

Introduction

With Love, From The End Of The World

As I write this book in the spring of 2019, it has become something of a truism among my community of queer people of colour that the end of the world is nigh. A wave of right-wing and openly fascist governments have been elected to power across the world. Wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a brazenly corrupt few. Climate change and mass extinction are ravaging the earth, largely unacknowledged by those with the political power to do anything about it.

As for those communities of queer people, racialized people, disabled people marginalized people that have been taking back their power? The social justice activists that raised me to believe in the possibility of a revolution that would change and save the world? Sometimes it seems like the most painful cuts of all come from within my own community: Call-out culture. Lateral violence. Puritanical politics. Intimate partner abuse. Public shaming. We know so much about trauma but so little about how to heal it. What would “community” know about saving us from the apocalypse?

In 2016, I turned twenty-five years old and published my first novel, which was quickly followed by a poetry collection and then a children’s book, all to relative success. I became “queer famous” that year. This was also the year that broke my heart, which has kept right on breaking ever since. This was the year that Trump was elected, that millions of people were displaced in the Syrian refugee crisis, and that forty-nine people—most of them queer and brown—were shot to death in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida. In the intervening years, more disasters and atrocities have followed.

My twenty-fifth year of life was also the year that I experienced several devastating personal crises that resulted in the loss of some dear friends and chosen family members, as well as psychological trauma from which

I have not recovered. For all its edgy pretensions, social justice culture had not prepared me for the havoc that abuse, mental illness, and the immense pressure of living as a publicly known trans woman of colour in the social media era could wreak upon my soul.

Not only was I in pain, but my pain was publicly known, scrutinized, gossiped over. People, mostly queer and racialized people, whom I didn't know sent me emails and Facebook messages that were thousands of words long, asking for intimacy and attention and occasionally threatening me when I didn't acquiesce. Journalists asked me for interviews about my private life—my sex life, my family, my mental health; no topic seemed to be off limits. I was stalked, in real life and online. I became terrified and paranoid. I stopped trusting people and this thing we call “community.” I stopped trusting myself.

All around me, the people I loved were also in crisis—psychological, financial, medical, interpersonal. When you live in a community of queers, anarchists, and activists, crisis is the baseline and stability an outlier. Among trans women, a life expectancy of thirty-five is the norm.

I lost my faith in community. I lost hope—in social justice, in revolution, in the world.

When we lose faith in the things that matter, it is easy to turn to anger. Anger helps us survive when survival seems impossible. I have been very angry throughout my life, and I still am in some ways. I need to be, to live. Yet anger, and its siblings rage and vengeance, have also been poisonous influences in my communities. I've seen people do awful things to one another in the name of anger and revenge, and it never seems to help anyone in the end.

So in the midst of despair, I have come to believe that love—the feeling of love, the politics of love, the ethics and ideology and embodiment of love—is the only good option in this time of the apocalypse. What else do we have?

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I mean love that is kind but also honest. Love that is courageous and relentless and willing to break the rules and smash the system. Love that cares about people more than ideas, that prizes each and every one of us as essential and indispensable. I mean love that is compassionate and accountable. I mean love that confirms and reaffirms us as complex and fallible yet lovable anyway, love that affirms us as human.

I want to live in love and believe in love. If I have to die, I want to die in love. This whole world might be coming to its end, or it might be in the midst of an enormous and terrifying change that leads to something better. Either way, I want to go through it in love with the people I love.

So this is a book is about love, which is a sentence I never thought I would write. This is a book that I never thought I *could* write. It isn't easy to believe in love, not after so many people and ideals I held so dear have hurt me or been taken from me. But, then, I too have hurt people and taken things from people. I have made mistakes, and I have done worse than mistakes. I still want to be believed in, and loved.

So this is a book about love. This is a book about revolutionary love. Love that might not save us at the end of the world but that might make it possible to live through. It may be hard to believe in. It will be harder to live. I hope we choose it anyway.

In love that never dies,
Kai Cheng Thom, April 2019