The Alphabet Between Less

Yu-Han Chao
In Yu-Han Chao’s collection, *The Alphabet between Legs*, these sensual and impressionistic poems read like pages from a primer of the human form as it interacts with space and becomes an object or experience in itself. The language sometimes whispers, sometimes explodes, as the poet reveals the body’s intimacies as well as its vagaries in images that flex across and energize each line.

–Susan Varnot
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE SKIN PRICKLED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A CROOKED HEART</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECT-THE-DOT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAVICLE ON FIRE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUDE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMBURGER</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDUSA AND MULAN</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOSE-UP</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAN</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE WALL HEARS ALL</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERFISH</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEEKABOO</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN LEGS, THREE CROTCHES</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEW ON A PETAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNRISE WITH LAKE MONSTER</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENLIGHTENED THIRD NIPPLE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAR-HEART</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQUARENESS CONTAGIOUS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRESH WATER PEARLS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW LONG</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I AM NOT A WITCH</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ALPHABET BETWEEN LEGS</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENUS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLOWFISH</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAITING FOR A BUS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SECOND BEFORE A DISASTER</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOOK DEAD</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE WHITE FAN</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIGGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARROT LEG MONSTER</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPANESE GOLDFISH</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALING TOOL</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAIWANESE WITCH</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE-QUARANTINE</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BLUR OF</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAUTREC GIRL</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT TORSO</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORM-FLATTERING COVER-UP</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEBCAM</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE EYE OF THE POEM</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for $J$
THE SKIN PRICKLED

The skin prickled with beads of water, or sweat. A sweaty butt. The candle blushing in the background.


Turn the torso, breasts point in different directions. Square nipples, rounded ribcage, square knuckles. Belly button a teardrop.
A CROOKED HEART

Bit of a blur. Round tits, one of them
staring, a bit rude. Belly button laughing.

Back. An hourglass, mane, deep groove.
A hint of a crack, a hint of a heel,
a hint of the front of a knee.

Overflowing candlelight. Strands of hair.
Wrinkled water and light spots on the body.
A crooked heart.
CONNECT-THE-DOT

The right breast is a star, illuminated by radiating light. Soft lines, round, dark nipple. Kneeling very straight.


Strange angles and lines from the belly to the thigh: straight legs, curved tummy with connect-the-dot outline.
CLAVICLE ON FIRE


A distorted butt, large as balloons, like pigeon-toed maracas; from downwards-up, cock-and-balls.

Dark chin, pouty nips. The right clavicle on fire.

Shield the light; diffuse glow. Back folded like the beginning instructions of an origami piece.
RUDE

Hogging the lens now, limbs stretched out, pushing forward with nips belly ribcage side of butt.

Arms stretched upwards, legs stretched downwards. A shallow C of side boob, unhappy face on backside, curved vertical hamster mouth.

Rude. Worse than Toulouse-Lautrec’s squiggly sketches of black pubes—nothing hidden, nothing shielded or furred. Head bent down drinking light naturally as if every day were a rude leg opening day.
HAMBURGER

Lips like hamburger buns.
A little hamburger in a larger,
longer hamburger. Explosive light.

Relevé retiré, knee on fire,
crotch on fire. A smile under one butt cheek.
Muscle bunched to point.
MEDUSA AND MULAN

Medusa eyes and Medusa flyaway. 
Raising up the sky like Chang Jieh. 
One circular one triangular Mu Lan rockets.

Just the Mulans. At the end of every episode 
the female robot stands with blackened still-smoking round holes, 
negative tits. Spent rockets. Something disturbing.
CLOSE-UP

Close-up of branch-like arms and shoulders, striped ribcage, ribcage cleavage, escaping heart, dotted body diamonds.

Thick torso, mounded pancakes with cherries on top. Fox spirit face, phantom hand. Pacman cutout shadow.
LEAN

Exaggerated invisible handcuffs, back arch. Arm-gina, zebra ribs, head does not match.

Three beads, one bead, split pacman still chewing a betel nut. Whiskers, or sound-effect lines.

Knee-cap-as-weapon. Here-it-is. Presenting yet just shielding with curve of distorted thigh. Lean like a model.
THE WALL HEARS ALL

Looking at the shaft of light
eck and midriff draw back into shadows.
A cowering, limp feathered tail.

Cradling side-butt. A chip in the whiteness
a leak of light. White triangles and dots.

Craning neck, no waist, listening, listening.
Ear touches shadow touches wall.
The wall hears all.
MERFISH

A new distraction of a large head, observation. Ready to jump, leave, hug, hit. Trying to make up mind which.


The center of a bud, a geometric diamond, a mouth, a sucking noise, spotted bright sand. A wave: shadow, light, shadow.
PEEKABOO

Exaggerated cheeks like punching fists
A baby’s bottom growing out of an adult’s bottom.
Badly photoshopped or a hunchback’s rear.

Punching shoulders, waiting: the word akimbo.
A little peekaboo slit between butt-thigh and butt-thigh,
aesthetically undesirable, a sometimes flaw, uneven distribution of fat.
NO

Pushed against the wall, dark-bodied, sadfaced. The body-eyeballs and body-pupils also pleading. Invisible cigarette in right claw.


SEVEN LEGS, THREE CROTCHES

Shadow puppet strings pull hand, head, shoulder.
Horizontal washboard above breasts.
Vertical washboard beneath breasts.

Limpid ghost dance: seven legs, three crotches.
All legs grow into all crotches into one original torso.
The head splits into two.

Cropped mask. Headless dress pattern shadow.
The womb and small of back ablaze.
DEW ON A PETAL

The act of smoothing butt curve. Thigh and waist equal-sized.
Ghost fingers about to seize arm on butt,
punishment for vanity.

Pushed together like orange fur coat shot.
Juicy with ball-eyes. Perfect sausages,
one longer than the other, black-white patterned.

A National Geographic cover. Dew on a petal.
Natural habitat of the stick-leg and life-stomach.
An inverted bowl for the wasted fetus.
SUNRISE WITH LAKE MONSTER

The sun rising from the bottom right.
Sunrise With Lake Monster.
The deepest part infertile.

Sprouting light strawberry moss, ball-tipped shooting stars.
A black hole hungry on the side, nothing escapes.
What is the gentle source?

A natural white heart at the neck—no doctoring.
Coincidence of projection, with the heart to bear,
the face heavy.
ENLIGHTENED THIRD NIPPLE

Knowing look, chewing-on-hot-dog lips.
The purple hot dog has a subtle white belt and bright hair.
Contemplate chewing some more dog.

Vantage point. Whole body save knee-down.
Could be no calf, feet, no matter.
Transparent topless sari wrap.

The third eye glittering on forehead, the breasts consider a third nipple.
It is between the legs, buried. It is more enlightened.
The smaller silver heart tries to shine, to speak to the ear-heart. The ear-heart is muffled, covered by dark hair, does not hear. A tragedy.

Stare. The slightly resentful, often hopeful, loving and little and genuine, every-six-months-inspected silver heart. Listen.

Departing body. The butt lingers. But the scarred torso, bruised and black, pulls it into shadows. Butt, rebellious, soaks in fluorescence.
SQUARENESS CONTAGIOUS

The battle between dark square and bright square: tits prefer dark, ass prefers bright.

Square nipple square torso square arm. Square background. Squareness contagious.

White babies outside trying to get inside. Foreshadowing of belly, breastfeeding, drooping. Plastic surgeon’s black ink. Knife slicing into smooth cream cheese icing, red velvet.
FRESH WATER PEARLS

Sliced in half. Bearing it. Cell division:
one boob into two boobs.  
Pulling away, year by year.

Heart between twins. Incestuous lesbianism.  
The sun still shines on the heart-crossed lovers.

The high fashion hunched torso of  
small-chested, large-nippled models. 
Soft sweetheart with Swarovski and fresh water pearls.
WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

Shy hush puppies with sad eyes.
Doves in the rain, bubbly sunny-side up eggs.
What-you-see-is-what-you-get—this time of month anyway.

Cobra yogi pose with running legs,
inlegant flat foot. Flipper hands. Tadpole head.
Somehow, ying yang.
HOW LONG

Lonely female lobster sans sex.
Fertilization outside the body. Never meets the male.
Never meets the children.

Stereotypical Japanese geisha morning after.
Regret, longing, still smelling the taste.
How long will this last?
I AM NOT A WITCH

The arm sharpened at the elbow into nothing.
A witch in water, in denial, melting,
still screaming I am not a witch.

Nipple-gazing. Fire-eating breast, weeping nip.
The loneliness of a beautiful circus freak.

A hanging pig carcass poses as woman.
Clear cuts of meat: breasts, ribs, rump, heeled hooves.
Ice box light bulb.
THE ALPHABET BETWEEN LEGS

The backwards lower case y of a virgin.
W of a hamster and w of a seasoned whore.
The alphabet between legs.

Body like putty, pulled into bulbous downward-facing-heart
cheeks, sinewy back, not Rodin
but Camille Claudel. The clay, alive.

Poised, perched, anorexic paper cut-out.
Flames and smoke eating away the shape bite by bite
carving out ribs, knobbed knees, chestbones.
The flammable cannot win.
VENUS

Don’t look at me. In the glass box at the Museum of Natural Arts, a placard: Emo Stick Insect. It sleeps, looks defeated.

Waist to hip, thigh to calf, calf to other calf, calf to toe. Each joint controlled by a stick, leather-shadow ballet theater.

BLOWFISH

Fat-bellied fish to drink. The antidote to a sore throat, a hemorrhage. Little known secret.

Twenty transparent fingers on branch. Bulbous trunk decorated by bubble glass beads, seed beads, encrusted. Work for it.

WAITING FOR A BUS

Waiting for a bus, nude.
Close up: a little lumpy, ever so slightly saggy.
Hair in motion.

Surprisingly light-reflecting dumpling.
Maraschino on icing, chocolate powder
falling down the groove, between cracks.
THE SECOND BEFORE A DISASTER

Expectant torso and butt. Thighs eaten by wax. Hair too close to fire. The second before a disaster at Walt’s haunted house.

Supernova attack on nonchalant nude. Full crescents welcome light, hairless V of crotch smiling like cartoon feline face.
LOOK DEAD

Listening, the treble clef of the body.
Lightheaded, bottom-heavy,
good for breeding and daughter-in-law-ing.

Look dead. Try to blend in with shadows.
The round of the tub square of the shelf
round of the rump square of the knee-angle.
THE WHITE FAN

Peeling off the wall, gray pin-up wallpaper.
Press release: new interior designer announces
Muse© paper. Real girls leap off the page when paper touches water.
A la Ran-Ma, Little P.

Black hair like unwashed ear flaps
Picking a light-flower is knowing how to smile.
The white fan: pubes between shadowy legs.
CIGGY

Laden flesh-grapes, squished together better than Miracle brand. Water could not pass through. Light bounces off—the radiance of damp skin.

Shoulder as outline of ashtray. Glowing profile of chainsmoker face, reincarnated into the addiction itself. Ciggy.
CARROT LEG MONSTER

A soft, long neck with no Karen rings, not held up from the outside. Held up from the outside, what’s inside grows limp and ineffective, bedridden.

Carrot leg monster with non-graceful peg leg. Tanning front for evenness. Overdone, the rib-skin becomes leathery, freckled, glued on like beef jerky.

HEALING TOOL

Surprised body-face. Eye-tits pushed round by arms, hands covering shock of pube-mouth. The legs open, awkward, shying away, ankle twisted.

Perfect legs, perfect mounds of mount-breasts. Scary face, however, tooth-showing lopsided smile. Blur, liquify, healing tool.
TAIWANESE WITCH

Hug self. Sagged hip-thighs melting out of sight.
The Taiwanese witch accidentally melting against backdrop of ugly leather sofa.

A baby ponytail, a ripe red fruit-butt.
Radiating anime leather wrinkles emphasizing the waist.
Staring at the wall in self-reflection, a punishment.
PRE-QUARANTINE

Blue leopard SARS mask, rainfall hair, blurry face. Pre-quarantine. A happy index finger and thumb, poised beneath Zoro’s chin.

Nubile birdy butt, still pristine, practically dancing. Dimpled muscle-tightened butt cheek smile.
THE BLUR OF

The blur of a furry animal around the neck,
face twisted in motion into goat’s face,
Pinocchio eyes. One clear knuckle.

Juicy hanging melons ready to be harvested
from hairy cornucopia of orange wool.
Fat thigh, unsmiling claws.
LAUTREC GIRL

Backlit Lautrec girl, lace pushing up slabs of meat, nonchalant, grainy spread. Garter with stray black ribbon.


See-through elaborate French Alençon lace body. Head thrown back, mouth open, hair hanging, pretending to be in heat.
CAT TORSO

Cat torso, jeweled tail. No longer fashionable to show significant portion of high thong under low jeans while sitting on bar stool, leaning on elbows and arching back to show more.

Curve of ear accentuated by wave of hair, accentuating hang of boob contrasting with flatness of midriff.
FORM-FLATTERING COVER-UP

Looking patiently, caringly at multiple nips like mother cat at litter of obedient kittens: feed, rub tummy, or die.

Pointy, shaggy, unhappy Filipina seeks form-flattering cover-up to put the smile back on her face.

Traditional Chinese cartoon flowers falling from the sky onto boobs and crotch, too many on the back.
Old picture. Colors off. Cross-eyed nipples and tits. Usually the owner becomes extremely offended upon being asked the question, “Are/Is…cross-eyed?”

Angel with water pitcher pouring century-old water on head of modern nymph, hair air-drying in front of webcam.
THE EYE OF THE POEM

One last peek at the bold nipple breaking through fabric, societal constraints, standard sizes, flower-shaped cover-ups. The most successful focal point of all. The eye of the poem.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


BIOGRAPHY

Yu-Han (Eugenia) Chao was born and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. She received her BA from National Taiwan University, MFA from Penn State University and teaches at The University of California, Merced. Her website is www.yuhanchao.com.