

## THREE POEMS



*Jane Yeh*

DOUBLE WEDDING, 1628

*Anne of Austria, sister of Philip IV, to Louis XIII of France;  
Isabella of Bourbon, sister of Louis XIII, to Philip IV of Spain*

We are laced taut  
As an archer's bow strung with catgut, a lean  
& deadly spring to the touch. At each breath  
Our stomachs press whalebone, seven bent fingers  
Stiff as our own ribs & wrapped in linen, leaving  
The fine print of their weave on our skin. We are wired  
For great things & small movements, hooped  
To glide like gigantic orchids, full-  
Blown, slow-footed, & deliberate  
In error. Afterwards we will bear the strange marks  
Of another house, gold arms on a gold collar,  
But for now *no other jewels hang about our necks*  
*Than these:* pearls knotted with string, clasped  
With velvet & fitted just long enough  
To choke us. This day will slip from us  
Shedding marquissette, point d'esprit, zibelline, trailing  
Taffeta & broché behind it; it will leave us bare-  
Handed & desperate to remember what we were  
Before it, & it will take everything we have  
To recollect what we wore when we walked  
The length of the nave without stopping, how we kept  
Our eyes straight & unturning until it was over.

BLUE CHINA

My signs all point to a singular disposition. How shatteringly  
unpleasant  
It is to be born under Sèvres, some doddering holdover  
From the *ancien régime*. Weaknesses: vainglory, powder. Those  
additionally  
Half-cusped in Lenox are said to be ill-suited

For industry, desirous of stately homes, & fickle in the extreme.  
To be avoided:  
Balconies, timepieces. In the Great Fire  
Of 1666, glazing reversed itself & ran down the window-panes  
Until every piece of bottle-bottomed glass

Fell out: a dripping Restoration. The curlicues of iron  
remained  
Red-hot & glowing in their frames, a line of crowns  
Across the façade of each building. That night clocks rang out  
in succession  
To wake the city where every new chiming-in

Meant another block had gone up, & the spreading pattern of  
bells  
Was a map of the movement of the burning constellation  
As it spilled through the streets, westward & processional. It  
was seven thousand  
Eight hundred & twenty-two o'clock when it ended.

My descent can be traced to a flawed set of plate—Delft in  
retrograde,  
Wedgwood rising—a most unfortunate condition. Inclined  
towards:  
Misplacement of items, a high degree of fury. At the collapse of  
the Brighton Pavilion  
In 1809, the varnish on the underside of the roof

Gave way first, cracking along fault-lines in a series of thin  
smiles  
Until they covered the ceiling. The painted  
Cupids & French roses began missing pieces  
At spots that marked where the weakening wood

Was liable to gap. The spars went down like ribbons on their  
heads,  
Feathered & curling into splinters under pressure,  
Unseating sixteen dozen white candles from their chandeliers  
so that  
The flames rose up above the ring of columns

To make another roof: a blinding coronation.  
My ruling planet is on course for an unsettling destination,  
Mid-orbital & revolving—certain of collision.  
The wobble in Dresden predicts a trial by fire.

Every day it gets harder to live up to it.

CORRESPONDENCE

I've gotten nothing for weeks. You might think of me

As dated in a blue housecoat, buttoning & unbuttoning,  
Waiting you out: I have my ways

Of keeping time. When your letter comes, dogs will bark  
Up & down the street. The tomatoes in the garden

Will explode like fireworks. Each day the mailman passes  
In a reverie, illiterate, another cobweb

Grows across the door. Picture me  
Going bald one hair at a time, combing & curling, burning

My hand on the iron once every hour: I like to  
Keep myself busy. When I hear from you, *aurora*

*Borealis* will sweep across the sky. Every lottery ticket in my  
drawer

Will win. Even the mailman will know the letters

Of your name. If you bothered to notice, you would see me  
Turning to gold rather slowly, bone

By bone, the way teeth come  
Loose from the gums, the way animals go

Extinct, in geological time.