乌托邦巡航 Little Utopias

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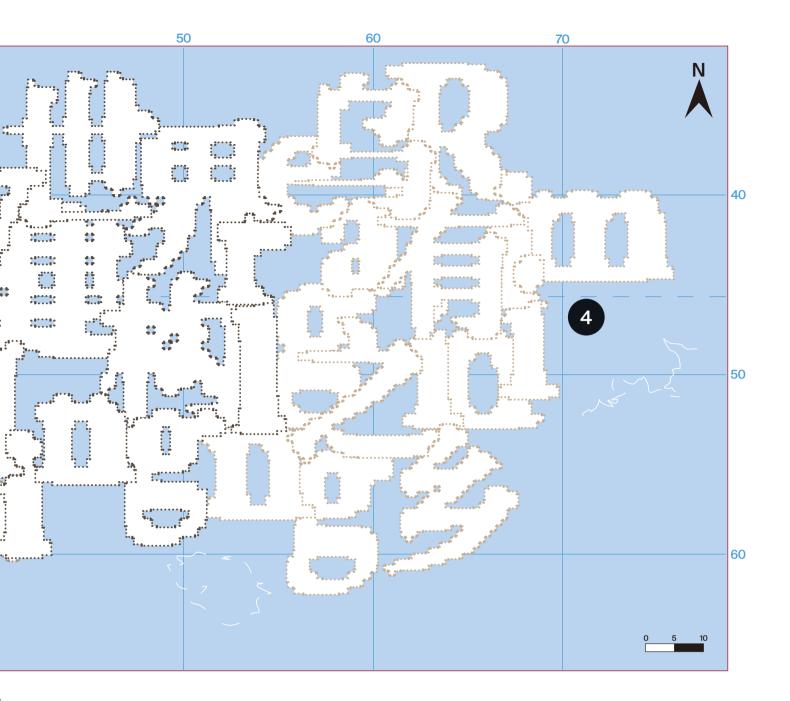
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乌托邦巡航 Little Utopias

重音三部曲: 如露亦如电

Accent Trilogy: Like Dew, or a Lightning

撰文:钟娜、李骄阳、林小颜 Text by Na Zhong, Jiaoyang Li and Xiaoyan Lin

2019 年,作家钟娜和诗人李骄阳共同创办了双语写作 平台重音社,并围绕之扩展了一个跨媒介、跨学科的创 意写作社群。2022 年 8 月,诗人、教育业企业家潘虹 如加入,促成了集艺术空间、出版工作室、书店为一体 的重音社线下空间——重音姐妹书店在泽西城落地。 2023 年底,由潘虹如主导、策划的重音姐妹书店衍生 品牌重音寺入驻曼哈顿中国城著名的寺庙神婆一条街。 基于此,本文可被视作"重音宇宙"的一版虚构指南。

In 2019, writer Na Zhong and poet Jiaoyang Li jointly founded the bilingual writing platform Accent Society and expanded it into a cross-media, interdisciplinary creative writing community. In August 2022, poet and education entrepreneur Pan Hongru joined them to facilitate the offline space for Accent Society in Jersey City. By the end of 2023, the derivative brand Accent Temple, led and planned by Pan Hongru, set foot on the famous temple street in Manhattan's Chinatown. This article therefore can be regarded as a fictional guide to the "Accent Universe."

Q:重音社是什么?从创建到现在发生了什么变化?

A:重音社诞生于 2019 年,具体日期已不可考。 最初它是一个松散的双语写作者社群,后来 在社群活动和内容分享的基础上增加了文学 写作坊和大师课,希望帮助想进行英语创作 的朋友走出第一步,并且找到同行的伙伴。

Q:《三个故事》是怎么来的?

A:"请以重音社为主题写一篇小故事"—— 刚拿到这个命题时心情很复杂!重音社侧重 文学写作,没有什么比让文学青年写搞创作更 让人脚趾抠地的了吧!重音社的心脏是写作 坊。我开过课,也上过其他老师开的课,更 是认识了干人干相的写作者。写作坊是一个 奇妙的场域:老师和学生之间存在权力关系, 分享作品的人更是将自己处在一个很脆弱的 位置。如何不滥用权力,如何关怀,如何在 写作坊的框架下与他人联结,如何在"谎言" (fiction)中读出真心,都是我想探讨的主题。 托米帮我完成了这个心愿。

------钟娜

Q:大纽约地区的第一家中文书店——重音姐妹书店为 何选址在新泽西?

A:新泽西总体来说就是一个比较"I"的地方 吧,很多有意思的东西都藏在大楼里边,不在 街面上。重音姐妹所在的泽西城是一片飞地, 这里安全、干净,尽管街上经常看不到几个 人和几个开着的商店。这里居住了大概三分 之一的纽约中国人。中文书店在这边,能够 深入抵达大家生活的社区。书店距离曼哈顿市 中心不算太远,但地租便宜好几倍,可以让 我们在寸土寸金的大纽约地区有还算宽敞舒 服的空间,不用过分操心书以外的商业问题, 保持相对的纯粹。专程来泽西看书的人也都 会是真正读书的人。纽约好玩的和让人兴奋 的东西太多了,但有时候总想出逃,逃到河 的另一边去休息休息。

Q:这篇小说的灵感?

A:我在新泽西住了接近4年,总体感觉是这 边中国留学生和工作的人虽然很多,但大部 分人还是很孤独的,很多人一年到头可能跟 自己拼租的室友都说不上几句话。大家好像 只是把家或者泽西当做一个睡觉的地方,天 亮之后赶紧把自己搬运去曼哈顿。做了重音 姐妹书店之后,好像才让我自己,也让很多 客人真正有机会了解住在泽西的友邻。书店 是预约制开放的,来的客人都需要和我们从 Instagram上互关并取得联系。每天在网上看 大家发的限时动态,在店里旁听他们各种光 怪陆离的故事,泽西人的面貌变得更加立体 起来,也让我们更加确认做书店和社群的意义。 ——李骄阳

Q:重音寺的概念从何而来?为何书店会叫寺庙?

A:重音寺可以说是重音姐妹的一个短期文化 实验场地。它基于书店,但又不仅是书店,就 像重音姐妹本身也是用策展的方式做独立书 店,用诗歌和剧场的逻辑做沉浸式展览。寺庙 的概念来源于"文学神龛"的寄望,在这个信 仰缺失的年代,文学,哲学与艺术某种程度上 起到了传统意义上"信仰"的作用,让许多 人——至少是我——在不好的处境也可以看 到光。在这里你可以朝拜波伏娃、李清照、福 柯、老子,以及任何你认为曾在心里点亮过希 望的人,无论它们是作家、哲学家或是艺术家。 大部分传统意义上的寺庙都是只能拜一个教, 但人文精神的一个核心是通过对不同文化、不 同群体的理解以达到共情与共存,通过文学, 我们甚至能够试图理解十八世纪英国妓女的 心路历程,为何不能理解此时此刻所处世界 身边的人呢? 所以希望重音寺是一个所有人 的"寺庙",不同的人能通过书这个媒介来感 受并理解彼此。

Q:这篇故事的灵感来源是什么?创作也是基于真实场 景吗?

A:重音寺的所在地理位置有着丰富的历史: 中国城本身就是一个充满神话的地方,给了 我很多灵感。许多段落穿插了对此处华人真实 生活的描写,比如中彩票的大叔、发廊店的 小哥、按摩店、苍蝇小馆。有些描述看似架空, 其实都穿插着真实生活中朋友们的面貌。俗一 点说,其实都是对爱情的追求,对知识的渴望, 对人类苦痛无法遏制的感慨的一种扩写。

——林小颜

重音三部曲 Accent Trilogy

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中英作品散见于《单读》《小说界》《Guernica》等, 曾获得纽约小说中心青年作家项目、麦克道威尔文艺 章、锡屋工作坊项目等支持。重音社合创人,跳岛 FM 主播。译有萨莉·鲁尼《聊天记录》《正常人》《美丽的 世界,你在哪里》。

女孩托米二十五岁上下,尼日利亚裔,身材瘦削,剃光 头,颅骨形状近乎完美,一双大眼,瞳孔黑得令人不安。 她唯一的瑕疵是门牙间的缺口,但对托米来说,这点小 毛病又算得了什么?

在我开设的四周非虚构写作坊报名结束 5 小时后,托米发来邮件。"Hi,还能报名吗?我爸把我手机砸了,我得等他出门布道了才能偷到他手机。我不骗你。欲知详情,先让我报名吧。"整篇邮件没有一个大写字母。换作是你,你能拒绝一个写出这样一封邮件的人吗?

写作坊在线上进行。我逐字朗读事先演练过的 课件,伪装出自信、松弛、有条有理的形象。实际情况 恰恰相反。对我来说,写作是件费神费力的事。我只在 写得顺手时才享受写作,然而这种情况很少发生,即使 发生了也转瞬即逝。每天,我坐在笔记本前敲下三百字。 有时,我在狂喜中收工,对着空气宣称一件杰作就此诞 生;更多的时候,我把这三百字一遍遍输入,然后晚上 做梦,梦见一只只红色章鱼倒挂在一条寒冰隧道的穹顶, 嘴巴一开一闭,发出我无法辨识的音节。

一读到托米提交的故事,我就知道她比班上其 他人都写得好得多。她的第一个故事表面写她想方设法 摆脱家中弥漫的炸鱼味,其实在写她为何十五岁离家出 走,以跳脱衣舞为生。行文流畅活泼,充满律动,如闻 其声。第二个故事写她在脱衣舞俱乐部的食物链上层层 攀升,第三个故事写她试图教她妹妹跳脱衣舞,以便让 后者学会自力更生,最后却以灾难性的失败告终。和大 多数同学一样,我也认为,第二个故事尽管满足了读者 的窥私欲,却没有第三个故事那么诙谐,也没有第一个 故事那么动人。在 Zoom 会议的小窗里,托米一边听 我说话,一边眼睛眨也不眨地盯着我看不到的某处。

"好吧。"她说。

"我认为我们更想知道叙述者为什么会离开她 童年的家,"我说。在第一堂课上,我让学生们将自传 性作品中的主要人物称为"叙述者",而不是"你",以 便和文本保持安全且礼貌的距离。

"好吧。"

"第一个故事很有力量。比如叙述者背诵的《圣 经》片段、虚伪的牧师父亲、母亲的离世。有太多值得 挖掘的东西了!"话说到一半,我突然听到自己紧绷生 硬的声音。我意识到,或许托米来上课的目的并不是写 出好的作品。也或许我们对什么是"好作品"有着截然 不同的看法。

我接着说:"下一轮你能改一改你的第一个故 事吗?"

"好吧。"

再轮到托米时,她提交了第二个故事的改稿。 她对它进行了扩展,巨细无遗地描述了俱乐部客人强迫 她进行的没有保护措施的性行为,前男友半强迫她进行 的性行为,她自愿和包养她的男人进行的充满不适的性 行为。露骨的文字让人兴奋,又令人不安,仿佛是对我 之前的说教进行的报复。有两个学生请了假,我不知道 这篇故事是不是直接原因。上课前一天晚上,我反复斟 酌该如何引导学生就这篇故事展开讨论。我不会指出托 米的修改与我的建议背道而驰;我会让学生思考读者和 作者之间的契约;我会分享一些敢于冒犯与挑衅的作品。

托米上线时看上去很疲惫。她戴着假发,眼下 挂着浓重的黑眼圈,没有化妆,皮肤上有明显的痘痕。 课堂讨论比以往更加迟滞。改稿是一个艰难的过程,没 有一个学生的改稿有明显进步,这让我对自己的方法产 生怀疑。轮到讨论托米的作品时,我的喉咙已经干如砂 纸。

"托米,"我说道。"能跟我们分享一下你的修改 过程吗?好比说你为什么会选这个故事,修改思路是怎 样的。"

她低下头,似乎陷入思考。当她再次抬头时, 她说:"因为我不在乎另外两个故事。"

我其实假装没听见就好了,可惜我没有。"为 什么?"我用微微颤抖的声音问道。

乌托邦巡航 Little Utopias 她心不在焉地用指肚捻着一缕脏辫的发尾。 "不知道。"经过死寂的一秒后,她说,"我就是不喜欢 这种哭兮兮的东西。"

"哭兮兮?"

"对啊,糟糕的爹,软弱的娘,寄生虫妹妹,童年, 纯真的终结,诸如此类。"她用一种听起来无比残酷的 声音说道。

"我知道这些是绝佳的题材。"她将目光转向摄 像头。对准我。"我知道你写的就是这种东西,所以你 喜欢它。但那不是我。我也不想成为这种作家。"

她才讲到一半,我的牙齿就开始不受控制地打 战。我对科技生出前所未有的感激,庆幸它把我们各自 锁在狭小的网络隔间里,让我和我的羞辱独处。我本就 脆弱的自我在托米投下的巨大阴影下迅速崩溃。万一她 说的是对的呢?这个声音在我脑海中回响。我还没来得 及关掉摄像头,喉咙里的强压便将泪水推穿鼻腔,从眼 框中涌出。

在全体学生的注视下,我崩溃了。录像继续 进行。

我忘了这堂课是如何收尾的。我想必是道了 歉。几天后,我取消了最后一节课,向所有人退了部分 学费,又再次道歉。我将所有学生的邮箱列入黑名单, 怕收到嘲讽的邮件,更怕收到安慰的邮件。直到整整一 年后,我才重新开始教课,但我再也不会为别出心裁的 电子邮件网开一面。有段时间,我密切关注托米的职业 生涯,生怕无意中撞到她的写作成就,这个可耻的习惯 一直维持到我的第二部小说出版。我的自我仍然容易受 到外部气候的影响,但我学会了观察和修补它的裂缝。 我接受了我的脆弱。

一天,我在一家连锁超市买菜时,麦片产品过 道的另一头,一个穿着时髦的高个子女人向我款款走来。 日光灯下,她黝黑的皮肤闪着冷调的哑光。我们立刻认 出了对方。"天哪,托米!"我脱口而出。

她睁大眼睛,捂住嘴,笑着和我拥抱。

我们在熟食区一张小桌前相对而坐,一边寒暄,一边彼此打量。托米已经不再跳脱衣舞了。今天她特地进城和影视公司开会,有人对她的剧本感兴趣。"准确地说,我给了他们三个剧本,"她说。"就是我在你的课上写的那三个。"

"这样啊。"我想知道他们最后选了哪个故事, 但不敢问。在托米面前我总是有些不安。

"你猜他们选了哪个?"她说。

我把目光移开。"三个都很好。我当时就知道 你能写。"

她目光凛凛地审视着我的脸。终于,她仿佛再 也按捺不住地说:"你知道吗,上完第一堂课后我哭了。 第一个故事全是假的,邮件也是我编的。我爸是中学老 师。我妈没死。我最喜欢吃炸鱼,因为他们从小就不让 我吃。第三个故事也是半真半假的。我是被教跳舞的那 个。我以前跳得很烂。"

我怔怔地注视着托米,被这突如其来的坦白震 惊了。一种熟悉的紧绷感回到我的喉咙。我咽了口口水, 用目光穿透她的皮肤,直到看见当年虚拟小窗里的托米, 房间的窗帘拉着,身后一堵昏暗的白墙。我穿过屏幕, 站在她的公寓里,周围是棕色沙发、卷发棒、书、避孕套、 俱乐部发的廉价和服、纸灯笼、一个写着"WHAT UP" 的霓虹招牌。我深吸口气,空气里是浓郁的香水、汗水 和宿醉、过期食物的味道。她此刻是不是还在撒谎?有 的人靠谎言来包裹自我;但对托米一无所知的我,没有 资格如此粗暴地解释她的动机。我只知道,在那堂课上, 某个不容否认的真相被我们指认并暴露了出来,而它让 她难以承受。

"没关系的,托米。"我微弱地笑了笑。"我们都 有过这种时候。"

她凝视着我,乌黑的瞳孔开始沸腾。



牧师,诗人,跨媒介艺术家,现居纽约和新泽西。在 媒介和叙事中转译视觉和感官的物料。常常摸索的充 西有:衣物,傀儡,叙事游戏和仪式;可穿戴的和稚 纵即逝的。目前作为重音社 / 重音姐妹出版工作室和艺 术空间的联合创始人,和姐妹们在共同修炼无用功。

重音三部曲 Accent Trilogy I 是你的人格, E 是你的工作。有时候,你只想快速回 到新泽西。快速从盛大的 Gala 和光鲜的谈论中脱身。 你害怕你虎虎生威的老板、同事,你甚至害怕你聪明伶 俐的学生,你害怕复杂的人际关系,害怕枝形吊灯的影 子。跳上终点站为时报广场的 Path 线火车,跳进属于 海底的隧道,属于隧道的噪音,噪音是你的安全区。你 不用再表演那个"杰出外星人"和福布斯 Top 100 成 功人士版本的你。

在噪音中,你才能够得到一种巨大的细节。你是一个艺 术家,总是企图用最离谱的方式回家,先绕道去霍博肯, 再缓缓抵达那个想象出来的目的地。你想象入冬骨骼的 断裂,烤面包盘里剥落的糠,针织围巾时铁棒的碰撞, 你想象携带跨州通勤的哨声,地窖里蟑螂爬行的窸窣。 去年,你的朋友怂恿你搬到新泽西,它说"这里的建筑 介于浦东和镰仓之间"。从此,腰间佩戴的河水如日本 武士刀一样清冽,头上悬挂的有轨列车将你灵魂中的小 职员用狗链牵引。在田野噪音中,你收集到了最大的细 节,你的听力更加清晰,你在安静的空气听出了白色的、 半结冰的蝴蝶结。

在 Path 站口,在 99 华人超市,在慈禧奶茶店,在大 四川。很多鬼你都碰到过无数次了,你们去过同一个天 台的角落,上过同一个纽大教授的课,好像在朋友的 Instagram 限时动态里也看到过,但从来没打过招呼。 没关系,足不出户你就能在你的大楼二手群里买到一切。 世界规整如一栋新泽西的酒店式公寓。凌晨群里的消息: 有人出电子烟吗。接着有人问:有人卖一瓶啤酒吗。即 使这里所有的居民楼都长得一模一样,你还是每年都要 搬一次家。

你是别人家的儿子,职位是 VP。你在亚马逊、谷歌 和彭博社上班,年薪 65 万美金。小时候你常和隔壁 的炒螺明一起幻想,如果有了五百万要干什么。现在 你的快乐其实是具体的:Grove street 附近的黄鱼 面,信用卡里程数换的免费酒店,家门口装修了三年 的 WholeFoods 超市终于开张,你的房子晋升为"猴 区房"。你常常去纽约文化沙龙,你是纽约电影节和 metrograph 的 VVIP 会员。你跟朋友说,王兵的纪录 片有三个小时,你愿意看两次。你还有一个秘密的公号, 你为你的三十个关注者写诗。有一次你鼓起勇气给家附 近新开的中文诗歌书店发私信说,上学时你也参与过创 办校园诗歌刊物,有空可以一起做点什么。她们看到你 的 ID 性别为男,信息已读,没有回复。

你是海湾大街 150 号,优秀的历史保护建筑,资本主 义老钱的坟场。企业家们把你当作山头,从这里包围纽 约,再从纽约占领整个北美。后来,资本被更大的资本 出卖,没人再进入过你的身体,你的喉咙里都刻着墓志 铭。去年,你被改造成了迷宫一样的艺术家工作室和画 廊,脚边堆满了发臭的树脂、易碎的陶胚,还有无脚鸟 没有重量的幻想。是的,你只应该做曼哈顿的睡袋,曼 哈顿的仓库,曼哈顿的坟场,你不应该做曼哈顿的枪膛。 可是蹦迪女孩不怕鬼,偏要在你的灰色的胸膛里玩弄工 厂流水线中的光。

为了和一种荒芜角力,你用画框拼出一个书架,再在书 架里塞进一个大于屋顶的水床。你在无用功中修炼一种 功,像拉手风琴一样拉锯悠长的白色纸凳,目之所及处, 窗光都被贴上了。你沿着窗的边缘 3D 切割金属的天空。 试了一下,谣言还是能漏过窗户,无孔不入的男宝还是 能漏过窗户。再来一遍,直到夜晚和你的肉体交换了风 景。展览要开始了。你邀请了艺术家,邀请了策展人, 邀请了看展的人,最后的最后,你邀请了飞在空中的 三十个空酒杯,一起去专修无用功的教会。今天:你卖 掉三本《叫魂》收入 50 美金,停车罚单交出 80 美金。 你收到的罚单足够装订成一个写诗的本子,从此你便成 了公路诗人。每个月你的营业目标是:将把月初付出去 的月亮赚回来。

想画的文字太胖了,得匀一些去地板和天花板;声音的 影子太长了,要藏在 206 号幕帘的幕帘后面。男性和 狗是不被允许从视平线升起的物种,除非它们困进了小 猫的身体:能咪呜着穿过窄门。你是在禁酒时期酗酒的 皇后。只有在密集的文字中,你不喝酒也在喝酒,酒精 的裙裾收拢了你颅内所有的莴苣姑娘:你在写字,你在 匹配光斑的形状,你把每本书里生长的肥尾守宫都探望 好了,你在迟疑钓起纸做的鸟群。你很累很累,但从未 伤心过。买走的书,捆在你回家的自行车后座上,像新 娘乘坐颠簸的轿子。

以前,你一个月要飞五个国家,你可以连吃三天日本秘 鲁融合菜的试餐单。为了策展项目去夏威夷学部落语 言,为了身体解放去阿维尼翁戏剧节上贾克·乐寇大师

LEAP FW2023 你不播放节目,只回收气息、声音和温度。你是这家中 文书店的二手收音机。有时候气压中挤满了亢进的脚步 和表达欲,有时候一个星期也没有一个人,屋内的蜘蛛 长到三米那么大。你在横跳的犀利尖锐和随时准备坍塌 的自尊中寻找一个能够辨别的频率和波段。刚刚,你的 旁边坐着一位韩式桑拿初创公司的营销助理,她在埋 头赶工,尝试为东北老板制作公司的介绍手册,她的 PPT 上用加粗字体写着"为什么蒸桑拿一定要去新泽 西?"。走的时候,她带走一本属于冬天的二手俄国小 说,和俄国小说的旁边的一本独立印刷小册子,名字 叫《世界大笨蛋反叛手册》,据是这个书店的畅销书。



"故说般若波罗蜜多咒,即念咒曰:揭谛揭谛,波罗揭谛, 波罗僧揭谛,菩提萨婆诃。"唱佛机反复唱着。

重音寺坐落于曼哈顿下城一条街,满是涂鸦, 蟑螂横行,旁边是一家有三十年历史的纽约先锋黑胶店, 许多年过去,先锋们都老了,头发花白,额前的闪电依旧。

黑胶店隔壁有神似梦幻丽莎发廊的理发店,发 廊小哥休息时常出来抽电子烟,吞咽薄荷的味道,在微 信里言语关心周末酒吧里遇见的姑娘。发廊地下室有家 按摩店,按摩小姐姐们口头常念叨一位中彩票大叔,此 人自中彩票后大叔天天来按摩,每次都要叫两位同时按。 重音寺对面则有各式苍蝇小馆,犄角旮旯挤满物美价廉 的小吃,一块钱的日式芝士蛋糕,五角钱的菠萝包,洪 门掌门曾在这吃过八块钱一整只的烤鸭。

一名穿着轻纱的店员问道:"施主远道而来, 要抽一支签吗?"客人有点戏谑地上下打量着签筒,摇 了摇:"三十九。"

店员用紫色的细长指甲翻阅着竹簿,按了下石苔,缓缓 起身走向店后的暗道。暗道尽头摆放着一个大木柜,拉 开标有三十九的小抽屉,取出一张暗褐色纸条,对着北 辰念道:"美女寻夫:千般用计,徒攻无功,不如守旧。"

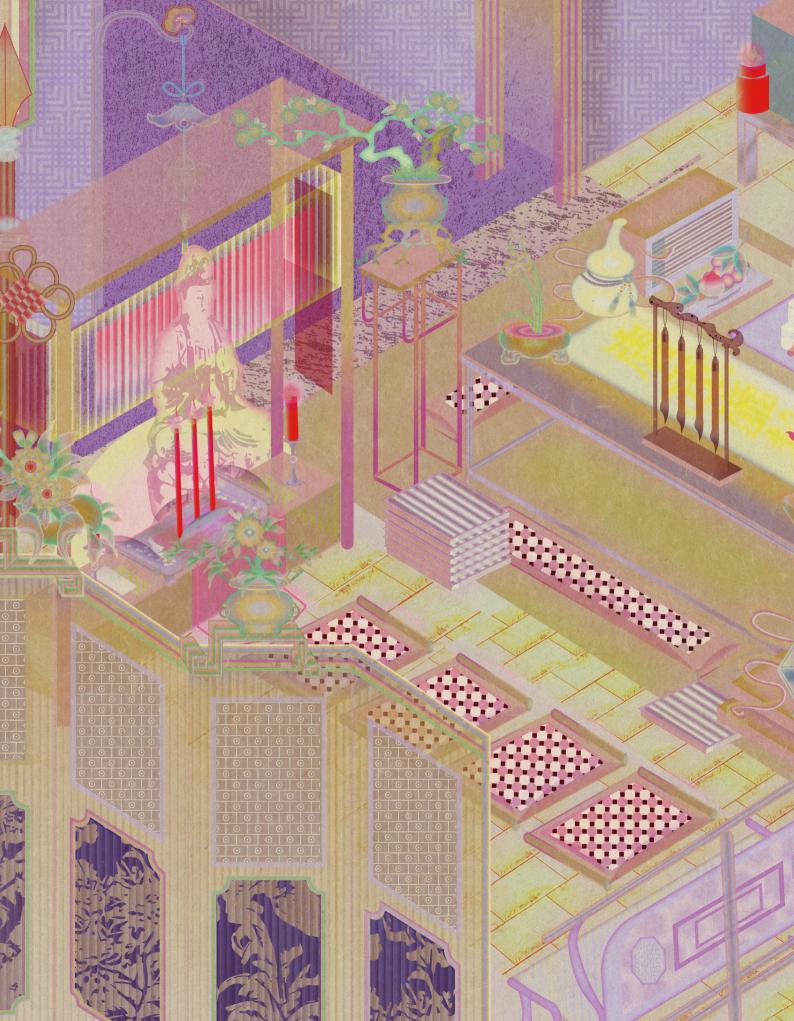
这时,Yoyo 从暗道尽头走出来,她是租用地下室最里 面房间的一位声音艺术家。用她的话说,自己常年缺阳 光和氧,如同蟑螂。她做各种兼职,外卖员,酒吧驻唱, 戏剧演员。每到深夜,她会在一个深红色的剧场里进行 诗歌朗诵。她会提前把诗句都抄写在糯米纸上,再折叠 成许多枚纸月亮,放入一个黑匣子。表演时,她抱着一 只双头棉花娃娃,伸手进盒子随机摸出一张诗句,读完 后将它吞下,直到吃得想吐。

Yoyo 把重音寺看作疗伤的洞穴。在洞穴里消磨时光, 消耗欲望,等昏暗的时光长出茧。手上皱巴巴的青筋暴 起,赤手空拳敲打空气,反抗基因的暴政,曾也把烟圈 和眼泪吐进爱人的嘴里,现在她更享受听气泡自我分解, 闻锈迹斑驳的佛像旁焚烧的肉桂香。暗道的穹顶上都是 到此一游艺术家涂鸦所画的各类当代神妖:骑在自由女 神像上的观世音,烤乳猪的灶王爷,开出租车的关羽, 做直播的如来,举哑铃的蛇精。重音寺的暗道尽头实际 上还藏有一扇门,只有 Yoyo 能开,推开后通往不属于 任何人的庭院,庭院中矗立着一口荒井。Yoyo 的存在 让店员们感到安全,她仿佛是常年寄居在寺庙深处的土 地公,或者说是一个时光守护者。

同样是时光守护者的,是重音寺里那只会念佛经的八哥: 纽约八哥学会了中文,常常念叨色即是空,空即是色。

调研 Research

重音三部曲 Accent Trilogy





然而很多身材曼妙的女尼姑都选择来重音寺出家,原因 不详,大抵是纽约众多寺庙中只有重音寺是可以穿透明 轻纱的。

萨特曾说,众生苦,万念俱灰。没有,萨特并没说过这 话。重音寺的众神像里也没有萨特,只有波伏娃。当然, 还有女娲、李清照、顾太清、陈衡哲等等。神,神话, 后人类,去撕裂是去理解,毁灭天堂也是创造天堂。

白天重音寺的尼姑们都在打坐念经,静到一粒青灰落地 都能听到声响。一到深夜,门口灯笼变成蓝紫色,宾客 盈门,眼神魅惑的东方塔罗师、打狗棒棒法传人、孙悟 空后裔等都会汇聚于此,将写满诗句的血红色气球放飞 至佛堂顶。茶道师为大家煮茶,烤板栗,鸡尾酒师调一 排马提尼,茶酒相间,觥筹交错,唢呐,尺八,DJ, 锣鼓喧天,烤菩提和枸杞的摊位滋滋作响,稍纵即逝的 笑声一阵阵如海浪,有人说要献身于十八世纪文学,有 人说要重建卡明斯基聋哑共和国,有人说要创造,一定 要创造。

如梦幻泡影,如露亦如电。

Vanilla Chi

一位插画师 / 设计师 / 独立出版人。出生于广东深圳, 现工作生活于纽约。过往作品刊登于纽约时报、纽约客、 VICE、彭博商业周刊等。艺术书出版工作室"珍珠鼻 涕虫"主创之一,也是《Raging》杂志的共同编辑。 她的网站是 vanillachi.com。

Vanilla Chi is an illustrator/designer/independent publisher. She was born in Shenzhen, currently lives and works in New York City. Vanilla's works have been published in *The New York Times, The New Yorker, VICE, Bloomberg Businessweek*, etc. She is the co-founder of the art book publishing studio "Pearl Slug" and the co-editor of *Raging* magazine.

Q: What is Accent Society? What has changed since it was founded?

A: Accent Society was founded in 2018. The exact date is no longer known. It was at first, a loose community for bilingual writers. Later, in addition to existing community activities and content sharing, we started literary workshops and masterclasses. The goal is to help those who want to write in English take the first step and find like-minded companions on this journey.

Q: How did you come up with "Three Stories"?

A: Please write a short story after the theme of Accent Society-I had mixed feelings when I got this prompt! Accent Sisters itself focuses on literature writing. There's nothing more embarrassing than asking someone wildly enthusiastic about literature writing to write about creative endeavors, isn't it? The heart of Accent Sisters is its writing workshops. I've taught workshops and have taken classes by other teachers. I have got to know so many different writers. Workshop is a very interesting space: between teacher and students, there is a certain power dynamic; and whoever is sharing their work, puts themselves in a very vulnerable position. How to not abuse power, how to care, how to connect with others within the structure of a workshop. how to read truth in fiction. These are all topics that I want to explore. Tomi helped me fulfill my wish.

-Na Zhong

Q: As the first Chinese bookstore in the greater New York area, why is Accent Sisters based in New Jersey?

> A: Overall, New Jersey is pretty much a place for introverts. Many interesting places, instead of on the street, are hidden in buildings. Jersey City, where Accent Sisters is located, is an enclave, safe, clean, and home to about onethird Chinese people in New York, even

though you only see a few of them, also very few open stores on the street. A Chinese bookstore is here, in an area that could reach deep into everyone's life. Not too far away from Manhattan, yet with a much cheaper rent, it allows us to have a relatively cozy space in the expensive land of greater New York. We therefore don't need to worry too much about the business aspect, we stay pure as a bookstore. Those who travel all the way to Jersey City to read are also people who really read. There are too many exciting things in New York City, which makes you want to flee sometimes, to the other side of the river and rest a little.

Q: What inspired this piece?

A: I've lived in New Jersey for almost four years. Although there are many students and working people from China here, I think most of them are still quite lonely. Many don't even get a chance to speak to their roommates whom they share their apartments with, because to them, home, or New Jersey, is just a place to sleep. After dawn, they carry themselves to Manhattan again. For me, it seems it's only after we've opened Accent Sisters that I, as well as many of our customers, got the chance to really know our neighbors in Jersey. Accent Sisters opens by appointment. People must contact us first on Instagram, and we'd follow each other's account. Seeing everyone's Instagram stories online and listening to their strange stories in store, I find the lives and faces of Jersey people become more and more vivid, which also affirmed to me there is a meaning to build this bookstore, a community.

–Jiaoyang Li

Q: How did the concept of Accent Temple come about? Why is a bookstore called a temple?

A: Accent Temple could be described as a short-term venue for cultural experiments. It's based on a bookstore and is more than a bookstore. Like Accent Sis-

ters, where we run the bookstore with a curatorial approach, creating immersive exhibitions with the logic of poetry and theater, the idea of a temple comes from our wish for here to be a "literary shrine." We are in an era with a general lack of faith. Yet literature, philosophy and art indeed, to some degree, play the role of faith in the traditional sense, allowing many, myself included, to see light in difficult times these days. Here, you can make your pilgrimage to Beauvoir, Li Qingzhao, Foucault, Lai Tze, or whoever has once lit you up with hope, no matter writer, philosopher, or artist. Most traditional temples allow for only one religion, and yet the core of the humanistic spirit is to achieve empathy and co-existence by understanding different groups and cultures. Through literature, we can even try to understand the life of an 18th century English prostitute, so why not try to understand those around us who are living in this world right now? Therefore, I hope Accent Temple will be a temple for everyone, where people with different backgrounds can understand and feel each other through the books.

Q: What inspired this piece? Are they real stories?

A: Where Accent Temple is located is blessed with rich histories. Chinatown itself is a place full of myths. I was inspired by this a lot. In many paragraphs, you might find descriptions of real-life experiences of Chinese people who live here. For instance, there is a man who won a lottery, a youth who works at a hair salon, a massage parlor, and small greasy eateries. Some descriptions may seem abstract, but in fact they all carry some aspects of our friends in real life. To put it more bluntly, they are elaborations of the yearning of love, the thirst for knowledge, and the profound laments for the inevitable pains we humans suffer. –Xiaoyan Lin

调研 Research 130

Na Zhong w York-based fiction writer and literary trans-She is a 2021 Tin House alumna, a 2021–2023

lator. She is a 2021 Tin House alumna, a 2021-2022 Center for Fiction Emerging Writers Fellow, a 2023 MacDowell Fellow, and a Pushcart Prize Nominee. Her work has appeared in *Guernica, A Public Space, Lit Hub, The Millions*, among others. She is the Chinese translator of Sally Rooney's three novels and the co-founder of Accent Society.

hree Stories

Tomi was a Nigerian woman in her mid-twenties: slim, head shaved to reveal a perfectly-shaped skull, big eyes with unnervingly dark pupils. Her only imperfection was the gap between her front teeth, but what did it matter, when she was Tomi?

I found Tomi's email in my inbox five hours after the application window for my fourweek creative nonfiction workshop was closed. "hey is it still open? my dad smashed my phone and i couldn't steal his until he stepped out to deliver his sermon. true story, i swear. i can tell you about it if you let me in." How could you say no to someone who could write an email, with no capitalization, like that?

The class met online. I read from the script I'd rehearsed, trying to feign a confident, relaxed, organized persona. I was the opposite of it. Writing, to me, was a messy business. It was something I loved doing only when I could do it well, which happened so rarely and ephemerally. Everyday I sat in front of my laptop and typed three hundred words. Some days I left the desk in elation, exclaiming to no one that a masterpiece was born; some days I retyped the three hundred words again and again, and had nightmares where red octopuses hung upside-down from the ceiling of an ice tunnel, mouthing words I couldn't decipher.

As soon as I read the stories Tomi submitted. I knew that she was better than everyone else in the class by a big margin. The first piece, which did nothing but describe how she tried to get rid of the smell of deep-fried fish that permeated her childhood home, which she left at the age of fifteen by becoming a stripper, was written in a zappy and jazzy prose, just like the way she spoke. Her second one was about how she tried to climb up the social ladder of the strip club world, her third about teaching her codependent sister strip dance and how it failed disastrously. Echoing the comments from her peers, I told her, through my coffee-stained laptop screen, that the second piece, while offering the reader a voyeuristic satisfaction, felt less funny than her third one and less moving than her first. In the little Zoom window, she stared unblinkingly at somewhere I couldn't locate. "Okay," she said.

"I guess we'd be more interested to know why the narrator left her father's house," I said tactfully. On the first day, I'd told the class to refer to the main characters in the autobiographical pieces as "the narrator," not "you," so we could dissect the story from a safe and respectful distance.

"Okay."

"The first story is so powerful: the reciting of the Bible, the duplicity of the father, the narrator's mother's death. There's so much to explore!" At some point, I became conscious of my highstrung voice. It occurred to me that maybe Tomi hadn't come to the class to become a good writer. Or maybe we had fundamentally different ideas about what "good writings" were.

When she didn't speak, I ventured, "For your Revision Week, can you submit a revision of your first piece?"

"Okay."

When Revision Week came Tomi submitted an expanded version of the second story. She added graphic descriptions of unprotected sex forced upon her by her clients, semi-nonconsensual sex forced upon her by her ex-boyfriend, consensual but painful sex between her and her sugar daddy. It was simultaneously arousing and disturbing to read. It felt like a vengeful attack on my previous preaching. Two students excused themselves from the class, whether directly because of the piece, I didn't know. The night before the class, I strategize about how to lead the discussion around the submission. I'd not refer to the fact that what she did was the opposite of my suggestion; I'd invite the class to ponder over the contract between the reader and the writer; and I'd cite examples of works that were meant to offend, to provoke.

When Tomi entered the virtual room, I saw that she looked tired. There were dark circles under her eyes and because she wasn't wearing any makeup, I could see the acne scars on her skin. She was wearing a wig. The class felt more sluggish than usual: revision was a grueling process, and the fact that none of the students' writings greatly improved made me question my method.

When it was Tomi's turn to be workshopped, my throat was as dry as sandpaper.

"Tomi," I said. "Can you tell us a little about your process? Such as why you picked this piece to revise and how you did it?"

She lowered her head as if to think. When she looked up again she said, "Because I don't care about the other two."

I should have let it go and move on, but to my regret, I didn't. In a slightly trembling voice I asked, "Can you tell us why you don't?"

She twisted a strand of her braided wig absent-mindedly. "I don't know." After a second of dead silence, she added, "Maybe some people just don't have a taste for this wishy-washy stuff."

"Wishy-washy?"

"Yeah, horrible fathers, weak mothers, clingy sisters, childhood, the end of innocence, coming of age, blah blah blah," she said in a voice that sounded terribly cruel to me.

"I know it's good stuff." She directed her eyes at the camera. At me. "I know you for one wrote stuff like that, which is why you liked it. But that's not who I am. That's not who I want to become."

Even before she finished I could hear my teeth clattering. Never had I felt so grateful for the almighty technology for separating us in our little cells, so I could be insulated in my humiliation. My sense of self, which was far from sturdy to begin with, crumbled rapidly in the gigantic shadow cast by Tomi's. What if she's right? The voice reverberated in my head, and before I could turn off the camera, a pressure that had been developing in my throat pushed the tears up through my nasal cavities and out of my sockets.

I broke down in front of my students. On recording.

I forgot how the class ended. I must have apologized, which I did again a few days later when I canceled our last class and issued a partial refund to all of them. I blacklisted all my students for fear of receiving messages of derision, or even worse, consolation. It took me a year to be able to teach workshops again, and I would never again make exceptions for brilliant email-writers. For a while I followed Tomi's career judiciously, afraid of coming across her publications by accident, but I dropped this shameful habit after my second novel came out. My sense of self was still susceptible to the external weather, but I'd become more adept at reading and mending its cracks. I'd become friends with my fragility.

One day, I was grocery-shopping at a chain store when a tall, fashionably-dressed woman sauntered towards me from the other end of the cereal products aisle. The fluorescent light cast a cool, matte finish on her dark skin. We recognized each other instantly. "Oh my God. Tomi," I blurted.

She widened her eyes and covered her mouth, smiling as she drew me into her arms.

Seated across a small table in the hot food section, we exchanged pleasantries while busily stealing glances at each other. She had quit strip-dancing and was in town talking to some movie people who'd shown an interest in a script she'd written based on her life story. "In fact, I gave them three scripts," she said. "Developed from the three pieces I wrote in your workshop."

"Oh." I wondered which story had caught their eyes, but felt too queasy to ask. Being around Tomi always had this unsettling effect on me.

"Guess which one they liked?" she said.

I averted my eyes. "Whichever they chose, I'm sure it's great. Even back then you were a very good writer."

She examined my face fiercely. Then, as if no longer able to hold it back, she said hastily, "I cried after our first class, you know. The first story was completely made up, so was my email. My father was a high school teacher. My mother is still alive. I love eating deep-fried fish because I wasn't allowed to have it growing up. Part of the third story was fictional, too. I was the little sister that was being taught. I was a disaster before I got better."

I stared at her, stunned by this confessional outburst. A familiar tightness seized my throat. I swallowed, trying to gaze through her skin until I could see the Tomi from two years before, trapped in the little Zoom window, the curtains drawn, a blank wall behind her. I crossed the screen and found myself in her apartment, surrounded by brown sofas, hair curlers, books, condoms, cheap kimonos provided by the clubs, paper lanterns and a neon sign that read, "What Up." I took a deep breath: spicy perfume, sweat and hangover breath, stale food. Was what she just told me a lie, too? Some people use lies to bubble-wrap their selves, but I knew too little about Tomi to airbrush her motivation with this theory. All I knew was that something undeniably true was recognized and exposed in that class, and she had found it unbearable.

"It's okay, Tomi," I said with a faint smile. "We've all been there."

She held me in her gaze until her dark pupils began to boil.

ersor

Jiaoyang Li

A wedding minister, poet, and interdisciplinary artist based in New York and New Jersey. She translates visual and sensory materials through media and narratives. She often works with garments, puppets, stories and rituals. Currently, as a co-founder of Accent Society/Accent Sisters publishing workshop and art space, she is meant to practice the kung fu of uselessness. *I* is the personality, *E* is the job. Sometimes, you just want to quickly go back to New Jersey. To quickly retreat from the grand Gala and the glamorous talks. Scared of your boss and colleagues with endless energies, of even your smart students, you are terrified by any complicated human relationship, by the shadow of the branch-shaped pendant lamp. You hop on the Journal Square bound PATH Train, diving into an underwater tunnel. A noise belongs to the tunnel. The noise is your safe zone. You don't need to pretend to be the "outstanding alien" or the "Forbes Top 100 Most Successful People" version of you anymore.

It's only in the noise that you can grasp tremendous details. You are an artist who always attempts to go home in the most absurd route. First, you detour through Hoboken, then you arrive slowly at the imaginary destination. You imagine the fracture of winter bones, the bran peeled off and left in the baking pan, the collision of knitting needles over the scarf they are weaving; you imagine the whistles that carry cross-state commutes, cockroaches rustling in the cellar. Last year, your friend persuaded you to move to New Jersey, saying, "the architecture here is something between Pudong and Kamakura." Ever since then, the river you wear at the waist shines clear like a Japanese samurai sword, the overhead tram leads the clerk soul of you with a dog leash. It's in the field noises that you gather the greatest details. Your hearing is even clearer: a half-frozen white butterfly knotted in the quiet air.

At the entrance of PATH Station, in the 99 Ranch Market, at Teazzi Tea, in Greater Sichuan. Many ghosts. You've bumped into them so many times, you've been to the same corner of a rooftop, the same lecture of a NYU professor, maybe you've seen them in friends' Instagram stories too, but you never say hello to each other. Never mind, you can still buy everything without stepping out, used goods from the group chat of your building. The world is as orderly as a New Jersey apartment hotel. Early morning, a message from the

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Little Utopias

高托邦巡航

group chat: anyone selling e-cigarettes? Soon another: anyone selling a bottle of beer? Even though all residential buildings here look exactly the same, you still move once a year.

*

You are the shining son of someone else. The position is Vice President. You work at Amazon, Google or Bloomberg, making \$650,000 a year. When you were a child, you liked to fantasize with your neighbor Ming, the fried snail boy, what you would do if you had five million. Now your happiness becomes more concrete: the yellow croaker noodle around Grove Street, free hotel stays exchanged from the credit card mileage, the Whole Food Market that finally opens after 3 years of renovation, your house becoming a "Whole district house." You frequent cultural salons in New York, you are the VVIP for New York Film Festival and Metrograph. You tell your friend, Wang Bing's documentary is 3-hour long, but you'd like to watch it again. You have a secret social account, where you write poems for your 30 followers. Once, gathering your courage, you messaged the Chinese poetry bookstore that opened recently near your house. You told them you were involved in founding a poetry journal when you were in school too, you would love to collaborate on something together. They saw your account which indicates the gender is male. They read your message, never replied.

You are 150 Bay Street, an outstanding historical building, graveyard for the old capitalist money. Entrepreneurs saw you as a foothold. From here, they sieged New York, then took over North America. Later, the capitals were sold by larger capitals, no one entered your body since your throat is engraved with epitaphs. Last year, you were refurbished into a maze-like artist studio and gallery. At your feet, piles of smelly resins, fragile greenwares, the weightless fantasies of the legless birds. Yes, you should only be Manhattan's sleeping bag, its warehouse and graveyard, you should never be its gun barrel. But the disco girls aren't afraid of ghosts; inside your gray chest, they still play with the light from the factory assembly line.

To wrestle a kind of desolation, you assemble a bookshelf with your picture frames. Into the shelf you squeeze a waterbed that's wider than your roof. Within the vain practices you are practicing a skill, like playing an accordion, pulling a long white paper stool. Everywhere your sight reaches. the window is pasted, lights are blocked. You 3D-cut the metal sky along the window's edge. You test it, rumors still leak into the window, the pervasive young and stupid boys still come through the window. You try again, until the night and your body exchange landscapes. The exhibition is about to start. You invite artists, curators, visitors, and finally, you invite the thirty empty wine glasses flying in the air to join the church that specializes in vain practice. Today: you sold 3 copies of Soulstealers and earned 50 dollars but paid 80 for a parking ticket. You've got enough parking tickets to make them into a poetry book, you could become a road poet. Every month your business goal is: to earn back the moon you paid at the beginning of the month.

Since the word you want to paint is too fat, you must spare some of it to the floors and the ceilings; since the shadow of the sound is too long, you must hide it behind the curtain of room 206. Males and dogs are species not allowed to rise from the horizon, unless they are trapped in the body of a kitten who can walk through the porte étroite in a meow. You are the drinking queen in the time of Prohibition. Only inside dense words, you are drinking even when you are not. The hem of the alcohol collects all the Rapunzels in your skull: you are writing, matching the shape of light spots, you visit every fat-tailed gecko in every book, you hesitate to fish the paper-made flocks. You are very tired, but never sad. The books you bought, tied to the back seat of your bicycle, are like a bride in a wobbling palankeen.

Before, you needed to fly to 5 countries a month, you could eat what was on the tasting menu of a Japanese Peruvian fusion place for 3 days. You go to Hawaii to learn the tribal language for a curatorial project; you attend Jacques Lecoq's masterclass at the Festival d'Avignon to emancipate your body. Exhausted. You are a weary former Brooklynite, a healthy punk retired from the hipster circle. Now, the most you can do for your artist pursuit is to hang at speakeasy spaces like Accent Sisters, where there may be more staff than customers. You are late. The staff could be later. The ghost in the store tells you the key is in the box next to the door, and once you dig out your intestines, the lock will automatically open. You ask Accent Sisters, how many sisters do you have, to which they reply, go ask a snake how many lives it has, ask a zombie how many legs it owns, ask a woman how many women from the past her one life carries.

You don't broadcast shows, only recycle breaths, sounds and temperature. You are the used radio of this Chinese bookstore. Sometimes, the atmosphere is crowded with advancing footsteps and the desire to express; sometimes, not a single person for a whole week, the spiders grow to 3 meters wide. Amid the jumping incisiveness and prides that are ready to collapse at any time, you search for a discernible frequency or wavelength. Just now, a marketing assistant from a Korean sauna startup sat next to you. She was busy meeting deadlines, making introductory pamphlets for her Northeastern boss. The bold fonts on her PowerPoint read, "Why Should You Go To New Jersey For Sauna?" Leaving, she took with her a second-hand Russian novel which belonged to winter, along with an independent booklet beside the novel, titled Manual for a Worldwide Manuke Revolt. They say it's the best-selling book at the store.

Accent Temple

Lin Xiaoyan bilingual poet and member of the North Amer-Writers Association, whose works en featured in poetry journals such as nave Yi Hang, Houston Poetry Garden, New York Flowing Light Poetry Shadow, and Chinese and Foreign Poets. She received her bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies and History at UC Davis and master's degree in Bilingual & Biculceived her bachelor's tural Education at Columbia University. She has published poetry collections, including Chanting Dream Record, Invisible Tel Aviv, and the English poetry collection Café After Dawn, as well as Iy Verses Cannot Awaken You. She is also the co-founder of the first ever Chinese/English bilingual bookstore in the New York area called Accent Sisters, and the co-founder of the art space/bookstore Accent Temple.

The Buddha machine chants repeatedly, "that is why the Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra is spoken, recite it this way: gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha."

Accent Temple is located on a street in Lower Manhattan. Everywhere there are cockroaches, the street is full of graffities. Next door stands an avant-garde vinyl store with over thirty years of history, although those avant-garde enthusiasts have aged, their hair is white, only the lightning bolts on their foreheads remain.

Beside the vinyl store, there is a hair salon that resembles the Dreamy Lisa Salon. The barber guy often steps out during breaks to smoke his vape. Savoring the mint taste, he sends WeChat messages to the girl he met in a bar over the weekend. The basement of the salon houses a massage parlor. The masseuses bring up a man who once won a lottery. Ever since then, he comes every day, always requesting two girls at one time. Across Accent Temple, assorted small eateries, cheap delicacies tucked in every corner. 1-dollar Japanese style cheesecakes, 5-cent pineapple buns, even the leader of the Hongmen has once enjoyed a whole roast duck for just 8 dollars here.

A shop assistant dressed in light gauze asks: "Traveler who's come afar, would you like to draw a fortune stick?" The customer examines the cylinder container as if it's a joke, shakes it, and reads, "thirty-nine."

The assistant flips through the bamboo book with her long purple nails, presses down a moss-covered stone, and walks into a hidden passage behind. A big wooden cabinet at the end of the passage. She opens the drawer which is labeled "thirty-nine," and takes out a dark brown piece of paper. Facing the North Star, she recites: "a fine lady seeking a husband: thousands of schemes, all go in vain, better to stick to the old ways."

At this moment, Yoyo comes out of the passage. She is a sound artist who has rented the innermost room in the basement. To use her own words, she lacks sunlight and oxygen all year round, like a cockroach. She does all kinds of part-time jobs—delivery worker, bar singer, drama actress, and so on. At night, she recites poetry in a maroon theater. To prepare, she writes down her verses on the glutinous rice papers, folds them into many paper-moons, and puts them into a black box. Holding a double-headed cotton doll, she would draw a line from the box during the performance, read it out loud, and swallow it. She swallows until she feels like vomiting.

Yoyo sees Accent Temple as a healing cave. In the cave, she kills time, she consumes her desires, let calluses grow out of the dim time, wrinkled veins protrude from her hands. She beats the air with bare fists, resists the tyranny of genes. She has also spit tears and smoke rings into her lovers' mouths. And now, she enjoys better the sounds of self-dissolving bubbles, the scent of cinnamon burning next to the rusty Buddha statues. The dome of the hidden passage is covered with graffiti by artists who briefly stopped by and are mainly images of deities and monsters in a contemporary context: the goddess Guanyin riding on the Statue of Liberty, the Kitchen God roasting suckling pigs, Guan Yu driving a taxi, Buddha doing live streams, a snake demon lifting dumbbells. In fact, there is another door at the end of

the hidden passage, which could only be opened by Yoyo. It leads to a courtyard that doesn't belong to anyone. In the middle, a deserted well. Yoyo's presence makes all the staff feel safe. She is as if a land deity who resides in the depth of the temple, a guardian of time.

Likewise a time guard is a mynah bird in Accent Temple who speaks only Buddhist scriptures. A New York mynah who has mastered Chinese. He chants from time to time: Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Nonetheless, many graceful ladies have decided to become nuns in Accent Temple. The reason is unclear. It could be because Accent is the only temple in New York that allows the donning of transparent gauzes.

Sartre once said, life is suffering, all hope is lost. No, Sartre has never said it. Neither does the pantheon of Accent Temple include Sartre. There's only Beauvoir. And of course, also Nüwa, Li Qingzhao, Gu Taiqing, Chen Hengzhe, and so on. Gods, myths, post-humans. To tear apart is to understand, to destroy paradise is to create paradise.

During the day, nuns at Accent Temple meditate and recite scriptures, it's so guiet here that even the falling of ashes could be heard. As night falls, the lanterns at the entrance turn purple blue, guests fill the house, which include seductive oriental tarot readers, successors of "Branch Beats the White Chimpanzee", descendants of Monkey King, they gather and release the blood-red balloons adorned with written verses to the ceiling of the Buddha Hall. The tea master brews tea, roasts chestnuts, while the bartender mixes a row of martinis. Tea and alcohol, they drink and drink, suona, shakuhachi, dj, loud gongs and drums, the sizzling sounds of roasted bodhi and wolfberries, brief laughter like tides after tides, some say they dedicate themselves to the 18th century literature, some say they will reestablish Kaminsky's Deaf Republic, some say they will create, they must create. All are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow; Like dew, or a lightning.

I-Person Club—Accent S(i)Sters, Accent Temple and all the Q&As are translated by Yun Qin Wang.

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广告垂询 Advertising 赵悦 Zhao Yue yue_zhao@modernmedia. com.cn

市场推广 Marketing 申采奕 Kelly Shen shencaiyi@modernmedia. com.cn

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