never became the woman she never will be,
 begrudgingly chewing on the rinds knowing I have never peeled fruit a day in my life
 waiting for that familiar stain that habitually returns throughout the nights,
 each time with a different fruit, a silent persistent sign that she is there,
 not that she needs any, the rough dialect of her nagging and yelling, the harshness of her words
 accompanied by even rougher hands in my peripheral,
 years of manual labor that etched marks and callouses into her skin
 like a tree wearing its rings of age, nevertheless peeling oranges the same as always
 I screamed like hot-blooded teenagers do when their hearts are broken,
 howling I wish you just died, I never wished to be born, and I saw that look on her face but I didn't
 care and I vowed that if I could help it,
 I'd never find someone like her
 So like a swallow set free from the nest, I stretched my wings at the first sight of daylight,
 soaring and flying until I met a beautiful boy,
 who is always so gentle and soft-spoken and gave me all this love
 that felt so different, one that I did not always feel I deserved because I was never worthy
 enough for her,

but when he peels the oranges to hold out its citrus flesh
 to my lips and the juicy tart brightness explodes,
 it is the same flavor of care and love
 that I held in my mouth all those days ago,
 the same flavor that I return to every time I return home.

*

when asked why i eat dogs

after Matthew E. Henry's "when asked why Black people can't be racist"

because the taste of dog meat is so much more enticing than
 your impulse to project your racist ignorance onto me.
 because the taste of dog meat is more thrilling than your need
 to reduce me to something feral, something savage.
 because pets are second-class citizens like me,
 and i must devour to assert my dominance and superiority.
 you would know, since your ancestors did the same
 since your whiteness seems to glorify usurpation and
 excuse your ignorance and justify your lack of decorum
 and if you ask me a stupid fucking question like that again
 i'll show up to your house with a napkin tucked into my collar
 and a knife and fork ready to slice and dice your dog
 for my first taste.

(Featured image from [Pexels](#))

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