

Dinnerview: Wendy Xu

written by Danielle Susi | December 2, 2020



Wendy Xu is most recently the author of *Phrasis* (2017), named one of the 10 Best Poetry Books of 2017 by *The New York Times Book Review*. She is Assistant Professor of Writing in Poetry at The New School.

Here, she talks about saving the best for last, thinking about syntax while preparing a beverage, and wanting to be unfussy, like an egg-and-tomato stew.

On her all-time favorite meal:

It feels so appropriate that I'm sitting down to think about and write about food while recovering from a wisdom tooth surgery yesterday. It's July. I'm so hungry. Everything I've eaten in the past 24 hours has been mushy, but only one thing has been delicious, and that's my all-time favorite meal of Shandong egg-and-tomato stew. You cook down a tomato with soy sauce and garlic, then you quick scramble an egg right in the pan and fold it all together. Add some sugar if the tomatoes aren't sweet enough on their own. I'm sure I first ate it as prepared by my mother when I was too young to remember, because it feels like I've been eating it my whole life. It's peasant food, it's cheap, it's filling, it's got an obscene amount of garlic in it the way my family makes it, it's silky, it travels well, it's good hot or cold, it's somehow both tart and rich, and it comes together in literally 5 minutes. It got me through college. It's getting me through adulthood and COVID. It's unfussy and practical and, honestly, I aspire to be like it as a person!

On what the light looks like during her favorite meal of the day:

I love breakfast, which is a new thing for me. I never used to eat it until a few years ago. These days the light is either creepy or perfect while I'm eating, never in-between. I'm not sure why? I'll be buttering the toast and it will just be like full-on green pre-tornado light, which is something you

understand if you grew up in Iowa. It determines the tone of the rest of the day.

On snacking while writing:

I literally never eat while writing, but I always have a beverage. Making the beverage, working out some syntax in my head while I putter around getting the beverage together...that's more the point.

On her go-to late-night snack:

Cup instant ramen. Always. Throw some kimchi in there. Ready in 4 minutes.

On her food quirks:

We weren't very food secure when I was growing up, and I have habits that formed around that, mostly around avoiding food waste...otherwise...I guess I always start by eating the thing I like the least, first? And work towards the thing I like the most on a plate? Which is completely illogical because you'll just be sort of full by the time you get to the favorite thing, but I weirdly want to get the "meh" items out of the way first because they are boring to me. Is this common?

On her final meal request:

My family is superstitious around imagining and/or any kind of thing that feels like role-playing death, or how one dies, or related scenarios, etc. So, my inner Panicked Chinese Person jumps out at this question, but I guess what I do see clearly is that I'm with them, my parents and my sister, and whatever we may or may not be eating we cooked together, following my mom's lead, my sister and I creating some poor half-version of whatever the dish is supposed to be, but my mom praising and eating all of it anyway. No leftovers.