

The background is a solid orange color. On the left side, there are two large, white, curved shapes that resemble the left half of a circle or a thick, curved line. These shapes are positioned vertically, one above the other, and they overlap the orange background. The text is located in the upper right quadrant of the page.

**Emerging
Literary
Translators
— 2022**

The Emerging Translator Mentorships Programme is curated and run by the National Centre for Writing. Each year we support a new cohort of emerging translators into English, with a particular focus on languages whose literature is underrepresented in English translation. We have also pioneered the development of translation skills via non-language-specific mentorships, in which the mentor need not necessarily translate from the mentee's source language.

For the past four years this has enabled us to develop our commitment to underrepresented writers by offering specific mentorships for UK-based Black or Brown literary translators and translators from the diaspora, heritage or community languages of the UK (supported by Visible Communities), and translators currently resident in a country on the OECD list of countries qualifying for Official Development Assistance (supported by the British Centre for Literary Translation and British Council). The Emerging Translator Mentorships were founded in 2010 by writer, editor and translator, Daniel Hahn.

With our warmest thanks to all this year's mentors: Juliet Winters Carpenter, Howard Curtis, Kari Dickson, Anton Hur, Sawad Hussain, Meena Kandasamy, Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Canan Marasligil, Oliver Ready, Ros Schwartz, Jamie Lee Searle and Kaija Straumanis. Sincere thanks also to the organisations which have helped to fund the programme: Arts Council England, British Centre for Literary Translation, British Council, Italian Cultural Institute, Latvian Literature, Literary Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea), Polish Cultural Institute London, Pro-Helvetia, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Russian Institute for Literary Translation, the Tadashi Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities at UCLA and Waseda University and the Visible Communities programme.

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‘Stories are empathy machines, and we need them from different viewpoints, contexts, languages, and voices, like never before. We’re proud to play a role in nurturing talented translators at the very beginning of their careers and take enormous pleasure in what this year’s cohort have produced. We’re excited for where their words will take them, and us, next.’

Peggy Hughes
Executive Director
National Centre for Writing

Foreword

There was a debate last year among avid readers, who felt the pandemic had impacted on their reading in different ways: while some simply could not concentrate on the written text as one news headline was chasing another, others constantly had their nose in a book. Some of these readers were looking for escapism, travelling to lands and times far away from the present day, while others were clinging onto facts and theories only non-fiction could provide.

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, and the globe starts to open up again, we are faced with a new world. A world that has thrust new crises upon us, challenging the power of translation to transcend barriers and transport readers out of their physical reality to lose themselves in a book.

Translations can make us aware of the parallels between languages and countries, and draw attention to our common humanity. This is particularly striking when we get the chance to look at the texts, united in this volume, translated from 11 different languages and chosen by the most promising translators working today.

This collection crosses physical and metaphorical boundaries: from the borderland around Trieste and Sarajevo, between Italy and Yugoslavia; to the creation of the Swiss Gotthard tunnel, currently the longest railway tunnel in the world; and arriving at an experimental single-sentence novella that does away with identity, national or otherwise.

The excerpts discuss physical and mental illness and obsessions, often hidden behind slick façades. They look behind the curtains of wealthy Oslo to a young woman in the thralls of anorexia and heroin addiction; through

a fictionalized lens, they explore the social and familial burden that comes with living with Tourette's Syndrome; they shine a light on alcoholism and homelessness via a Korean 24/7 convenience store; and they find unlikely parallels between obsessive female friendships in modern-day Tokyo, and invasive carnivorous Nile perch in Lake Victoria.

These translations show a range of style and form, and find surrealist humour in the darkest places: a Latvian-Estonian musical takes us to the mass deportations in the 1940s USSR, and a piece of autofiction set in mid-80s Poland offers a satirical take on a Soviet state.

And finally, the anthology shows how literature lets us travel, and literature in translation takes us to the most remote places and the most distant time periods: to medieval Persia, a place of sensual poetry about food and objects of desire; and to the Nenets people in the far north of Russia, where a backlash to an arranged marriage threatens the old ways of life.

The overall image of literary translation today is strikingly diverse, and yet united by a shared love of language. Translation is an act of collaboration in the face of division and offers an expression of steadfast optimism. As a colleague said recently: poetry (and — by extension — literature) will prevail!

Vicki Maitland & Rebecca DeWald
National Centre for Writing

Note:

At the time of writing, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is ongoing. This collection features translations of Ukrainian and Russian voices that predate the conflict. We condemn the acts of violence perpetrated by the Russian state, and acknowledge that these do not reflect the views of all Russian people, and voice our support for the people of Ukraine.

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Norwegian to English

Lise Lærdal Bryn

Mentor

Kari Dickson

Lise Lærdal Bryn is a drama and prose translator from Stavanger, Norway. She received a BA in 'Cross-Cultural Storytelling: a bilingual study of literary, visual and dramatic narrative' from the University of Redlands in California, and an MA in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia. She occasionally acts and gardens.

Introduction

Lise Lærdal Bryn

Written by up-and-coming author Maria Kjos Fonn, *Heroin chic* is a dark and incisive rendering of a young woman's mental illness, beginning in her early teens, which first expresses itself as an eating disorder and then develops into a devastating drug addiction in her early twenties, as well as her arduous journey through recovery and relapse. The protagonist, Elise, is talented, beautiful, from the 'good side' of Oslo, leading a seemingly charmed life, yet beneath the surface, she struggles — a reflection of Norway itself, which tops happiness surveys and the Human Development Index, yet its capital has been considered a heroin capital of Europe where heroin was once cheaper than beer.

From the first page, the poetic imagery is arresting, and the precise prose reflects a character who strives for precision in all that she does — whether it be hitting a high note, or simply a high. It is a striking new entry into the drug-canon, as well as the privileged-yet-mentally-ill-young-woman-canon, and is both timeless and intensely contemporary (published in October 2020, it includes an effective and subtle integration of the coronavirus pandemic).

The novel's particular strengths lie in its brutally elegant baring of anorexia and addiction; its depiction and interplay of a range of abuses, whether it be by sexual predation, drug-driven co-dependency, parental enablement, or one's own hand; and its centring of the *body* — a manifestation of its fresh and feminine perspective on a topic that has thus far been dominated by male voices, a perspective that is encapsulated by the novel's title, and which was what drew me to translate it. I am attracted to provocative literature: literature that ices, draws blood, makes your fingers flex, makes your breath stutter. I hope to evoke the same with all of my translations.

From *Heroin chic*

Maria Kjos Fonn, translated by Lise Lærdal Bryn

I listened to Messiaen's *Le Réveil des oiseaux*. You can hear the birds patter. Twitter. Flap. How the pianist's hands move over the keys like birds' feet. Pit-a-pat. Carefully. Or incisively — black birds swooping through the cloud cover. Wing-beats. In the middle of the sky, no bearings, only air.

I'll say it like it is. Starvation, when you have a talent for it, is a delight. Everything spins and lights up, like a carnival. The colours are sharp, your joints are sharp. I cannibalized myself. I gnawed at my knuckles, ate of my brain, my heart. If I were to paint a picture of anorexia: a girl with a wild look in her eyes, standing by a fridge and gnawing her own arm.

I went to the music studio in the basement during lunch, where I could rehearse, and no one was around to notice I didn't eat. I swayed, I had to support myself on the piano while I sang. Smudged new dark circles under my eyes in the disabled toilet after I'd cried. Collapsed, lay on trampled toilet paper, nice to just lie there, lovely to rest.

During lessons my head got slower and slower, and when we had music theory, I read about the concept *calando* over and over again. Gradually increasing, both in strength and tempo. *Staccato*. Short, sharp. The repetition symbol was two lines and a colon. They turned into spindly stick figures before my eyes. I put my head in my hands. Sank onto the desk. To rest forever, for a few seconds.

Decrescendo.

Rhythm is in us from a very young age, said Solveig, our music teacher. In our pulse. In our breathing. In our mother's beating heart when we're feeding. What's your rhythm like these days? You seem a little stressed. And your breath is short, I can hear it when you sing. Has something unsettled you?

No, I said, not really.
Alright then.
Right.

Rhythm was everywhere: in the staccato steps, in the refrigerator door when I opened it and closed it and opened it and closed it and opened it. You couldn't say I'd lost my beat, but I teetered, between heavy and light, soft and hard.

Quattro Pezzi su una nota sola. Four pieces on a single note. I'd heard that the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi suffered a nervous breakdown. He just sat at the piano and played the same note over and over and over again. Eventually, it became a composition.

Once, on the way to the shop, I saw the woman with the Pepsi Max and fur coat. She was standing completely still. In the middle of the crossing. I tried shouting at her, but she didn't turn.

Cars slammed their brakes. A man ran into the street and pulled her onto the pavement.

The stairs up to maths got harder with every step. I couldn't understand why I needed maths: I already knew everything about BMI, calories, kilos, grams. On the first floor I opened a door, looked around and asked: Is this the room for maths?

The others laughed. We'd had the same classroom for half a year.

One night, I got lost in Oslo, in Grünerløkka, maybe, or Majorstua, Frogner, I'm not quite sure, nor was I sure where I was going, and I wondered if I was in a film, because suddenly everything went out of focus. The faces of the people passing by were edgeless. I looked at my shadow, which started to lift, got smaller and smaller, until I couldn't see it any longer.

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Swiss German to English

Astrid Freuler

Mentor

Jamie Lee Searle

Astrid is a British/Swiss translator with a particular interest in Swiss German literature. She grew up near Zurich and moved to the UK in 1991 to study Fine Art. Following a number of years working as an ITI-qualified commercial translator, she now combines commercial and literary translation. Her debut was Andreas Pflüger's *A Shadow Falls* for Head of Zeus.

Introduction

Astrid Freuler

Published in 2015, Zora del Buono's *Gotthard* is a quirky, multi-layered novella that uses wit and linguistic interplay to shine a light on themes not usually associated with the picturesque Alpine world. Narrated from the alternating perspectives of eight characters, it is set on and around the construction site of what is currently the world's longest railway tunnel.

I fell for this book as soon as I read it, struck by its strong sense of place and astute observations on people and the relationships that bind them. Suspenseful and precisely drafted, *Gotthard* leaves no room for clichés as it tells of life in a curious corner of the Swiss Alps and of a dark secret buried in the depths of the mountain. The overall tone is darkly humorous and, despite the rather grizzly ending, there is a real warmth for the different characters and their trials and tribulations.

The extract presented below introduces Fritz Bergundthal, a Berlin trainspotter and neatly groomed bachelor in his fifties who has travelled to the Gotthard tunnel to take some spectacular photos of beautiful locomotives. His is an orderly world, but in the course of the single day across which *Gotthard* is set, he becomes increasingly embroiled in local affairs. This is largely the result of his encounter with the eccentric pensioner Dora Müller and her daughter Flavia, who works as a lorry driver on the construction site. In this scene, Bergundthal has set up his equipment in one of the valley's prime trainspotting locations, which is right by Dora's house.

It's been a real pleasure to work on this project with my mentor Jamie Lee Searle and to have her support and companionship over the past six months.

From *Gotthard*

Zora del Buono, translated by Astrid Freuler

Fritz Bergundthal, 09:55

The *Re 460 001-1*, the *E 633-212* of the *Ferrovie dello stato*, plus two *Ae 6/6* of the *SBB*, specifically the *Mendrisio* and the *Brunnen*, even the historic *Ae 8/14* with its fourteen axles, he had them all. Today he was expecting the *TEE RAe II 1053 Gottardo* between 10:13 and 10:16 – he was well informed.

Bergundthalsat on the camping chair he had previously vacated for Dora Müller. He hadn't really paid heed to the old woman's strange get-up. Yes, her appearance seemed a little garish perhaps, but only her daughter's disapproving reaction – 'Mamma, ma che fai qui vestita in questa maniera ridicola?' – had actually caused him to take a close, albeit discreet, look at Dora Müller, sitting there in what was indeed a rather ridiculous outfit.

What an encounter! Even now he felt utterly dazed by it, almost flushed, but he didn't want to get caught up in it, the *TEE RAe II* would be passing through soon, this here was a unique opportunity, the phenomenon of the early sixties, not in a museum, but coming right towards him in all its glorious might. Bergundthal stood up and double-checked the stability of the tripod and the field of view, the arch of the tunnel centre stage, the drystone wall to the right, the rockface to the left, the main road out of view, but one of the concrete pillars that supported the motorway high above him in prominent position, and of course that metre-high red strawberry that someone had sprayed onto the rock, a political symbol or a juvenile proclamation, he had forgotten to ask the two women about the significance of the fruit, which could be seen all around the valley.

Bergundthal looked at his watch. In ten minutes the train would emerge from the upper loop tunnel, and another one-and-a-half minutes after that he'd see it coming towards him head-on, travelling at a steady rather than fast speed, due to the many bends; that was

the brilliant thing about this spot, nothing happened quickly and you could keep an eye on everything. There would be no surprises. He went back to the chair, sat down again, opened the accounts ledger and sharpened his pencil. He always noted everything down in pencil. It was rare for him to make a mistake, but nothing was uglier than a crossed-out number or word. Other trainspotters didn't use accounts ledgers, even though they lent themselves so well to the type of entries to be made, the dozen columns waiting to be filled, place, date, time, model, series, fleet number, year of production, and for the older Swiss trains the cantonal emblem, provided it hadn't been stolen, plus any obvious damage, special paint finishes... ach, there was so much to record.

He felt flustered, less because of the *TEE*, and more – he had to admit this to himself – because of the recent encounter with the mother and daughter. He wouldn't say he was aroused exactly, that would be going too far... or perhaps just a tiny bit. He had still been kneeling on the tarmac, fiddling about with his camera, while Dora – at this point they were already on first-name terms – was sitting in his chair and babbling on about a fig liqueur recipe that a Sicilian construction worker called Vico had given her back in 1974, when she was a young canteen cook, and it was at this point that Flavia had climbed out of her lorry and walked towards them, slowly, with long strides, until he saw the pointy cowboy boots right in front of him and saw, too, how the startled Dora quickly pressed together her bare thighs and, following Flavia's cutting remark, bashfully crossed her legs. That was when he finally stood up, a little stiffly. He felt overwhelmed by the opposing poles of this double femininity. Next to him the older woman in her heeled strappy sandals – a gaudy yellow and disconcertingly high, as he now noticed – and in front of him the younger woman, half a head taller than him, decidedly butch and clearly outraged over her mother's appearance.

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Italian to English

Amaryllis Gacioppo

Mentor

Howard Curtis

Amaryllis Gacioppo is an Australian writer and translator currently residing in Palermo. She has a joint PhD in Literary Studies from Monash University and the University of Bologna. Her debut book, *Motherlands: In Search of Our Inherited Cities*, will be published by Bloomsbury this summer.

Introduction

Amaryllis Gacioppo

Federica Manzon is a prolific Italian writer and editor from the Friuli Venezia Giulia region who lives between Milan and Turin. *Il Bosco del Confine* is her fourth novel.

It is 1979 and our narrator, a young Triestine girl, and her father, a Serbian migrant, regularly walk in the woods between Italy and Yugoslavia, their crossings between the two nations discernible only by occasional sightings of uniformed officers. Despite living in an Italian city corralled and shadowed by Yugoslavia, her pacifist father's mantra is that in the woods there are no borders. In 1984, the narrator's father takes her to Sarajevo for the Winter Olympics. There, she meets Luka, the nephew of her father's friend. Led by Luka, the narrator finds herself falling in love with the city and the mountains that surround it, even as she senses the tensions that bubble underneath the surface, foreshadowing looming conflict.

This is a book preoccupied with borders. Crossing years, it takes place in two cities of four different nations: the Italian city of Trieste (which in the past was governed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Yugoslavia, and the UN); and the Sarajevo of Yugoslavia, and the Republic and later Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through an episodic narrative told in deft, elegant prose, Manzon articulates the dichotomy of borders: while they are (often) arbitrary and (often) imaginary lines that shift according to the desires and machinations of those in power, frontiers also have an immense impact on the lives of those on either side of them, whether they be migrants who have been shut out or civilians caught in the crossfire of the wars waged in their name.

This sample is taken from a chapter told from Luka's perspective. Here, we find him writing to our narrator back in Trieste from a 1993 Sarajevo in the throes of the Bosnian War.

From *The Woods on the Border*

Federica Manzon, translated by Amaryllis Gacioppo

Sarajevo,

The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1993

I went to pay the condominium fees under a rain of sniper bullets. I settled the arrears until December. I paid for a phone to be installed last month, but it still hasn't arrived. Peace will be declared and we won't even be able to call each other to complain about how Izetbegović let himself get walked all over. In line at the post office, strangers smile at me. I think that one of them might be Ivan, the tailor, and the guy next to him may be quick-fingered professor Alić. I no longer recognise anybody. We smile with our mouths closed, so as not to show our teeth, which are beginning to fall faster than the houses on Sniper Alley. We don't say hello. We waste nothing. I know how some people look at me. I'm young, what am I still doing around here? Why am I not in the mountains defending the city? Why haven't the policemen come to take me away to dig trenches like they did to their husbands and fathers? These days, a sick uncle is a poor excuse. In any other town in the country, I would already have been reported. Not in Sarajevo. Here I'm one more person in the market haggling for a bundle of onions, a turnip leaf, but no one has reported me yet. Maybe my mother is keeping an eye on me from the radio tower. She slips marks, even dollars to the right people, to keep me safe. Or, more likely, I've had cosmic good luck. Like with my sniper.

I'm sorry, I can't seem to write a proper letter, like you did. It must be all the books I burned to make coffee or heat up a tin of meat, and now Goethe or Apuleius or that bastard Dostoyevsky have laid a curse on me. All I'm able to do is record the days here, when I feel up to keeping track. I'll send you all the sheets of paper together, a nice bundle, a firsthand report from the city of the dead,

cool right? Besides, flowers are no longer the thing here, apart from roses. Sorry, I'm being stupid, it's just that I can't manage to write for too long. I can't concentrate. Anyway, it was nice to get your letter. So, the rest of the world still knows we exist? Good job remembering the address after all this time, I don't plan on moving, so I hope you'll send me more. I'll do my best to write you too. In the name of our Olympic Games... scout's honour!

Yesterday afternoon I went to the theatre. I was bored at home. They were staging *The Hollow*. The actors were just skin and bones, and there were exactly two dim little lights from candle ends so that it was like being in a ghost theatre. An unforgettable show. At the end, we all hugged. We're all skin and bones. I don't know how much longer we can go on for. We hugged and we were crying. Not from despair, but because the performance was so wonderful. That's how Sarajevo is. This is why I don't leave, even if it seems stupid to you. I don't want to go. Besides, it's risky. The convoys haven't left for weeks, I don't even know if I'll be able to send you these pages of notes. If I tried to leave, I would surely be caught and sent to the mountains. Do you remember Mount Trebević? They're up there. They shoot from the piste. They've stuck their mortars through the gaps in the dividing walls and they fire shells down like slingshots. I like to imagine them there.

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Arabic to English

Salma Harland

Mentor

Sawad Hussain

Salma translates key texts from pre-Nahda and (post)modern Arabic poetry that have been forgotten or understated in English translation. Her translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ancient Exchanges*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Medievalists*, and elsewhere.

She holds an MA in Literature and Philosophy from the University of Sussex, a PGCert in Translation and Interpreting from the American University in Cairo, and a BA in Translation from October 6 University.

Introduction

Salma Harland

Kushājim (c. 902 – 970) is a celebrated tenth-century Shi'ite Muslim Arab court poet, master chef, and polymath of Indo-Persian origin. During his lifetime, Kushājim was considered the epitome of excellence in literature so much so that he was part of the circle of Sayf al-Dawla (the founder and ruler of the Emirate of Aleppo from 945 to 967 and arguably the most famous ruler in Islamic history). Though a poet of considerable range, Kushājim is best known as a pioneer of *maqṭu'āt al-waṣf* (مقطوعات الوصف; ekphrastic epigrams): short yet highly-complex monothematic poems characterized by hyper-realistic sensory depictions of carnal and earthly topics. In these poems, Kushājim vividly chronicles culinary, social, and intellectual aspects of court life during the Middle Abbasid era, detailing numerous native and exotic foodstuffs and recipes; the social etiquettes of sharing food and wine; the various musical instruments used at the time to entertain the caliphs and their guests; the harem with its cross-dressed male and female dancers and concubines; the wide variety of plants and geometric designs found in courtly gardens; indoor pastimes and outdoor sports; the art of gift-giving; and the traits of coveted courtiers and boon-companions.

My current work-in-progress brings eighty-five of Kushājim's dazzling ekphrastic poems from the Classical Arabic into English for the first time, uncovering a treasure trove of insightful material about the Arab-Islamic Middle Ages. In doing so, my annotated translations will (a) offer a unique insider's look at the courts, cuisine, music, pastimes, etiquettes, and aesthetics that were at the heart of the Islamic Golden Age, (b) add to the existing understanding of classical Arabic poetry by defining a new genre and unusual thematic topics, (c) redefine the role of Arabic poetry and what it offers society, and (d) challenge stereotypes of the Arab world through poems that are endearingly human and fun to read.

‘Elegising a Handkerchief,’ from *The Collected Poetic Works*

Kushājim, translated by Salma Harland

I am not weeping over a mortal's death
but over a handkerchief¹
Which a dainty antelope² desired
and so I yielded reluctantly.
It was finespun
with unsurpassed craftsmanship,
As if the delicacy of its ornate details
was derived from the tenderness of lovers,
As if it was knit from long silky eyelashes
interlaced like ants' legs in wet sand,
As if its woven embellishments
were the plumage of a strutting peacock or ruff.
It was well-used, yet its beauty reinvigorated it
that it never became a threadbare old rag.
Many a note from a beloved

-
- 1 The word used in the source text is *shustujah* (شستجة), a Persian word meaning 'handkerchief or towel.' It is derived from the root *shustah* (شسته), which means 'washed, cleansed, dressed, prepared' (Steingass, 744). The word *shustujah* itself does not appear either in modern Arabic dictionaries or in Reinhart Dozy's nineteenth-century *Takmilat al-Ma'ājim al-'Arabiah* (تكملة المعاجم العربية; *Supplement of Arabic Dictionaries*), yet it makes an appearance in pre-modern Persian-English and Persian-Arabic dictionaries, such as in Francis Joseph Steingass' nineteenth-century *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, as a Persian word of Syriac origin. Being of Indo-Persian origin himself, Kushājim often used non-Arabic Persian words in his poetry, especially in descriptions of food, scents, flowers, and textiles.
 - 2 *antelope* 'a common term of endearment in Classical Arabic used to refer to a young maiden'

had been inscribed³ on its folds
Then stained with sweet lips
to cool my kindling heart!
Many a tender farewell it waved
that has since possessed my weary soul!
It cleaned cups
from the last dregs of their drinks
And silver platters whenever they were crowned
or wreathed with delish dips
And books may their charms
be revealed.
It fondly clung to my ring
every time I held it,
But Time seized it! Verily, He brings
many unsettling, grievous afflictions!
My handkerchief has since been reined back
and restrained in the sleeve of a strutting beauty.

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3 In the Abbasid era, inanimate objects such as cups, plates, and handkerchiefs were often inscribed with poetry and prose. Lovers were also known to exchange love notes by embroidering perfumed handkerchiefs with ornate script in gold thread. Baghdadi litterateur and grammarian Abū al-Tayyib al-Washā' (896–937) detailed this in his book *Kitāb al-Muwashā* (كتاب الموشى; *The Book of Brocade*), also known as *Al-Ẓurf wa-l-Ẓurafā'* (الظرف والظرفاء; *On Refinement and Refined People*), especially in the chapter titled '*Mā wujida 'alā al-zanānīr wa-l-tikak wa-l-manādīl*' (ما وجد على الزنانير والتكك والمناديل; *What Was Noted on Belts, Waistbands, and Handkerchiefs*).

Polish to English

Jess Jensen Mitchell

Mentor

Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Jess Jensen Mitchell fell in love with Polish culture as a disaffected youth in Wisconsin. Curious about her past, she watched Kieślowski's *Blind Chance* and her fate was sealed. She loves slice-of-life stories, especially funny ones. Her favorite novel is *The Doll* by Bolesław Prus. She is a PhD candidate at Harvard University.

Introduction

Jess Jensen Mitchell

The List of Adulteresses (Spis cudzołożnic) is a 1994 novel written in Polish by the iconic satirist Jerzy Pilch. The work takes place in the mid-1980s, an uncertain period in Polish history marked by both the earlier successes of the Solidarity Movement and the repressions of Martial Law (1981-3). In this uproariously funny work of autofiction, Gustaw, the narrator — an academic and wannabe author — dissects his relationships with literature, women, and the West before the sudden fall of the Eastern Bloc.

The first sentence of the work sets the scene for a picaresque adventure: “in the mid-1980s, I tried to convince at least one of several lady friends to cast aside their scruples, coldly consider the pros and cons, and embark on a short-term intimacy with a Swedish scholar.” Asked to give the (unnamed) Scandinavian professor a tour of Kraków, Gustaw insists on pairing his guest with a Polish woman. Between city sites (including a stop at the bottle bank), he calls old loves from payphones. Only one picks up: Iza, a failed ornithologist waiting for the end of communism from an apartment with a prime view of the Lenin Museum. Although the Swede’s visit comes to a deflating end, this story offers the reader a clear-eyed glimpse into the psyche of a man who has read too many books, looked up too many skirts, and still hasn’t found his place in the world. We are left with the portrait of a flawed, though endearing, man who has more in common with us than we might realize. Gustaw, c’est nous.

Born in 1952, Pilch rose to widespread fame thanks to his newspaper columns and satirical novels. He cemented his status as a literary icon in Poland in 2001, when he received the Nike Award, Poland’s most prestigious literary prize. Pilch died in May 2020.

From *The List of Adulteresses*

Jerzy Pilch, translated by Jess Jensen Mitchell

Chapter 1: The Opening Bars of the Ballad of the Procurer

In the mid-1980s, I tried to convince at least one of several lady friends to cast aside their scruples, coldly consider the pros and cons, and embark on a short-term intimacy with a Swedish scholar.

I was standing before a payphone, cooling my burning forehead against its faded green armor, and feverishly riffling through the pages of my tidy little pocket diary. There, the maiden and married names and phone numbers written in my characteristic, Protestant hand had become a mythical list of temptresses, a pocket diary changed into a forbidden tome of ravishingly scented pages. I liked to imagine that I was a budding author, emotionally preparing myself to write something that could be titled *The Ballad of the Procurer*. “On the day he would metamorphose from a scholar of the humanities into a mack daddy, Gustaw was woken by the telephone”; that is how the first sentence of the book, pitiless in every respect, would sound.

The number I dialed most often was that of Jola Łukasik. I felt that Jola, of all people, would willingly, if not eagerly, perform for the Swedish scholar in her role as an inspired imposter, a Fallen Mother Poland, showing up in full makeup and an ambiguous ensemble, to ensnare the starving Swede with a classic repertoire of meaningful glances and bold gestures. I was certain she’d materialize the instant I called. At this hour she couldn’t possibly be busy; she should be at home. The only real obstacle could be Aleksander, her awful, bastard child.

And yet — I frantically turned the dial — and yet — and yet ... A few years had passed since that fateful dinner when Awful Aleksander had proven a truly insurmountable obstacle. A few years mean little in the life of a nation, perhaps, but in the life of a child they are undoubtedly meaningful. The child can certainly stay home alone by now and can certainly tuck himself in. And

who knows, maybe he even goes to school already.

The Swedish scholar sat waiting at a table, nursing an Albanian brandy, and gazed through the panoramic window at the Poles crossing the mud-colored paving of the Market Square that November evening. He looked a bit like Captain Nemo, peering into the motionless depths from behind the crystal walls of his Nautilus. Now and again, he turned to face me. I hung up the handset and, affecting a look of mild vexation, I went up to him. But I didn't sit down, I just leaned over and in a confidential whisper I intoned in English: *"Beautiful girl, I told you, seems to be busy. But don't worry. If not today, tomorrow you will fuck for sure."*

The Swede smiled gamely and raised his glass, I raised mine and we drank, the Swede sitting, I standing. The Swede sitting, though he was clearly niggled by a vague desire to get up. He glanced around timorously, as if afraid to break a local custom dictating that on this day and at this hour and especially after raising a toast and reciting the magic formula of a pledge, one must stand post-haste. With a gesture that was reassuring and sincere, but that brooked no argument and was devoid of sacramental meaning, I patted him on the shoulder. With the back of the same hand I wiped the corners of my mouth, dug another American cigarette out of my pocket, lit it, and with a knowing wink, I declared, *"Now I'll call to another one."*

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Latvian to English

Ieva Lākute

Mentor

Kaija Straumanis

Born in Riga, Ieva lives in Bristol. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University, and was longlisted for the 2020 John Dryden Translation Competition.

Her love of theatre led her to complete the Theatre Translators Mentorship with *Foreign Affairs* during the same year.

She believes that dreams come true, and hers is to see a Latvian play staged in English.

Introduction

Ieva Lākute

The musical *CABARET SIBERIA*, written by the Latvian playwright Lauris Gundars and composed by the Estonian composer Siim Aimla, explores the themes of the 1940s USSR mass deportations which took place across the Baltic countries. It was originally staged in March 2018 in a site-specific performance at Tallinn's Railway Station where many of the deportations took place. This collaborative project between Latvian *Teātris TT* and Estonian *Piip ja Tuut Teater* was part of the Baltic centenary celebrations.

The musical follows the story of two Estonian cabaret artists, Max and Mel. One night, following their show, they are arrested and exiled to Siberia. On the brink of exhaustion, they continue to perform, desperate to earn an extra ration of bread or impress *nachalnik*, the Gulag camp's director.

The Soviet mass deportations are a culturally significant event for the Baltic nations, and you can find a story about them in almost every family. Consequently, new novels and films are being released every year that address this topic, as a way of commemorating and coping with the past. But what makes *Cabaret SIBERIA* different is its unique approach to storytelling: it tells a tragic story through the typically frivolous form of a musical. The facetious nature of the cabaret songs contrasts with the dark subject matter, creating an extremely powerful, emotionally charged experience that is likely to resonate with any audience.

The musical consists of one act with an approximate run-time of one hour and forty minutes. The following excerpt is taken from the middle section, where Max and Mel are attempting to comfort the children crammed inside the cattle train's carriage. Unable to cope with reality, Max is growing increasingly deluded and grandiose, while Mel desperately tries to 'bring him back'.

From *CABARET SIBERIA*

Lauris Gundars, translated by Ieva Lākute

Mel: No one told us what was going on, or where we were headed. And there were people there... I mean, babies...

Max: I get it. It's hard to change the way you think. These things take time...

Mel: There were three babies in our carriage. Three, four and six months old. They survived only a little while.

Max: I know. It's really hard to change the way you think. The children, especially, struggled with it. We wanted to cheer them up. It was really tight and stuffy in the carriage, but we managed to pull it off! We made a special song for the children. Half of the passengers were children.

The music starts.

Max: If you want a nice surprise, pull the curtain shut! Something is waiting for you at the next stop, because this train is taking us to Wonderland!

SONG #5: "Chugga-chugga, choo-choo"

Max and Mel: The first night, the first stop —
pull the curtain shut!
Don't look! No need.
I'll tell you just how beautiful it is —
this is the land of... Bunnies!
You can jump and skip as much as you please!
Hooray, hooray, hooray!

Mel: But will skipping be enough?

Max: I'll tell you in the morning.

Max and Mel: Let's keep moving!
Chorus. Choo-choo, chugga-chugga, choo-choo! There goes our train, taking us to Wonderland! Everyone is smiling there, even cats and dogs!

The second night, the second stop —
pull the curtain shut!
Don't look! No need.
I'll tell you just how beautiful it is —
this is the land of... Cheese!
Can you smell those wonderful aromas?
Hooray, hooray, hooray!

Mel: But will the smell of cheese be enough?

Max: I'll tell you in the morning.

Max and Mel: Let's keep moving!

Chorus.

The third night, the third stop —
pull the curtain shut!
Don't look! No need.
I'll tell you just how beautiful it is —
we're in the land of... Flowers!
So fragrant and bright — just picture this lovely scene!
Hooray, hooray, hooray!

Mel: But will the fragrant flowers be enough?

Max: I'll tell you in the morning.

Max and Mel: Let's keep moving! Let's see what happens next!

Chorus.

The fourth night, the fourth stop —
now, open the curtain wide!

Look, how beautiful it is —
our Wonderland! Our Promised Land!
Everyone is smiling here, even cats and dogs!
Hooray, hooray, hooray!
This is our final stop! We're here! We've arrived!

Max: Oh, how the kids were laughing!

Mel: Three of them died, in just four days.

Max: But we managed to cheer them up.

Mel: One of the mothers slit her throat. After she'd killed her two children.

Max: Well, yeah, to be fair, they didn't think it through. They shouldn't have put us all together like that. I mean, grown-ups with children and babies. Someone should have foreseen this would happen. But we all make mistakes. Eh? Especially when you're dealing with so many people!

Mel: I hate you.

Max: I've heard that before. The world hates optimists. But you can't live without them either! Anyway, on the fourth day, they realized their mistake and said that we could change trains. We'd continue towards Moscow, but separately. Men — to the left! The women, children and elderly — to the right!

Mel: No!

Max: They promised to reunite us at the final stop. They swore on their lives! And I actually think it was a good system... It was such a huge station. There must have been hundreds of thousands of carriages there.

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Ukrainian to English

Hanna Leliv

Mentor

Canan Marasligil

Hanna Leliv is a freelance literary translator based in Lviv, Ukraine. In 2017–2018, she was a Fulbright fellow at the University of Iowa’s MFA in Literary Translation. Her translations of contemporary Ukrainian literature into English have appeared in *Asymptote*, *Washington Square Review*, *The Adirondack Review*, *The Puritan*, and *Apofenie*.

Introduction

Hanna Leliv

'Stop that at once!' father yelled, but I just couldn't stop twitching. 'Can't you hear?' 'Enough!' Mama broke in. 'He can't help it, as you well know.' Father stopped yelling, and muttered: 'Then he'll have to learn to control it.'

This emotionally jarring episode happened to Adam, the main protagonist of *The (In)Visible*, a Ukrainian novel by Ivan Baidak. Diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome as a teenager, Adam, now 26-year-old freelance designer, looks back at his rollercoaster relationship with an abusive father, and guides the reader through his more recent experiences.

He attends his first meeting of a therapy group for people with disfiguring disorders and meets Eva, Marta, and Anna. Shaped after the writer's own experience of living with Tourette's syndrome, Adam tries to move from self-inflicted invisibility to being visible — in his family, career, and personal life. His straight talk with Eva, a makeup artist, Anna, a charity worker, and Marta, a TV anchor, pulls the curtains aside to show us how these young people go about their daily lives in a society that has a long way to go in terms of tolerance and acceptance. A tapestry woven out of four stories, the novel lets us hear the voices of millennials pushing against othering and struggling to accept — and love — their bodies as they are. I picked this book up because I felt a strong urge to give its protagonists voices in English. Louder voices to enter a global conversation around disability and representation. Exploring a lesser-known Ukrainian context, the novel adds to the discourse of disability writers sharing their stories. David Mitchell co-translating *The Reason I Jump*, and Alice Wong and a constellation of writers behind *Disability Visibility* are some of the first that spring to mind when thinking about potential 'conversation partners.' The novel has already inspired artists to lift the narrative from the book and 'translate' it into a dance performance and a visual arts exhibition — which only speaks for its urgency.

From *The (In)Visible*

Ivan Baidak, translated by Hanna Leliv

Our family always had dinner in silence. My father would return home irritable after an exhausting shift at the factory, and he couldn't bear our chatter. Mama knew his habits all too well, and she could tell whenever he wanted a second helping, a pinch of salt, or another beer. I was expected to finish my meal as quickly as possible and make myself scarce. I liked it better when my father had night shifts. Then Mama and I could joke and laugh a lot. It's not that I didn't love my father — I just felt more comfortable having dinner when I wasn't worrying that I might drop a knife on the floor or stain the tablecloth.

That night, father came home wiped. He drank more than usual and vented to Mama about his boss, and then he started grilling me about things at school and the sports club. Once he'd heard what he wanted, he reached for another beer.

'Stop blinking!' father burst out, glaring at me.

I froze. Then I grew agitated and started blinking even harder.

'Didn't you two go to the doctor last month?' he asked Mama.

'Yes, but he said that tics aren't easily cured.'

'Then find another doctor who can sort him out! Last thing I need is people thinking that my son is dumb.'

Mama was angry, but she kept quiet. I couldn't hold back my tics.

'It's been years now,' father went on. 'Can't they give you pills or something? I'm working my ass off to support this family, and what do I get for it? A damn disgrace! What are you going to do with him anyway? He'll need to get a job one day.'

Father glared at me.

'Stop that at once!' he yelled, but I just couldn't stop twitching. 'Can't you hear?'

'Enough!' Mama broke in. 'He can't help it, as you well know.'

Father stopped yelling, and muttered:

'Then he'll have to learn to control it.'

It's been a while, but I still remember that episode. I honestly couldn't understand what father was demanding of me that night, but I didn't want to wind him up even more, so I tried to make my body listen to me. Later, my whole life would be centered around controlling my tics so that people wouldn't see me as 'different,' and I wouldn't have to explain 'what was wrong with me' all the time. I heard these two phrases more often than any others. At some point, I caught myself thinking that my tics were taking over my entire life — I had to secure their approval for all my actions and plans. It sometimes felt like friendship. How ironic. It was nothing but madness.

I'm tired of it. I came here to break free.

'Hello. I'm Adam. I'm a graphic designer. Freelance. I love watching TV series, and I hate shopping. I'm 26. I have Tourette's syndrome.'

Hello. I'm Ivan. I am a writer. I love helping people, and I hate discrimination. I started writing this novel when I was 29. I have Tourette's syndrome.

I first realized that I was 'different' when a university professor asked me to leave the room because my sniffing made it hard for her to read her lecture. All my life, I've been struggling with the side effects of Tourette's syndrome. I was fired from jobs; my girlfriends broke up with me; passers-by mimicked my movements just for fun. Had I written this book a few years ago, it would have been full of memories like that, negative emotions, and reflections about the unfairness of the world — which is a confirmed fact, by the way. It's just that each of us has their personal reason for saying that. This book, though, is not about negative things. Neither is it a bold coming-out. It is a silent coming to terms with my own lived experience. It is a call to not give up on yourself. It is a plea for acceptance of others.

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Russian to English

Irina Sadovina

Mentor

Oliver Ready

Irina Sadovina is a translator of Mari origin from Yoshkar-Ola. She has a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto, a PhD in Folklore from the University of Tartu, and a passion for literature that reflects Russia's ethnic diversity. She teaches Russian at the University of Sheffield.

Introduction

Irina Sadovina

Anna Nerkagi (born 1951) was born in a nomadic Nenets community in Russia's Far North. She left her home to pursue an education and made her first steps as a writer in the city of Tyumen. This trajectory is common for indigenous youth, but Nerkagi's next steps were decidedly uncommon: she returned to the tundra, relearned the traditional lifeways, founded a school – and kept writing.

Nerkagi is an extraordinary figure: an activist, a mystic, and a writer of fiction, wisdom literature and apocalyptic dystopia. Her work has recently been gaining more recognition. The novel I'm translating, *White Moss* (1996), was adapted into a film in 2014 and published in Spanish and German in 2019 and 2021. My own translation of an excerpt from it won the Australasian Association of Writing Programs Translators' Prize in 2021.

White Moss tells the story of a young man torn between romance and duty. Alyoshka is in love with a childhood friend who has left the tundra, and the community pressures him to marry. On the day of the wedding, Alyoshka refuses to follow Nenets customs, disrupting the lives of everyone around him. Shifting seamlessly between perspectives, the novel follows different characters' reactions to this crisis. The excerpt included here focuses on Alyoshka's mother.

As a translator, I aim to render the restrained beauty of Nerkagi's language. Her metaphors are deceptively simple: a young woman is a 'bird-bride', old people are 'foolish loons', gossiping women 'wash their tongues with their spit'. These arresting images pose a challenge. Oliver Ready and I spent hours looking for the right words to capture this combination of the entirely natural and the strange. In this engaging process, I'm also indebted to the support of Annie O. Fisher and Robert Chandler, who, like Oliver and I, were drawn into the book's orbit.

From *White Moss*

Anna Nerkaġi, translated by Irina Sadovina

No guests at this wedding, that's what the young neighbour wanted. No word about the wedding was sent to any camp, and no relatives, close or distant, were invited. Though it's a sin, they did not even slaughter two calves, one from the groom's camp, the other from the bride's; they did not sanctify the sacred sleigh with their blood. And there was no wedding in the bride's *chum*,¹ either. Everyone just sat down at the table as though they were having ordinary tea, and downed a glass without a good word being spoken. The bride was brought to the groom's camp as though she were not a woman, mistress of the chum and of life, but a cart of firewood. Without song, without joy, only weariness and irritation at Alyoshka's incomprehensible stubbornness.

Throughout those strange days Alyoshka's mother, who had recently grown much older, lived as though in a dream. The woman just couldn't understand what was happening. Was this a wedding? Or had her son turned these grey-haired old men and women into mere puppets, children's toys made of rags, with whom he could do whatever he wanted? The bride's parents, sensing that something was amiss, cited the long journey and did not go to the groom's camp. And when the *argish*² with the bride was about to leave, Alyoshka's mother, holding the driving pole ready, turned back to look at the bride's mother, a woman her age, and suddenly she had the urge to leave quickly, to run away like a beast with its prey, before someone could snatch it away. And while they were travelling, she looked back often.

'Is that what it was like? Is that how it's supposed to be?' thought the woman. Her secret thoughts caused her to mistrust the Big Life, but one had to keep living, so she kept going, she didn't turn back, like an old she-wolf who

1 Chum – a traditional tent dwelling made of reindeer hides.

2 Argish – a train of six or seven sleighs drawn by reindeer.

had hungry, skinny cubs waiting for her in the den.

And when they got back and needed, for the sake of appearances if nothing else, to perform the sacred ritual of bringing the new mistress into her new chum, into a life that is easy to enter but hard to leave, the woman held her young daughter-in-law's hand tightly, more tightly than necessary, and froze before the flap at the entrance of the tent. She was overcome by soul-scalding fear: was this a good omen? Would this girl be happy in her chum, with her son? Shouldn't they come to their senses? Maybe her son was right? He wasn't sixteen after all, he was twenty-six, a fully grown man, who by this time of life should already have not one but two or three children in every corner of the chum. After all, he, too, had a head, not a hummock, on his shoulders. Maybe the truth of their old, not always abundant, life had died, as everything else dies? And some new, entirely other truth had been born? Every time has its own face, and therefore its own truth. But the woman straightened herself out. To think too long is to stay too long in one place. It's too late to think. The truth of life is the same and its meaning remains this: to live and to work, honestly.

Everything will work out. In vain do they, the old men and women, weep like foolish loons on the lakeshore before rain. There will be no rain, the sun will come out.

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Korean to English

Shanna Tan

Mentor

Anton Hur

Shanna Tan is a Singaporean translator working from Korean, Chinese and Japanese into English. She is drawn to prose on heritage and space, as well as stories giving voices to ordinary folks and their struggles. She is also a 2022 ALTA mentee, translating Singapore Literature from Chinese. She lives in Singapore.

Introduction

Shanna Tan

The Inconvenience Store by Kim Ho-yeon is a composite novel (eight linked stories) about people working in a 24-hour convenience store in Seoul. A homeless middle-aged man (ajusshi) named Dokgo, suffering from alcohol-induced amnesia, is offered a part-time job at the convenience store, and as his unconventional mannerisms touch the lives of the employees, customers and family members of the store, he assimilates back into society, regains his memories, and confronts his past.

Born in 1974 in Seoul, Kim is an all-rounded storyteller, having taken on different hats such as movie scriptwriter, manhwa writer, editor, and later novelist. Kim is known for writing about issues faced by the average working class, making his novels and characters relatable to those facing their own struggles. Published in April 2021, *The Inconvenience Store* is a bestseller in Korea, driven by strong word-of-mouth recommendation. Translation rights have been sold to publishers in several Asian countries/regions.

The book has impact—the slow burn type. It nudges you gently to shift your perspectives a little, chip away at the stereotypes and experience the powerful ripple effect of a small act of kindness as it continues to be paid forward throughout the story before coming full circle. At its heart are simple life lessons to be relearned, which we've forgotten when we are caught up in the suffocating challenges of life.

I came to translate this book as a Singaporean often caught up in the frenetic competitiveness and pragmatism of my country. Which is why the second story (an extract on the following page) on a recent graduate's career dilemma placates my anxieties over the pursuit of the road less travelled.

I am hugely grateful to Anton Hur for his insightful comments and generous advice.

From *The Inconvenience Store*

Kim Ho-yeon, translated by Shanna Tan

There is one regular Si-hyeon can do without. Judging from the frequency of his appearance, the JS—codeword for obnoxious customers, a.k.a. jinsang— probably moved into Cheongpa-dong recently. Likely in his mid-forties, the JS has a scrawny frame and bulging eyes that give the impression of a nasty temper. From his very first visit, he has been tossing money on the counter and speaking informally, treating Si-hyeon like a personal robot at his beck and call. She can't even complain, not when he holds her mistakes like a trump card. Si-hyeon can only fume in silence.

One time, he appeared at the counter with snacks that were on a 3-for-2 sale until the previous day.

'Why not?' he demanded, when told that the discount could not be applied.

'Sir, this promotion ended yesterday.'

'So why didn't you take down the tag? I spent time deciding on these, are you saying I've just wasted my time? I want the discount.'

'I'm not able to do that. The promotion dates are clearly stated on the tag. If you had checked—'

'Ridiculous! I'm far-sighted! You expect *me* to read the teeny print? Isn't it common sense that people in their 40s are far-sighted? Shouldn't *you* have enlarged the font? Are you discriminating against *us*? I demand the discount as your apology.'

'Sir, I'm sorry but . . . this is difficult.'

'Forget the crappy snacks,' he huffed, 'Cigarettes.'

'Which one would you like, sir?'

'I get the same one every day and you still can't remember it? No wonder business is going down the toilet when you treat the regulars this way! Tsk!'

Her first mistake was not removing the expired tag; her second mistake was to lose her calm and ask the obvious. Technically, the JS could have read the tag and not get the snacks if not for his long-sightedness, but the latter was definitely not a mistake. However, the damned JS just

wanted to fudge the situation and be extra vindictive.

After slamming the cash on the counter, he sat at the outdoor table to smoke, blatantly ignoring the no-smoking sign. He then left, flicking the cigarette butt on the ground. Behaving so insufferably himself and nit-picking on people's mistakes (which aren't actual mistakes) really took the cake. He is truly the JS of JSes.

8 to 9 p.m. became the most inconvenient hour for Si-hyeon, for that's when the JS would appear for his daily cigarettes and snacks. At the tinkle of the entrance bell and his bulging eyes appearing in her line of sight, her anxiety would shoot up and stay heightened till he departs.

Her heart churns. How would he show his JS-ness today? But it's only an hour, she tries to comfort herself. Just treat him like a nasty neighbour she must greet from time to time.

One late winter evening, Si-hyeon's jaw drops at the sight of the ajusshi stepping in with her boss. Had his beard and moustache really taken up that much face space until now? She knows hair does make the man (or woman). But she can't believe that once the overgrown weeds were razed to reveal the bare face underneath, there would be an ordinary ajusshi who could pass as her relative, not the scruffy homeless man she would normally disdain. Sporting a new haircut, he has switched out his dirty jumper and cotton pants for an over-sized shirt and jeans. Is this even the same person?

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Japanese to English

Yuki Tejima

Mentor

Juliet Winters Carpenter

Born in Tokyo, Yuki Tejima moved to Los Angeles at age four and now divides her time between the two cities. A graduate of UC Irvine, she has worked for 15 years in film, television and commercial translation. She won Second Prize in the 2020 JLPP International Translation Competition.

Introduction

Yuki Tejima

Published in 2015, *Nile Perch Girls* by award-winning author Asako Yuzuki caused a stir in Japan for its unflinching depiction of female friendships, minus the clichés. The author examines society's preoccupation with catfights and 'scary women', asking whom these reputations serve. Do women harbor a natural-born competitiveness and contempt for one another as portrayed in the media, or have they been shaped to play these roles?

In the novel, we learn the Nile perch is a violent carnivorous fish deemed responsible for destroying the ecosystem of Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake, upon its introduction. Driving over 300 native species to extinction, it soon made its own environment uninhabitable. These facts become increasingly haunting as the novel, set in modern-day Tokyo, proceeds.

Eriko is a career-driven 30-year-old, a Type-A perfectionist with no time for a personal life. Shoko, also 30, is the opposite. Happily married, she has not worked since experiencing burnout years before, and now pens a popular blog called *The Lazy Housewife*, of which Eriko is a devoted fan.

The women meet in a café and connect instantly over their difficulty to make friends, especially with other women. As their bond grows, Eriko becomes dependent on Shoko to fulfill her best friend role. In this scene, Eriko has been unable to get a hold of Shoko for several days and tracks her down in a panic, determined to learn her whereabouts.

What begins as a slight miscommunication leads to the rapid deterioration of a friendship. But are the women to blame, or has their environment groomed them to be obsessive in their pursuits?

'If the Nile perch had never been released into Lake Victoria,' Eriko remarks in the novel, 'they would never have learned how violent they are.' I am filled with gratitude to Juliet Winters Carpenter for her endless generosity, wisdom and guidance throughout the mentorship.

From *Nile Perch Girls*

Asako Yuzuki, translated by Yuki Tejima

It's an old apartment building with stucco walls, right behind the rice shop.

That's how Shoko had described her home on the blog. Eriko quickened her pace, trying to recall the view from the window as seen in one of Shoko's blog photos. She remembered a telephone pole and a red brick apartment... *yes, there they are.* And right across the street, a white building with stucco walls. Bingo.

She walked toward the building and through the entrance, her heart swelling with satisfaction. She quickly spotted the mailbox with MARUO on the name plate. Apartment 303. The box didn't appear to be overflowing. She tried to jiggle it open but it was, of course, locked.

'Eriko?' a voice said from behind her.

There stood Shoko, her eyes wide with surprise.

'Shoko!' Eriko felt herself go limp with relief. *Oh my god, she's safe.*

The short, stocky man next to her must be her husband. They didn't seem particularly well-matched, Shoko being so thin and willowy, but that was neither here nor there. Eriko ignored the husband and faced Shoko, all but clinging to her friend.

'I couldn't get a hold of you, and I was so worried! I thought you were in some kind of danger. You were telling me about those creepy emails, remember? And since you mentioned the other day that you live around here, I decided I'd try to find your house.'

'Wait, did I say where I live?' Shoko gave a nervous laugh.

How could she forget?

'You did! You said to turn the corner at the rice shop. And that red building was in one of your photos. You know you really should be more careful about the images you post. People can figure out where you live.'

Shoko was silent. After a long pause, she said with a touch of defensiveness, 'Yeah, sorry, my dad wasn't

doing too well so I went to see him for a few days, and I forgot to take my phone. I got back last night. Oh, this is my husband.'

Shoko's husband lowered his head in quick acknowledgment.

'He has the day off today, so we stayed up all last night bingeing an entire season of a TV drama. We went to return the DVDs before the store opens at 10. And before we fell asleep,' she laughed.

Eriko was relieved to see Shoko looking so relaxed, but soon she felt her insides churn. So Shoko *hadn't* been in any danger. She could have replied to Eriko's messages once she was back in Tokyo. 'You could have called or texted!' she snapped. 'I was worried about you! Your blog readers are asking what happened, and I couldn't even sleep at night. I thought we were *friends...*'

As soon as the words left her mouth, Eriko felt her heart quicken. Here she was repeating the same phrase she'd said to Keiko back in high school.

It was happening again, the situation she most feared. The bewildered look she'd seen on Keiko now appeared on Shoko's and her husband's faces: an expression frightened and bemused, as if they had just been informed their favorite fish was really a cheap and violent carnivore.

A line now clearly separated her from the Maruos. Panic set in.

Oh, I have to take that back.

A drop of sweat trickled down her spine.

They think I'm nuts.

'Oh, wait, sorry, was that weird?' She tried to make a joke, but her voice came out sounding chirpy. The couple stood motionless, their awkward expressions frozen in place.

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Hungarian to English

Csilla Toldy

Mentor

Meena Kandasamy

Csilla holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Sheffield. She works as a writer and artist, lecturer and interpreter in the community. She published three poetry books with Lapwing Belfast and a short story collection (*Stupor Mundi*). She translates contemporary fiction and poetry from Hungarian and German.

Introduction

Csilla Toldy

László Garaczi (born 1951) is a prolific Hungarian playwright and novelist with many prizes to his name, including a George Soros Fellowship, the József Attila Prize, and the Palládium Prize and Writer of the City of Graz.

His short novel, *MetaXa* was first published in 2006 by the leading Hungarian publisher of contemporary fiction, Magvető.

A poetic one-sentence novel set in Hungary, America and Germany, *MetaXa* is a brilliant and uncompromising work of fiction that captures the increasing alienation of an individual. The title refers to the favourite drink of the protagonist, but there's more: 'Xa' refers to the unknown element, someone without a name or characteristics, and 'Meta' is a nod to the Greek word 'after/beyond/between.' Narrated in four parts, provocatively titled 'I', 'You', 'He', 'X', the story unravels at a gripping pace, and the reader is not even sure towards the end who is telling the story, or what identity means any longer. Felix, the narrator, is a classical musician who writes his confession at the request of his therapist as a means of healing and an explanation for his attempted suicide. The narrator's crisis, his journey from possible happiness to inner hell, is filled with grotesque twists and turns. *MetaXa's* subtext is the exploration of the idea of freedom that democracy and capitalist liberation brought with them to Hungary.

I enjoyed translating this work because of its playfulness and linguistic challenge, the variety of voices and its wry humour.

From *MetaXa*

László Garaczi, translated by Csilla Toldy

after a storm in spring a sparkling light appeared in Zsolt's staircase, a newspaper published a picture of it, too, a thunder-ball, we learnt a new word, *thunder-ball*, after this something constantly took fire in Zsolt's house, on a Gobelin hanging in the living room a Parisian jackeen lights up a cigarette and exactly there a brown fleck appears and bursts into flames, they flap it with wet towels, *cinders and soot*, or another time Auntie Manyi was coming home from her shopping & the door handle was red-hot & the crocheted doll on the keyring burnt to ashes; a fire goblin rampaged in their flat — localized fires — the fireman said — they don't spread but concentrate on targeted objects — a little circular hole in the Persian carpet, the shoe lace blazes through the shoe, the milk carton smoulders, only the block of frozen milk is left in the freezer, the label on the wine bottle flares, the hair roller melts, the cigarette smokes itself, in the night Zsolt goes to the toilet for a pee and sees the glowing nostrils of his sleeping aunt; after the repeated call-outs the firemen performed a thorough, comprehensive examination: electric discharge, high frequency radio waves, auto-ignition gases gathering in the walls, or perhaps, the children throw matches after all; on his birthday, Zsolt is standing in front of the window, the newspaper's hovering in the draught — *how many years, how many forgotten, never returning days, hours, minutes* — a pigeon lands on the windowsill, head spinning spasmodically, dives into the abyss, the feathers ignite & flames bite into the curtain's seam; they move away from the area, Zsolt is now homeschooled, I don't see him for years, at grammar school age he breaks a shop window on Margit Avenue, a patrol car stops abruptly in front of him, they floor him, handcuffs, billy club, this is the time when he develops his decision-theory: your decisions govern who you are, the maturity of our true selves depends on how we break with our constraints and determinism, changing the customary code, willingly

bringing decisions that contradict the common interests & the reasonably calculable common sense, wanting the opposite of necessary, the unexpected, the surprising, for instance you lose a chess game on purpose, or force yourself to fall in love with a girl for whom you feel horrifically cold indifference, chatting relaxed with an acquaintance while counting the words they utter; therefore, by introducing new perspectives we can cancel out ossified reflexes and bring our existence under the capricious & totally artistic awareness's control — we have to give up our planned lives to find out what kind of life is ahead of us — bring to the surface the hidden, hide the obvious — he realized it there, in the police cell that decisions create an overly dense matrix & the mistakes are calculated into it, too — the thing is the same as its opposite & the illusion of freedom shackles even more — Eastern European communism collapsed very soon after, but he was still fiddling with the decision-theory, it was clear to everybody that that year would be written into the history books with bold letters, that it would become compulsory curriculum and definitely an exam paper, everybody was living in the euphoria of this compulsory curriculum, while he lived in the euphoria of the decision-theory, and when we met and I was trying to pick on this impracticality, he replied that revolutions either elevate their ancient enemies onto the throne or dissipate into shabby politics,

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