



ENGLISH
PEN

PEN PRESENTS...
EAST & SOUTHEAST ASIA



Lake Like A Mirror by Ho Sok Fong

Original title: 湖面如鏡 (*Húmiàn rú jìng*)

Language: Complex Chinese

Length: 240 pages

Genre: Literary fiction

Original publisher: Aquarius Publishing Co., Ltd.

Rights holder: Ho Sok Fong

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 1,500

Turn to page 5



Sergius Seeks Bacchus

by Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Original title: *Sergius Mencari Bacchus*

Language: Indonesian

Length: 70 pages

Genre: Poetry

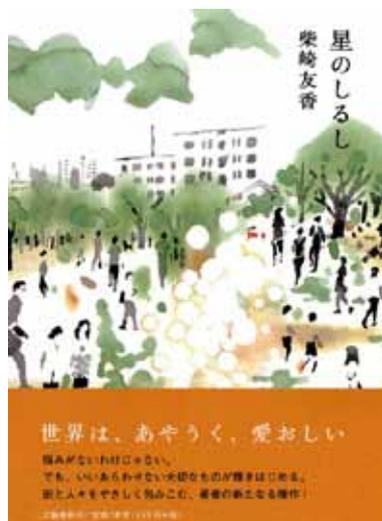
Original publisher: Gramedia Pustaka Utama

Rights holder: Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 829 copies

Turn to page 9



Star Sign by Shibasaki Tomoka

Original title: ほしのしるし (*Hoshi no shirushi*)

Language: Japanese

Length: 165 pages

Genre: Literary fiction

Original publisher: Bungeishunjū Ltd

Rights holder; Bungeishunjū Ltd.

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 5,000 copies

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The Shoe by Kim Soom

Original title: L의 운동화 (*Lui undonghwa*)

Language: Korean

Length: 274 pages

Genre: Literary fiction

Original publisher: Minumsa

Rights holder: Minumsa

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 5,000

Turn to page 17



Tangut Inn by Yijun Luo

Original title: 西夏旅館 (*Xi Xia Lu Guan*)

Language: Traditional Chinese

Length: 767 pages

Genre: Literary fiction

Original publisher: INK, 2008

Rights holder: Yijun Luo (INK)

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: n/a

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I'm Waiting for You by Kim Boyoung

Original title: 당신을 기다리고 있어 (*Tangshinül kidarigo issö*)

Language: Korean

Length: 112 pages

Genre: Science fiction

Original publisher: Miracle Books, 2015

Rights holder: Kim Boyoung

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: n/a

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Welcome

Theodora Danek

Writers in Translation Programme Manager

English PEN



Welcome to the second round of PEN Presents! At English PEN we're always keen to discover untold stories. We want to make sure that a variety of voices from all around the world are heard in the UK and the wider English-speaking world. PEN Presents addresses a simple question: What books make it into English translation? We want to help UK publishers discover authors and books that haven't yet been translated into English, and we think that translators are in a great position to recommend works that they're familiar with. So for the second year running, we've asked translators to pitch projects that they feel passionate about. This time, we've focused on East and Southeast Asia.

We are excited to partner with the Asia Literary Review on PEN Presents...East and Southeast Asia. The ALR will feature several of the shortlisted translations in their Spring 2017 issue. The translators who submitted the six winning books will each be awarded a £250 prize, and will take part in a celebratory event in June 2017 at the Free Word Centre.

This catalogue will introduce you to a shortlist of six exciting book projects. From a Korean love story set in space to poetry about being gay in Indonesia, from short stories about Malaysian women to Taiwanese magical realism, from a Japanese tragicomedy to a political artist's novel set in Korea, this introduction covers a lot of ground. We hope that you're as excited about the authors, books, and translators as we are. Welcome to East and Southeast Asia!



Lake Like A Mirror

by Ho Sok Fong

Lake Like A Mirror is a collection of nine quiet, disquieting stories that encapsulate very different slices of Malaysian women's lives. Ho Sok Fong's characters observe a rapidly-urbanising, patriarchal world that seems to confront them with infinite challenges. Malaysia features almost as its own character throughout, colouring the collection with its expressways, gossiping aunts, lurking censorship and clash of languages.

In 'Wall', the shortest story in the collection, an old woman's routine is changed when a wall is erected behind her house. Ho's knack for addressing tragedy is on full display here. A child's death and dramatic urban development operations carried out by invisible, unaccountable 'developers' make an appearance early on. Yet these twin catastrophes are always in the background and slightly out of focus; Ho's attention is on her protagonist, a woman whose life revolves around her domineering husband, a cat, and a garden. 'Auntie', as the neighbour's children call her, becomes thinner and thinner, more and more confused, until she eventually disappears.

Malaysian society and its restrictions are vividly addressed in this collection. In the title story, 'Lake Like a Mirror', a Chinese professor at a Malaysian university is accused of encouraging a Muslim student to read 'homosexual poetry' – e.e. cummings. Her hope that the scandal will pass if she lies low and keeps her thoughts more closely to herself is rewarded, and soon another Chinese professor is the focus of hostile attention instead.

Set in Taiwan, 'Summer Tornado' is a careful, unsettling account of a Malaysian bride's sense of alienation. It opens with her alone on a ferris wheel, practicing her thickly-accented Chinese. She observes a father and his children in the nearby pool, first from a distance and then from the poolside, through the zoom lens of a camera with a flicker of panic. The park around them veers from festive to creepy, and it's only when they invite her

to join that we realise, with a jolt, this is the family she has married into.

Anglophone Malaysian writers such as Tash Aw and Tan Twan Eng, along with Carlos Rojas' translation from the Chinese of Ng Kim Chew's *Slow Boat to China*, have brought Malaysian literature closer to English readers. *Lake Like A Mirror* is a welcome addition and counterpoint to these voices, and has made steady waves in Sinophone literary and academic circles. Ho's settings are mostly contemporary, with occasional ventures into the colonial past. She is a master at taking the reader deep into her character's milieu. As such, they are engrossing, often amusing, tightly structured, and difficult to shake off.

"The most accomplished Malaysian woman writer." – Ng Kim Chew, author of *Slow Boat to China & Other Stories*, tr. Carlos Rojas)

"The way I see it, in terms of vision and literary talent, Ho Sok Fong is [also] more accomplished than any Malaysian male writer. (...) Ho Sok Fong's short story collections are a response to many familiar social issues. In a broader sense, they're also a response to the question of how a person should exist in the world." – Liu Yiwan, *Promethian Fire Review*

"The writing in *Lake like a Mirror* is pithy, restrained almost to the point of repression, and this rhetorical repression can be seen as a mirror of the taboo and repression inherent to Malaysia's desolate, absurd reality." – Tee Kim Tong

"In her cool, quiet tone, Ho Sok Fong voices deafening protests... [Her] stories confirm literature as an event, forcing a reader to confront, consider – even to resolve – the difficulties of human existence." – Li Youcheng, Afterword to *Lake like a Mirror*

Ho Sok Fong is the author of two short story collections, *Maze Carpet* (2012) and *Lake Like A Mirror* (2014). She is the 2016 recipient of a Taiwan National Culture & Arts Foundation grant, to support the completion of her first full-length novel, *The Forest in Full Bloom*.

Maze Carpet was a finalist for the Taipei International Book Exhibition Prize (2013), and *Lake Like A Mirror* won the Chiu Ko Publishing House award for a short story collection (2016).

Lake Like A Mirror by Ho Sok Fong

Original title: 湖面如鏡 (*Húmiàn rú jìng*)

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Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 1,500

Lake Like A Mirror

by Ho Sok Fong

Sample translation by Natascha Bruce

When the developers said they were building a wall to keep out the sound, everybody thought it was a good idea. For the past few years, the expressway had been expanding closer and closer to our houses. It used to be a full sixty metres away, but now had come so close we were practically run over every time we opened our back doors.

One morning, a seven-year old girl really was hit by a car outside her back door. Late that very night, the developers started building a wall along the side of the road.

'They're just laying a wall,' the aunty next door said. From her upstairs window, she watched the workmen spreading a layer of cement, then positioning a line of bricks, then smearing over more cement.

'It's got no foundations,' she said to her husband, when she came back downstairs. He was watching a football game on television, and when they scored he clapped and cheered with the South American sports presenter, so didn't hear what his wife was saying.

His wife wasn't surprised. She went back to watching the workmen laying the wall. She thought they looked thin, like they were too feeble for a job like that. But their wall looked very thick, thick enough to hide a thin person. It grew higher and higher, until it blocked her view. When it was over one storey high, she went to sleep.

The next morning, all the tenants in our row woke to find the wall was finished. It cut off the sunlight, making our backyards and kitchens dark. But everybody agreed that sunlight wasn't much of a price to pay, considering the seven-year-old girl who'd been killed by a car. The only thing was, the wall blocked our back doors too, and now they opened just a little wider than the sole of an adult's foot. Wide enough for a cat, or a small dog, but too much of a squeeze for a person.

The aunty from next door wasn't happy. Wasn't this the same as having no back door at all? No back door meant no way out. Her husband agreed. 'It's like having a mouth but no asshole,' is what he said.

But, gradually, they got used to it. There's nothing a person can't get used to. It wasn't too much of a hardship, anyway, not compared to what that girl's mother was going through. One morning, two days after the incident, the aunty and her husband saw a tiny coffin being carried

out through the other family's gate. A few days later, the mother lit a fire by her front door, burning all her daughter's clothes and schoolbag in a big metal dustbin. The thick white smoke reeked of burning plastic, and choked up the whole street.

The aunty couldn't remember if her husband had ever left the house. He sat glued to the football on the television. The light was gone from their windows, but they carried on as best they could.

The aunty had no kids to take care of, and spent most of her time in the kitchen. If she closed the kitchen door, she couldn't even hear the television. Before the wall, the kitchen had been filled with the roar of cars hurtling along the expressway. After the wall, the noise sounded like it was packed inside a capsule, or like a person humming from deep inside their chest. After a few days, she was used to it, and didn't much mind one way or the other.

She did things a little differently after the wall. It blocked out the sunlight, making her eyes too tired to read the newspaper in the kitchen. Instead, she turned her attention to a tiny yard, about the size of a bathroom, just to the side of the kitchen. In the first week, she planted cacti, and later added dumbcanes, bush lilies, hydrangeas and gerbera daisies, filling the little space to bursting. You'd have been impressed, if you ever saw it – such big fat leaves sprung from a tiny patch of soil, spreading out so that there was almost nowhere to stand. And it seemed to be because of the wall: the gloom meant the soil stayed moist and the plants flourished. In addition to her plants, the aunty kept a bowl of goldfish.

Her husband hardly ever came into the kitchen, so he didn't know she also kept a cat. He'd had a lung infection a while before, and he'd been wary of dog and cat hair ever since. This cat had snuck inside the day after the wall went up. The aunty had been trying to push open the back door, and a tabby cat had squeezed in through that sliver of a gap. She guessed it belonged to one of the houses further down the row, and that because her slightly-opened door had barred its way, it decided it might as well come in. It leapt boldly onto a chair, then strolled right into her little yard, where it relieved itself. After that, she couldn't bring herself to put it back out again. She hugged it close, a fluffy tabby cat, feeling its weight against her, like the weight of loneliness in the pit of her stomach.

Because of the goldfish, she had to keep the cat shut away in the yard. She couldn't let it inside, but neither could she let it leave. It often fell asleep in the yard. When it woke up it would prowl around in circles, and when it was hungry it would rub against the door, meowing. She was careful never to feed it too much: if it was hungry, it needed her. She felt there was an invisible rope between them, and when the cat was hungry, the rope pulled taut. To start with, she'd thought about finding a real rope, to tie the cat up, but then she'd decided, so long as she made sure to shut the door tight, things would be fine as they were.

One morning, while she was out shopping, her husband went into the kitchen. He opened all three doors - to the back alley, to the little yard, and to the rest of the house - and then went back to the living room, where he sat contentedly reading the paper. When his wife came home, she found the goldfish bowl smashed into pieces and water all over the floor. Her husband was just sitting there, without a care in the world.

'What happened to the fish bowl?'

Her husband glanced up, but said nothing.

'And the cat?'

He shrugged. She glared at his expression, the way he acted as though this had nothing to do with him. A ball of fire flared in her chest. This wasn't a warming fire, though. Bit by bit, she felt her heart turn to ice. And so, when she spoke again, she was even frostier than he was: 'Cat get your tongue?'

'What are you talking about? Have a cat if you like! Don't ask me!'

He went back to reading his paper, flicking from international news to the sports pages.

'Brazil won!' he exclaimed, delighted. But his cheery tones weren't for his wife's benefit. It was as if there were an invisible crowd in front of him, eagerly awaiting his reaction.

She went back into the kitchen, where she slowly washed radishes and chopped greens. Methodically, she threw pork bones and medicinal herbs into a pot, to brew into soup. Once she'd finished, she sat down at the table. She felt she needed to think things through. There seemed nothing else she really needed to do than think. In the

afternoon, she put a saucer of fish and rice in the back alley and left the door open. It opened barely wider than a person's foot, so she didn't have to worry about anyone getting in. She waited for a whole day, but the cat did not come back. She strained her ears, but couldn't hear even the faintest meowing.

A few days later, she thought she heard the cat crying, the way it did when it hadn't had enough to eat. She sat in the kitchen but couldn't figure out where the sound was coming from. For a while, she suspected it might be right there in the little yard, because the cries seemed to be coming from the cluster of dumbcanes and bush lilies. She sat for a long time in the kitchen, with the doors and the back window open, but saw no sign of the cat.

She closed the doors.

After a while, her husband came into the kitchen. He had the feeling it'd been quite some time since he'd seen her. He stared at her blankly and, after a long pause, said, 'You got thin.'

She didn't react. He walked over to the back door. He'd been planning on opening the door to let the breeze in, but the moment he tried, his face puckered in disgust. 'It stinks! What is it, a dead rat?'

He slammed the door shut.

After her husband left, she studied herself carefully and discovered it was true: she was thin. She walked to the back door and found she was almost thin enough to squeeze through the gap. This was not bad at all, she thought - a few more days and she'd be able to flit right through.

Natascha Bruce started out translating scripts and subtitles for Taiwanese films, before discovering the joys of literary translation in 2015. She was joint-winner of the 2015 Bai Meigui Award, for translating a story by Hong Kong surrealist writer, Dorothy Tse. Since then, she has worked on short stories for Tse and other sinophone writers, including Xu Xiaobin, Gu Xiang, and Patigul. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Pathlight*, *PEN America's Glossolalia*, and *BooksActually's Gold Standard* (Math Paper Press, 2016). The recipient of ALTA's 2016 Emerging Translator Mentorship for a Singaporean language, she's currently working on Yeng Pway Ngon's *Lonely Face* (Balestier Press, 2017).





Sergius Seeks Bacchus

by Norman Erikson Pasaribu

It's hard to be queer in Indonesia. Government officials make offensive public statements about homosexuality and transsexuality; a movement is currently underway to criminalize same-sex relationships; LGBTQ Indonesians regularly face the threat of violence, and the police turn a blind eye. The context in which Norman Erikson Pasaribu's debut *Sergius Seeks Bacchus* was written is just one of many aspects which make this a groundbreaking work.

This poetry collection draws upon various aspects of the poet's life, and is a heartbreaking yet humorous rumination on what it means to be in the minority on multiple levels – in terms of ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Indonesia is a site of tremendous ethnic and religious diversity, but it would be difficult to tell based on the Indonesian works that have been published outside Indonesia so far. Almost all Indonesian works available in English translation feature main characters who belong to the majority: ethnic Javanese with a Muslim background. In contrast, Norman Erikson Pasaribu is an ethnic Batakese writer of Christian background who is openly gay.

Sergius Seeks Bacchus is a breath of fresh air, a unique, honest, and technically innovative voice, by one of the most interesting Indonesian poets to have emerged onto the Indonesian literary stage in recent years. The collection is comprised of thirty-three poems. In poems of varying lengths and styles, he addresses his sexual orientation, his ethnicity, his Christian upbringing and his ensuing struggle with that religion. The result is an alternative gospel, a mini-cosmos of bittersweet and often tragicomic good news, ridicule, violence, but also happiness.

There are frequent references to the literary canon, from Herta Müller to Roman poets. Several poems are directly inspired by Dante. A poem about a secret encounter in a parking lot effortlessly combines Catholic theology with an elegy to queer love. Pasaribu cleverly instrumentalises a roster of Catholic saints – from Augustine to John Henry Newman – to show how their ideas about love overlap with his own. Part of a long tradition of queer Catholic writing, these poems are nonetheless firmly rooted in their own time and place, drawing also on the work of great Indonesian poets such as Dorothea Rosa Herliany, Joko Pinurbo, and Subagio Sastrowardoyo.

Several of Pasaribu's poems have been featured in the *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Asymptote*, translated by Tiffany Tsao. *Sergius Seeks Bacchus* won first prize in the prestigious Jakarta Arts Council Poetry Manuscript Competition in 2015. It was shortlisted for the 2016 Khatulistiwa Literary Award for Poetry and the national magazine *Tempo* named it one of the best poetry collections of that year.

"Of all the entries, *Sergius Seeks Bacchus* responds most to our desire to discover a manuscript that is thematically powerful, innovative, and technically inventive and masterful. For all these reasons we are pleased to award first prize to Norman Erikson Pasaribu." – Jakarta Arts Council

Norman Erikson Pasaribu was born in Jakarta in 1990. He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the Indonesian State College of Accounting and worked for the Indonesian tax office for almost 6 years before resigning in 2016 to pursue writing.

His first short story collection *Hanya Kamu yang Tahu Berapa Lama Lagi Aku Harus Menunggu* (Only You Know How Much Longer I Should Wait) was shortlisted for the 2014 Khatulistiwa Literary Award for Prose. His debut poetry collection *Sergius Mencari Bacchus* (Sergius Seeks Bacchus) won first prize in the 2015 Jakarta Arts Council Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for the 2016 Khatulistiwa Literary Award for Poetry.

Sergius Seeks Bacchus by Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Original title: *Sergius Mencari Bacchus*

Language: Indonesian

Length: 70 pages

Genre: Poetry

Original publisher: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2016

Rights holder: Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Other languages sold: n/a

Sales figures: 829 copies

Sergius Seeks Bacchus

by Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Sample translation by Tiffany Tsao

On A Pair of Young Men in the Underground Parking Garage at fX Sudirman Mall

Is there anything more moving than two young men
in a Toyota Rush parked in the corner of level P3,
stealing a little time and space for themselves,
exchanging kisses wide-eyed—keeping watch as one
for security guards or janitors, in each other's arms,
escaping the loneliness of another week living
someone else's life. A friend dismissed
their feelings as unnatural urges,
but each of them knows who he is now. Both
are sure the longing they feel is genuine longing,
and the love in their hearts is the same love that made
Sergius and Bacchus one, and the loneliness they feel in their vacant rooms
is no different from John Henry Newman's from 1876 to his death,
and isn't it the rest of the world who has it all wrong?
Aelred of Rievaulx said there is nothing more exquisite
than to love and be loved—it's true, even though they also
know that the world's just not ready for us.
Thérèse of Lisieux was baffled at why God played favorites,
why some souls were chosen over others,
why a sinner like Augustine of Hippo got to wear a white robe,
all shimmering and spotless. Even the two young men sometimes wondered
why they were the ones who had to be there to show love
could bloom anywhere, even in the dark,
and that love growing in the dark was no less life-giving.

Curriculum Vitae

2015

The world I lived in had a soft voice and no claws.

—Lisel Mueller

1) Three months before he was born the Romanian dictator and his wife were executed before a firing squad. To this day his mother still talks about it.

2) When he was little he fell from a tree. Ever since, his first memory of his father was himself in school uniform, squatting on the toilet. This stemmed from his first day of school—he was five and right before they set off he told his father he needed to poop.

3) The first thing he learned at school watching the girls during recess was that there was a girl inside him. He knew when he grew up his penis would shrivel and her breasts would sprout.

4) He didn't say much and only learned to read when he was finishing second grade. In front of a friend of his mother's, the mother of one of his friends dubbed him "the stupid one." His mother's friend told his mother and when he was grown up his mother told him.

5) He was bad at making friends and spent most of his time reading and playing Nintendo and Sega. The first book he read was a book of Japanese folktales.

6) Some parents in his neighborhood refused to let their children play with him and his brothers because their family was Bataknese and Christian.

7) He had no friends and didn't realize how sad this was.

8) His father beat him a lot. One day he eavesdropped on his parents. His father was upset because he was too girly. He looked in the mirror, to the little girl within. He saw it was good.

9) One time his father kicked him and sprained an ankle. His father stayed home from work. His mother gave him credit for all the problems in their family.

10) One Sunday morning his father took him and his brothers to jog and play soccer on a badminton court nearby. You faggot! his father screamed in front of everyone.

11) He accepted that he was a mistake. The day before he started middle school was the day of his first suicide attempt.

12) He got into the best high school in town. All the government officials sent their children there. His only friend from middle school started avoiding him. The bud of loneliness blossomed into first love.

13) Not long after he graduated from college he discovered the rest of the Bataknese community called him "the faggot" behind his back.

14) When he was twenty-two depression hit. One night he lost his memory. His brother found him at a gas station near the mall.

15) He ran away. In a bookstore in Jakarta he discovered a book by Herta Müller. Herta wrote about Ceaușescu's Securitate. It reminded him of his mother. He then read every English translation of Herta's books and loved them all.

16) As he approached his twenty-third birthday, for reasons unknown, he felt male. And he saw it wasn't bad.

17) He moved back in with his parents.

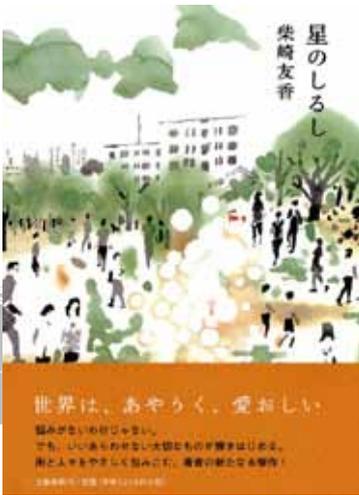
18) He went back to work and began writing again. In a novel-writing class he met you, the man who loves him.

19) His father sold a motorbike he was leasing from his employer to marry his mother. He hopes to use the royalties from his books to marry you.

20) He will grow old. You will grow old. You both will grow old and be wed before the Three-Branched God—the tree-like God—and have a child named Langit. Your descendants will fill the Earth so that whenever anyone is walking in the dark by themselves they will hear, from every window on every building on both sides of the street, voices reaching out—"Salam!" "Salam!" "Salam!"

Tiffany Tsao is a writer, translator, and literary critic. After spending her formative years in Singapore and Indonesia, she moved to the United States where she received her Ph.D. in English from UC-Berkeley. She now lives in Sydney, Australia. Her writing and translations have appeared in *LONTAR*, *The Sydney Review of Books*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Asymptote*, and the anthology *BooksActually's Gold Standard 2016*. Her translations of Dee Lestari's novel *Paper Boats* and Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel *Aruna and Her Palate* are forthcoming from AmazonCrossing, and her translation of Eka Kurniawan's short story 'Caronang' was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize. Her debut novel *The Oddfits* was published in 2016.





Star Sign

by Shibasaki Tomoka

Star Sign stars Nomura Kae, a thirty-year-old office worker in the midst of a tragicomedy. The novel begins with the death of her estranged grandfather on New Year's Day and follows her over the three-month mourning period. Unsure how she should go about grieving for someone who was nearly a stranger, Kae goes through the complex motions of Buddhist rituals with a lingering sense of detachment. Her surrounding friends and family all attempt to help her heal (in spite of the fact that she may not need healing), but their suggestions are frequently baffling to her. Her best friend Minako insists fortune tellers will have all the answers. Her co-worker believes that a 'life counseling' session complete with 'energy healing' will solve her problems. Katsuo, a young man who has adopted Kae and her boyfriend as his family, remains insensitive to the whole affair and instead gushes endlessly about UFOs and his fascination with the idea of an alien invasion. Kae accepts her friends' help, but her sense of bewilderment and confusion persists. Ultimately it is in solitude that she finally finds a sense of release and closure.

Japanese literature is not often portrayed as having a sense of humour. Well-known authors like Haruki Murakami, Yoko Ogawa, and Banana Yoshimoto produce works that may be considered strange or quirky, but are rarely considered to be funny. In contrast, Shibasaki is an incredibly comedic author, and many of her works contain laugh-out-loud moments. Though *Star Sign* is primarily concerned with death and mourning, Shibasaki's approach to the subject is uncommonly humorous and light.

Star Sign takes place in Osaka rather than Tokyo, which may partially explain why this narrative feels fundamentally different from many contemporary Japanese works in translation. Osaka, which is Shibasaki's hometown, is a cultural metropolis in its own right, distinctly different from Tokyo. The dialogue of the book is rendered primarily in the Kansai dialect, which offers a stark contrast to a Japan where Tokyo and its dialect are increasingly considered the sole arbiter of culture.

Shibasaki is a refreshing new voice whose work exists in conversation not only with the contemporary global literary scene, but also with modern authors like Natsume Soseki. Where many Japanese novels in translation feel like they might take place in any major urban centre in the world, *Star Sign* is distinctly Japanese. From the New Year's celebration to the Buddhist rites for the deceased to the prominence of fortune telling, Shibasaki's work conveys a Japanese spiritual identity that is not inaccessible or exotic, but instead simply a part of daily life.

"This novel will make your mind run wild with ideas of things unseen." – Asayo Takii, Japanese writer and literary critic

"A new form in literary reportage. A novel told like a collection of photographs." – Akiko Ohtake, novelist and literary critic

Shibasaki Tomoka is one of Japan's foremost women authors. Over the course of her seventeen-year career, she has written twenty-three novels, short story collections, and essay collections. Her novel *Kyou no dekigoto* was adapted into a film and shortly after awarded the Sakuyako no Hana Prize. In 2014, she was awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for her novel *Haru no niwa (Spring Garden)*, which has been translated into French, German and Russian, and is now out in English translation with Pushkin Press.

Star Sign by Shibasaki Tomoka
Original title: ほしのしるし(Hoshi no shirushi)
Language: Japanese
Length: 165 pages
Genre: Literary fiction
Original publisher: Bungeishunjū Ltd
Rights holder; Bungeishunjū Ltd.
Other languages sold: n/a
Sales figures: 5,000 copies

Star Sign

by Shibusaki Tomoka

Sample translation by Laurel Taylor

It seemed that the two people perched on the railing of the second-storey balcony were looking at me, pointing, and I wondered if, from where they were, they could see me. The car heater was off and the cold was creeping in. A shiver started from the core of my body, and I hunched my shoulders. My right hand was pressing my phone to my ear, but for a moment, I missed what my boyfriend was saying.

The main road cut through the mountains and continued through the housing developments around the family restaurant where we'd stopped; its parking lot was packed with cars – people with nowhere else to go on New Year's Day. I surveyed the green slopes on either side of the road. On one corner of the development – all evenly-spaced, new two-storey houses – there was an empty lot where they would probably build another house, and across the road was a brand-new, two-building apartment complex. Each building also had two storeys, and each storey had seven balconies. The young man and woman sat facing me on the railing of the second-floor balcony on the far right. Their bare feet dangled into empty space.

The woman was wearing a pink tracksuit and the man a black one, but when I squinted, it looked like he was wearing a kung fu outfit. Though I knew they were more than a hundred metres away, it felt like they must be closer, because I could clearly make out the woman's long hair as it blew and twisted in the wind. I wondered if they were cold. The temperature had plummeted a few days ago, and in Nara, I'd seen snowflakes dancing in the air.

Rain clouds had appeared after noon, and though this whole area was covered with houses, there wasn't a human shadow to be seen. I couldn't even tell if there were people in the other apartments. In the absence of sunlight, the houses and the road and the mountains had become a damp colour. The woman climbed up onto the iron railing and grabbed the drainpipe. It was a quick movement, fearless. The man's left hand pointed up at her face. She thrust out her free arm and pointed back. I turned toward the restaurant and looked at my friends sitting inside by the window. I suddenly felt afraid, all alone, watching the pair on the balcony. But my friends hadn't noticed anything; they were busy waving down the waiter.

My boyfriend was with his family in Okinawa and would be back on the fifth, so I vaguely promised I'd drop by after that and then hung up. The two on the balcony

hadn't moved, didn't even tremble. The only thing moving was the woman's hair. I opened the passenger door and got out. After crossing the parking lot, I looked back and saw that the woman had sat down on the railing again, feet dangling, and then I went through the two sets of doors into the restaurant. I was instantly surrounded by the sound of laughing children and clinking silverware, and I felt like I'd entered a completely different world.

I passed a family waiting on the bench by the register, walked by the No Smoking sign into the non-smoking section, and saw Katsuo's shaved head sticking out from the window booth. He noticed me and waved.

'Kae, what do you want? I ordered a mushroom and cheese hamburger steak.'

From his seat on the yellow cushions, Katsuo opened the colourful menu and showed it to me.

'You ate so much yesterday and you're still having meat?' I said. I laughed and pushed back the 'Hamburger Steak Fair' menu Katsuo had thrust toward me before sitting down next to Minako. She and I would probably end up paying for his meal anyway.

'What are you having, Kae?'

This time, it was Minako who asked. I pointed out the single-pane window.

'There're some weird people on that balcony. See 'em?'

'Pink and black,' Katsuo answered immediately, surprising me.

'Huh? Where?' Minako's gaze wandered in the wrong direction.

'There're two of them, on the right...on the very last one.'

'About to jump. Second floor, so I guess it wouldn't hurt too bad.' Katsuo planted his elbows on the table and stared out the window. Maybe his eyesight was better than mine.

'What? Where?' As Minako spoke, both the man and the woman spun around, got off the railing, and went inside.

'Oh. They're gone.'

'Bet they were drunk. It's New Year's, after all. You notice weird stuff, Kae.'

Minako didn't seem particularly interested; she picked up Katsuo's menu and placed it in the holder. I stared out at the balcony, expecting the two to return, but they didn't.

'Before, they were pointing like in E.T. They had their arms out, like this.'

'They were calling a UFO, definitely,' Katsuo said, looking

at me with his round eyes. Katsuo was ten years younger than both Minako and me, and his face was oily, as though he hadn't washed it this morning. 'There are lots of UFOs on New Year's Day.'

'What are you talking about? What have aliens got to do with anything?' Minako asked, shocked. A waiter in uniform arrived to take our order.

Late last night, Minako and I had visited our recently-married friends from high school at their new house. It was on the border between Kyoto and Nara, in a housing development much like the one here – it also had two stories and was painted a light yellow.

Katsuo, who'd been staying at my boyfriend's house since the thirtieth, was a student with a stomach of steel, so poor he was liable to follow you anywhere. The moment he heard there'd be food, he'd show up at anyone's house. For example, if he heard there would be Matsuzaka beef and snow crab, he'd invite himself along to the house of some newlyweds he'd never even met and stuff himself. Last night, he gorged on beef hot pot, fell asleep at five in the morning, woke before noon, and since he was already up anyway, tagged along in Minako's car when we went to Kasuga Shrine for hatsumōde. It was so packed we almost didn't find a parking spot, and then we were swept along by the wave of revellers. Jehovah's Witnesses shouted, their voices like background music, warning us about the coming of the Messiah and urging us to repent. We continued up the long path lined with tall trees and threw our coin offerings through the gaps between people's heads. While Minako and I talked about how we wanted the wisteria hair decorations dangling over the shrine maiden's foreheads, Katsuo searched the ground for stray coins, but there were none to be found. He began to complain about being hungry, so we decided to stop at a restaurant.

By the time Minako and I had eaten about half our meals, I noticed two girls sitting at a table across the center aisle, peering at a laptop screen. The girl sitting on the same side as me had brown hair done up in light curls, and I couldn't see her face. Across from her, the other girl had glossy, straight hair and flawless makeup and nails, and looked like she was in her mid-thirties. Her big eyes were looking down at the A4-size laptop screen, on which there was a round graph and some numbers on a blue background. I never worked weekend overtime at my job, and I never had to bring work home with me, so I was stupidly wondering if it was OK for them to be sitting with an open laptop earning their living over the New Year's holiday, but then I realized that the girl on my side of the booth had tarot cards lined up on the table.

'They're telling fortunes,' Minako said, leaning close to me. Katsuo had finished his mushroom and cheese hamburger steak in the blink of an eye and, now bored,

was drawing a panda on the paper mat under his plate, but he stopped and looked over at the table next to us. He stared at the girls and their line of tarot cards, and without turning back, quietly said to me, 'Her new boyfriend is different from her ex-husband, and he just started a new job, right?'

The restaurant was too loud for me to clearly hear anything the girls were saying. Minako, sitting next to the window, could probably hear even less.

'What?'

'She's starting with her compatibility with the new boyfriend. I can read lips. Cool, right?' He paused to listen. 'She's asking whether she ought to remarry.'

Katsuo smiled with only the right corner of his mouth, took a sip of water – all the ice had already melted – and then focused his eyes and ears on the neighbouring table again.

'She shouldn't move in with him yet. Maybe come summer or a little after that. That's what she says.'

'I thought you were just an idiot, Katsuo, but it turns out you have your uses,' Minako said, looking at Katsuo's face as though mesmerized. I wasn't sure if Katsuo could really read lips or if he was making it up or if my hearing was just bad.

'I am amazing. I've still got my secrets, though. Not that I'd tell you. Um, that woman, when she got married before, she consulted this lady then, too. Apparently, she told her to watch out for him cheating.' He glanced back at the table with a sly grin and then looked at Minako's plate. 'Oh, if you don't eat, your rice will go dry. Don't worry about the fortune telling, I'll listen for you.' Katsuo's smile was odd, maybe because he had a chance to make use of his special skill. In the seat behind him, two brothers squabbled over a hand-held gaming device. When I looked outside, weak sunlight was peeking out from the clouds, casting shadows on the roofs and the balcony where the man and woman had been, and somehow that made everything look farther away than it had looked before.

Laurel Taylor is currently a student at the University of Iowa's MFA in Literary Translation program, where she is a recipient of the Iowa Arts Fellowship. She graduated from Middlebury College with a BA in Japanese Studies and then moved to Japan where she spent four years working and furthering her understanding of the language. In the summer of 2016, she received a grant from University of Iowa's Center for Asian and Pacific Studies in cooperation with the Japan Foundation to travel to Tokyo and study the publishing industry as it relates to women, particularly women in translation. Taylor's work has focused primarily on women's literature including the works of Batchelor Yaeko and Shibasaki Tomoka. Her translation of Batchelor's work was adapted into a stage production.





The Shoe

by Kim Soom

An art restorer is approached with a new job. He is asked to restore the shoe of a college student who was killed while protesting the lack of transparency in the Korean government in 1987. The shoe is on display in a museum dedicated to the memory of the dead student. It has been kept in less than ideal conditions, and is now in the process of falling apart – to the dismay of both the museum keepers and our protagonist, from whose perspective the story is told. He agonizes over whether or not he should work on the project, and we slowly come to discover the importance the dead student has to him and to the country as a whole.

As he works on restoring the shoe, he reflects on how memories and meaning are created and selected. The physical object is a jumping off point for thoughts about family, friendship, and society. A co-worker tells a story about her sense of guilt when she accidentally made her young son walk around with his shoes on the wrong way round; a friend remembers how safe he felt when he saw his father's shoes by the door, even after his father had died.

This is also a novel about art, which begins with a long reflection on Marc Quinn's self-portraits, made of his own frozen blood. The protagonist is deeply immersed in his profession, and sees life reflected through the pieces he admires. Lee's shoe reminds him of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. But while Duchamp's 'found objects' suggest that beauty is not created but selected by the artist, the dead student's shoe is an example of beauty defined by history – and by the value South Korean citizens have assigned it.

In recent years, Korean literature and history have found more and more of an English-speaking audience. *The Shoe* takes a central moment in recent Korean history as its starting point: the death of the student Lee Han-yeol during government

protests has become a potent symbol for an ongoing struggle for transparency and honesty that continues to this day. After accusations of corruptions against president Park Geun-hye had emerged in 2016, she stepped down – but only after massive nationwide demonstrations had taken place. The publication of *The Shoe* that same year couldn't have been timelier. Kim Soom's themes are extremely relevant to our collective understanding of democracy and art.

An artist's novel as well as a political parable, this is a powerful reminder of the entanglements between public and private life by one of Korea's great writers. Kim is a prolific and multi-award winning writer whose novels trace the pervasive influence of injustice and social conflicts on her protagonists. *The Shoe* is a great way to discover the work of an important literary voice that has yet to be translated into English. It received much critical and popular attention and turned Kim into a bestselling author.

"Despite the fact that this is a story about Lee Han-yeol, the novel feels less like a historical and political book and more like a lyrical, dream-like poem. The shoe that starts out as being nothing more than a 'material object' to the main character, becomes a complex and indescribable abstraction." – Shim Hyeri, *Kyunghyang Newspaper*

"The author presents all those historical events that we have to remember: the two girls killed by an American tank [in 2002], the Jeju Uprising, comfort women used by the Japanese, and even the Holocaust. Yet amidst all the sadness and chaos she focuses on a warm spot. The story ends with the story of the female student who picked up Lee Han-yeol's shoe, brought it to the hospital, and waited for the family so she could return his shoe to them." – *News1 Korea*

Kim Soom was born in South Korea in 1974. She has published nine novels and four short story collections. Her debut story 'On Slowness' won the Daebo Ilbo's New Writer's award in 1997. Since then, she has won multiple other awards, including the Daesan Literary Award, as well as the 2012 Hyundai Literary Award. Noted for her distinctive style that often focuses on the meticulous, detailed dissection of objects and the realistic depiction of her characters' inner turmoil, her work is concerned with the struggles of women and those outside mainstream society. She has yet to have a complete work published in an English translation.

The Shoe by Kim Soom
Original title: L의 운동화 (*Lui undonghwa*)
Language: Korean
Length: 274 pages
Genre: Literary fiction
Original publisher: Minumsa
Rights holder: Minumsa
Other languages sold: n/a
Sales figures: 5,000

The Shoe

by Kim Soom

Sample translation by Jason Woodruff

Lee's shoe, she called it.

Mrs. Chae, the curator of the memorial exhibit, was holding the photograph of the shoe that she had brought to show me in place of the actual shoe itself. It was clear from the photograph that the shoe had deteriorated into a state that made picking it up and bringing it impossible.

I understood two things from the picture of Lee's shoe. One, that it was a simple 'material' with the physical attributes of mass, density, and elasticity. And two, that while being an artefact, a work of art, and a personal effect left by the dead, it will never be more than a material object.

Inevitably, no material can help but be affected by, be damaged slowly or even quickly by, the various elements that constitute the environment around it, be they invisible gases like CO₂, or steam, or infrared light, or UV rays, or even vibrations.

It takes oil-based paints roughly ten years to harden fully after exposure to the air, which is why a tube of oil paint can remain liquid for years and years even if the lid isn't on properly. Oil paintings that collect dust as they slowly dry will be irreparably damaged as the dust bores into the paint. I know several artists who prefer acrylic paints purely for this reason.

'I heard you have experience restoring modern art made from material similar to polyurethane,' Mrs. Chae said.

I lifted my eyes from the photograph of the shoe and looked at her.

'No. I am merely familiar with a precedent.'

'Ah, I see.'

'The precedent being the work *Prière de Toucher* by Marcel Duchamp, which was restored in America.'

Polyurethane is a very poor medium for art because of the speed at which it deteriorates. It has an unavoidable limit to its 'shelf-life', just like Mark Quinn's blood. In the contemporary art world, however, there are many mediums that have a much shorter lifespan than polyurethane. I mean, is it not this generation that uses umbilical cords, elephant shit, sperm, dead butterflies, living flies, and bleeding cow heads to make works of art?

The Italian artist Piero Manzoni used his own excrement in his artwork entitled *Artist's Shit*, contained in over ninety sealed cans with a label that reads, in four languages: '*Artist's shit. Contents thirty grams net. Freshly preserved. Produced and tinned in May 1961.*' It is said he wanted to convey the message to society that it should focus on assigning meaning, that nothing is meaningless, that all things have meaning.

Things that have precedents and things that do not.

I didn't take the trouble to explain to Mrs. Chae the huge difference between the two when it comes to art restoration.

'How is Lee's shoe currently being stored?'

'It's in a specially-built display case.'

She went on to tell me that Lee's other effects, his clothes and notebooks and the like, had all received preservation treatment, but due to the fragile condition of the shoe, and the fact that there was only one, it had not received any treatment.

I suddenly remembered having read in a newspaper, several years before, about the opening of the Lee Han Yeol Memorial Museum in Seoul.

'I should be able to decide whether the shoe can be restored after I see it myself,' I said.

'You can see it if you come to the memorial.'

'Where was Lee's shoe kept before? Before it was put into the special display case, I mean.'

'It had been kept in an acrylic display case on the fourth floor of the museum.'

I was about to ask where it had been kept even before that but stopped myself. If we kept moving back in time I would be forced to picture in my mind the foot that had worn the shoe.

After several further questions, I learnt that that there was a large window on the fourth floor through which the sun shone directly onto the shoe. I had the impression that Mrs. Chae felt a sense of guilt about the damage the shoe had received from being placed there, but I may have been reading too much into her responses.

'And how long was that? How long was it in the acrylic display case?'

'Um, from 2005 to 2013 so . . . eight years,' she mumbled, her face growing dark as she herself realized the length of time. I suddenly began to wonder just what relationship this 40-kilogram woman had had with Lee in the first place. The way she said his name, without any formal prefix, led me to assume they must have been in the same class or group in college.

Exposed to sunlight for eight years, the shoe would have suffered persistent and continuous damage from the UV rays. Light doesn't just damage skin; it will destroy art as well. It is of the utmost importance for paintings to be protected from light so the colours don't change or fade. Unfortunately, it seemed that the shoe had been kept in the worst possible place.

An octogenarian art lover once asked me to describe the best location in which to keep a work of art, so as to preserve it most effectively. I told him that the best place for a person is also the best for a work of art; that if you spend the day hanging out in one place, your body would by itself let you know if it was a comfortable place or not. This art lover, so strict with himself that he never ate anything after six in the evening, then sent his favourite works to our restoration lab as if to give them a check-up, as if he were sending them to the dentist for a cleaning and to make sure there were no new cavities.

'As I told you,' Mrs. Chae went on, 'in 2013 we had all the items in our collection except the shoe go through restoration and preservation treatments, though of course because of the damage from sweat, blood, tear gas, and emergency medication, they could not be fully restored. We were told that to prevent any further damage or change, we must immediately construct completely airtight display cases to keep out UV rays and control the humidity and temperature. We did that. All the items passed through three stages of restoration and preservation and are now kept in a secure storage room. The relics we currently display are all reproductions, apart from the shoe. For only one month each year, we bring out the original items for display. . . . It's not too late, is it?'

'...'

'How much longer will it last?'

'Well. . .'

'A year? It will last another year, won't it?'

'...'

'It has lasted twenty-eight years, so surely it can last one more. . .'

Though not meaning to put pressure on me, she was indeed doing exactly that. How much longer would Lee's shoe last . . . wouldn't she herself know better than anyone else? Therefore, it was clear to me that her reason for asking was to let me know that the shoe had lasted as long as could reasonably be expected.

After Mrs. Chae left me with the pictures of the shoe, I asked myself several questions.

Am I going to fully restore Lee's shoe?

Am I going to do as little restoration as necessary?

Am I going to forget about it and do nothing?

Am I going to make a replica?

These questions, however, were premature. These were questions that I should ask after I had decided whether I would agree even to consider restoration of Lee's shoe in the first place.

Nevertheless, the questions had to be asked, because even doing nothing, even merely analysing the situation and deciding that there was nothing to be done, even that is part of an art restorer's work.

Jason Woodruff is a literary translator based in his home town of Salt Lake City, Utah. His translations have appeared in *Asia Literary Review* and *Asymptote*, where his translation of Kim Kyung-uk's story 'Spray' won runner-up in the 2016 Close Approximations translation contest.





Tangut Inn

by Yijun Luo

Yijun Luo's masterpiece of magical realism compares the situation of those who left Mainland China for Taiwan in the 1950s with the lost kingdom of Tangut, an empire that dominated western China throughout the 11th and 12th century. There are two main plotlines: one follows a cavalry fleeing the empire during the Mongolian invasion, the other focuses on the second generation of 'mainlanders' in Taiwan. The result is a heady, inventive melange of memory, myth, legend and history.

During his futile search for the missing corpse of his wife, the protagonist, a man called Tunick, finds himself in a magical hotel that morphs and grows larger every night like a living behemoth. Each of the inn's sheer endless number of rooms is like a wormhole, transporting him through history to a different time and place: the eve of the Mongol invasion that ended the Tangut empire; the imperial palace where the Tangut king slew his seven queens; the snowbound Tibetan plateau where Tunick's father was abandoned. The hotel functions as a stand-in for human history, a place where memory and reality collide.

Tangut Inn weaves together the story of one man's search for redemption – for we soon find out that Tunick is himself responsible for the murder of his wife – with the tale of a mysterious empire. Add to that Tunick's encounters with the other guests, all unreliable narrators who tell surreal stories about men becoming monsters and historical figures living through centuries: a kaleidoscope of ditties, lies and hearsay by 'mainlanders' who have called the eponymous inn their home ever since they left mainland China during the so-called Great Chinese Diaspora of 1949.

Luo is a well-versed novelist who is clearly influenced by authors such as James Joyce, Italo Calvino or Salman Rushdie. There are elements of postmodernism, metafiction and magical realism in his writing, but Luo's strong narrative voice and his unique protagonists set his novels apart.

Tangut Inn is generally thought to be his best work, a feverish, baroque, intense masterpiece that has been widely regarded by critics and readers as one of the greatest Sinophone modern classics since its publication in 2008. It has won several prestigious literary prizes in the Chinese-speaking world, including the Taiwan Literary Award Golden Prize, and was the first Taiwanese novel to win the HKBU Red Chamber Award in 2010. It was adapted for the stage in 2014. Yijun Luo's transnational allegory not only tackles the tangled relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China after the Chinese civil war, but also envisions Taiwan as a phantom island on the political map of the world.

"*Tangut Inn* is a magical book of signs that transcends reality." – Mo Yan, Nobel Laureate in Literature

"*Tangut Inn* is like a nuclear fusion of the 'I-novel' and the grand narrative, magic realism and eroticism, black humour and sentimentalism. *Tangut Inn* embodies Luo's ambitious expedition to the twilight zone of human ethics. *Tangut Inn* is a great exhibition of flowery language, labyrinthian structure and striking imagery; it is the masterpiece of 21st-century Chinese literature." – David Der-wei Wang, Edward C. Henderson Professor at Harvard University

Yijun Luo was born in Taipei to a 'mainlander' father and an 'islander' mother. He has an MFA in playwriting from the Taipei National University of the Arts. Mo Yan, Wang Anyi and Ng Kim-chew praise him as one of the best novelists in the Chinese-speaking world. In 2007, he was a visiting writer at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In 2010 he received the prestigious HKBU Red Chamber Award for *Tangut Inn*.

Tangut Inn by Yijun Luo
Original title: 西夏旅館 (*Xi Xia Lu Guan*)
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Other languages sold: n/a

Now I'm going to tell you a story about women and love, said Tunick. Or rather, it's a story about the dark side of love: fickleness, jealousy, and fury. You shall witness many evil deeds committed in the name of love. It's a story that unleashes your most perverted fantasies, in which you torture your ex-lovers out of guilt and feigned anger, ruin them with rumours, kill them with a borrowed knife, wipe out every single relative of your love-rivals, fornicate with your neighbour's wife and daughter, kill your best pal and screw his voluptuous wife (which arouses in you the incestuous pleasure of the *levirate*), slay your love-rivals and their sons, sleep with your son's wife, and send your little sister to your best friend after teaching her to seduce him with her spread legs, so that she'll conceive his little bastard and seize his entire fortune... Whatever you dream of. There're so many eye-dazzling crimes, said Tunick, that only a 'Museum of Decadence' would be large enough to display them. All these crimes – believe it or not – were committed in real life by one man, and he is the very source of all my stories about the Tangut Kingdom. That man was stout but handsome, with an aquiline nose. He loved to wear white garments and black coronets. He swaggered on the back of his galloping steed with bows and arrows across his shoulders. That cruel, malicious demigod's blood was saturated with pantherine aggression, suspicion and strength. He was the stallion of stallions. Upon seeing such a macho whose veins and pores discharged pure testosterone, wankers like us (whose sole proof of manhood is a pair of pea-sized balls hanging below our loins) can't help but moan like whores in heat. If he lived in our time, he would be more visionary than Che Guevara the dreamer, more vengeful than Iosif Stalin the tyrant, and more rhetorically seductive than Osama bin Laden the demagogue... He was Tuoba Yüanhao, the founding father of the Tangut Kingdom.

None but he was powerful enough to weave such a scroll of lushly violent tapestry, where numerous female faces came alive with hatred, violence, and lust; where ivory bellies flaunted thick bushes and diamond-shaped bodices patterned with furious trolls and gaping toothy maws; where bloody pantomimes – perfumed with semen and vaginal juice – administered death through hanging, poisoning, slow slicing and dismembering in dim light. None but he could endow the hell screen of blossoming evil and the flesh forest with such splendour, such suspense and such horror, that we almost forget

the rhizomatic structure of human ethics and yearn for a pantheon that houses the tragic sublime.

This story starts with Yüanhao's seven queens, and ends with his own funny and noseless face, whose very centre became a big bleeding hole.

Now, let me now introduce Yüanhao's first queen, Tunick said, Lady Weimu. Dull and dumb, she hovered in the background like Pepper's ghost. She belonged to the vanishing past, just like Cinderella's birth mummy or Hamlet's spooky daddy. She embodied the fragile conscience that had been abandoned by a palaceful of people who made a deal with the Devil and sleepwalked into a collective dream of massacres. Historians tell us that she 'was virtuous and acted with the utmost decorum.' Although we know nothing about her sex life with Yüanhao, she did bear him a son. The Weimus were a prosperous clan of the Yinxia Tanguts and the very clan to which Yüanhao's birth mother belonged. (So Lady Weimu and Yüanhao were cousins by blood?) Unfortunately, Weimu Shanxi, one of the clan's chieftains, plotted against Yüanhao, who in overwhelming anger – well, perhaps behind the mask of feigned anger he'd calmly calculated all consequences and manipulated his subaltern nomadic troopers to end the conflict between the Weimus and his blue-blooded Tuobas (which would later be renamed as the Ngwemis) – slaughtered the entire Weimu clan and poisoned his own mother. Try to imagine the scenario: Yüanhao's aunties, all covered in blood, hid themselves in his mummy's tent, sobbing and panting, 'Your wolf cub, the little one whom we bathed and whose willie we toyed with, is now with his men out there, waving their scimitars and dyeing everything crimson.' It is the Tangut version of The Oresteia: the paternal will and the maternal sin. Oh yes, it is Lady Weimu that led the chorus behind this tragedy of matricide. Historians tell us that she '*righteoufily reprimanded Yüanhao*,' but she was to realise that Yüanhao would be the one to crush the trio of monolithic goddesses with massive breasts and lead the Tanguts from matriarchy towards male violence. In a theatrical darkness and silence, he slew Lady Weimu and their mixed-blooded son.

His second queen Lady Yelü (also known as Princess Xingping) was the elder sister of Yelü Zongzhen the Khitan King of Mos Jælud, and their political marriage was made to solidify the Tangut-Khitan alliance against the

Song Empire. Historians tell us that '*she was at variance with Yüanhao and died.*' Tunick said, would you please try to feel for Yüanhao the dictator? During the daytime, his feverish mind was engrossed with plots to outwit his foes and build his own kingdom. In his tent, he and his tacticians would play chess over the map of battlefields against a duo of invisible foes. They would rehearse a variety of strategies: paying annual tributes, feigning submission, pretending benevolence, colonising enemies' borders with exiled criminals, attacking enemy sentries with spearhead forces, capturing citadels, sending spies as envoys offering horses and camels, inciting Tangut tribes to rise against the Khitan . . . Yet, at night, this exhausted predator had to crawl into the embalmed tent of his queen as a humble castrate in a matrilocal marriage, and screw her while recalling those genteelly-worded petitions (of insincere bullshit) he submitted to her Khitan brother. How could he not be swollen with a dark fury to strangle her when they had sex? Some say this poor princess died in childbirth and Yüanhao never went to her deathbed. There was indeed something suspicious about Lady Yelü's death. However, historians tell us that '*the Khitan Priuy Counfellow Yelü Shucheng was fente to interrogate Yüanhao about this very incident.*' Perhaps we could try to visualise the subsequent scenario: Yüanhao, stark naked and wet with sweat, violently shook a female corpse by whose side lay a dead infant. 'I'm screwed. I literally fucked her to death.' He spared no foe, but for the very first time he felt a sense of fear as he gazed at her corpse and witnessed the evaporation of life. He pictured a crusade of vengeance in his head: the Khitan King of Mos Jælud and his heavy cavalry were encroaching on the Tangut border like an immense tsunami. Of course, it was just a phantasmagoria of horror, but the death of Lady Yelü anticipated the fall of Yüanhao's kingdom. Her life was sacred, yet the bestial impulses of Thanatos and Eros drove him to kill her. (The sense of sexual humiliation ignited the fuse spiralling over his penis and set off the bomb.)

We Tangut dudes are hopeless fools! Tunick sighed.

Pingta Ku was born in Chia-yi, Taiwan. He wrote a doctoral thesis on James Joyce's *Ulysses* and received his PhD from University College London in 2014. He is now living in Taipei and teaching English literature, writing and translation at National Taiwan University. *Tangut Inn* is his first major translation project, which has been funded by the National Museum of Taiwanese Literature.





I'm Waiting for You

by Kim Boyoung

I'm Waiting for You is a series of love letters from space. In an age of interstellar travel, a groom boards a ship travelling round the 'orbit of waiting' on a trip that promises to speed up the period of time until the arrival of his fiancée from the far-away galaxy of Alpha Centauri. Due to the complexities of space and time, two months on the ship will get him back to Earth four years later. The young man is impatient to finally be united with his bride, and sends her letters full of longing.

But nothing is ever easy in space. Although sophisticated means of travel enable people to spend time at different speeds, these modes of transport are subject to the same hiccups and delays as those we know today. Small delays in space amount to massive delays on earth. A number of technical difficulties and misunderstandings mean that the protagonist's arrival, and that of his fiancée, is delayed first by months and then years.

When the narrator first arrives back on Earth after an absence of seven years, the Korean government has collapsed and the global economy has crashed. Over the next few years, he is faced with increasingly dystopian circumstances. Communication with his fiancée becomes impossible, but he continues to send out letters into the void, hoping that she will receive them somehow.

After his first voyage comes to an end the narrator takes refuge in a tiny spaceship and travels through space alone, regularly returning to the port on Earth where he was supposed to meet his fiancée. Completely isolated out in space he almost loses his mind. When he does meet other travellers they are hostile. He finds out that his letters were intercepted by the captain of the first ship he took. On a final trip to Earth to end his life he decides

to seek out the wedding venue he had booked. The building is overgrown and derelict, but miraculously it is still standing. Inside he finds countless notes left over decades, covering the wall behind the altar, all from his fiancée. The newest one simply says, 'I'm waiting for you.'

This is a story about star-crossed lovers that is literally set among the stars. Kim Boyoung is one of the most beloved authors of speculative and science fiction in Korea but this short book is an elegy to love just as much as it is a dystopian take on a future in which space travel has become a normal commodity. *I'm Waiting for You* had an unusual genesis: It was commissioned by a fan to use in a wedding proposal. Originally published independently by the now happily married reader, the story has taken on a life of its own. It is a memento mori to the transience of our planet and an ode to love. As the narrator's journey shows us, when everything is lost, the love of another person is enough to keep someone going (albeit drenched in urine in a rickety one-man spaceship) through the boundless universe.

Kim Boyoung was born in 1975 in South Korea and is one of the most popular authors of science fiction in South Korea. Her debut short story *The Experience of Touch* (2002) and her first novel *Seven Executioners* (2013) both won major Korean SF awards. *Seven Executioners* was praised by film director Bong Joon-ho as 'a stunningly beautiful film in itself' which provides a 'new and wondrous literary/filmic experience.' She had worked with Bong on his dystopian masterpiece *Snowpiercer* (2013), for which she had developed a story scenario. Her short story *An Evolutionary Myth* was published in *Clarkesworld* magazine in an English translation by Gord Sellar.

I'm Waiting for You by Kim Boyoung

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I'm Waiting for You
by Kim Boyoung
Sample translation by Sophie Bowman

The Fourth Letter

One month and twenty-five days into the voyage, seven years, four months and twenty-five days later in Earth time

I received your letter.

So my letters got through after all. It was a real surprise. To be honest it's even more surprising that your reply reached me here on this ship. We were both lucky, right? Though it sounds ridiculous to say so, considering the circumstances we're in.

I've no idea what processes your message went through, but I got it as a voice mail. Listening to it in a man's voice was a bit odd. It sounded like he didn't understand the content of what he was reading, like a foreigner looking at phonetic symbols and sounding them out. It was hard to understand, so I listened to it over and over again. Then, once I had grasped the meaning, I listened to it some more.

I understand. It's all because of me. None of this was your fault. You did the right thing in changing ships. I changed ships unable to wait another two months to see you, but for you it would have been three years.

You said that as soon as you disembarked on Earth you looked to board a ship taking the route I'd started out on. That you were in such a hurry when you bought the ticket, you found yourself on a research vessel that was going prospecting, rather than the 'orbit of waiting' space liner. I heard that many of those research ships are worn out, in operation long past their recommended life spans.

Thank goodness you were able to take shelter, even if it is somewhere that few ships pass.

Don't cry. Every so often in the letter there was a weird 'hul-hulk-hul' sound, and I wondered for ages what it was. Somewhere along the line a machine must have translated the sound of your crying that way.

Eleven years though!

I read your letter again.

I'm fine. Just a few scratches. But one of the crew died fixing the ship. Still, they're saying if it hadn't been for that person we wouldn't have gotten even this far.

The ship's navigator says that it's only freight carriers or research vessels that pass by this stop. And those can only take a certain number of people, so we had to draw lots. My number came out with two options. I could wait here for two more months and then board a Light Voyager back to Alpha Centauri, or else take a hibernation-type freight carrier to Earth that will be here next month.

I asked when the freight carrier would arrive on Earth. They said eleven years from now.

The captain told me to take the Light Voyager and go back to my family in Alpha Centauri. That Earth eleven years from now isn't a place where anyone would want to live. It'll be uninhabitable, even for people who have been there all their lives, let alone people coming from other planets.

I said I'd go anyway. When I told them my fiancée to be would be waiting for me they all laughed. According to them there isn't a single man alive who would wait around for eleven years to get married.

But I'm going because I think you will wait. Although it might sound strange...

By the time you get this letter I will already have been put into deep sleep. Write back. I'll be able to read it when I wake up. Whatever you decide to do I'll try not to be hurt. Because I've made my decision and you will have made yours.

Hul-hulk-hul

No, that's not true.

There are no words that can express how much I'm hoping that you'll wait for me. I want it so much that I can't even bear to wish for it. So I'm going to sleep. That way I can stop having painful thoughts.

Will you come out to meet me all the same? Whatever state you're in, I don't mind. I think I'll be pretty sad if there's no one there when I arrive. If you're not there at the port I'll go to the wedding venue. Even if I'm on my own I can go and pretend.

And then the letter ends with a dry voice saying 'Hul-hulu-hulk-hul-hul.'

I'm sorry. My sweetheart, I'm so sorry. But I can't wait eleven years.

We're already three years late. Seven and a half years have gone by. Even if I go back now there's no guarantee that my flat or my job will still be there. Once someone's been out of contact for three years they're worth as much

as a dead man. If my uncles have emptied out my bank account and shared the money among my nieces and nephews I can't make them give it back. If my tenants claim my flat belongs to them there's nothing I can say. Considering the economy these days it wouldn't be at all strange if my employers had gone under. If the company has been bought out they wouldn't bother taking back an old employee.

Eleven years, no, eighteen years! In eighteen years my friends will be ancient and there'll be no one to hang out with. And where the hell can you use knowledge that's eighteen years out of date? Everything I've learned will be completely useless. Who knows whether ordinary workers at supply companies will still be able to make a living? After eighteen years of not knowing what's going on in the world, what could I do to get by?

I'm sorry. I want to go home. This isn't right. Sure we can meet eleven years from now but what's marriage if the husband is a homeless, penniless bum? I guess we just weren't meant to be. I don't know what went wrong or at what point it all started, but everything's a mess.

You have to stay healthy. Take care of yourself, they say hibernation travel takes a toll on your body. When you get to Earth I'll treat you to lots of good food. I'll be there to meet you too. I can promise that much. I'll be there, I won't forget. I mean it. I love you.

The Fifth Letter

Two months into the voyage, seven years and five months later in Earth time

How have you been?

You haven't seen the last letter yet, right?

Yeah, of course you haven't. It'll take a few more years. But you will have read that letter by the time you see this one.

I... well... I came back home. Actually, just to the port on Earth. I couldn't go home. Well, I couldn't go to the port either. I was stuck on the ship for a week, unable to put my feet on the ground. They put us through all kinds of tests. Fumigation, vaccinations, even a mental health check-up. I filled out twenty pages of forms, and I had to do it three times over. When I said 'I've filled these out already,' I got shouted at. There seemed to be thirty different departments working on processing arrivals. The TV on the ship only showed the news, and only one channel at that. All the internet portals had gone bust too, so I couldn't access my emails.

After a whole week of being stuck on ship in the port, some guy who was still wet behind the ears stormed in with recruits traipsing after him and started mouthing off. He had a real temper, like someone with a stomach ache. He went on and on about how it's all because of the old generation, people like us; it was our laziness and inaction that got the country into this mess. That was a bit much I thought. It's only been seven years.

According to this guy a terrorist group has taken over Seoul. But the city is still safe. I couldn't understand what that was supposed to mean. The brave national forces would put the insurrection down soon enough, but we couldn't be processed properly if we entered the port, so we should leave and come back later. There was a big commotion, with people clamouring to go home, but the grumpy young guy and his entourage just left.

A little later someone from the Red Cross or Lawyers for Democracy or somewhere like that came in and told us there had been a military coup. The party that had lost the election had proclaimed martial law and seized control of the national assembly, and the citizens were fighting back. When someone asked what the UN was doing they explained that America had filed for bankruptcy last year and in the aftermath the whole world was in economic collapse, so the overall situation wasn't great.

They said that if we come back in about ten years' time the global economy should be in a better state and things will be much more stable. They told us to get a move on. That this was our last chance to escape, while the country is still relatively safe. If we waited much longer and an interdict was declared restricting port traffic then we really would be stranded.

I managed to get the aid-worker's attention, explained that I had booked a wedding venue and asked them to look into whether I could get my deposit back, but they just stared at me blankly and left.

Sophie Bowman studied Social Anthropology at SOAS and then went on to do a Masters in Korean Studies at the same university. After five years of living and translating in Seoul, South Korea, she is now completing another Masters in Korean Literature at Ewha Woman's University. The winner of the 2015 Korea Times translation award for poetry, Sophie translates short stories for *Koreana* magazine, writes and translates for *Korean Literature Now*, and has a column at *Korea.net*.

ENGLISH
PEN

