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Pen and Brush

Edited by Etienne Charierre and Emily Goedde

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ABSINTHE

PEN AND BRUSH

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A selection by Emily Goedde
in collaboration with Etienne Charrière

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FROM THE EDITORS

When I began to think about what to include in an issue that would weave together literary work from and about Europe and East Asia, a poem came to mind, “Renoir’s ‘Portrait of a Young Girl’” written by the Chinese poet **Zheng Min**¹ (郑敏 b.1920). It begins, in my translation:

*Those who pursue you, enter your depths through eyes half hung,
Half opened; eyes yet to send darts of light into the world;
Like an ocean entry for the soul, your every thought flows through them
Back to calm body, like tidal waters breathed back into the earth’s core.*

This poem—a sonnet, actually, a form that Chinese poets embraced in the early 20th century—seemed an appropriate place to begin. Not only because it is an ekphrastic poem by a Chinese writer on a piece of European art, but also, maybe more so, because it is a meditation on opening up to the world. The poem ends:

*Look, how a soul first locks itself tightly, tightly
Only then to unfold toward the world: Strenuously, silently, she scrutinizes
herself,
In order to walk toward a world full of demands of love.*

Although a poem about a woman coming into adulthood (Zheng Min was a young woman when she wrote it), it suggests questions that all the writers in this issue of *Absinthe* take up in some way: How do I scrutinize myself, even as I open up to the world outside? And how does this world outside bring me to scrutinize myself?

Wei-Yun Lin-Górecka, a Taiwan-born writer and artist who now lives in Poland, treats these questions in her three keenly observed essays, ‘The Skeletor,’ ‘Miss Kiwi,’ and ‘Solaris Stop,’ which I have woven through the issue, like threads connecting the many possible answers. The pieces are drawn from Lin-Górecka’s collection *Translanders*, a term Lin-Górecka uses to describe ‘people who feel at home everywhere and nowhere. Always in-between.’

Hong Kong writer **Xi Xi** takes up these questions as well, using them to play with meaning and form. Xi Xi is among the mostly highly regarded Hong Kong writers

¹ Although we have generally kept Chinese names as they appear in Chinese, which is to say surname first and given name second, we have followed the writers’ preferences in the cases of Wei-Yun Lin-Górecka and Japanese writer Ryoko Sekiguchi, whose given names are followed by surnames.

from the second-half of the twentieth century, and her ‘At Marienbad’, from the late 1960s, is an avant-garde gem from the period. Written thirty years later, her musing on Chinese translations of Yeats’s poem ‘Among School Children’ is just as insightful and playful, a true joy for anyone who has thought about the trials and tribulations of translating poetry.

Ryoko Sekiguchi’s *It’s Not Coincidence* is a deeply moving reflection on her experience of the Great Sendai Earthquake of 2011, and the tsunami and nuclear disaster that followed. From her position as a writer, who, living and working in France, is physically distant from Japan, even while she is still intimately connected to it, Sekiguchi pushes us to simultaneously consider the effects of catastrophe on international and internal levels.

The intensity of Sekiguchi’s work reverberates in the swirling poetic excerpts of **Yang Lian’s** book-length *Narrative Poem*. Yang shows us that to move between continents is to stretch and transform ties between families. Indeed, Yang, who was born in Switzerland, but who grew up in China, only to be exiled in 1989, has the ability to transform the pull-and-pull between places into revelations about family, language, identity and belonging.

Icelandic writer **Magnús Sigurðsson’s** poems evoke crystalline moments of natural beauty, and they pair evocatively with the oil paintings and watercolors by artist **Chen Limin** included here. Both Sigurðsson’s poems and Chen’s images subtly mix the sparseness of Chinese traditional forms (be they literary or visual) with European subject matter, allowing us to see both the forms and the objects in new ways.

As with Sigurðsson and Chen’s works, **Chang Ying-Tai’s** novel *The Bear Whispers to Me* is both innovative and timeless. Winner of the 2015 Lennox Robinson Literary Award, *The Bear* is one of the first novels about Taiwan’s aboriginal populations to appear in English. It revolves around the life of a young boy, and in this excerpt we find how the international wars of the 20th century reverberate in his world, even today.

In his fascinating vignette ‘The Women Who Defeated America: The Victors’, Spanish writer **David Jiménez** is transfixed by a postcard image of a young woman soldier from the Vietnam War, only to meet the same woman a few hours later. She is no longer a fighter, however, but a grandmother, full of stories and wisdom.

Jiménez comes away from his time with her feeling as if his understanding of the world has shifted.

Zhou Weichi's graceful poems mix the playful and poignant, the academic and the sentimental, creating a portrait of an intellectual who moves between China and Europe. While Ouyang Jianghe's 'Autumn Listening: on a performance by the late cellist Jacqueline du Pré' evokes the pathos of the talented musician's short life. In **Lucas Klein's** translation, we hear the chiseled musicality and lovely poignancy of both Ouyang's verse, and du Pré's own story.

Excerpts from *The Waiting Room*, by **Tsou Yung-Shan**, join Wei-Yun Lin-Górecka's essay on translation, 'Solaris Stop', to bring the volume to a close.

Tsou, a writer from Taiwan who now lives and works in Germany, has written a beautiful novel about a young man, Hsu Ming-Chang, who, after being divorced by his wife, moves from Munich to Berlin, rather than return to Taiwan. In Berlin, Hsu finally finds the space to create his own world, and the novel presents with great acuity the folding in and opening up that Hsu is able to perform only once he has moved into this foreign space. One of the great strengths of the novel, however, is that even as it develops Hsu's central story of self-awareness and freedom, it weaves in the struggles of two women, one Belarusian, one German, as they come **up** against limitations of place. In this way, the novel creates a nuanced picture of the effects of political, economic and cultural realities on our personal narratives.

Let me close with some words of thanks. I am thrilled to include a short review by a Master's student in the University of Michigan's Center for Chinese Studies, **Samantha Hurt**, on English-language publishers of contemporary Chinese literature. If your interests have been piqued by this issue, we hope that you'll use these resources as a starting point for continued reading. I am also indebted to writer and artist **Bonnie Mu-Hua Hsueh**. It is thanks to her fine advice that the work of Wei-Yun Lin-Górecka and Tsou Yun-Shan appear here. Similarly, I would like to thank **Professor Xiaobing Tang** for introducing me to the work of artist Chen Limin. This issue would be much the lesser without the addition of her lovely works.

EMILY GOEDDE WITH ETIENNE CHARRIÈRE

ANN ARBOR, MAY 2015

WEI-YUN LIN-GÓRECKA 林蔚昀

骷髏樓

‘The Skeletor’

(non-fiction)

Translated by Darryl Sterk

For a while there, every time I got homesick I would run to the Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski Expressway, perhaps the widest road in Kraków, and one of its few raised thoroughfares. For a moment, I would feel like I was back in Taipei, at a Civic Expressway intersection.

Strange, isn't it? That it wasn't oyster omelets and other night-market fare that I missed, or the convenience stores open 24-7, or the all night A&E programming that got better the later you watched, but the Civic Expressway: a landmark of all the commotion of urban civilization, which I usually craved to escape.

I guess it's the incorrigible urbanite in me, and the nostalgia feel for a childhood in Taipei. I grew up near the Jen-ai Roundabout. Jen-ai Elementary School was a three-minute walk from my house, across a crowded street of cram schools. We would always say: "Let's go to Eslite Books! The one right outside our front door." Or: "Let's go to the Far Eastern Department Store! The one right across the way." Living in the cultural heart of the city was really convenient. Nowhere seemed far away, as if the most distant land were close at hand, as if whatever I wanted I could just reach out and take.

I never lived in downtown Kraków. Even when I lived closest, I would still have to walk fifteen minutes to get to a place with an "urban vibe" (somewhere with cafés, bookstores, restaurants, and banks): the Rynek Główny, the Main Square in the old city. Kraków is a very European city, replete with a graceful, profoundly classical beauty. But classical beauty did nothing for my homesickness.

What about the bookstores? There are indeed bookstores, but only chain stores without much character. And the antiquarian shops are so austere I feel I can only look on from afar. There are only a couple of independent bookstores. And the cafés? Yes, there are cafés, and they're really interesting. But the cafés here all double as bars, so while they're good places to go for fun or to have a chat, the mood isn't right if you want a quiet place to work. Restaurants don't sell snacks. And when you

go to the bank, the step-motherly lady who handles your business is nothing like the xiaojie who bows, smiles and serves you tea in Taiwan. The convenience stores aren't open all night. The only way for a typical Taipei kid to relieve homesickness is to go gaze at a raised roadway.

There's only one other place I can go to soothe my soul, the Skeletor Tower, by the Mogilskie Roundabout. It wasn't supposed to be called Skeletor. It was supposed to be a twenty-four story building. Construction began in 1975 and stopped four years later when the money ran out. It's been standing there ever since, a ruin in the middle of the city. For a while it was a giant billboard, advertising *Avatar* or whatever the latest Hollywood blockbuster was for miles around. To be perfectly honest, whenever I went past on the bus, the Navi princess on the side of Skeletor looked truly ghastly.

Why would I pass such a forbidding old building to indulge nostalgia? Just because it reminds me of the Hotel Fortuna I would pass as a kid whenever I went around the Jenai Roundabout. It had a better fate than the Skeletor. For a while it hosted 'glittering official gatherings' and was 'a place of pomp and circumstance', according to the Taipei municipal government website. But in 1982, financial problems forced the Hotel Fortuna to close, and everything was moved out except the skeletal frame. Later on, when its stakeholders were unable to reach a consensus, the frame of the Hotel Fortuna sat empty, and this is how it stood all through my childhood and adolescence.

My most vivid memory of Taipei, in fact, is from the night before I went off to school in England. After an all-night karaoke marathon at the Holiday KTV in Danshui with all my theater friends, I came home at dawn with sleepy eyes. Going around the Jenai Roundabout, I looked up and—Wow! Incredible! Under wraps for the longest time, the ruined Fortuna was newly unveiled, and perched on its head, haloed in the morning light, a crane wielding a wrecking ball.

That was the last time I saw the ruined mien of the Fortuna Hotel.

When I came home for winter vacation, the Fortuna Hotel had gone the way of the proverbial river of springwater that flows to the east: in its place was a construction site and a half completed edifice. One summer, several years later, it had turned into a 'glittering' glass-plated skyscraper, the headquarters of Taishin Financial Holding Co., The strange thing is that whenever I see that shiny new building I feel: *Ah! I'm not at home here anymore.*

XI XI 西西

‘At Marienbad’

在馬倫堡

“Reading Translations of the Closing Couplet of Yeats’
‘Among School Children’”

讀葉慈《在學童中間》中譯末二行

(poetry)

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

At Marienbad

The face of the afternoon paper. A stampede of fenced-in cattle. Green light. I race against the sick Futurist sun. All figures are →.

Walk down the hallway. Run into someone hawking wild strawberries and singing strange songs. A girl rolling a copper hoop. A bell rings thrice. A poster paster appears. Cocteau stands behind a harp. Staring. Watching me, glancing past.

The evening paper covers the face of the afternoon paper. I run relays run obstacles. The hands of the police. Every clip-clop every two wheels intertwining every cross. Give me an anchor. Give me a mountain.

‘At Marienbad’ was first published March 27, 1964, in the journal 中國學生周報.

Reading Translations of the Closing Couplet of Yeats' 'Among School Children'

Many people have translated Yeats, but as for the debate of transliterating his name, should it be *Yezhi* or *Yeci* in Chinese?

As a Cantonese, I think the latter more flattering
In the closing couplet of 'Among School Children'
Yeats writes:

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*

In Bian Zhilin's version (to translate the translation) it reads:

*Body swayed to music, O, bright glance
How can we differentiate the dancer and the dance?*
(though he lost the first O, he found the end rhyme)

Qiu Xiaolong's rendition goes thus:

*O, body swaying to music, bright eyes
How can we differentiate the dancer and the dance?*
(the medial O has been moved to the front
the last line follows Bian Zhilin)

Fu Hao renders it such:

*O, body swaying with the music, O, brightening glance
How can we differentiate the dancer and the dance?*
(though he has both the O's
the last line still smacks of Bian Zhilin)

Yuan Kejia recasts it as:

*Body swayed to music, bright glance
How to make a man distinguish the dancer and the dance?*
(‘glance’ and ‘man’ nearly rhyme
‘dancer’ and ‘dance’ are alliterative)

Yang Mu turns it into:

O body spun to music, O gleaming glimpse

How can we recognize the dancer from the dance?

(he forgoes the Yeatsian rhyme for mere alliteration

‘spun to’ kinda spins off ‘swayed to’

‘dancer’ and ‘dance’ are spot on)

To read the original is to read the author

To read the translation is to read the translator

Who speaks for Yeats?

Translations are simply transitions

O disparate starry skies, O variant landscapes

How can we know the poet from the poem in translation?

(1998)

RYOKO SEKIGUCHI

Ce n'est pas un hasard

From *It's Not Coincidence*

(non-fiction)

Translated by Shannon K. Winston

I call continuously for half an hour without any luck. No one picks up at my brother's either. I begin to worry. I write them a collective email. I finally realize that if no one picks up, it's not because my mother is away from her cell phone but because the line is inundated.

A call. I pick up. A French friend. "I'm in front of the T.V.," he says to me, "the tsunamis are impressive..." Then, I lose my temper. I can't help it; abruptly, I interrupt him: "Impressive or not, I don't give a damn! For us, it is not an image, it's a reality that falls on our heads!" However, at the moment when I say this, in the distance, the tsunami cannot be for me anything other than an image. The ordinariness of these images. But in this instant, I don't grasp the seriousness of the situation.

Without a doubt the impossibility of reaching my family made me angry. Maybe I also exaggerated a little because I was speaking to a foreigner. He must not have had much experience of catastrophes. The temptation of taking the high ground. Yet, there is nothing to be proud of. The information that I had in that instant recalled the catastrophes of the past. Serious, certainly; but we've known some serious ones, too.

Three hours later, I finally reached my mother on the phone. She is doing well, but has no news of my father. A call from a cell phone company agent who offers me a "competitive deal." In general, I am quite patient with this type of call. I imagine myself in the place of someone who must do that work. But this time, it was impossible; I didn't have the mental space for it. I told this to the woman on the other end of the line, who responded: "Okay, I've noted it."

"It's noted." What is noted?

Okai, a friend from Japan, worries about nuclear plants; I read his commentary on a website and spent some time consulting specialized pages. Until then, no one around me had considered this risk because so many were captivated by the image of the tsunami.

When I think about it, on this first day, all the way through until late afternoon, most Japanese thought that they were dealing with a natural catastrophe like those that they had already experienced, even if the power of the tsunami was incomparable.

However, it is never the same thing. Even if one has survived others, every catastrophe is without precedent until the moment in which one experiences it. And this time, I worry this was more real than ever.

Returning home, I watch the NHK channel on repeat on my computer; it's a news channel par excellence for this type of situation. It is in this way that I begin to realize the enormity of the situation.

In the evening, I invite my friends over to my place. It's better to be many than for each to be alone in his or her corner, imagining the worst. The further one is, the more one's imagination gets carried away.

There are seven of us glued to the NHK website.

Among my friends, some were still not able to reach their families. Each time that the television announced a new aftershock, the igniting of a fire, one of them picks up the phone in vain.

It is then that I am seized by a strange sensation: I had already lived this.

I remember: my brother and I stayed up until three or four o'clock in the morning watching the city of Kobe burn, ravished by flames as if after a bombing. I remember myself, I was a middle schooler, when a district of the island of Miyake was 70% destroyed by lava. I also remember an earthquake in the very region that was affected today.

So many images return to me, of earthquakes and typhoons, that I can no longer distinguish between them. The images superimpose themselves one on top of the other. And all at once they are and are not images. As soon as one is affected, the image is not an image, but a reality; but when one is not directly affected, the image keeps in some form its status as an image, and it is these image-realities that affront us

each time Japan is victim to a catastrophe, and which superimposes themselves before our eyes as we rest riveted before the T.V.

But at a distance, far from the drama, here in Paris, I suddenly feel surrounded by my Japanese friends who are assembled in my small apartment like small animals looking to take shelter.

It suddenly strikes me that there are people who never know this, who have never been confronted with such a situation in their lives, like the French, who stand upright on solid ground—it is an incredible good fortune.

Even us, in this anguish, we cannot help but to think that we are, us too, also well-sheltered Parisians.

March 12

At three o'clock in the morning, my father finally returned home. My parents' house is located in Kanagawa, west of Tokyo, too far to walk home like certain Tokyoites did after the earthquake surprised them at work.

Impossible, clearly, to find a train or a taxi. No room either on the regional bus, the line was interminable. My father had to walk to the Tokyo train station to take the Shinkansen, the Japanese high-speed train, that had resumed service by evening and which dropped him off due west, in Odawara, eighty kilometers from Tokyo. From there, he finally was able to find a taxi and retrace the twenty-five kilometers to his house.

Undoubtedly, he could have spent the night in Odawara but, worried about my mother, he wanted to return home at all costs.

On the 61 Bus, there is a mother and her two children beside me—a boy and a girl. They take turns screaming about where they would like to spend their summer holidays. “Me, I want to go to Brazil!”; “Me, Mexico!” It's like a list of countries learned at school. At one point,

the boy says: “I would gladly go to Japan—oh, actually no, that’ll be for later.”

While walking, I become aware that I am indeed on firm soil.

It is this afternoon when I begin to write. On March 11th, I had not yet sat down to write. I don’t know what triggered it. Undoubtedly, among other things, it is because I thought about a lecture that I had to prepare for the following Tuesday. I knew that I couldn’t read a text as if nothing had happened.

March 13

Exhausted, the Japanese poet Tatsuhiko Ishii arrives in Paris.

He came to make several talks and to participate in a round table, in which I will also be a part, on March 15. His flight was not canceled, but since the airport shuttle didn’t seem to be working anymore, until the last minute we thought he could not come.

Ishii taught me the etymology of the word “disaster,” in Italian “disastro,” which means “under an inauspicious star.”

An article in a French daily newspaper asks how the Japanese can continue to live on an island that is subjected to such extreme catastrophes. I would really like to know if the journalist would have dared to say something similar to the inhabitants of regions with harsh climates, or of certain African countries, or Iran, where there are also lots of earthquakes.

...

They tell me that people from Kyoto do not feel affected. Seen from here, in Paris, it seems that all of Japan trembled. It is really not the case. In the West, people must figure they have already gotten their fair share with the earthquake of Hanshin-Awaji in 1995. One must also feel just as removed from, not to mention critical of, the portrayal of events by the Japanese media in the West. They are right: it is as if all of Japan

revolves around Tokyo. Even if the capital was not directly impacted, it is enough that it was a little affected—the systematic rationing of electricity, owing to the problems at the power plant in Fukushima—for the media to run wild. When other regions are affected, there is no common measure. On March 30th, I receive an email from a friend who is a breeder in Okayama. He congratulates himself for having left Tokyo twenty-seven years beforehand in order to settle in the countryside. The egotistic attitude of the media was unbearable to him.

...

As long as this catastrophe does not tarnish Tokyo's image. Or perhaps it is already too late and the city is already irreversibly sullied?

Japanese cuisine contains a lot of algae. They're excellent for one's health because they are rich in iodine. Well that is why people buy it in astronomical quantities, believing that they are protecting themselves against radiation. It's a bad joke.

Very quickly, we learn that once the sea is polluted, algae not only retain radioactive particles, they actually condense them.

The reading and round table in the amphitheater of the Paris VII University. There's a lot of people. In general, this type of event doesn't attract many young people. Today, there seems to be a significant number of students. A strange atmosphere pervades the room. The audience has come to listen to poetry, but we who read have a hard time pretending as if nothing happened.

Before beginning to read, Ishii explains in a few words that he had chosen these texts well before the earthquake, entirely by coincidence.

It struck me, too, to be bothered by this coincidence. Last year, we created a sonic piece with Eddie Ladoire, a ceramicist and composer, that we had played on tour. I was interested in the great Molasses Flood in Boston on January 15, 1919, that killed 21 and injured 150. A distillery

tank—15 meters high, 27-meter diameter, which could contain up to 8,700,000 liters of molasses—collapsed.

The incongruity of the catastrophe had intrigued me, but I had also wanted to reflect as a way of imagining the eve of such a catastrophe.

As for the writers and artists who are wrought by this issue, it is not surprising that their creations, their thoughts, immediately precede or coincide with a catastrophe.

As it turns out, Eddie put this musical piece, “The Day Before”, up online on March 10, 2011. I posted it on FaceBook on the same day. On exactly that day. These things happen. What matters is not to let oneself be surprised by chance; this type of coincidence has nothing, in and of itself, to tell us.

The important thing, when one asks oneself about “what is possible after a catastrophe,” a question asked many times by the world, is to be in the state of mind that one also has on the eve of other catastrophes to come. Thus, it is equally necessary to interrogate oneself about what one can write before a catastrophe, or between two catastrophes, which is the permanent state in which we live.

Ishii says that he cannot write a Tanka about an earthquake. This makes me understand one thing: one can perhaps write about catastrophes—but afterwards. To write a poem after, it is probably possible. Not during. I would be incapable of writing a poem during.

I also understand it too; what I am in the midst of writing is not literature.

It’s a “report.”

I draw up a report, the most sincere possible

Before images of the earthquake and the tsunami, what returned to me in memories are literary souvenirs as well as images from the

television. A passage from *The Makioka Sisters* by Tanizaki, which describes the great flood of Hanshin in 1938. Also, the image of a character walking on the edge of train tracks; I couldn't immediately find in which text it originated. A friend reminded me that it was from a scene in Morio Kita's *The House of Nire*, which mentions in one instance the great earthquake that hit Tokyo region in 1923. The character, who found himself in Hakoné, hundreds of kilometers from there, returns to Tokyo on foot. Cécile Sakai also reminds me about one of Tanizaki's short stories in which a character is haunted by the image of a big earthquake in a dream-like world.

During the round table and the dinner that follows, there is a palpable unease. Each person keeps an eye on his or her cellphone "just in case" there is news. A tremor in Shizuoka, 6 on the Richter Scale. It's closest to the area where my parents live. I try to reach them without any success. Panic.

Tatsuhiko Ishii retorts to the ones who are worried in a joking tone: "If the emperor leaves Tokyo, it will be the end of us."

The emperor like the Geiger counter.

A few hours later, I finally succeed in reaching them. They are incredibly calm. There is only me, in my distance, who shows herself to be so fragile when they are the ones in the middle of the event.

Strangely, I find myself overwhelmed by the same sensation that preceded my grandfather's death. He was the dearest person in the world to me. He was very sick and we knew that the end was near. Living in Paris, I asked myself when I should leave for Japan in order to arrive "in time," but in a way, I dreaded returning, as if doing so risked speeding up his death. It was a kind of superstition, but that's the way it goes; I waited in Paris, living my everyday, in anguish.

It was the sensation of living the day before without wanting to admit it to myself.

One would like that it not happen, but waiting is so unbearable that one reaches the point where one almost wishes that something would happen, during which one closes.

YANG LIAN 杨炼

叙事诗

From *Narrative Poem*

(poetry)

Translated by Brian Holton

PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM 1

22nd February 1955 – 4th May 1955

Berne, Switzerland

Canto 1: Ghost Composer

 this unseen structure written by a ghost

sets up a red auditorium

the little mouth in the womb sipping at scarlet sludge

maggot-like fingers arching to grab at mother

grabbing red-hot sheet music

the cello spattered with pearl-white mucus

has been abruptly bowed the foetus hangs on that notation

 listen to the submerged structure at its inception

the foetus is the notation a pearl of rancid perfume

its still undifferentiated limbs already nailed down

a moment ago squirming in the egg it has shaken the bell's ring apart

the music vomits branches saturated in sky-blue greasepaint

close your eyes and hear birdsong string up a dotted line

green leaves tongues licking into the old age of bowstrings

twisting wrinkled flowers stockpiled by ghosts

like a dried scallop the cello echoes the ocean's vast enormity

pouring out emptiness once, pouring out the sobs a thousand times
in flashback

close your eyes semen dissolves the dark

in the net's tail, the silvery shoals

flesh still flowing in the little ears flowing into thought

the little ghost calm in wordless song, the world calm in lingering

inside blood-red elements

this is May the wind is full of weeping

an empty wooden chair before the classroom altar

turns around waits for him to arrive

First Day

snow on the mountains melting in sunlight

just slipped out of a tunnel too

this little beast sleeps on its side

a weeping frenzy

fills in the hollows on the bolster

mycelium-fine hair damp and briny

paws shrunk in a coverlet of white mittens tremble faintly

a tsunami picks up the sailor's little cot

another hostage mortgaged to home and family

snow on the mountains parallel to the masthead watchers

he is added to endless weary human forms

returning implies kissing the next ocean breakers

a photo stops the verdant pine wood outside the window

the instant daybreak hits the shutter

he falls in love with the dream in a dream that he isn't there

shattered on a soft reef to have reached

ignorance of black ignorance of white

a bitter rosin fierce friction on tree-trunks remembered

Tenth Day

in the market snow's brightness slaps your face too well-known

as the car's automatic door lock snicks softly shut

his eyes are still firmly closed thirty years on

the keen chill whets life the sheaves of light

golden milky-tasting far from symbolic

by a nurse's hand at the bedside held tight

the seal's little nostrils rise from the whitecap coverlet

geranium and lemon a seductive solution thirty years on

though there's doubt then with sewn-up eyelids' hurt

sewing the tenth-day world onto what's external

light's tenth pull on the trigger already an axiom

he's shot chasing the rifling of the barrel

whose nature lengthens unto death avalanche sky-fallen

both feet pillowed on melt-water's line of thought

at the command of a geography milky-tasting and golden

double exposure in the mind leaps the car door and lands on

suddenly-wakened acrid pellets of fruit-flesh

hidden by light-speed among blind cobbles he blazes on

Mother's Handwriting

her hand gently strokes after death still stroking

each white deep-sea coral branch

refracted through layer on layer of blue roiling

cold as carefully-chosen words the first letter written to her son

in her own hand the seawater scours with its murmuring

through images of a little face currents are glancing

with her scribbles page by page growing

a drop of blood called love from the start

each day into stickier grammar ripening

only against the tide of time can the son's reply be delivered

the son's gaze changes the direction of reading

reads up to illness when he can't hold a word for shivering

her cut-off hands above the page her ocean hanging

a single inch away the blue ink still more dazzling

body heat curdles into a place the wind can't blow down

coral lamp sets off a blood-woven twilight

faintly lighting the moment of a poem in childbirth

as all language responds to dying words clogged in a heart

First Month Fulfilled

into the round lip of the First Moon's cup will pour

so many moons now the child is lying quiet underwater

becoming part of the far-off view of early morning

waking early little frog or swordfish

opening the webs between its five fingers pupils gleam and wander to

the window the aquarium's bright beautiful glass

First Month clouds belly's fish-scales shimmering bright

the first Spring bends down and gives his cheeks a scratchy kiss

birdsong's colourful tail dragging the little cot along

still doesn't know the past exists doesn't know the bloody circulation

plucking at his eyelashes an non-person's daybreak

each cell a boat wandering off its course

delivering the single passion of being dashed on the rocks

this child's good behaviour has exhausted the reticence of the future

uprooting the clock's second hand in brilliant sunshine

he has understood that the bitterest of tears must remain unspoken

little dolphin in swaddling clothes, one year old in one day

eyes full of amazement gently splashing into the whirlpool

Fifty Days

the ocean is like mother's body detained elsewhere

the only hand she has left cut off in the photo

on her nightdress ripples of blue and green stripes

sleeves rolled all the way up a mild and kindly light

embracing him a seashore overflowing with the scent of soap

telling him that all his life he'll rest his head on the sea-breeze's shoulder

all his life sopping wet looking up from the washbasin

at the tiny nakedness clambering up the wrapped-up umbilical cord

a tiny stalk with the evanescent dialect of the water's voice

chatting with mother her non-existence

has cut off bleached when injected into her son

brightly beautiful as the tracks of terns everywhere

even the sea will die too just as words

have died then scoop him up skin sticky with dream journeys

an exercise lost in the washbasin

pulling at a hand embedded in a tiny armpit

that hand becomes ocean is also known in a son's body weight

lying down in mother's fragments he endures this pleasure

Seventy Days - May 4th

the wild ducks have tucked lapis lazuli feathers in their bosoms

voyaging on the little lake of his snow-white lapel

bent into the eyebrows of an instant spilling out laughter

migrant birds are seduced by the magnet planted in their brain

flight! the meaning that lies between two dates

burns both hands makes the writing's shape more graceful

grown into a cobblestone full of life in the little square

jolting the pram and the curious sun leaning over it

snowy mountains like smoke curling up from a cigarette

a farewell to being full of life bamboo grove drawing out the
scent of rain

blotting out a million miles he reflects the claustrophobia of
the water's sound

first moment forged into ineluctable madness

the ducks' emerald necks loll on their backs

seashore's axis twisted through 360 degrees

sewn soft toys of his youth only the needle's eye is left

his today so like a fake mollusk clouds

have endlessly climbed the ridge portents of living

quack quack ducks' orange tongues are still explaining

Peking Opera Lesson

peonies cluster round on their fine stamens stand pergola and patio

her cheek transits over to him a dream half-white half-red

his sweet tenderness becomes her springtime soprano

is't man? is't ghost? an impossible beauty dallies with the world beyond

dalliance approaching powder's perfume shores up the aroma of flesh

hip-swinging high buskins wade the riffing pool till it overflows

he sings and she signs each drawn-out end-rhyme

life is like theatre but not everyone puts on a brilliant show

—says Father

Eastern Peace Market Fortuna Theatre Goldfish Lane

all chasing the king's concubine clouds want clothes flowers want faces

history wants broken-down relics that follow after greasepaint is gone

he and she amorous looks and sweet ogling fill in a blank storyline

white silk sleeves have been rippling for a millennium who cares

about dried-up names?

the shot glass is filled up all unseen is knocked back all unseen
the snapped neck hangs from the strap in a darkened private party
pirouettes a true cut flower encountered this false coming of age

—says Father

a world hidden in air materializes
with the crane's cries oh dynasties the crimson and the white
are bliss indeed
an aria forced from deep in the throat forces out Deep Time's
metamorphoses
always the same story always this girl and this boy
treading the margin of the stage as if it were the margin of time
treading the knife-edge of the now oceans below the cliff recede
she and he watch us from a great height only extreme elegance
is allowed
oh how golden shines art's alembic it fills every silence in the ear

—says Father

MAGNÚS SIGURÐSSON

Tími kaldra mána

From *Cold Moons*

(poetry)

Translated by Megan Alyssa Matich

Easter Window

The morning sun
casts the silhouette

of an oriole
in an apple tree

on the paper curtain
of the east window.

Li Po
barely traced

a more beautiful shape
with his feather.

Sailing

The boat drifts
through the water lilies.

The bank,
lined with cherry trees
in bloom.

Nothing
under the canopy
of the willow

except a mango bird.

Each haul
of the oars brings
us nearer.

Hunter

I can neither read
nor write.

The spear is my stylus.
The water's surface,
my page.

As soon as the shadow
of a fish appears,
I sign my name
on the surface.

Rain

What I love
most of all
is rain,

when it rinses
dirt off of the leaves

and yellowed grass
absorbs the water.

Until the world
reclaims
the sharpness of its colors.

New Moon

The plum wine
held out until spring.
Nearly a barrel.

And now, we celebrate
its arrival
with poetry and songs.

Now that the Moon
of Growing Grass
is here, and the mountain
pass
can again
be traversed.

Daylilies

The morning sun
glitters

on the crown
of a daylily.

A wellspring
that fills up

and a cruet
that empties

each day.

CHEN LIMIN 陈立民

From *Peintures 2011-2013* and *Aquarelles 2011-2014*

‘Galets 小石子’

15 x 24 cm. Aquarelle sur papier, 2012

‘Fraises 草莓’

46 x 60 cm. Peinture à tempera, 2013

‘Paysage 风景’

30 x 30 cm. Aquarelle sur papier, 2012

‘Prunier, l'éventail 梅枝与折扇’

70 x 70 cm. Peinture à tempera, 2013









CHANG YING-TAI 張瀛太

熊兒悄聲對我說

From *The Bear Whispers to Me*

(fiction)

Translated by Darryl Sterk

Chapter 4

A Manifest Mystery

Oazmu—nowadays people call it white-eyed thrush—is the reincarnation of a great warrior of our people. We augur by the oazmu. For hunting parties, a magnificent call of an oazmu is auspicious, but a sorrowful call is inauspicious; an oazmu that flies left to right is a bad sign, but one that flies from right to left is a good sign...

I head west, down the mountain.

On the way down, my whole body feels light, carried along on currents of air, with superlative grace. And the cool breezes, butterfly shadows, bird calls and insect cries make me feel wide open and care-free. But further down the sun appears from behind the clouds and its rays start burning my head. To keep from fainting, I duck into a grove of jelly fig trees.

It is refreshing and cool inside, but the turquoise of the trees, the smell of rot and mold and the light milky mist give me a bad feeling. I feel like a formless force is leading me by the arm. I want to resist but I can't.

Underfoot there are moss, fallen leaves and hiser beetles crawling all over the ground. There is also a pulsating buzzing or humming sound. In the dim light, I can still make out some green grasshoppers darting here and there. I drag my foot over the ground to brush aside the thick layer of moss and leaves. Underneath this layer is the trace of a trail.

Has someone been here lately?

Maybe there is someone here now, but I haven't seen anyone on the way. Inside the grove are several pieces of coral. Washed colorless by corroding time, these pitted hunks are thickly covered by a layer of decaying

leaves, through which ants, hoppers, centipedes and spiders crawl. I walk past the coral and brush aside snakelike threads of beard lichen blocking the way. A ray of sunlight penetrates the canopy and shines on a big beautiful conch shell, like a burst of silver in a crypt. It's as if someone has brushed aside a camouflage of lichen and leaves to reveal a mystery to me.

Gingerly, I dig out the shell. The texture of the surface is rough, and there are round holes the size of needles that form a weird pattern, like a secret sign. I press my lips close and blow. The sound is remote, like a syllable in an ancient spell that I heard in a dream and have followed here.

Outside the grove, the path continues to the left. I soon come to a cliff.

Here, its roots gnarled right into the rock, grows a giant cypress tree. This is actually a platform jutting out halfway up a cliff, the way a shoulder juts out from a neck. Down below is Devil's Gulch. I have to be careful, lest I fall into the canyon, which is tortuous, fathomless and dark. There are always weird sounds coming from it: one time I was startled by the thunderous sound of beating wings as thousands of bats gushed out of the chasm and flooded the sky.

Even though Devil's Gulch is scary, I come here to the shoulder of the cliff every couple of days, because of an elfinwood called the Enchanted Thicket. The cypress is one of the trees in the Enchanted Thicket.

I named it myself. There are lots of bizarrely shaped trees, some with large lumps covering their roots, some extending claw-like branches, some with roots like octopus tentacles and even some like centipedes, spiders and crabs.

Among them is a tree like a bat with wings outspread. This particular tree contains a secret of mine and Cub's. Whenever I come, I always put something to eat in a box which I have placed in the hollow in the bat tree: sweets, cakes or breadmen Father hasn't been able to sell. On the box I have carved the likeness of a bear.

The opening to the hollow wasn't originally so big, but one time Cub widened it considerably with her claws while yanking out a beehive. Putting the wooden box in there was an idea I had later—I was sure Cub would smell the treats inside when she came near.

I get out the box and open it, discovering the treats I left last time are untouched. In the past few months, the stuff in the box has often gone stale or rotten or been nibbled by ants. I am disappointed every time, of course, but I keep cleaning it out and leaving fresh treats inside.

Once today's treats are safely stored, I put the box back and lean on a gravestone by the tree, speaking silently to Grandpa, who lies beneath.

Whether it is really my grandfather I don't know, but I feel he is there. When I pray for things, he appears and presents me with what I've asked for. Like last year I wished for a bear cub, and he arranged for that trap to be set, for Cub to step in it, and for me to find her...

Grandpa was sent up the mountains late in the Japanese occupation, in the 1930s or 1940s, to be a camphorman. At the time, camphor wood was an important commodity, so the Japanese ordered the Taiwanese people, especially the aborigines, to log it. Grandpa didn't want to go to the Philippines to serve as a military porter in the war against the Americans, and working as a camphor logger was the only other option.

My grandmother was the daughter of a shaman. Too bad I never saw her. I heard that before she died she said she wanted to climb the mountain to where the moon shone brightest and meet her husband, my grandfather, who had become the Guardian of the Celestial Spirit. According to shamanic lore, the Celestial Spirit is a glowing giant clothed in bearskin, while its Guardian is a giant bear. Grandmother's ashes were scattered at the brightest spot on the mountain—right here in the Enchanted Thicket—as she instructed. But nobody is sure if Grandpa is really buried here, only that a lot of camphormen were killed near here during a B29 air raid. The villagers dug a pit and threw all the charred remains into it. There was nothing they could do for those who

had died deeper or higher in the mountains. But even so I am sure that Grandpa can really hear me praying to him. Cub's appearance in my life was proof of that. Even if I only got to keep Cub for a short time, I still believe Grandpa is here.

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" I murmur. "I've brought you another shell. Look how big it is! What spirit does it represent?"

I turn the shell over and put my ear close to the gravestone.
"Evil Dispellor?"

What? Evil Dispellor? No... It's Hunting Companion.

I quickly dig into the ground beside the gravestone, find the urn buried there, open it up and put the shell inside. Then I return the urn to the ground.

"It's hidden now, Grandpa."

Even when he doesn't say anything, I can feel his response.

Maybe Grandpa is everywhere, sometimes just a beam of light, a gust of wind, at other times a moonshadow or a leaf. Sometimes he lies inside the grave sleeping soundly —I need to call several times to wake him. Sometimes he appears unannounced before me.

Lately his voice has been muffled, probably because his beard has grown too long. I pick up a rock and scrape the moss off the gravestone. Now Grandpa's face is clean. No words are etched on the stone, but it is by no means unmarked. I always draw something on it by scraping with a stone or by dipping my finger into the mud. When my drawings get washed off I just draw them on again. I always draw the same thing: scenes from the story of a bear, which is Grandpa's story

I am sure it's Grandpa's story. It is a mystery into which I have been initiated and which I draw to make it real. When I bury a shell or draw the pictures on the gravestone, the melody of a ritual song sung by a chorus of many warriors starts coming from the center of the grove. The words sound like this:

*i likihli likihli iui i lavahli lavahli
ina muli vengeeli iui mulilalee vuai
ina mataru taruuhl iui matalalee vuai
ina hlisapeta vinnau i saramarukaruka
ina vengavenga vihlua i kupatarahlapee
kupatarahlapee kumiakui iaiai*

Somehow, though I don't speak this language,
I understand what the words mean:

*The spleenwort fronds in moonlight clear the fog,
And flames are dancing on a ribwood log.
Our patewood cups are filled with mead and grog,
Beneath the routbaum roasts a feral hog.*

And then I hear Grandpa chanting.

*Our tribe has in total twelve Sacred Shells, one for each Tribal Spirit:
Guardian Protector, grant us many offspring;
Hunting Companion, grant us abundant game;
Peace Patron, grant us safety and well being;
Inspiration Whisperer, grant us skill and fame;*

*Valorous Warrior, grant us fearlessness in the fight;
Evil Dispeller, grant us deliverance;
Victory Guarantor, grant us vigor and might;
Work Leader, grant us diligence;*

*Weather Master, grant us favorable wind and rain;
Weariness Chaser, keep us in good form;
Sustenance Bringer, grant us full stores of grain;
Health Preserver, keep us safe and warm...*

A mystery has been made manifest. I have undergone a rite
of passage.

DAVID JIMÉNEZ

‘Las mujeres que derrotaron a América: los vencedores’

‘The Women Who Defeated America: The Victors’

(non-fiction)

Translated by Andrea Rosenberg

Vo Thi Mo doesn't remember the day she started hating Americans. Was it when she saw the first planes fly over Cu Chi, her village in southern Vietnam? Or maybe after two of her brothers were killed in an air raid? What has remained etched in her memory is the day she stopped hating them. Her Viet Cong unit had come across three marines resting in the jungle. She was aiming her AK-47 at them—her finger on the trigger, the target caught off guard—when one of them pulled a photo of his family out of his pocket. The other two rummaged in their knapsacks and opened battered envelopes and began to read the last letters they'd gotten from America aloud. The young men started crying, and Vo Thi Mo decided to move on without shooting them:

“For the first time, I saw them as people.”

The three American marines evaded death without knowing it. Maybe they died in another attack a few days later. Or maybe they're taking a walk with their grandchildren in a park somewhere in Wisconsin. Vo Thi Mo kept killing as many enemies as she could and was awarded the Military Victory medal. But after that encounter in the jungle, nothing was ever the same again: she had stopped believing that her participation in the war had any merit. When it all came to an end, with the evacuation of the US embassy in Saigon on April 30, 1975, she did not share her comrades' euphoria. The greatest army in the world had been defeated by an army of peasants, but Vietnam lay in ruins. Her friends and family had died. Her village had been destroyed.

“It was hard to feel like we had triumphed.”

Decades after the end of the conflict, tourists continue to try to relive it. Some of the blame lies with Hollywood and the hundreds of movies produced on what the locals call “the American war” because, they point out, it wasn't the Vietnamese who traveled thousands of kilometers to occupy a foreign company. One of the most popular attractions is the Cu Chi tunnels built by the Viet Cong so they could hide and launch attacks from the heart of US-controlled South Vietnam.

In the souvenir shop at the entrance to the tunnels, a postcard catches my eye: the black- and-white image of a beautiful young woman, a seventeen-year-old communist guerrilla fighter. She has long, dark, neatly brushed hair, childlike facial features, and a frank gaze. Her adolescent hands are gripping a rifle. The sales clerk tells me she lives nearby, and a local farmer offers to take me to her house.

Vo Thi Mo is reclining on an opium bed, cuddling her cat and watching a soap opera. She looks like a friendly country grandma; nothing about her evokes the legendary guerrilla fighter from the photo.

“Come in, come in. Would you like some tea? Have you eaten?”

Vo Thi Mo once led the C3, one of the Viet Cong’s most effective battalions. The women in the unit rode behind American lines on motorbikes, were experts in the targeted assassination of officers, carried out some of the riskiest missions in the South Vietnamese jungles, and, in what for many of them was the most difficult assignment of all, slid between the enemies’ sheets to obtain information. They had to go the extra mile if they wanted to convince the men that they could be part of the guerrilla army.

“There was a saying in the camp that said that women were so useless, that we couldn’t even piss above the grass,” Vo Thi Mo tells me. “So one day a group of us climbed to the top of a tree and started to piss from up there. We told the men, *See, we can piss above the grass just like you, and fight like you, too.*”

The former Vietnamese guerrilla fighter has telephoned her comrades-in-arms, and a few minutes later her house is full of grandmothers regaling me with fascinating tales of assaults and battles in the jungle. Cao Thi Huong and Truong Hai Thuy recount how they escaped from a column of tanks by racing between them. Tran Thi Neo stepped on a mine in 1973, and they amputated her toes one by one as they became gangrenous. When she had only one left, she threatened to kill herself if they cut it off. She still has it. Le Thi Suong joined the guerrillas

with her three sisters to avenge the deaths of all the males in her family. The last one to talk is Thanh, who has to be encouraged by the others to speak.

“Go on, tell him,” they urge her.

Thanh’s mission had consisted of getting dolled up and going to Saigon cafés frequented by American soldiers from the 25th Infantry Division, trying to seduce them to gain access to the base. The women preferred the battlefield, as prostituting themselves for their country meant sleeping with men who might destroy their villages and kill their loved ones the next morning. They had to endure disapproving stares and insults when they strolled with American marines through the streets of Saigon. Thanh bore it all while sketching out detailed maps of the US installations and providing information for an assault. When she was found out and arrested in 1970, the South Vietnamese soldiers tortured her for days, freeing her only when her wounds had become gangrenous and it looked like she was going to die. Five months after one of her arms was amputated, she traded in nights of feigned passion for the battlefield, firing from the back of a motorcycle with her weapon braced against the stump.

“The American soldiers were paralyzed with shock,” she says, laughing. “When the war ended, many women who had fought did their best to hide their wounds. But I was never able to disguise my missing arm. Over time, I have learned to be proud of it.”

Vo Thi Mo was the most famous of the Viet Cong’s women guerilla fighters. She was named the best soldier in her company and promoted to second-in-command of the C3 battalion. It was said she’d taken out two M-48 tanks in the village of Cay Diep. That she’d killed dozens of enemy soldiers. And that she’d fought in her underwear in one battle after losing her pants. Men who at first had refused to take orders from a woman ended up following her with blind loyalty. The communist government used her image on its official seals, the same image that

had brought me to her house four decades later. Vo Thi Mo became a symbol for a people that had forged its independent spirit over long centuries of resistance against the Mongols, the Chinese, the French, and the Americans. Rebelling against foreign powers was in their blood, and women had never stayed on the sidelines in those fights. The first uprising against China, in the year 40 CE, had been led by three women, including Phung Thi Chinh, who is said to have given birth there on the battlefield before charging the enemy, clutching her sword in one hand and her newborn baby in the other.

The final victory against the Americans was already near when Vo Thi Mo bumped into an old flame, a boy she'd known as a girl and lost track of when he was sent north to serve in the regular army. They got married between ambushes and military operations. During the final offensive, with Saigon under siege and the Americans preparing to pull out, the guerrilla fighter was giving birth to the first of her three children. She didn't care that she was missing a historic moment: giving life seemed much more natural to her than taking it.

"When I think about the mother of those soldiers I found in the jungle, I'm glad I didn't shoot them," she says as she lies on her opium bed, recalling the day she stopped hating the enemy. "I can't stop thinking about the mothers of the men I did shoot. They were sent to our country. A lot of them were just kids. What fault was it of theirs?"

After the end of the war, Vo Thi Mo and her comrades from the C3 got married and started families. While most of the Viet Cong men were given medals and government jobs, the women returned to their villages in silence. When I review their stories in my notebook, I am surprised not to find a single expression of bitterness. Not toward the Americans who brought war to their land, and not toward the Vietnamese who forgot their contribution to victory. They wanted to leave the days of carrying weapons behind, to go back to being women who had to climb a tree in order to piss above the grass.

WEI-YUN LIN-GÓRECKA 林蔚昀

奇異果小姐

‘Miss Kiwi’

(non-fiction)

Translated by Darryl Sterk

For a time while I was studying in England, my hobby was collecting obituaries.

Reading obits had nothing to do with “desiring melancholy, like most English people” as Virginia Woolf put it in “The Mark on the Wall.” I’d been reading the newspaper to improve my English language facility, but at that time it was mostly too difficult: editorials, reports, and interviews require the mastery of a lot of vocabulary, to say nothing of knowledge of current affairs and culture. An obituary, which plainly recounts a life, was the most appealing and interesting part of the paper.

The obituary that made the deepest impression on me was about an actor. It’s a pity I can’t now remember his name. All I remember is that he was a Jew who fled to America and ended up playing Nazi roles in the movies, because he looked ‘Eastern European.’

“To make ends meet in a foreign land, he had to play a character he’d left Europe to escape, a role he found detestable. Is there anything more ironic?” I thought sympathetically, not knowing at the time that a few years later I would be living the same kind of life.

After graduating from college, I went to Kraków because I wanted to live in Poland. After a year of language courses, I didn’t know what to do, but didn’t want to go back to Taiwan, or to return to England for a Master’s degree. One day I heard the “China-Poland Cultural Arts Exchange Foundation” was looking for talented bilingual individuals. The name sounds official, I know, but it was actually founded by a Polish Sinophile businessman. I applied and was hired.

My primary role (at least according to the contract) was to help plan exhibitions, to make arrangements with Chinese people, to translate documents, and to teach the boss, as well as my coworkers, Chinese. To an arts graduate without much work experience, this seemed like a good job. But there are, as they say, no free lunches in this world, and after a couple of months on the job, I came to discover how big the gap between ideal and reality could be.

Take the ancient Chinese technology exhibition, for instance. I'd never been much interested in antiquity, China, or technology, and since I no longer had to prepare for tests, I had detached myself from such things. But there needed to be an English-Polish bilingual brochure for the exhibit, and the person in charge quit right in the middle of it. (I heard the boss thought her style was too literary, not colloquial enough.) And so the job fell to me and another colleague. What else could I do? I read everything I could find on the astrolabe (astronomer's inclinometer?), clepsydra (water clock), and the double-bladed plough (good enough) and tried to describe everything in a colloquial idiom. (Later I discovered that editing Wikipedia was the best way to learn how to write colloquially.)

After a lot of time and effort, the exhibit opened, complete with bilingual texts. Finally I didn't have to edit anymore. I thought my life would be easier, but the boss seemed worried that I might not have enough to do (which was actually true). So he arranged for me to give Chinese tea ceremony and calligraphy demonstrations at the exhibition. He also gave me a bunch of new jobs to do at the office: write introductions to Chinese culture on the company's official website, plan Chinese cooking classes, edit Chinese language calendars of Polish scenery, translate the ingredients for bottles of male potency pills ("Includes caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), a powerful Yang enhancer"), and to prepare proposals for future events—on ancient Chinese architecture, Chinese nose pipes, Chinese dinosaurs (not fossils, but battery-powered rubber models that could turn their heads, wink, lay eggs, swim, and say "Nee Hao"), although in the end none of these exhibitions came to anything.

Of all the unbelievable tasks I was assigned, the one I resented most was peddling an orientalist cliché. I couldn't understand why I had to wear a cheongsam while steeping tea or doing calligraphy. I'm just not a cheongsam kind of girl. I especially hated wearing the one they provided, which did not fit me right. Putting it on was like wrapping pork

and glutinous rice in bamboo leaves for the steamer. I complained to my coworker and she said: “Aiya, they’re here to see you. You give the exhibition a more oriental atmosphere.” “Doesn’t that mean I’ve turned into a kiwi fruit, which people are attracted to just cause it’s fresh and exotic?” (In Taiwan we call the kiwi the *chee yee*, which means “fresh and exotic.”)

Yes, I played the role of Miss Kiwi in real life. The exhibition-goers were pleased to see me wearing the cheongsam and writing names with a Chinese brush. Their eyes would light up. During the tea ceremony people would raise their hands and ask how to correctly steep the perfect cup of green tea or Oolong tea. (To be honest, in private I just throw the leaves in a mug and pour in boiling water.) Flanked by Polish matrons and mademoiselles, I hawked Made-in-China cell phone covers, fans, wallets and lucky biscuits in a bamboo kiosk lit with red lanterns, but the person people saw wasn’t me. The person they saw was the mysterious Orient I represented. A lot of them were happy to buy a little piece of the Orient for a cheap price and take it home.

When the year’s contract was up, I left that company. Yet although the work was filled with many terrible memories, I am glad I had a job like that. It kept China in my face so much that it motivated me to learn more about Taiwan, just to keep my psychic balance. I started trying to get to know Taiwan, my unfamiliar homeland, which I had left in such a hurry. I even did my homework, using Polish to write a lot of essays about Taiwan culture (like the Wang Yeh Boat Burning Ceremony, the Eight Infernal Generals, and Taiwan film) to stick on the company website.

Because of these experiences, I feel a lot closer to Taiwan now than I did when I first went abroad. And that, I think, is the most precious legacy of my short life as Miss Kiwi.

ZHOU WEICHI 周伟驰

(poetry)

‘Kant, Who Refused to be a Poetry Professor’

不愿当诗学教授的康德在哥尼斯堡林荫大道上散步

‘Stargazer’

望星空的人

‘Returning Home’

还乡人

Translated by Eleanor Goodman

Kant, Who Refused to Be a Poetry Professor, Walks Along a Leafy Boulevard in Königsberg

1.

Poets detour around stone statues,
they are melted by light,
they eulogize and sing praises.

I see only the starlit sky and its darkness.
I am not melted by light.
I do not eulogize or sing praises.
My whole body trembles.

2.

Time promises: leaves will separate from the branches
the leaves stay intact, and emit the smell of corpses

I break off early summer twigs
the rich fragrance of sap rises
as though from a girl's sweat glands.

3.

Seeing me
they reset their clocks

Seeing them
I reset the celestial bodies

4.

The people of Königsberg crouch in doorways
watching the old man pass by on the hour
the cathedral clock
sounds oppressively, just as in the old days
finishing *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and going out for a walk
the noontime is silent, just as in the old days
the breeze of my passing stirs low-hanging leaves

5.

The lightning rod at the top of the Königsberg Cathedral
lets lightning pass through

as peaceful as my life

6.

Last night I dreamt the water of the Baltic Sea
erected a high staircase made of waves
wanting to pluck the autumn moon from the sky

7.

Suddenly I open my eyes
and see lines and black shapes

not knowing who I am
or where

three in the morning
the *a priori* me is still sleeping

8.

Turning the lamp on in the room
outside the window appears
the river, boats, hop flowers, the street.

The light goes out
the river and boats, hop flowers and street
return to the darkness.

Only our window remains as before.

9.

On a star-filled night I look up at the dark Milky Way.
But each time my eyes meet it
I can't tell
if I'm seeing its face or my own.

10.

Inside ethics
orbit the planets

11.

Flowers and females
stroll inside the floral axis
fruit blocks
their road back

12.

In the morning on the way to campus I saw a young woman and baby
their skin shining with the luster of Chinese silk

Returning home at dusk, I saw many age spots
smudging the roadside sycamore trees

In a candlelit mirror, I saw myself crying
a hard, black kernel.

13.

On an icy evening I walked along the black river
and saw the enormous naked planets revolving brightly
in the firmament:
the great beauty inside each of us was at work
as though within reach.

Stargazer

*But on man's journey
how many chances are there
to go stargazing!*

—Guo Xiaochuan, *Stargazing*

In memory of the poet Guo Xiaochuan (1919-1976), on what would have been his 90th birthday.

There have always been stargazers, escaping their own eras.
Standing on the surface of the moon and seeing how lovely the earth is,
standing on the surface of the galaxy and seeing the insignificance of the
solar system,
standing on top of the universe and seeing the invisibility of the galaxy.
They forget the rocket on their shoulder, holding off shooting for a while,
and they forget the bow and arrow in the enemy's hands, softening for
a while,
and while they're lost in thought, everyone everywhere is a brother.
They think that their lengthy time is merely
a short glimpse of an autumn cicada on a bright morning.
And deadly earthquakes, tsunamis, and forest fires are only a swarm of ants
encountering raindrops, wind, claws,
and enormous leaves swirling down out of the blue.
They realize the towns or countries they'd considered the center of the
universe
are no more than a speck of sand in the Sahara,
and their prideful long history is no more than a brief sentence
in the sand's flight record, in which their systems and they themselves
don't even figure as a letter.

They think of life as jujube flowers in wind, some falling into palaces,
others into toilets,
some falling into a language, others falling into a tribe
and a religion, believing their gods offer the whole truth,
believing that their birdsongs and fragrant flowers are the most beautiful.
They think of their hometown neighbors strolling and moved to tears by
their own morality,
mistaking it for orbiting planets, such perfection!

Those nighttime stargazers have always had their secrets.
By the Ganges, or the Nile, or in the Central American rainforest, these
rare creatures
expounded religion, philosophy and astrology.
They used wooden poles, carpenter's squares, ropes and rocks to track
the sun,
erecting sundials next to palaces.
They invented modern astronomy, modern philosophy and the modern
odyssey,
grinding out the Hubble and Webb telescopes,
using mitochondrion-sized eyes to see the expansion of the universe,
seeing a chain of math and physics formulas.
The more dark matter there is,
the more black holes,
the more gravitation,
the heavier their secrets become.

Those stargazers on balconies or in observatories before dawn
had to return to the crude earth at daybreak, had to return to intrigues
of the market or palace.
Between vegetables and human desire they discovered a quantum
mechanics more complex than macromechanics,

sometimes they couldn't feel it and sometimes it was overwhelming,
but they could never predict it.
Always in a muddle, they stumbled into sewers and wells, ridiculed by
women.
(Though if ruthlessly they decided to work on the side,
they could gain admiring fans with their profiteering.)

As astronomers, those stargazers bent their childhood necks into old age,
yet they still couldn't say why the universe is thin and flat,
and why in the end humans and astronomers appeared.
They hemmed and hawed about archaic constellations, myths,
monotheism, and polytheism,
along with mechanical cosmology and cosmic teleology,
and still couldn't answer the questions their grandsons asked them on
their knee.
After a universe of mechanics, of physics, and of chemistry, why did a
universe of life arise?
They're awkward and embarrassed, and throw the question to the
theologians and ontologists,
who toss the question to a poet.
The poet spreads his angel wings and flies to the moon to look, flies into
the galaxy to look,
and reports back that he's very excited, so very excited,
the universe is a dream, life is a dream—and everyone everywhere
should have sweet dreams,
instead of nightmares.

September, 2008, Beijing: the inauguration of Europe's
Large Hadron Collider

Returning Home

A five-hour journey, from damp cool to cruel heat
through a glittering rainstorm, the whole time
like a kite-line, the asphalt road
tugs my hometown back to me: for thirteen years

it's flown far enough. With the long wait
this upturned face
is vaster than the sky. Yes
when I come back alone, like an English word

stuck into a Chinese novel
I feel the force of the trigger of time
and in an instant, it shoots me
into time's ovum, and then with a *ding*

Sharp forceps drop me into a dish of pain.
When I come back alone, when like an autumn bee I gather
too much hatred and love, and see the luxuriant
leaf buds opening by the road, and the pond changing

with the traces of traveling clouds, I feel
that art has taken life by the hand and taught it
to sneer. Light rain, cool wind
I sneeze again and again from deep in my lungs,

then struggle silently like a clam on the sand. Yes,
"heaven is near": pure, hard as a pebble in a gully
how did it hatch
this hell of mineral constructions? A school of carp

swims toward the fog-enshrouded city, bringing paper money
and insomnia, sleepwalking out of heaven.

My darling, when I return alone
to my source, like a deer raised in a zoo

facing a savanna of tigers, like a deaf-mute child
facing strange music, thinking only
of desire scrabbling along in a new world
and you in the world, like a fish on the deck hopelessly mouthing

and like an idiot facing a binary equation
my mind flashes blank. The long distance bus
passes by towns and villages, men with naked torsos
work on the road, and I think of how years ago

if it hadn't been for my fated departure, I'd be one of them
with sincere guile and bright sweat
pondering the grain, spreading gossip third- and fourth-hand
experiencing grief, happiness, pleasure, bitterness

but rarely seeing the pitch-battle of desire and conscience
that leaves part of the heart in ruin. On both sides of the road
are Canadian poplars, green rice paddies, and bamboo forests surround
the villages
and occasionally a cemetery appears,

full of vitality, humble, persistent, like the bent
women planting rice seedlings in the fields, their savage fertility.
Darling, when I arrive alone
in my hometown, my shrunken new life is gestated in a peasant woman's
womb

once again a combination of an XX and an XY,
the gloomy flavor of a ten-thousand-year-old heaven
the flavor of grass and alfalfa, using more arms than an octopus
to savor heaven, and to become part of it

with lightness and dark, with water and dry earth
with the wind of God (He makes me float over the abyss
like a feather) but today it's gasoline and rock 'n' roll desire
that accompany me home. Strange, inappropriate things.

I was vomited out by my hometown like an outsider
and occasionally memory covers my eyes
like cataracts, conjuring an apparition
of beautiful scenery, while the long distance bus

seems to head toward a fairyland. But I know,
darling, when I return alone to my hometown
I'll still be like the tangent of two circles,
intersecting both, then fleeing for alien places.

1995

OUYANG JIANGHE 欧阳江河

秋天：听已故女大提琴家du Pré演奏

‘Autumn Listening: on a performance by the late cellist
Jacqueline du Pré’

(poetry)

Translated by Lucas Klein

Autumn Listening: on a performance by the late cellist Jacqueline du Pré

a troubling old dream, turning to face the dead, here
and now. not that you heard the intense impression of the wild wind
weakening in the light, ending in a sigh before the distance of the
disappearing string vibrato and the
darkness of the tight-shut lips burst open.

heard was: flowing water forming in the vault above.
water obeying deadwood, chiseling a deep notch.
counterpoised shadows, plus counterpoised, shaded
eyes glancing back,
I see the fading of the aesthetes vast only in their backward glance.

one insomniac night the dim torch in transit to naming
will be snatched from your ear. with a heartbroken old dream
rolled up and reconstructed according to fashion. if late at night
or early in the morning old age
disappeared, no one would seem lonesome to forgetting.

oh aesthetes of romanticism! in tragic human nature's
good deeds will your flesh be expended,
tears pooling, nothing to depend on.
only flesh
will be gentle, however brief said gentleness.

August 14, 1992, Chengdu

TSOU YUNG-SHAN 鄒永珊

等候室

From *The Waiting Room*

(fiction)

Translated by Michelle Wu 吳敏嘉

The Waiting Room

00

It was 7:30 in the morning. He sat in the waiting room of the *Ausländerbehörde*—The Foreigners' Registration Office—with his head bent. He didn't read anything to kill time, nor did he bother to look around. Now and then people speaking different languages chitchatted around him, but he didn't know what they were talking about most of the time. Once in a while, the sound of Chinese drifted down the corridor. In the past, he used to lift his head to follow the voices, but not any more.

People waiting in the waiting room rarely conversed. Only those who came together talked to each other and they would talk about their common worries. Those who came alone usually sat alone with their own thoughts. Even though they were gathered in this room for the same purpose, they were all too tired to tell the strangers beside them anything about themselves. As the scattered conversations subsided, some closed their eyes for a brief moment of repose.

The sky was still dark when he was waiting in line outside the *Ausländerbehörde*. The quota for reservations had already been filled and those who had failed to make one in advance had to huddle up in a queue outside, in the dark, in minus ten degrees cold, until the guards opened the gate at 6:30. He had been there since 4:30 that morning and was lucky to have gotten a number. Those who had arrived thirty minutes after him were asked to leave because all the tags had been given out.

After a while, the sky slowly lit up. It was a gray and brittle winter morning. The skinny tree branches silhouetted against the window resembled pencil sketches on coarse, grayish paper. The little holes that punctured it were bird nests perching on branches. Further down the street huge sheets of translucent ice floated on the dark waters of the canal, resembling chunks of white paint showing through under the

pencil markings. The cracks and fissures screeched and a lone goose perched on the ice flapped its wings and took flight.

The flashing red number on the screen beeped and the person seated beside him accidentally brushed his elbow when he stood up. The person apologized and he said not to worry. This was his first interaction with another human being in the waiting room. He shifted, cupping his chin with his hand, and tilted his head to count the nests in the tree. A bird had flown into the wrong nest. Finding that it was too small, it flew away. He followed the bird with his gaze, watching it fly over the canal and disappear into the buildings across the water. Inexplicably, his mood dampened.

It had been many years since he left Taiwan, that damp and rainy island. The climate in continental Europe was relatively dry and it didn't rain non-stop like it did over there. When feeling blue, he often remembered the bone-chilling dampness that he experienced back home during the winters. He bowed his head to prevent the rain in his heart from welling up in his eyes. He bent his head low, so low that the pungent smell of the moist earth entered his nostrils, so low that the worms that had hibernated in the ground all winter could crawl up onto his hair. He was waiting and there would be no end to it.

He dared not imagine an end to it. He looked down. He seemed to be staring at the number tag between his thumb and index finger, but really he wasn't looking at anything at all.

Having bowed his head for so long, he felt a strain in his neck. So he looked up and stared straight ahead. Language schools had posted advertisements on the wall. "Come learn German" was written in many different tongues. He stared. Finally the number that flashed on the screen was the same as the number in his hand.

He dragged his feet along the corridor flanked by offices. A map of the world was posted on the wall between doors. Colorful paper cutouts *Willkommen in Deutschland* had been pasted on to the world

map. He passed by the slogan, paused before the door of the office, knocked and went in.

01

The unexpected brightness in the little office made him squint. The window took up the entire wall and framed the cold, glaring sunlight. It was so bright that no additional lighting was necessary. All the furniture in the room was steely gray and under the cold glare, the gray appeared even steelier. A long table dissected the tiny room, separating him from the person who had been waiting for him. His interviewer was a stocky woman in her fifties who looked very tired. He could no longer recall her name. The woman asked him to take a seat. He pulled out a chair from his side of the table and sat down. Beneath the woman's hand, he saw his application papers and passport. The woman flipped open his passport and he caught a glimpse of his name in Chinese. The three characters felt unfamiliar to him.

"Herr Hsu."

Germans tended to pronounce his last name with a heavy accent. When he first arrived in Germany he would try to correct them, but now he didn't bother anymore. He would simply respond when his name was uttered, regardless of how it was said. The woman's face was expressionless and her voice void of emotions. The coarseness gave it an even more detached quality, "You resided in Munich before, as a dependent. You came to Berlin alone?"

Hsu Ming-Chang nodded and the woman continued her questioning in an unemotional tone, "What are you doing here in Berlin?"

The woman didn't speak very fast and was friendly enough. Yet her voice felt heavy, like her body. He looked at her, trying to figure out how to compose his sentences.

"I came to work," Hsu Ming-Chang responded simply in German.

The woman's vision cut across her narrow spectacles to rest on his face. Seconds later, she bent her head to read the files in her hand. When she came across some photocopied documents, he continued to explain without waiting for her to speak, "I am an editor and I also write about cultural and literary events." He didn't know how to say all of this in German, so he switched to English. The woman glanced at him. He could sense some impatience. "So you are applying for a freelance visa," the woman arrived at her own conclusion. She clicked on the mouse with her right hand, obtained the files that she needed and read the provisions on the monitor. After a while she said, "You don't have anything to prove that you have income from the work that you have just described, you also lack work plans and spreadsheets." She singled out a document from his papers and asked, "What is this?"

Hsu Ming-Chang took a look and responded, "This is an application for KSK. I just submitted an application."

"What is KSK?"

Not expecting this question from the woman, Hsu Ming-Chang was taken aback and stammered, "KSK is Social Security for Artists and Writers. I am a writer, so I figured I would need KSK if I were to apply for a work permit..."

Without allowing him to finish, the woman interrupted him, almost rudely, "You already have proof of insurance, so that is not required." She returned the document to him. Her reaction rendered him momentarily speechless. She handed him a list with several check marks: "The documents you have provided are insufficient, so I cannot give you a long-term residence and work permit. I will, however, give you a temporary three-month visa. Prepare your documents and come back to me within three months. Take this card to the first floor to pay your fee, come back with the receipt and I will return your passport to you."

The woman let him out. After leaving the room, Hsu Ming-Chang looked left and right, not knowing for a moment where to go.

He located his position by examining a map on the wall. On the first floor he found the payment machine. It took him a while to figure out how to pay by inserting the card and cash. The machine printed out the receipt. "I just paid for three months of residence," he thought to himself, numbly.

His wife used to take care of all of this, preparing the necessary documents and dealing with government agencies. But now he was on his own. Even though he had double-checked the documents again and again, he still failed to get everything ready before the visa extension, especially the documents he had to reapply for due to the change in his marital status. Under the circumstances, it was no surprise that he had been denied a long-term visa.

He thought of his wife. She hadn't crossed his mind in a long time now. And yet, he started to think about her as he stood before the machine, making his payment. She used to complain that he only thought of her when he needed her. Would she be angry if she knew that he was thinking about her at a moment like this? He took the receipt.

He went back to the clerk. The woman stuck a temporary visa into his passport and signed her name. She returned his passport and documents to him. With a perfunctory "good-bye," she sent him on his way. Hsu Ming-Chang stepped out into the corridor. It was bright at both ends of the corridor. He had entered from one end and the other went on into the unknown. Rays of light bounced off the floor, but the painted walls didn't reflect any light at all, dull and lifeless. There were interconnected openings on the walls, all blocked off by doors, but the doors did not lead anywhere in particular. They were all closed. He stood in this ambiguous space. He glanced down at the documents in his hand, his thoughts similarly hesitant, similarly ambiguous.

There were no seats in the corridor. Hsu Ming-Chang returned to the waiting room, sat down and examined his papers. The woman's neon red pen had scrawled all over his work plan, spreadsheet, and

income certificate, all of which he had printed on greenish-gray recycled paper. The edges of the letters were smudged and blurry. As Hsu Ming-Chang examined his ksk application form, scattered memories flashed across his mind's eye.



Hsu Ming-Chang said nothing the day his wife told him that she was leaving him. He didn't lift his head from his novel; he avoided her gaze. She kept waiting, waiting for him to say something, but he said nothing. Obediently, he accepted. But they both knew it to be a gesture of resistance and denial. She knew she wouldn't get what she was waiting for. She placed the divorce papers on the table and left. When leaving, the look in her eyes contained a brazen sadness.

Hsu Ming-Chang originally thought they could go their separate ways without signing papers. It was only when he had to reapply for documents due to the change of his marital status that he realized why she had insisted on the divorce agreement. They met at the lawyer's office.

They sat side-by-side before the lawyer's desk without looking at each other, listening quietly to the lawyer as he read them their rights. They didn't make the splitting up of property too complicated, nor did his ex-wife make any demands. He caught a glimpse of her profile, pale and exhausted, not happy; but once the papers were signed and they were no longer legally bound to each other, an expression of relief washed over her face and he felt a twinge in his stomach.

His signature may have been the last thing he could give her. Had he ever really given her anything?

Their friends all said that their relationship was some kind of role reversal, that deep down she was more like a man and he was more like a woman, or that she was the dominant one. She had made it all start.

They had attended the College of Liberal Arts together. She was two years his senior. The moment he entered college Hsu Ming-Chang knew her as the popular girl who double-majored in literature and finance, head of the student council. She wasn't a typical beauty, but her outgoing and charismatic personality gave her a certain charm; he caught rumors about her despite rarely emerging from behind his books. Yet, he was never one to gossip nor did he take much stock in rumors. Quiet and withdrawn, he never thought he would be associated in any way with someone as popular as her. One day he lifted his head from his book and saw her sitting on the window ledge in the classroom where he often sat reading. She sat there quietly, without disturbing him. When she left she gave him a note.

The note was filled with trivial details about this and that. Hsu Ming-Chang read it many times over, pressing it into the pages of the novel he was reading. He wrote her a reply. It wasn't until much later that their friends found out about them. They joked around, saying she was the one who had courted him, but what did they know? It was true that when he was with her, she was never the little woman nor did he act the alpha man. People placed bets, saying that their relationship would not last a semester, but they were still together when he had graduated from college and completed military service and she had completed her graduate studies in finance.

She was always outstanding, at school and at work. He was proud of her. Hsu Ming-Chang was sure of that. He was content working as an editor in a small publishing house. After work, he read. He stood by her, oblivious to change. Even though she was used to being the center of attention, when they were together she would sit quietly by his side as he read. She rarely spoke; instead, she scribbled notes trivial and fragmented in form and content.

He asked her many times whether she felt bored. She would laugh and say that she never felt bored when she was with him. His heart would fill, but he never told her.

They continued like this for several years, deeply connected yet seemingly detached. At work, she was promoted again and again and was eventually given an opportunity to work overseas. Germany was the natural choice, given that she had studied German in college. She didn't tell him formally, she gave no real details. She didn't talk to him about how this new assignment would affect their relationship. She merely continued to accompany him as he read. That night, when she left, she left him a note in the pages of his book. He took out the note and read the words: I don't want to disrupt this smallness and triviality. I am humbled by it.

"I don't want to disturb this smallness and triviality. I am humbled by it."

He repeated the words to himself. She was proud and sometimes arrogant, yet she felt humbled. This touched him. It was her wedding proposal and he said yes. He said yes to following her overseas.

They were happy but the decision didn't evoke the same feelings among their families.

Hers made it very clear to him that they regarded him as lacking in manly attributes and with dull prospects, not to mention the fact that he was younger than she. Put plainly, they wanted her to go to Germany without him. She was displeased by their reaction, especially at their prejudice with regards to the age gap. He, in contrast, felt no such resentment. He was younger, that was a fact. Always passive, he didn't really care about what her family thought of him. When they decided to get married, her family had a lot to say and still felt he wasn't the right man for her. When she told him this he listened quietly, waiting for her reaction. Once she made up her mind about something, nothing could change it. Facing their imminent separation, she had no intention of breaking up and so they married in a whirl of arguments.

His family, in comparison, could only be described as indifferent: Hsu Ming-Chang had been raised by his mother after his father left when he was young. His mother had no special love or expectations for

her middle son. His elder and younger brothers had already started their own families and didn't bother to find out what was going on in his head. When he announced that he was getting married, they responded with apathy. His mother merely said, "Finally, you are getting on track." Hsu Ming-Chang looked at his mother, lost for words.

02

After leaving the *Ausländerbehörde*, Hsu Ming-Chang tucked his collar in and wound his long, scruffy scarf around his neck several times. He sighed, emitting a puff of white smoke. He stood waiting by the bus stop, still thinking about what had happened between him and his wife and the incomprehensible events that had left these gaping holes in his heart. Yet, there was no going back. The forlorn feelings drifting through the holes in his heart were more pernicious than Berlin's winters. No amount of heavy clothing could ward off the cold.

"Don't you have anything to say to me?" she had asked, before leaving him. She had already made up her mind regarding everything else. Hsu Ming-Chang didn't see what there was left to discuss now. If this was how it was going to be, what more could he say?

In fact, he had a lot to say to her but none of it had anything to do with her decision or whether or not they had anything to negotiate. But he didn't know where to start, so he didn't say anything. This time, however, she didn't wait indefinitely. She didn't hang around, waiting. Before he knew what to do, she had left and he was left having said nothing at all.

She left. He stayed. Staying was unbearable and he grew fearful that somehow staying meant she could leave him again, and again he would be unable to find the words. The next day she returned, looked at him as if he were a stranger, waited for him to sign the divorce papers, told him to meet her at the lawyer's office a few days later to straighten things out and then left. He allowed her to push him on and he barely

remembered now what the lawyer had said to them. He then packed up his things, left the house that was leased in her name and boarded the night train to another city. His only moment of initiative. He chose Berlin.

Hsu Ming-Chang sat in a second-class carriage looking out the window with his chin propped in his hand. The train wasn't moving very fast and he could see the tall straight birches flanking the railroad. The wind blew over the murky tips of the trees and a crescent moon hung in the inky blue sky. The train came to a halt for a while at Dresden. The eerie fluorescent light on the platform banished the dark, but accentuated the loneliness. Time seemed to come to a standstill. The sinking stillness weighed him down and he fell into a fuzzy dreamlike state, the images started moving again but there was no sound.

He fell asleep and then woke up. Morning had broken and the glow of sunrise spread across the rolling fields in the distance, an expanse of crimson red glowing under the deep blue sky. The colors of the sky turned a lighter shade and it became misty. By the time the morning fog had lifted, the train had arrived in Berlin.

He got off at Berlin Ostbahnhof, walked into train station and looked around. The morning sunlight had a grayish hue, so the train station, with its muted color scheme, also seemed gray. He had arrived too early and the stores were not yet open. People were few and far between. A janitor pushing his cart filled with cleaning utensils passed by, leaving two wet wheel tracks on the charcoal floor. His first impression of Berlin.

He waited until the stores opened and bought a map of the city. He checked his present location and that of his meeting later that afternoon and planned his route. He had found a sub-let in the classifieds and was going to see the room that afternoon. The apartment was located in Charlottenburg in the western part of Berlin. Hsu Ming-Chang didn't want to drag his suitcase halfway across the city, so he left it in a locker at the train station.

The S-Bahn was elevated so Hsu Ming-Chang could see buildings and scenery along the way. Berlin was much bigger than Munich, less refined and less orderly. His second impression of Berlin.

There had been a sudden downpour while he was on the train. Black storm clouds covered the sky. As the train entered the rainy zone, torrents of water splashed the windows and huge droplets moved in the opposite direction, leaving trails on the glass, blurring his view. By the time he reached the station, the rain had stopped and the sky was so blue that you would have no idea it had been pouring only a few minutes ago. The air after the rain was so refreshing that one gulp of it in your lungs made you feel as if you were made anew.

Charlottenburg houses resembled those of Munich. The atmosphere of the neighborhood also resembled the one he had left behind, and yet, there was an awkward feeling about the place that was difficult to describe. Hsu Ming-Chang stood on the ground floor with his bag looking for the name of the apartment's occupant and, after some difficulty, found 'Nesmeyanov.' Hsu Ming-Chang waited downstairs until the time of the appointment and then rang the bell.

The landlady came downstairs to meet him. She was a solemn and hefty middle-aged woman. She didn't look German. She showed him a room to the side of the apartment. The doors flanking the corridor were closed and the lights turned off, making it quite dark. When the landlady opened the door of the available room, Hsu Ming-Chang was welcomed by a bright and spacious feeling: the space was big with a tall window and French doors. Sunlight flooded the room, lighting up the dark corridor behind him. The French doors led to a tiny balcony offering an expansive view, from which he could count the chimneys of the neighborhood buildings. Hsu Ming-Chang made up his mind to rent it right away. The landlady looked at him with a solemn expression but, without much hesitation, told him he was welcome to move in.

They signed a contract, and then both felt more at ease. The landlady invited Hsu Ming-Chang to sit down for a little chat to get to know each other a bit. She could barely speak English and Hsu Ming-Chang's German wasn't exactly fluent, so they had to resort to gestures and body language. Fortunately they managed to get through to each other without too much trouble. The landlady's name was Nesmeyanova and she had come to Berlin from Belarus with her husband. The couple had a son and the room for rent had belonged to him. They found it difficult to pronounce each other's names, giving up after several attempts. Hsu Ming-Chang summarily explained his occupation and was relieved to find that Mrs. Nesmeyanova felt no need to ask too many more questions.



On the day that Hsu Ming-Chang moved into Mrs. Nesmeyanova's home, he only brought one suitcase with him. Everything he owned was in that suitcase. Dragging it behind him, he walked into the middle of the room. A mattress, a closet, a chair. Mrs. Nesmeyanova glanced at his luggage and said if he didn't mind, she would gladly provide him with a pillow and blanket. He accepted.

Having accepted the pillow and blanket, Hsu Ming-Chang went to put them on the mattress. It was then that he discovered he didn't like the mattress being directly placed on the wooden floor. It was very thin and definitely not comfortable to lie on. Furthermore, when Mrs. Nesmeyanova showed him around his room, she had kept her shoes on. It occurred to him when he moved in that the floors might not be clean. He took off one sock and walked around and found a layer of dirt had stuck to the base of his foot. He set the pillow and blanket down on the chair and asked Mrs. Nesmeyanova to give him a cloth. He got down on to his knees and wiped the floors twice, including the area under the mattress. When he lifted it, he could hear small pieces of grit rolling onto the floor.

He put the mattress back in position, made his bed and burrowed into the blanket for his first night in an unfamiliar room. The pillow had a strong smell of laundry detergent, keeping him wide awake even though he was exhausted; the silvery moonlight shone into his room, landing on his blanket. He looked out the window and could see wisps of smoke from the chimneys against the moonlit sky. Though he had wiped the floor, there was still some dust caught between planks and his nose itched. The unfamiliarity of it all gave him insomnia. The next day, he cleaned his room again.

He ran into Mrs. Nesmeyanova on his way to the bathroom to fetch water in a bucket. Worried, she asked him if he was comfortable in his room. Hsu Ming-Chang meant to reply that all was well and that he was not uncomfortable, but he blurted out “no”; in the German context, this meant that he was not comfortable and Mrs. Nesmeyanova gave him an uneasy look before returning to the kitchen. She later kept quiet about his constant floor-wiping.

The floor no longer felt grainy when he walked barefoot. This made him feel much better. The days passed like falling sand. He wasn't in the mood to decorate his room. He didn't have a lot of possessions and settling in wouldn't have been any trouble, he just had a vague feeling that he could leave this place any time, so his clothes stayed in his suitcase without making their way into the closet. A new place to live, but this didn't necessarily translate into a new beginning. The room with one mattress, one closet, one chair, one suitcase, one pillow and one blanket that he couldn't really call his own; none of it gave him the feeling that he could easily start anew.

Apart from wiping the floor every other day, he engaged in no other regular activity. He only left his room to eat, drink and to go to the bathroom. He stayed in his room all day without communicating with anyone. He read the novels from his suitcase, one after another. There were no curtains, so the sun shone directly into the room, illuminating the dust motes that floated in the air; the sun shone on his feet, then his

abdomen and chest, then his face and into his eyes. He moved his chair around the room to avoid it.

On the balcony ledge were pots of herbs that Mrs. Nesmeyanova had planted in the spring. When he moved in Mrs. Nesmeyanova stopped taking care of them, so he watered them from time to time and when winter came, he moved the plants into his room to prevent them from freezing. When Mrs. Nesmeyanova found out that he was looking after her plants, she gave him a bouquet of dried lavender as a token of her appreciation. Taken by surprise, he hesitated for a moment before accepting the lavender, discovering as he did so that Mrs. Nesmeyanova had delicate hands. As he thanked her, he noticed that Mrs. Nesmeyanova's facial muscles, normally so tense, seemed relax a little.

He stroked the bouquet of dried lavender, releasing a heavy scent into the air. The room seemed to brighten up. He left half of the bouquet on the windowsill and tucked the other half into his suitcase.

WEI-YUN LIN-GÓRECKA 林蔚昀

索拉力車站

‘The Solaris Stop’

(non-fiction)

Translated by Darryl Sterk

When I was living in London, a friend of mine returned from Warsaw, eager to tell me about everything she'd seen and heard in Poland. We chatted and chatted and suddenly she exclaimed: "You know what? There's a bus stop in Warsaw called Solaris. You know, just like the star in the Andrei Tarkovsky film."

At the time I'd never been to Poland, and my only impressions were from books, film, music, and posters. I knew that Solaris was based on the novel by Stanislaw Lem, but did the planet in Lem's sci-fi novel really exist? It was too much like a movie plot.

"Really? Are you sure that's what you saw?" "No mistake. It was on the bus marquee. A coworker of mine didn't believe me and even went online to check, and said it's the name of a bus company. But how could the name of a bus company end up on a marquee? It must have been the name of a stop..."

When I got to Poland I made a point of keeping my eyes peeled whenever I took the bus to see if there actually was a Solaris stop. After looking for a long time, I think I have figured out the origins of her beautiful mistake. Solaris is indeed the name of a bus company. I've seen it on the front and back of buses, and I've also seen it above the marquee (unmoving, as it's just a sign). Maybe my friend was simply so happy to see Solaris and superimposed the word upon the marquee. Maybe it really appeared on the marquee, even though it is actually just the name of a bus manufacturer.

Fantastic film plots don't happen in real life, but in its own way my friend's story is fantastic. It is a story that would only happen to a stranger in a strange land. It is the story of a stranger who is about to enter into a relationship with a language or a culture, to exist in an ambiguous state, so close but yet so far.

The process of going from strange to familiar is like falling in love. People make the most mistakes early on, but this is also the period in which miracles abound. I'll always remember a story an English

friend told to me about a Polish girl studying English who mentioned that her favorite novel was *The Quietness of the Sheep*. No one could figure out what book she was talking about. She finally took it out to show everyone, and it turned out to be *The Silence of the Lambs*.

It was a clumsy error, yet so cute, so poetic. I experienced the same kind of poetry when I first arrived in Poland. At the time I liked to take a SLR camera along with me on my strolls around Kraków, using black and white film to record the everyday things I saw. One time I saw a sign on a wall. The sunlight shining on the sign had such a texture that I clicked the shutter. The picture I developed was a frigging work of art. I felt so proud of myself for the longest time. Only when my Polish got a bit better did I discover that the sign said, “Post No Bills.”

Beautiful scenes result from misunderstanding, and disillusionment is inevitable when misunderstanding is cleared up. Misreadings sometimes produce unexpected surprises, maybe even poetry. One time I was translating the Polish poet Andrzej Bursa’s ‘Paramecium.’ One stanza goes like this:

A child is more friendly than an adult
An animal is more friendly than a child
You say, ‘In that case’
I would say
Most friendly is the paramecium or the protozoa – in the wild

But for some reason the first time I translated it I misinterpreted the comparative *milszy* (more friendly) as “more silent,” *mileżacy*, so I translated it as:

A child is more silent than an adult
An animal is more silent than a child
You say, ‘In that case’
I would say
Most silent is the paramecium or the protozoa – in the wild

The second version is an obvious misreading and betrayal, but it created a new poem. It's a fresher formulation, which nobody would ever think to say, except maybe a child learning how to speak for the first time or a foreigner learning a second language.

Yoko Tawada, the Japanese writer who lives in Germany, once said something like: "When people use correct grammar they often aren't saying anything interesting. To me, broken language is more interesting. I think 'talking funny' can be powerfully artistic." This is true for me, totally. When my Polish was still poor, the essays I wrote were awkward, but there were many interesting sentence structures, usages, and metaphors (because I didn't know the right word and had to use figures to get people to understand). When my Polish improved, some of the freshness and innocence gradually disappeared.

I know I've passed the point of no return, that I can never go back to that time many years ago when Polish was so unfamiliar to me, so magical, when could I feel happy a whole afternoon just because a barista in a London café told me how to say flamingo flower (which in Chinese we call a "fire crane") in Polish. I am lucky that my Polish is good enough for me to survive in this world, and to explore, but not so good that I am overly used to it, so used to it that I lose the ability to surprise—and be surprised.

I hope that ten or twenty years from now I'll still be able to find the Solaris Stop in Polish.

SAMANTHA HURT

‘English-language Publishers of Contemporary Chinese Literature’
(reflection)

For English-language readers looking to read more Chinese works in translation, the question might arise of where to begin. Fortunately, there are several publications that include a special focus on contemporary Chinese literature.

Online, readers can find Chinese fiction through the *Paper Republic*, an online resource for Chinese literature in translation. The webpage contains links to individual translator and author biographies, as well as book descriptions and translation samples. There are also links to *Pathlight*, an English-language literary journal for contemporary Chinese literature in translation, as well as other periodicals. Browsing the website is relatively easy and would be a good start for readers unfamiliar with contemporary Chinese literature.

Asymptote is another excellent resource. It's an online trimonthly journal, which features visual art together with many different forms of literature in translation. The website is organized with links to poetry, fiction, nonfiction, interviews and criticism, in addition to drama and an archive of past issues. Browsing the website is straightforward, and it is aesthetically pleasing, with most pieces accompanied by an author and translator introduction and an illustration, as well as, in the case of poetry, the original language in both printed and recorded form (in case you'd like to hear the way the original poem sounds).

For those with a taste for poetry, the beautiful *Jintian* poetry series published in book form by Zephyr Press is an excellent place to start. The text of the poems is presented in the original Chinese, with the English translation on the facing page. The books in the series focus on a Chinese poet, and include a foreword by the translator or translators, which gives information about the poet and his/her literary context. In the lovely *I Can Almost See the Clouds of Dust*, for instance, in addition to basic facts about poet, Yu Xiang's life, we are given the translator, Fiona Sze-Lorrain's, impressions of the quality and essence of Yu's work.

Although Ken Liu's forthcoming *China Dreams* will present contemporary Chinese science fiction stories in translation in an anthology format, it is not due out until 2016. As of now, there is no one-stop source for contemporary Chinese science fiction in translation. However, if interested in this genre, one can avail oneself of Liu's excellent article of the same name in *Clarkesworld* magazine, which not only introduces Chinese science fiction to English-language readers but also includes a large selected bibliography of Chinese science fiction titles in translation, with links to their publication venues in most cases. Included in this list is the 2012 issue of *Renditions*, which presented both contemporary and earlier science fiction pieces in translation. Also included are works by Xia Jia, who describes her own work as 'porridge science fiction.' Her stories are affecting, and feature vivid, hyper-real imagery. In both 'A Hundred Ghosts Parade Tonight' and 'Tongtong's Summer,' Xia Jia raises questions of what it means to be embodied in a technological society, and what constitutes 'real' experience, and gives a window into the psyche of China's aging population and how technology might be used to assist in the care and self-efficacy of the elderly

One final resource for readers is the University of Oklahoma's *Chinese Literature Today*. Their website offers a sample of the magazine's contents; some of the articles are linked from the table of contents and give the reader a taste of the full text, available in print or digital form by subscription. I found the website relatively easy to navigate, and the content was diverse, including poetry, short fiction pieces, literary critiques and interviews with literary scholars. Much of the work is by well-established translators, and it is appended by the Chinese texts. This magazine should be useful to general readers and specialists alike with its excellent pieces, as well as its interesting critical content.

We are thrilled that that *Absinthe*, which has been devoted to European literature, is now bringing contemporary Chinese literature to its readers. We hope this space in which art speaks to art will be the beginning of a rich literary conversation.

EDITORS

Etienne Charrière received a BA and an MA in French in Modern Greek from the University of Geneva (Switzerland). Since 2009, he has been a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, where his research is on the transnational rise of the novel in the late Ottoman Empire. Etienne translates from Greek, Armenian and English into French.

Emily Goedde received an MFA in literary translation from the University of Iowa. While at Iowa, she was co-editor of *exchanges*, an online journal of literary translation. She is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, where she researches Chinese poetry from the 1930s and 40s. Her work has been published in *91st Meridian*, *The Iowa Review*, *exchanges* and *Discoveries: New Writing from The Iowa Review* as well as in the anthology *Jade Mirror: Women Poets of China* (White Pine Press, 2013).

AUTHORS • TRANSLATORS • VISUAL ARTIST

Chang Ying-Tai (張瀛太) is a Taiwanese writer and Professor at National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. She holds PhD in Literature from National Taiwan University. Over the past decade, her writing has garnered numerous accolades, including the prestigious China Times Prize for Literature, United Daily News Literature Prize, Taiwan Literature Award and the 2015 Lennox Robinson Literary Award. *The Bear Whispers to Me* is her first book to be translated into English.

Born in Guangzhou, China, **Chen Limin** (陈立民) was educated in China and France, and now resides in Strasbourg. Her work, which includes woodcuts as well as oils and watercolors, has been featured in exhibitions throughout France and China, as well as in the United States.

Jennifer Feeley has published translations of poetry and essays from Chinese into English in various journals and anthologies, including *FIELD*, *Epiphany*, *Tinfish*, and *Chinese Writers on Writing*. Her translation of *Not Written Words: Selected Poems of Xi Xi* (Zephyr Press), and her co-edited collection, *Simultaneous Worlds: Global Science Fiction Cinema* (University of Minnesota Press), are forthcoming in 2015.

Eleanor Goodman, a writer and translator, is a Research Associate at Harvard's Fairbank Center. She has been awarded a Fulbright, and residencies at the American Academy in Rome and the Vermont Studio Center. Her book *Something Crosses My Mind: Selected Poems of Wang Xiaoni* received a 2013 PEN/Heim Translation Grant. Her first book of poems, *Nine Dragon Island*, will be published this year.

Born in the Scottish Borders and educated at the Universities of Edinburgh and Durham, **Brian Holton** taught classical and modern Chinese language and literature in Edinburgh, Newcastle and Durham, as well as Chinese-English translation in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

He has published a dozen books of translations of the work of the poet Yang Lian, and his work has been used, as a cybertext self-generating poem, as the framework and text for a computer artwork, and as the libretto of a piece for soprano and qin commissioned from Liza Lim by Festival d'Automne à Paris. He is the only Chinese-Scots translator in captivity, and has published a range of classical Chinese poetry and fiction in Scots: an anthology is in preparation at the time of writing.

He has read his work and conducted translation workshops in Scotland, England, Ireland, Catalunya, Malta, the USA, Canada, China, and New Zealand, as well as reading at major literary festivals in the UK, Europe and the Far East. He has also held residencies at the Vermont Studio Center and the Bogliasco Foundation, Genoa.

Brian Holton lives in Melrose, where he plays traditional Scottish music on smallpipes, whistle, guitar and Appalachian dulcimer, and sings the songs of his native Borders. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Holton_\(translator\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Holton_(translator)).

Samantha Hurt is a second-year Master's student at the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies. She specializes in contemporary Chinese literature and culture, with a recent focus on Chinese science fiction literature and film.

David Jiménez is a 2015 Nieman fellow at Harvard University, an author, and an award-winning journalist from Spain. He was the Asia bureau chief for the Spanish daily *El Mundo* from 1998 to 2014. He has been a contributor to CNN, the BBC, the *Guardian*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Sunday Times*, *Esquire*, and others. Jiménez has covered conflicts in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and East Timor; popular uprisings in the Philippines, Burma, and Nepal; and the great tsunamis of the Indian and Pacific oceans. He has reported twice from inside North Korea. Jiménez is the author of four books, including *Children of the Monsoon* (Autumn Hill Books), a collection of essays just published in the United States.

Lucas Klein is a writer, translator, and editor whose work has appeared in *Jacket*, *Rain Taxi*, *CLEAR*, and *PMLA*, and from Fordham, Black Widow, and New Directions. Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong, his translation of poetry by Xi Chuan 西川 won the 2013 Lucien Stryk Prize and was shortlisted for the Best Translated Book Award in poetry. His translations of seminal contemporary poet Mang Ke 芒克 are forthcoming from Zephyr and Chinese University Press, and he is at work translating Tang dynasty poet Li Shangyin 李商隱. For more, see <http://xichuanpoetry.com>.

Wei-Yun Lin-Górecka (林蔚昀) was born in 1982 in Taipei, Taiwan. She finished Theatre Studies (BA) in Brunel University in London. She writes poetry, prose and novels in Chinese, English and Polish. She has been promoting Polish literature through translation and organizing literary exhibitions in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. In 2013, she received the Order of Merit in Polish Culture (Odznaka 'Zasłużony dla Kultury Polskiej') from the Ministry

of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, being the first Taiwanese to receive this award. She is the author of the following translations: Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Last Wish* and *The Sword of Destiny*, Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium under the Sign of an Hourglass*, Wisława Szymborska's *Poetry For Me—Selected Works by Wisława Szymborska 1957–2012* and Tadeusz Różewicz's *The Art of Walking—Selected works by Tadeusz Różewicz 1945–2008*.

Ouyang Jianghe (欧阳江河) known as one of the 'Five Masters from Sichuan,' is a poet and prominent critic of music, art, and literature, and president of the literary magazine *Jintian*. His poetry collections *Doubled Shadows* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014) were translated by Austin Woerner and published by Zephyr Press.

Meg Matich is a poet and translator, and a recent recipient of a grant from the PEN/Heim Translation Fund for her work with Sigurðsson. Her translations from Icelandic have appeared on *exchanges*, *Catch & Release* and are forthcoming from *Asymptote* and others. She curated the June 2015 Icelandic poetry feature for *Words Without Borders*, just after delivering a presentation on Icelandic poetry at Barnard's *Translation in Transition* conference. She was previously shortlisted for a creative-writing Fulbright grant to Iceland and was a resident translator at Banff International Literary Translation Centre in 2014. She is currently completing her MFA thesis in Poetry and Literary Translation at Columbia University.

Andrea Rosenberg is a translator from Spanish and Portuguese and an editor at the *Buenos Aires Review*. Her work has appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Quarterly Conversation*, and other publications. Her translation of David Jiménez's first collection of essays, *Children of the Monsoon*, was recently published by Autumn Hill Books.

Ryoko Sekiguchi (関口涼子) was born in Tokyo in 1970 and has lived in Paris since 1997. She studied art history at the Sorbonne and comparative literature at the University of Tokyo. Writing in both Japanese and French, Sekiguchi has authored more than ten books since 1993, as well as several Japanese translations of French literature. Three of her books have appeared in English translation: *Tracing* (translated by Tracy Doris, Duration Press, 2003), *Two Markets, Once Again* (translated by Sarah Riggs, The Post-Apollo Press, 2008) and *Heliotropes* (translated by Sarah O'Brien, La Presse, 2009). Excerpts of her

work have also been published in English-language anthologies of contemporary Japanese poetry.

Magnús Sigurðsson is an Icelandic poet and translator. In 2008 Sigurðsson received the Tómas Guðmundsson Poetry Prize for his first book of poems, *Fiðrildi, mynta og spörfuglar Lesbíu*, followed by the prestigious Jón úr Vör Poetry Prize in 2013. The poem ‘Tungsljós’ [‘Moonlight’] appeared in Sigurðsson’s third book of poems, *Tími kaldra mána* (2013). His debut translation was Ezra Pound’s *The Pisan Cantos* (University of Iceland Press, 2007). This fall Sigurðsson released a fourth book of poems, *Krummafótur*. He is currently translating Emily Dickinson’s collected poems into Icelandic. He was recently awarded the Val Björnson Fellowship for a yearlong residency at the University of Minnesota.

Darryl Sterk has translated numerous short stories by Taiwanese writers for The Taipei Chinese Pen, *Asymptote* and *Pathlight*; his first novel translation is Wu Ming-Yi’s *The Man With the Compound Eyes*. He teaches translation in the Graduate Program in Translation and Interpretation at National Taiwan University.

Tsou Yung-Shan (鄒永珊) graduated from National Taiwan University. In 2001 she moved to Germany to pursue a graduate degree in art. She continues to live and work there as an artist. Her work is characterized by the dialogue between image and language, between content and the process of writing. She has also drawn inspiration from the gulf between the German language and her mother tongue, using its more precise grammar to stretch the subtleties of Chinese. *The Waiting Room* was recommended title in the 2014 Taipei International Book Exhibition, and won a translation grant from the Taipei Book Fair Foundation.

Shannon K. Winston is currently a Postdoctoral Lecturer in Princeton University’s Writing Program. She is also a translator, poet, and poetry critic. Her work has appeared in *Her Circle Ezine*, *Zone 3*, *Two Review*, and *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. Her first full-length poetry collection, *Threads Give Way* (Cold Press), was published in 2010. She received her PhD from the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 2014.

Michelle M. Wu (吳敏嘉) is Assistant Professor of Professional Practice at National Taiwan University’s Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. She has been translating and interpreting since graduating from the

Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation Studies at Fujen Catholic University in 1992. For many years she has translated essays and short stories for the Taipei Chinese PEN, and her translation of Li-hung Hsiao's *A Thousand Moons on a Thousand Rivers* was published by Columbia University Press in 2000. She is currently finishing her translation of Yung-Shan's novel, *The Waiting Room*.

Xi Xi (西西, b. 1938), pseudonym of Cheung Yin, is among the first generation of writers to have grown up in Hong Kong and is considered one of the territory's most beloved and prolific authors. She began writing poetry in the late 1950s and has published two poetry volumes, *Stone Chimes* (1982) and *The Collected Poems of Xi Xi* (2000), along with numerous novels and collections of short fiction and essays. After winning Taiwan's prestigious United Daily fiction prize in 1983, her fame catapulted throughout Greater China, where she has continued to cultivate an enthusiastic readership.

Yang Lian (杨炼) was born in Bern (Switzerland) in 1955, where his parents were in the diplomatic service, and grew up in Beijing. Like millions of other young people, he was sent to the countryside for re-education during the final years of the Cultural Revolution. After the death of his mother in 1976, Yang began to write poetry. Back in Beijing, as one of the leading experimental poets, he was associated with the underground literary periodical *Jintian* (*Today*).

Yang Lian is best known as a poet, but he also writes prose, literary criticism and art criticism. His work, which comprises half a score of poetry collections and two volumes of prose, has been translated into over twenty languages. It includes: *Dead in Exile* (1989), *Masks & Crocodile* (1990), *Non-person Singular* (1995), *Yi* (2002), *Notes of a Blissful Ghost* (2002) and *Concentric Circles* (2006). He is regarded as one of the most representative voices of present-day Chinese literature. *The Narrative Poem*, an excerpt of which is published here, is a book-length autobiographical poem written between 2006 and 2010. It has received much critical acclaim, and will be published in its English translation in 2016 with Bloodaxe Books.

Zhou Weichi (周伟驰) was born in Hunan in 1969. He graduated from Peking University with a degree in Philosophy and currently works as an associate research fellow in the Center for the Research of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He specializes in the study of Christianity, and has published monographs, books of translation and poetry, and many scholarly articles. translation: *Tracing* (translated by Tracy Doris, Duration

Press, 2003), *Two Markets, Once Again* (translated by Sarah Riggs, The Post-Apollo Press, 2008) and *Heliotropes* (translated by Sarah O'Brien, La Presse, 2009). Excerpts of her work have also been published in English-language anthologies of contemporary Japanese poetry.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE

Electra, inspired by exemplars of the 15th and 16th centuries, was drawn by William Addison Dwiggins for Mergenthaler Linotype in the early 1930s. Dwiggins did not strive to replicate these earlier designs, but rather to create something fresh that evoked the vitality of the early 20th century. When released, Electra was described as having ‘energy like metal shaving coming off a lathe.’ The style and substance of Electra supports the content of *Absinthe* via a fusion of machine aesthetics with an inflection of the hand.

The display font used in the frontmatter is *Bell*, based on original types made by the punchcutter Richard Austin for the foundry of John Bell in the 1780s. This hot metal typeface, a contemporary of Electra, was released by Monotype in 1931. It stands as a stylistic bridge between the publication’s body copy and masthead.

The redesign of *Absinthe* [Issue 21] happened to be in sync with the release of a new character set, Blesk, from Samarskaya & Partners of Brooklyn, NY. This distinctly vivacious typeface has been inspired by mid-century paperback book lettering and is offered in various styles that can be rendered into seven combinations. Blesk robustly raises the banner under which the journal continues to roll forward.

Chang Ying-Tai 張瀛太. Excerpts from 熊兒悄聲對我說. Taipei: 九歌, 2010. English translation *The Bear Whispers to Me*. © Balestier Press, 2015.

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ABSINTHE's Spring 2016 issue *Unscripted: An Armenian Palimpsest*

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