Emerging Literary Translators — 2025

The Emerging Literary Translator Mentorships are 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. This year this involved offering a mentorship for a UK-based mentee who identifies as chronically ill, as part of our ongoing endeavour to increase access for translators from underrepresented groups to the world of literary translation.

The Emerging Literary Translator Mentorships were founded in 2010 by writer, editor and translator, Daniel Hahn.

With our warmest thanks to all this year's mentors: Clare Richards, Marita Thomsen, Annie Rutherford, Kotryna Garanasvili, Elena Pala, Jeremy Tiang, Polly Barton, Sawad Hussain and Sean Gasper Bye. Sincere thanks also to the organisations which have helped to fund the programme: Arts Council England, British Centre for Literary Translation, FarLit, Italian Cultural Institute, Lithuanian Culture Institute, Literary Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea), National Arts Council for Singapore, Polish Cultural Institute London, the Sheikh Zayed Book Award, the Society of Authors and the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities at UCLA.

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‘From tales of feminism and futuristic robots to intergenerational family sagas and timeless classics, our emerging translators offer readers a window onto a wealth of new stories, previously only accessible in their source language. These sample translations represent just a slice of the talent and passion this cohort are ready to bring to the global literary landscape; as ever, we’ll watch with excitement to see where their work and words will take them next.’

Holly Ainley
Head of Programmes & Creative Engagement

Foreword

I often feel I have the most exciting and tantalizing task when compiling these annual anthologies: in showcasing the enormous range of work contemporary translators are championing, keen for a wider audience to be able to read them in English, I get a first glimpse of just how exciting the international contemporary literary landscape is. We feature contributions from Italy to Malaysia, from the Faroe Islands to Morocco, and yet, as vast as this territory is, certain themes emerge in the translators' picks.

In this sampler, you will find stories that travel back in time, such as an Italian Bildungsroman detailing the horrific mark the First World War has left on rural communities and their inhabitants; or hark back to age-old myths, such as in a Faroese novel, where dragon-slaying reminiscent of a medieval ballad becomes an allegory for a fascist regime, and heeds that small nations are just as vulnerable to ideological extremism as large ones; or a Lithuanian retelling of the hunchback story, reimagined in an early 20th-century tragicomedy classic infused with German philosophy.

In another translation of a classic, as in several other contributions, feminism plays a key role: from first-wave feminism in a Polish turn-of-the-century novel in which the female narrator has to choose between a life of love or learning, to its companion piece, contemporary poetry on queer desire and genderplay, denouncing the political situation of LGBTQIA+ rights in contemporary Poland; from an epic saga of three generations of women from a family that runs a circus troupe across Singapore, Malaya, China, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand, defying the expectations of a male-dominated society,

to a selection of short stories by a female collective of speculative fiction writers—the appropriately named 'Hardy Horde'—who are not only defying gender stereotypes but also genre snobbery.

The politics of genre is yet another emerging theme we don't often point out: translated literature in English is dominated by high-brow, 'worthy' literature that reflects the serious nature of foreign countries and cultures through the medium of the novel. Our anthology, instead, reflects the vast gamut of the literary world, championing underrepresented formats and genres in English translation, such as short stories, poetry, and classics beyond the traditionally translated FIGS (French, Italian, German, Spanish) and ancient languages canon, as well as YA and speculative fiction. Anthology contributions sometimes even blend these, such as the latter two in a Japanese coming-of-age YA novel about a gorilla who learns to speak English through sign language and high-tech gloves, and ends up taking her host zoo to the US Supreme Court to defend her rights. This brings out the complexity of how we relate to one another, as humans and non-humans, and adds a humorous twist. We find a more serious take on this theme in a Moroccan novel, where the birth of twins brings back memories of a lost twin, in a layered narrative that merges realism with mythology; and a downright terrifying turn in a futuristic Korean short story set in a world in which AI has turned evil, and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch has become the Great Pacific Dead Body Patch, as seemingly disposable robots take on humans' identities and dispose of their bodies in the ocean.

These translations are often political, engaging with themes of feminism, extremism, discrimination on the basis of physical ability, class and sex—and even, in the case of a gorilla, on your level of humanness—and the threat posed by AI and climate collapse. But instead of being moralistic, they are hugely engaging and incredibly creative, employing a vast selection of literary styles and genres to show us just how varied the international literary scene is.

I get a first glimpse, and I have heard the translators raving about these texts with so much verve and passion that I instantly want to run to my nearest independent bookshop to put in a bulk order for every single one of them. Except…I can't. Our emerging translators' enthusiasm can only be matched by their skill and ease with which they render these works in English, which made me forget that these books are not available to read in English. Or at least, not yet. So over to you, editors and publishers: make it happen!

(You'll find each translator's contact details at the end of their samples).

Rebecca DeWald
Emerging Translator Mentorships
Programme Manager

Emerging Literary Translators 2025

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Arabic to English

Imane Amraoui

Mentor

Sawad Hussain

Imane Amraoui is a literary translator, graduated from King Fahd School of Translation in Morocco. Her background in English studies provided her with a solid foundation in literary analysis. She translates Arabic literature into English, focusing on sociological and psychological themes that explore the complexities of human relationships and society.

Introduction

Imane Amraoui

The extract I've chosen is from *The Twin* by Fatiha Morchid, a novel that blends psychological depth with complex human relationships. My decision to work on this piece stems from my interest in layered narratives that merge realism with mythology, and the author's strong background.

Fatiha Morchid is a Moroccan novelist and poet. She hosted a health education program on Morocco's 2M television channel and oversaw the Poetry Moment segment in the cultural program Diwan. A member of the Moroccan Writers' Union, she won the 2010 Morocco Prize for Poetry. Despite lacking a formal literary background, she has excelled in the field whilst also earning a doctorate in medicine and a diploma in pediatrics.

The story revolves around Murad, a filmmaker caught in the monotony of life, who finds solace in his wife Nadia's unwavering support. Yet, his mind remains entangled with Noor, who became his sister-in-law, a captivating actress who profoundly influences his artistic and emotional world. Murad reflects on how Kamal, once inspired by Noor, lost his spark after marrying her, discarding her when the novelty faded. Burdened with the secret of Noor's twin pregnancy, Murad is haunted by the loss of his own twin brother, who died after their parents' divorce severed their bond. As he grapples with his past, Morris—the keeper of Murad's darkest secrets—holds the key to unlocking truths he fears to confront.

Through lyrical prose, Morchid explores regret, ambition, and unspoken truths. This mentorship deepened my engagement with works that resonate personally while challenging me to navigate their complexities. *The Twin* lingers, urging reflection on the choices that shape our relationships and lives.

From *The Twin*

Fatiha Morchid, translated by Imane Amraoui

'There is a place inside me, deep within. No one can reach it. A fortified sanctuary, I retreated there whenever life waged war against me and wrapped me with the void of lonely nights.

A refuge as comforting as my mother's embrace, a piece of heaven graced with beauty and unconditional love to myself.

A carved shelter among deep scars where I feel safe and free...

I rearrange the drafts of my life, refining them, erasing chapters and adding new ones as my mood shifts...

I discovered this place in the midst of my slide into insanity, no different from a jumper's life being spared by slamming into a car parked on the pavement below.

That was the last door opened before hell's gate. Since then, I've kept it closed, guarded by my eyelashes. Because these kinds of places are meant only for oneself.

Any one of us has that sanctuary within that can be reached, a person may find it through meditation and psychological practice, while others might stumble upon it by chance, in the depths of hell.'

'What you are saying, sounds too good to be true. I wish I could find my sanctuary as well.' Murad admitted.

'I believe you are on your way there already. Coming to this cave of mine is an important step to learn the value of silence, to practice isolation, and to distance yourself from the noise of things and people.

Chatters empty us of our souls, and the crowd drains our energy.'

'Yes, and I can't thank you enough for letting me enter your cave. You can't imagine how much I value the time I spend with myself here.' Murad said.

After some thought, he added,

'And what about your story of falling into madness? You've never told me.'

'I'm a discreet man, and my story isn't a pleasant one to tell,' Morris added.

'It's your story, and that's what makes it interesting.' Murad replied.

'All right then! It's about love, dear friend. Love, when it turns into madness, confuses fantasy with reality, and the truth with illusion.

I was obsessed with a woman's love. Deluded into believing it was reciprocated, I entered a whirlpool of delusion, where I thought I was living a wonderful love story, one that almost ended in a murder.'

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Chinese to English

Jilly Bong

Mentor

Jeremy Tiang

A former fashion journalist and editor from Malaysia, Jilly Bong has translated web novels in a range of genres, including romance, fantasy, action, adventure, and Isekai. A cultural adventurer at heart, Jilly is keen to navigate underrepresented voices, historical fiction, and more. She has a Master's in Translation from USM.

Introduction

Jilly Bong

The Scent of Plum Blossoms is an epic saga of three generations of women from a family that runs a circus troupe across Singapore, Malaya, China, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand; they fought to survive as the world changed rapidly, defying the expectations of a male-dominated society, reshaping their own destiny. The grandmother inherited the traditional family business and expanded it upon her husband's death; the daughter-in-law helped enhance the circus's global reach; and the granddaughter witnessed the peak and decline of their fortunes.

Women's efforts in the past have often gone unrecorded. The plot refreshingly describes them in a favorable light. Each character had their flaws, but they bravely faced the test that life threw at them. The simple description couldn't conceal their unspoken vulnerabilities, which intrigued me, reminding me how a single, courageous decision can lead to an unimaginable future.

Through their journey, I found a common belief in Chinese culture subtly echoed throughout: that wealth rarely lasts beyond three generations. I wondered why this phenomenon often held true in Chinese families. Then, it hit me. Perhaps the actual wealth of a family lies not in worldly possessions, but in the principles, beliefs, and values that their forefathers passed down. This concept resonated with me, as it mirrored my own immigrant family—where the sacrifices, the quiet battles, and the hardships we faced could never crush us but made us stronger.

The challenge was never about finding the right words but accurately capturing the inner turmoil and raw edges of each character—which built up the momentum and shed light on why they made the choices that shaped their fates. Many times, I was struck by the characters' brilliance and bravado as they overcame obstacles. I thoroughly enjoyed the story, as

these characters from different times shared the same unyielding spirit as people in modern society.

From *The Scent of Plum Blossoms*

Tan Ju Li, translated by Jilly Bong

I was thrust into the world of the circus, a surreal place beyond belief; it took me a while to gradually return to the real world.

Excitement aside, my head was clear. No stranger to the cruelty of reality, I was well aware that it was survival of the fittest. I kept reminding myself to adapt fast and get comfortable living within a large community to avoid being isolated and forced out. In this line of work, one needed to be diligent, hardworking, and determined; the overwhelming pressure would break those with faint hearts. The circus crew worked from sunup to sundown; each person fulfilled their job well, keeping their guard up and not slacking off in the slightest. Among all of them, the circus performers had it worst, plagued by constant training and rehearsing to perform their stunts to perfection. The tension to perform flawlessly was immense and any carelessness was not acceptable.

Hard work and a hectic lifestyle didn't scare me. What I struggled with, however, was the web of complicated relationships, where business and personal matters were constantly intertwined. When I first joined, everyone was always giving me odd and curious stares, watching my every move and trying to find something to laugh at. Sharing the space with so many others meant each person had their own opinion; my life was fraught with complexities, with personal space and privacy being non-existent. Gradually, I learned to wear the mask of a clown to hide the weight of my sorrow behind forced smiles, putting on a tough front to conceal my tears and vulnerabilities.

Diligent training by day and night produced results, as I quickly mastered basic dance moves and cycling tricks, and stepped on stage to perform when needed. My primary role involved menial tasks and organizing

the wardrobe. It was a tedious chore, which required a high level of patience and a good memory. With so many performances going on, categorizing and upkeep became a demanding duty. The fluctuating number of performers and the corresponding changes in their sizes and outfits made it difficult to keep track of the numerous hair accessories, gloves, costumes, and shoes required for each show. We kept these outfits in dozens of iron chests, bound by chains, and locked to prevent theft. Each morning, I had to open the heavy chests and hang up the costumes according to the performance schedule. After the show ended, it was my responsibility to reopen the chests, clean the costumes, and put them back into the chest for the next day's show. Moreover, there were additional sessions over the weekend, and those were the days when I often found myself drained and could barely keep up with running around. I made every effort not to slip up or make mistakes, knowing that my oldest sister, Dajie, would surely bombard me with insults if I did.

One day, while opening a heavy chest, I accidentally lost my grip. The lid slammed shut before I could pull my hand away, and the rusty iron lock drove into my palm. Instantly, my vision turned black while fresh blood spurted, but the sharp pain didn't hit until a moment later. I quickly wrapped a rag around it to stop the bleeding. The pain was unbearable, and the injury was bone-deep; the slightest touch caused it to bleed heavily. People turned a blind eye to my situation, and nobody offered a word of comfort. Fortunately, it slowly healed, despite the lack of medical treatment. The wound, long and deep, still marks my hand to this day.

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Faroese to English

Bradley Harmon

Mentor

Marita Thomsen

Bradley Harmon translates Nordic and German poetry and prose. He debuted in 2024 with his translation of Katarina Frostenson's poetry collection *The Space of Time*, with forthcoming books including Monika Fagerholm's novel *Who Killed Bambi?* and Lív Maria Róadóttir Jæger's poetry collection *I Write on Wet Paper*. He grew up in rural Minnesota and currently lives in Berlin.

Introduction

Bradley Harmon

The epic novel *Frænir eitur ormurin* (1973) by Jens Pauli Heinesen (1932–2011) is one of the most ambitious novels ever written in the Faroese language. A paradigmatic example of Heinesen's work, which was dedicated to critiquing what he saw as cultural parochialism, it depicts how small nations are just as vulnerable to ideological extremism as large ones. Its grand vision is evident already in the title, which translates literally to "Fafnir is the name of the dragon" and refers to the Germanic myth of the dragon Fafnir and the dragonslayer Sigurd, specifically the Faroese version preserved in the medieval ballad *Sjúrðarkvæði*. In Heinesen's novel, however, there is not a dragon but a fascist political regime, and the dragonslayer is rather the leftist (anti)hero Gudmundur. Even before the narrative proper commences, the two prefatory epigraphs—one by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on the nature of small nations and the other by Rosa Luxembourg on the contingencies of freedom—leave little doubt as to Heinesen's political sympathies and cosmopolitan worldview.

Frænir eitur ormurin is a political novel of ideas portraying an artist's search for freedom in a totalitarian society. We follow the protagonist Gudmundur as he navigates the opposition while simultaneously searching for the truth about his father who was politically assassinated before he was born. Along the way, he falls in love with the dictator's daughter, before he's forced to choose his political beliefs over her. The novel's climax comes in the form of an election that does not end in favor of freedom. Gudmundur is mysteriously murdered, just like his father, and the novel ends with his wife Hildur choosing to lead a resistance movement in his name.

Frænir eitur ormurin earned Heinesen the Faroese Literature Prize for the third of an eventual four times.

The following excerpt is taken from the first chapter. The first-person omniscient narrator has been banned from writing, his books burned, and his language

forbidden (echoing Faroese's historical subordination to Danish up until WWII). One night, he has a dream of a vicious bullfight. Upon waking up, he meditates on nothing less but the nature of the universe and his place in it.

From *Frænir eitur ormurin*

Jens Pauli Heinesen, translated by Bradley Harmon

It is said that the world was created from a primordial haze. Countless solar systems emerged from the womb of the heavens and flocked into constellations that soared out into space, planets began to revolve around their suns and moons around their planets, while comets flapped around amongst them like lost birds. Somewhere in the middle of all these galaxies, the earth started to spin, to wind up its ball of years around the sun, light and dark radiated around it and from them sprang life and death and along with them came the wonder of creation. On Earth, in the air, and in the sea, life ignited, blazed forth everywhere in all its forms and images. One day man appeared, emerged from the dust, and began to walk, to create gods, languages, nations, and history. The Stone Age, the Iron Age, the Middle Ages all swept across the earth, which at that point was as flat as a pancake and shrouded by the darkness of faith. Anyone who chose to smile at it was burned, crucified, hanged, or dismembered. But the laughter of Copernicus eventually prevailed, Earth became but a speck in some far-flung corner, his view of the world changed the laws of nature, philosophy leapfrogged itself several times, religious doctrines split, God disappeared into the dark of the world *tohu wa-bohu*, biblical hell escaped from the holy book, descended from heaven, and has been here ever since.

And then one winter day, I, as the poet says, 'came to be.' Of course, this fact didn't matter much to the cosmos. For me it was a little different. But I'll get back to that later, for now let me admit that I am still, today, despite everything that has happened to us, grateful that I 'came to be' as a human and not as a wandering fish or that bull

backed up against the wooden wall soaked in blood. I was lucky, because one thing is certain: no one has the ability to decide what, who, where, how they will be in the moment he is born. There's a dead bluebottle fly in the window frame next to me. After centuries of ceaseless research, man has discovered that there are over 800,000 species of insects. This fly is of only one of these, and one of some 50,000 species of flies. But my bluebottle fly, which I should've removed a long time ago, never had a chance to choose to be any of them.

Nor did I. I was born as a human being, was given light and somewhat wiry hair, and even though I wish that much of me would be different, both physically and psychologically, it also could've been much worse. What's more, I was born in a small island nation, and the language of my lullabies is one of the approximately 2,000 languages that exist (not to mention thousands of dialects), one shared by only a very small sliver of the world's population.

I didn't have a choice in this either. But for this I am grateful, even though it has caused us problems that are insurmountable. And I'm sure that Gudmundur was also grateful that he 'came to be' in this little Sprachraum. I never saw him falter or fret, but the day they passed the school law, the deathblow they dealt our language, his voice trembled.

'One of the greatest crimes that can be committed against a child is to take his language away from him,' he said. 'Take language away from a child, and you kill it. He who cannot express his feelings, his dreams and hopes, walks around in existential darkness. He has no soul. Though he may be alive, he is dead. A people with no language is a doomed people.'

If you listen carefully nowadays, you will hear that this prophecy has come true. The children no longer speak, they curse and swear from morning till night, because their words are misplaced, and they can find no others. The poets have also gone quiet, no songs are being sung.

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Italian to English

Fiona Spencer -Piacentini

Mentor

Elena Pala

Fiona Spencer-Piacentini is a linguist and translator of Italian descent. She is currently based in Edinburgh after several years in Amsterdam where she obtained an MSc in Logic (Language). Bristol Translates 2023 sparked Fiona's strong interest in multilingualism in translation. They are mostly drawn to historical and contemporary literary fiction.

Introduction

Fiona Spencer-Piacentini

Paolo Malaguti's writing is predominantly historical fiction centred around his region—Veneto. Sul Grappa dopo la vittoria, originally published in 2009, was his debut novel. Malaguti's third novel *La reliquia di Constantinopoli*, (2015), reached the final twelve of the prestigious Premio Strega in 2016. His three most recent novels have won several regional prizes including the Premio Mario Rigoni Stern.

In *Sul Grappa dopo la vittoria*, we follow a 10-year-old boy navigating both the famine that is ensuing among the valley as well as the treacherous terrain that he is compelled to traverse whilst climbing Monte Grappa in the search for leftover rations and useful materials from the mountainous battlegrounds. In this *Bildungsroman*, the boy is impressionable at the start of the war, wanting to be part of the brigade alongside his father, but it is in the aftermath of the war that he discovers, on his trips up Monte Grappa, the true horrors that his father has left unable to tell him.

Whilst stories of the Italian Front are largely unknown to English-language readers, which is hardly surprising given that the Fascists weaponised narratives of WWI, *Sul Grappa* remains delicate and alert by resisting the image of the men as heroes, for the boy instead comes to see them as victims of a gigantic meat grinding machine.

As a translator and linguist, I particularly enjoyed seeing Malaguti's interest in languages, especially the many regional languages of Veneto, so intimately reflected throughout the novel. Capturing the oscillations between lingua veneta and Italian presented many interesting puzzles.

Over the course of the mentorship with Elena, we focused on historical fiction from the Northeast including stories of civilian women in Friuli in WWI and of resistance by partigiani in WWII.

From *Sul Grappa dopo la vittoria*

Paolo Malaguti, translated by Fiona Spencer-Piacentini

Everything had started in 1915, almost inadvertently. Papà had left for war in May. He wasn't in active military service, but he'd been called back, as many had. They didn't even bother sending letters. They had pinned up a list on the town hall door, and my father was among the names. Perhaps he didn't even go to see if it was true. That's what they'd told him, and he simply went off to Bassano to have his papers checked. He came back black with fury, as did the others. There were those who were silent, blowing the rage away with the smoke of cigarettes or a pipe. Those who swore, those who blasphemed. Real proper blasphemous curses were only rarely heard in the village, and only in certain contexts, like in the osteria, but that day, returning from Bassano, there was more than one man, from among the men of village, to blaspheme. God took it badly and so He made the war break out.

Before '15, the war was something that God kept us from, granting our invocations: *A peste, fame, bello, a flagello terraemotus, a fulgure et tempestate libera nos Domine.*

As for plagues and earthquakes, I acknowledge God did good work: you'd have to go back centuries, in the history of the village, to find any trace of these terrible and mysterious evils. When it comes to tempests, however, something wasn't working: every other year a storm would come and sow hunger and ruin, and it'd come—the coward—just when the grapes hung dark and full on the vines, or when the fields swayed with golden wheat spikes, bending heavy on their stems.

They, the old villagers, could burn all the olive branches they wanted in their fireplace and stick a spade and a rake in the shape of a cross at the edge of the field, for all the good it did them. Evidently God hadn't heard that part of the litany very well. Next year, they should try shouting it at the top of their lungs, you never know.

[…]

But it was clear, even to me, that the war, deep down, was something other than plagues, hailstorms and earthquakes. War was sung about in the filò, the winter gatherings in the stables*: Down comes Napoleon, and so the handsome soldier must leave, and give a little kiss, oh a baseto, to his sweetheart, for otherwise he must die.*

Did it make sense to ask God to keep us far away from something that then would be sung about in the filò, recounting it with pride even if you hadn't been there in the thick of it? Maybe the war, which God, listening to our prayers, so promptly delivered us from, was something to try, at least once in life.

Besides, is not war the most typical game children play? A stick is enough, if it's one of the right ones, or if push comes to shove, stones will do. There's never a lack of stones.

War, then, perhaps wasn't right. But beautiful it was, yes. Almost certainly. And when the men arrived, with the papers that enlisted them, I would have liked with my whole heart to be part of their brigade. Just so I too could go up to my sweetheart, which I didn't exactly have there on the spot but which, and of this I was certain, would have been assigned to me along with my uniform and musket, and demand my kiss, my *baseto*.

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Japanese to English

Ecre Karadag

Mentor

Polly Barton

Ecre Karadag is a London-based Japanese literary translator. Born and raised in England and America, she is a graduate of SOAS, University of London and Sophia University, Tokyo. She has worked in fashion editorial, book marketing, and fundraising for children's programmes, and is interested in translating vibrant middle grade and young adult fiction.

Introduction

Ecre Karadag

Queen Kong's Day in Court is a contemporary YA novel with a speculative twist—think *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* by Hank Green or *Legally Blonde*, if Elle Woods were a gorilla—blending comedy, coming-of-age and social justice with an incisive take on fame.

Winner of the 64th Mephisto Prize for best unpublished genre fiction in Japan, author Kotori Sudo takes inspiration from the aftermath of Harambe's 2016 shooting, crafting a novel that taps into the cultural zeitgeist of young adult readers without feeling tied to a particular moment in time. Set in America, it's a great fit for mainstream English-language audiences, including those new to translated fiction.

The story follows Rose, a gorilla raised in a Cameroon sanctuary, who is taught sign-language by American researchers Sam and Chelsea. The more Rose learns, sitting on Chelsea's sofa watching soap operas and talking about boys, the more she finds herself itching to break free of the enclosure and explore the world beyond. After all, if she can speak, then what makes her so different from a human girl? When she gets her hands on high-tech gloves that translate her signs into spoken English, she decides it's time to leave her enclosure and take on the world.

With Sam and Chelsea by her side, Rose embarks on a new life at an American zoo—where she quickly becomes a global sensation. But when her new, dreamy gorilla boyfriend is shot after a child falls into their enclosure, Rose refuses to stay silent. Determined to fight for justice, she takes the zoo to the U.S. Supreme Court.

From the courtroom to the wrestling ring, *Queen Kong's Day in Court* is a wildly original tale about identity, media spectacle, and what it means to have a voice in a world where everyone thinks they already know who you are.

From *Queen Kong's Day in Court*

Kotori Sudo, translated by Ecre Karadag

I had decided to stay strong and all, but reality kicked in pretty quickly.

Clifton Zoo's quarantine room was as cramped as ever and smelled nothing like the jungle. No matter how long they made me wait there, I couldn't get used to it. The fruit they gave me tasted nothing like the good stuff back home.

It was only the first week and the stress was building up. And going straight to my stomach.

They gave me a bunch of toys to keep me from getting bored, but my favourite way to kill time was watching TV. I binge-watched old shows and movies. Sam pointed me to *King Kong* and *Planet of the Apes*, saying, 'You've gotta watch them, Rose. People are gonna want your takes.'

There were lots of sequels and remakes. 'Nah, stick with the originals,' Sam advised sagely. 'The rest is just filler.'

I followed his advice and only watched the first movies in each series. They were quite something.

The other movies Sam recommended were awful. *Congo* had a gorilla that used sign language like me, which was nice—but then it turned into a whole murderfest. *Gorillas in the Mist* was the worst movie I'd ever seen. The ending was horrific, and I started to resent Sam for making me watch it.

The quarantine was basically the first true trial of my life. The wait felt like an eternity.

And it wasn't just me—the world was waiting, too. My arrival at Clifton Zoo was already being reported in the news, and there were constant calls for a press conference. But Director Hopkins turned them all down. He could see my distress and knew it wasn't the right time for a media debut. I'm sure in usual circumstances, he'd have wanted the free publicity. But he put my wellbeing first.

It wasn't just the boredom—he knew I was craving human contact. So, in the second week of quarantine, the

celebrities started to visit.

Starting with the Governor of Ohio, local Republican and Democrat politicians trickled in, and then the President and his family. All the politicians were eerily like Senator Lloyd—same suits, same speech, same mannerisms.

Even I perked up when I heard the President was coming. But then when he did, I wasn't sure if we would actually get along. To a human, he might have seemed like a great leader—but to me, it was much easier to have confidence in Director Hopkins.

Then, the floodgates opened: CEOs, actors, artists, musicians, athletes, and authors started streaming in. And talking to them was way more fun than talking to the politicians.

They all believed in my potential. The artists were curious about how I saw the world. The athletes wanted to know how far I could push my body.

Hey, you should try painting something!

You could totally be a movie star.

We gotta get you into a game, man. Do you play?

I found it fascinating how they each wanted something different from me.

But I didn't have the headspace to think about any of that—I just wanted to be a gorilla. And I couldn't wait to meet my new gorilla friends.

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Korean to English

Sarah K. H. Yoo

Mentor

Clare Richards

Sarah K. H. Yoo is a writer, educator, and translator working between Korean and English. An LTI Korea and BCLT Summer School alumna, Sarah has translated many short stories for the one-woman press Nabiwabook Publishing House. She lives in Korea with her husband Fitz and dog Louie.

Introduction

Sarah K. H. Yoo

In her 2022 short story collection *The Weather Controllers*, writer and activist Choi Jeong-Hwa uses her characteristic dark wit and keen observations of the human psyche to shine a light on some of society's most pressing issues such as gentrification, workers' rights, and the climate crisis.

The first story in this collection, 'The Great Pacific Dead Body Patch', imagines a world in which the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is filled not with human trash, but the humans themselves. Indiscriminate overconsumption and wanton waste have resulted in 'bllers'—disposable robots that aid people with day-to-day tasks—murdering members of the human population and assuming their identities unnoticed. Panic ensues; screening centers are set up. Paranoia permeates every corner of society as the line between man and machine becomes hopelessly blurred, yet people still can't seem to stop using bllers. They use them to carry their coffee and to read them a bedtime story. They throw away yesterday's bller just to order a new one today. Bllers are cheap to manufacture, free to order, and convenient... and humans are nothing if not addicted to comfort.

Choi Jeong-Hwa's characters are earnest, ridiculous, hapless, anxious, and unreliable. They face horrific situations and ponder questions that have no answers. They are wonderfully, tragically, beautifully human—even when they're not actually human. And through them, we are forced to reckon with the most impossible question of all: What does it really mean to be 'human'?

Working with mentor Clare Richards has been a dream. She helped me bring out the story's morbid humor and rich absurdity while maintaining the beating heart at the center of the tale: Choi's unapologetic love of all living things and her stubborn optimism that things can, indeed, get better.

From *The Great Pacific Dead Body Patch*

Choi Jeong-Hwa, translated by Sarah K. H. Yoo

The news of Charlie's discovery rattled people all over the world, Mimi included. The night before she saw the televised broadcast, she had awoken in the middle of a dream in which she was ten years younger, still in high school, and arguing with the proctor about going to the restroom in the middle of her college entrance exam. She was kind of disappointed—dreams about urination were supposed to be good luck, after all.

After Charlie's interview, a woman named Joanna Pluss appeared on air. A researcher at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. who specialized in artificial intelligence and robotics, Pluss said her team was currently in the process of identifying the dead bodies. While they'd only gone through 10% so far, she admitted that none of those already identified had been reported as dead or missing. She appeared to have a hard time believing her own words as she disclosed that these people were, for lack of a better term, 'still alive'. Despite their corpses having been found on the island, back home they were alive and kicking: going to school, clocking out from work, retrieving documents from the local government office, shopping for groceries, clothes, and electronics. They were taking leg day at the gym very seriously, enjoying a cold beer at the bar, and purchasing lavender shampoo to soothe the body and soul. Impostors—fake human beings—were roaming the earth.

'We'll call them 'interlopers', because these nonhuman entities are hiding in plain sight,' Joanna declared. 'On the outside, they look no different from us. How exactly they accomplished this feat will become apparent over time. For now, all I can confirm is that many of us are already dead. Countless individuals are currently prowling the streets as if still alive. Your friend, your lover, your family member, even… you could be one of them.'

The news segment ended and was followed by a commercial. Mimi watched Sung Shi-il, the star of the TV show *Plastic Love*, wink as he neatly and gracefully bit into a hunk of fried chicken coated in an all-new sauce. She searched for any signs that would indicate whether or not he was truly human, but she had no idea what to look for. The fact that he was eating chicken, that he was capable of closing one eye at a time, that he was a greedy little man, that he was a racist, that he'd had two nose jobs, that he was on fluoxetine for his mild panic disorder—none of these things offered any evidence he was human.

One month later, the mystery was solved. The interlopers were actually bllers, the disposable robots that assisted humans with everyday tasks. It turned out that discarded bllers were murdering certain individuals, disposing of their bodies, and assuming their identities. Soon, there were reports that the government was researching ways to distinguish bllers from humans and had begun setting up screening centers in each district.

The reason for the bllers' ubiquity was simple: they were free.

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Lithuanian to English

Asher Maria

Mentor

Kotryna Garanasvili

Asher Maria is a translator and Ph.D. student in Comparative Literature & Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania. His Lithuanian and Russian translations have been published in *Asymptote*, the Academy of American Poets 'Poem-a-Day' Project, and *Doublespeak Magazine*. Asher also translates from Portuguese and researches diasporic literature in Brazil.

Introduction

Asher Maria

Ignas Šeinius' *The Hunchback* (1913) is one of Lithuania's most celebrated classic stories. Remarkably timeless, a hunchback miller Olesis recounts his tragic life journey to the landlord's son. Despite great early aspirations as a church organist and devout Catholic, he falls into spiritual and psychic disrepair after having his heart broken by his beloved Kunigunda. This leads him to adopt a life of asceticism, abandoning God for German philosophy. What makes Šeinius' story so powerful is the subtle beauty of the tragicomedy, opening itself up for endless moral speculation and nostalgic reflection.

After months of deliberation with my mentor Kotryna, I chose this piece for the ETM programme for both an appreciation of Šeinius' impressionist stylistics as well as the novel's value as an introduction for new readers of Lithuanian literature. Using the familiar imagery of Western European literature and history, *The Hunchback* brilliantly demonstrates the way philosophical, religious, and aesthetic concerns were being negotiated in the fin-de-siècle Lithuania. Naturally pulling from Victor Hugo, the story also valiantly works to humanize difference by revealing crucial possibilities for connections across class and physical ability.

Šeinius was also a fascinating historical figure who had wielded important influence in both literary and political spheres. Born to a peasant family in 1889, he was able to receive an education as a teacher in both Kaunas and Vilnius. By 1912 he got the opportunity to study art and philosophy in Moscow where a few important Lithuanian literary figures were living. The next year he published *The Hunchback*. He then moved to Stockholm as a representative for the Lithuanian Society for the Relief of War Sufferers. He would soon become an important diplomat between Lithuania and Sweden, eventually moving to Sweden and dedicating himself to writing after the 1940 Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

From *The Hunchback*

Ignas Šeinius, translated by Asher Maria

I

I'm starting to think that today's going to be my day.

Again I write.

I write, and I think. And I soar in this wide world of unseen images.

The blue fogs of spring have swallowed up the world today, along with every field in sight, green meadow, and cool forest.

The silent forests rest there at ease. Only the sound of grass and grain growing fills the air.

The thought sparkles and flashes only to disappear, again. I'm unable to grasp it. A calm is weighing on me. I hear hurried steps just beyond the door. Someone's coming.

Let them.

Father enters. He stops and smiles.

'Ignas, do you know what I'm about to ask you?'

'I'm feeling a bit useless today, but let's hear it.'

'First, make me a promise.'

'No, I'm too afraid.'

'None of that. It's just a small task.'

What could he have in mind?

'Well, if that's the case.'

'Great!' he put his hand on my shoulder. 'Head to the mill in my stead. I'd go myself, but I'm needed at the fair later, we're selling old Gray.'

Before he turned to leave, father lingered at the doorstep.

'By no means can the little hunchback at the mill do all that work alone,' he said.

My face clouded after hearing this.

'This is what the hunchback said, as soon as you see the wings spinning, have him hurry over,' continued father.

I glanced through the window. The wings were already spinning: the hunchback must've begun.

‘Just my luck,’ I think to myself. ‘Spending today of all days covered in flour!’

Father likely guessed what I was thinking.

‘You’re worried about being confined to the millstone?’ he said. ‘Think about how much fun it’ll be for him to have someone to chat with. Surely you remember how fond he’s of you.’

‘I was actually planning on some other work today.’

‘Save your breath… there’s not even much grain to carry. The wind’s also shaping up nicely. Just get moving and you’ll be done in no time. And keep an eye out for old familiar faces; it’s been five days since you’ve stepped foot outside the house. Guests like yourself have no business being stuck at home. After all, the days are so lovely this time of year.’

I put down my plume and took a step toward the window. The day did feel quite remarkable. An unclouded sky, the trees glimmering with fresh verdure. Even through the glass I could feel the sap weighing on the spring air.

‘I’ll go!’ I said, getting up.

Father nodded with quiet satisfaction before heading off to harness the horse.

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Polish to English

Kasia Laganowska

Mentor

Annie Rutherford

Kasia Laganowska is bilingual, bicultural and binational. Love of a jolly good read has been a joyous constant in her life. An alumna of Cambridge University and based in the UK, she translates between Polish and English and most enjoys working with verse and quirky mainstream prose, especially speculative fiction.

Introduction

Kasia Laganowska

First and foremost I want to thank Annie, my mentor. Time and time again she went beyond the call of duty, never refusing advice or support when it was requested or needed and every step of the way has been pure joy for me. I am also deeply grateful to all who make this truly barrier-breaking programme possible. Just as, when I read the first warm and enthusiastic words in Annie's offer message, I knew without a doubt that she was the right mentor for me, I knew from this story's first sentence that it was the right one for my anthology choice.

My recent projects include experimental translations of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński's poetry and working directly with the Harda Horda (Hardy Horde) collective of female Polish speculative fiction authors towards a translated anthology of selected short stories. This publishing format, under-represented in the English language, is widely enjoyed in Poland.

The Hardy Horde was formed a few years ago, initially as a friendly, misogyny-free social group to counteract the solitude of writing and currently consists of thirteen writers at various career stages. In 2019 they joined forces with the Polish house Sine Qua Non to publish their first joint anthology of speculative fiction. Two further short story anthologies have followed, as well as a number of other collaborative projects.

Ewa Białołęcka was the first woman to win the coveted Zajdel fantasy award for her *Tkacz Iluzji* (*Illusion Weaver*), which was later developed into an exceptionally well-received and successful book series.

Tylko nie w głowę (*Not right in the head*), taken from the first Hardy Horde anthology, is irreverent, funny, steeped in Polishness, joyously idiomatic, brilliantly observed and pure, unadulterated reading fun. There's even a cat—what's not to love?

I hope you enjoy the opening words of this story.

From *Not right in the head*

Ewa Białołęcka, translated by Kasia Laganowska

It might be hard to believe, but I slept right through the end of the world. No kidding. I dragged myself out of the sack one day, boiled the kettle for my coffee, filled my mug and only figured out that my drink was cold once I'd taken a swig. I clicked the kettle switch a few times, then tried to turn the kitchen light on. Nothing happened. They must've cut the leccy. I tried to remember when I'd actually last paid the bill but even if you're behind they don't just turn it off, do they? They have to send you all the red bills first. And anyway, it's illegal to deny people access to the basic necessities of life like water, coffee and internet.

I had a vague recollection of something having gone on. Some kind of kerfuffle, noises, someone banging at the door. But, after two of the white pills, I was dead to the world. My brain merely swam up for a few seconds from the depths of some rather vivid dreams to make the obvious connection: postie—they'll leave a slip—don't get up. I'd long ago realised the fundamental truth that sleeping people have no problems. Unless they're having nightmares of course. But that's what the pink pills are for.

Marbles was circling my legs, purring and chirping, performing the traditional 'hungry cat, starving cat' dance. I inspected the bowls. One of them was licked clean, another still had a few bits of dry food at the bottom. The water level had gone down considerably in the big bowl. I must have been asleep for at least twelve hours, if not longer. I automatically glanced at the cooker clock. A dark rectangle stared back at me blankly. Shit... Our block of flats wasn't wired up for gas so, when the leccy gave out, we all had to resort to cold food or going out for pizza.

I offered Marbs food, which she accepted with enthusiasm. I plodded over to the desk and started rummaging through piles of junk in search of my mobile. Screen dark and battery dead—for fuck's sake! It looked

like I'd slept for absolutely ages. My head was filled with cotton wool, which had no intention of letting up. Luckily the wall clock ran on batteries so I could tell that it was half past noon. But what day was it? Wednesday? Thursday? Did it actually make any fucking difference what day it was? I didn't currently have a deadline looming so I could happily take a wander round la-la land. So there.

Three blue-brown capsules and one massive pill in a fetching shade of salmon. They were here to help me. And so they did. I slept and dreamed dreams in which there was no space for anger, heavy-as-lead fear or thoughts of death. I swallowed them down with tap-water.

Silence.

Very silent silence. No passing cars. No stomping about or ball-kicking from the kid upstairs. I looked out the window. The car park of the local Biedronka supermarket was completely empty, as if some giant iron hand had swept it clean. I couldn't believe my eyes. Could it really be Sunday already? Surely I couldn't have slept for three or four days straight!

I would've had to get up for a pee and a drink... Maybe I had, but just didn't remember?

On the other hand, Marbles would have had an absolute meltdown—kneading my face, yowling her head off—exercising the inalienable right of all cats to food, a clean litter tray and scratches behind the ears.

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Polish to English

Monika Zaleska

Mentor

Sean Gasper Bye

Monika Zaleska is a writer, translator, and PhD candidate at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center. She holds an MFA from Brooklyn College, where she was fiction editor of *The Brooklyn Review* and taught in the English department. She now teaches Polish literature at Hunter College.

Introduction

Monika Zaleska

In my work as a translator and academic, I am interested in feminist works on gender and sexuality, both historical and contemporary. *Women* (1906), Zofia Nałkowska's first novel published at the age of twenty-two, is an exciting example of first-wave feminist thought—exploring the narrator Janina's complex relationships with both men and women in Polish high society. Throughout the novel, Janina is confronted with conflicting social messages about her role and worth as a woman and must choose whether she will devote her life to love or learning. Marta is her foil—seemingly uninterested in men in the passage below, she later finds herself in a loveless marriage marred by betrayal. Nałkowska's style is marked by contrasting moments of symbolism and directness, yet always tinged with irony. I pair her work with 'say yes' (2024) by contemporary Warsaw poet Maja Demska, whose first book, *Playacting People*, I am also translating. Demska's cheeky approaches to queer desire and genderplay rebuff the stark realities of LGBTQIA+ rights in today's Poland and insist on expression beyond the binary. I consider Demska's mischievous ethos to be a direct descendant of Nałkowska's playful irony—both wryly interrogate our limited beliefs around gender and sexuality and invite us into their carefully constructed worlds.

From *Women*

Zofia Nałkowska, translated by Monika Zaleska

Janusz has left for L. for a few days. It's just Marta and I and we have it awfully good. She's the one being under the sun that can share my delight in reading intelligent and beautiful things. She understands and experiences everything just as I do. Reading together, we amaze each other with the depth and subtlety of our insights. We enter a pleasurable state of mind where we stop sensing one another as individual beings. We pick up on sensations at the same time, with the same immediacy: all we need is a look, a gesture, to understand one another. We become wholly the same, one and the same. We are severed from everything surrounding us—we communicate somewhere on high and come together to meet on soaring bridges that link our two souls over an abyss and that hardly anyone can cross, as these bridges are made of knots of lace. At the foothills of the soul, people come together easily, but towards the peaks they grow farther and farther apart—and the gulf between them grows deeper and deeper. And these delicate bridges, cast from peak to peak, crumble and collapse under any heavier, brutish footstep.

Despite all this, there's no love between me and Marta—we don't even like each other that much. We don't call one another friends either. We both agree that honest love between women is impossible. So we don't lie and pretend it's there. And though we don't say everything directly, we know and understand each other very well.

The only thing that could drive us apart would be one of us standing in the way of the other's love for a man. Luckily, that's another thing Marta doesn't believe in. She has an ascetic disposition and is proud of the fact that no one has ever fallen in love with her yet. She usually likes to pretend that she's been overlooked, underappreciated by the world and everyone in it. In any case she does it with charm as she's very pretty—and so no one takes it that seriously.

'My life,' she says, 'is clean as a white sheet of paper, without a single kiss, blush or thrill. My sole belief is in the crystal-clear transparency of my life, the consciousness that another's life passes by me, rubs against me, and leaves not a speck of golden pollen from its flower on my long, slim, white dress—the purity of my soul, which even after wandering through coal mines, emerges white as snow... My one dogma, my only beloved, is the thought that I'll walk through life with limitless, peaceful sweetness, aesthetically and honorably, that in the history of the world, I'll be a beautiful, bright marvel... I'm a lovely, rare flower. That's how I'll die. I don't want love, even if it were to bring me happiness...'

Sometimes in the blue twilight, she plays Grieg's *Der Frühling*. And that's when I know she's been lying. With her music she quietly, softly pleads for something with infinite longing. Her beautiful, white soul weeps painfully and dreams, forever dreams, of love.

Malgré tout, I am smart, young and pretty—so I want to live. Nietzsche says that when it comes to women, don't forget the whip. Amiel—that woman should stick with her kind and have her own distinct gender ethics. Garborg—that she should go everywhere with a governess, so that her future husband has no cause for suspicion. But despite all this, I still want to be a woman.

say yes

Maja Demska, translated by Monika Zaleska

if I were born a boy
I'd know how to burp on command

wear tight dresses
without sucking in

I'd be a little scared, but come on
fear would build my character

if I grew up to be a man
I'd ask for your hand

I'd marry you
and then we'd kill each other

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