

# My Children Will Return Me to Solitude — On the Poetry of Yu Xiang

I cannot tell if the day  
is ending, or the world, or if  
the secret of secrets is inside me again.

— Anna Akhmatova, “A Land Not Mine”

Children — this is how Yu Xiang refers to her poems. Invested with affection and enigma, her rhetoric enacts metaphor and misnomer. Should one assume innocence or maternity in Yu’s poetry, reading “Satan” or “It Goes Without Saying” sets off an immediate mix of thrill and shock. Answerable to longevity, these children have an age that defies science. Within them, they carry life and muse. “Two birds are on the branch of a tree,” writes Simone Weil, quoting an Upanishad. “One eats the fruit, the other looks at it.”<sup>1</sup> While Yu Xiang foretells her waning years, abandoned by her children in one poem, she metamorphoses into a sorceress of lofty age in another. The poetic “I” theatricalizes her age in order to liberate herself from time: a female artist in her prime of womanhood, Yu gives birth to many healthy lives, yet builds her memorial through self-mythology and imagined suicides. Are these children “dead” once they are “born”? Are poems “dead” when pronounced “read”? Time offers a more inward resilience when the beginning is a return to some end, and the end a lucid revision of the beginning. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* — much as the poet resists elegy in which melancholia lays claim to the morbid guise of death, age as a conspiracy of time creates a foreign but forceful intrigue with narrative cues.

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1. Weil, Simone. “Forms of the Implicit Love of God.” *Waiting for God*. Trans. Emma Craufurd. New York: HarperCollins Perennial Classics, 2001. 105.











