

國立台灣師範大學碩士論文

A Thesis Presented to National Taiwan Normal University's Graduate Institute of Translation
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紀大偉的《膜》及其他四篇故事：研究與英譯

An English Translation and Study of Chi Ta-wei's *Membranes* and Four Other Stories

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Abstract

The 1990s in Taiwan were an almost unprecedented era of globalization, commercialization, urbanization, and cultural and social change following the lifting of martial law in 1987. Against this vibrant backdrop Taiwan's *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities powerfully found their voices through a number of political and social movements and, perhaps most importantly, through a number of talented young authors who wrote specifically for this emergently visible yet still marginalized market. Among these authors, Chi Ta-wei occupies a prominent place: his early novellas and short stories brought visibility to *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities and the issues they faced while offering powerful critiques of the social, political, gender, and sexual inequalities and imbalances in Taiwanese society that prevented these communities from enjoying full equality with their straight peers. The present thesis offers a translation of Chi's second, prize-winning novella, 膜 *Mo* (*Membranes*), in addition to four other short stories that were published under the title *Membranes* in a 2011 collection of Chi's works. The thesis is divided into two Parts: Part 1 consists of a study of the works translated, while Part 2 consists of the translations themselves. The first chapter of Part 1 serves as an introduction to the study, containing a brief preface, an introduction to the author, summaries of the translated works and a brief review of the scholarly literature on Chi's works and currently available translations. Chapter 2 presents a brief chronological discussion of *tongzhi* literature in Taiwan from its beginnings in the 1960s to the present, helping to situate Chi's works in their literary and cultural context. Chapter 3 discusses Chi's use of queer themes and contexts in his works, highlighting how the author uses his fiction as a vehicle to both inspire and critique the often conservative social and military cultures of 1990s Taiwan. Chapter 4 discusses my views on translation and provides examples of translation problems encountered and the strategies used to overcome them. Finally, Chapter 5 offers brief concluding remarks that recapitulate my views on translation and note that much work still remains to be done in making Chi Ta-wei available to foreign readerships. This chapter is followed by Part 2, which consists of my translation of the five works by Chi Ta-wei discussed in the preceding chapters.

Keywords: *Tongzhi* Literature, Chi Ta-wei, 1990s Taiwanese Literature, *Membranes*

摘要

九零年代的台灣解嚴後發生罕見的全球化、商業化、都市化、文化及社會上的改變。以其改變為背景，台灣同志與酷兒族群以不少社會及文化上的活動，很成功地找到了自己的聲音，尤其是通過當代同志文學家來寫書給這些受公共認可未久的族群與台灣廣大社會來看。在同志文學家中，紀大偉的地位特別重要：他早期的短篇小說一邊幫台灣同志族提高聲音及社會承認，一邊同時批評當代台灣保守社會社會上、政治上、性別上與情欲上的不公平，強烈抗議害同志接受次等公民地位的不平等。本論文翻譯且研究紀大偉得獎寫的《膜》與其他四篇短篇故事，作品皆集於 2011 年出版的《膜》此書。本論文分成兩部分：第一部分提供譯者對紀大偉五篇作品及譯文的討論及研究，包括前言、作者生平、作品情節的簡介及關於紀大偉作品研究與翻譯現況的初步討論。第一部分的第二章討論台灣同志文學的起源與現況，從 1960 年代起至目前為止說明同志文學在台灣的發展與特色，亦有助於將紀大偉的作品脈絡化(contextualization)。第三章則談到紀大偉作品中所提到並使用的酷兒議題與脈絡(context)。第四章到譯者對翻譯的概念，也談到翻譯過程所遇到的問題與解決方式。第五章為結論，重新提到譯者對翻譯的看法與多將紀大偉早期作品翻成外語的建議與必要。第二部分為《膜》及其他四篇作品的譯文。

關鍵字：同志文學、紀大偉、九〇年代台灣文學、《膜》

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Preface: Why Translate Chi Ta-wei's Early Works?

I have been a student at National Taiwan Normal University's Graduate Institute for Translation and Interpretation since 2008, and am, like Taiwanese students, restricted to a maximum of eight semesters of active study in which to obtain my degree. As I approached this limit last year, it became incumbent upon me to find a thesis topic and to write my thesis as soon as possible if I were to have any chance of graduating. A chance discussion with my thesis adviser and classmates in August 2013 yielded a number of suggestions for a possible translation thesis, among which was 紀大偉 Chi Ta-wei's 膜 *Mo* (*Membranes*). I must confess to having never heard the author's name prior to that discussion, but I was drawn to his works both by their comparative brevity—I had no ambitions to translate a full-length novel—and by their humanity. Though understandably deeply rooted in the *tongzhi* 同志 concerns of the time in which Chi wrote (for a brief discussion of which see section IV of this chapter), I found his works especially interesting because, in their treatment of *tongzhi* themes, they asked larger questions about what it meant to be human, the limits of what we can know, and who has the right to make decisions about our bodies, questions that I, as a disabled person, found and continue to find compelling. This is *not* to say that I approached Chi's works from the standpoint of my own disability or that I made the abhorrent error of treating *tongzhi* themselves as disabled, but rather that, as I was drawn deeper into Chi's intriguing and unfamiliar literary world, I nevertheless found space within it of common ground between my own particular upbringing as a disabled American and Chi's particular circumstances as a Taiwanese *tongzhi*. The deep humanity in Chi's works motivated me to learn what I could about the *tongzhi* movement and its concerns, and to accordingly do my best to translate both the letter and the spirit of Chi's early works into English.

As for the works themselves (for a discussion of which see section II of this chapter), I chose to translate *Membranes* both because of its length and because it was the work of Chi's initially suggested to me by my classmates and thesis adviser. I chose to translate 牧神的午後 *Mushen de wuhou* (*L'Après-midi d'un Faune*) as both an initial test of my skills (it was the first of Chi's works I translated into English) and because I enjoyed its Kafka-esque style and allusions. I chose to translate 戰爭終了 *Zhanzheng zhongliao* (*The War Is Over*) because I felt that it offered a lighter and more humorous take on many of the sci-fi themes in *Membranes* and because I found its message of finding one's own identity and one's own humanity among members of one's own kind deeply meaningful. I chose to translate 親密關係 *Qinmi guanxi* (*Nuit et brouillard*) because it reiterated the theme of finding love and acceptance among members of one's own kind and because it focused heavily on marginalized "people

who are never seen,” a concern which seemed to me to be important for understanding Chi’s own worries about the plight of Taiwan’s *tongzhi*; and I felt that such an understanding was helpful for putting the other writings I had translated more fully in context. Finally, I chose to translate 敲打樂十一首 *Qiaoda yue shi yi shou* (11 *Songs for Percussion*) for its great stylistic diversity, for its reiteration of those messages in Chi’s other works which I had found most meaningful, and because Chi himself expressed a fondness for the stories in the prefatory material to the edition of *Membranes* from which I worked. None of these works has been translated into English before; and it was with the blessing of the author that I undertook to translate them.

Acknowledgements

I am a young and inexperienced translator, and this thesis has both tested my abilities and helped them to grow. I am grateful to the author for his constant kindness and support; to my thesis adviser for all of her patience and helpful suggestions; and to my classmates at National Taiwan Normal University’s Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation for their encouragement and for suggesting that I translate *Membranes* in the first place. I am also deeply grateful to the thesis reviewers who have kindly dedicated their time and expertise to examine my work, give helpful criticisms and suggestions, and ensure that this thesis meets the rigorous standards expected of an MA candidate from National Taiwan Normal University’s Graduate Institute for Translation and Interpretation. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my parents and to all of my friends and classmates who have read over the drafts of my translations and provided suggestions and criticism to help me make them far better than I ever could have done alone.

Outline of This Paper

This paper is divided into two parts and begins with a brief preface explaining how I came to translate the five works by Chi Ta-wei translated in Part II. Part I begins by introducing the author (1.1), then goes on to give a brief summary of the plot of each of the works translated below (1.2). Next is a brief survey of the available literature about Chi’s works and other available translations of his writings (1.3). This is followed by a brief chronological sketch showing the evolution of *tongzhi* literature in Taiwan as a genre from the 1960s to the present day (Chapter 2),

situating Chi Ta-wei firmly in the literary context of the 1990s, during which he wrote all of the works translated here. Chapter 3 discusses the treatment of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* themes in Chi's early works, helping to set them in context. Chapter 4 contains an analysis and discussion of some of the problems encountered in translating Chi's works and the solutions adopted to meet them, as well as a discussion of the translator's philosophy of translation. There follows a brief section of concluding remarks (Chapter 5), after which a list of references is given. Finally, the translations themselves are given in Part II, including a translation of the prefatory material for the most recent printed edition of the Chinese works consulted.

Part I: A Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 About the Author

Chi Ta-wei is a Taiwanese author, scholar, and literary critic who was an active participant in the lively *tongzhi* cultural movement that emerged in Taiwan in the 1990s following the lifting of martial law on the island in 1987. Chi's earliest works comprise both science fiction stories such as the novella *Membranes*, translated here, as well as more fantastic works and writings that deal more directly with the realities faced by the *tongzhi* community in the 1990s. The work translated here presents the novella, *Membranes*, as well as four other short stories published in the 2011 edition of *Membranes* that collects a number of the author's other early works. The translation thus represents only a small but important portion of the author's early works, most of them dating from the early and mid-1990s.

Chi himself was born in Taiwan in 1972, and received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Taiwan University. He later went to the US to continue his studies and received his doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Los Angeles.

In addition to his literary output, most of which dates from the 1990s or early 2000s, Chi is also the editor of two anthologies of Taiwanese queer fiction. He has also published Chinese translations of works by Manuel Puig and Italo Calvino. His most recent book is a short history of *tongzhi* literature in Taiwan that was published in 2012. Chi is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Taiwan Literature at Taiwan's National Cheng Chi University.

1.2 Summary and Discussion of Works Translated

1.2.1 Introduction

The five works translated below were all written during 1994-1995, before the author left Taiwan to study in the US. They thus offer us a valuable portrait of Taiwanese society by a committed intellectual who was concerned to critique and to change it from the inside. The following paragraphs offer a brief summary of the plots for each of the five stories translated below and also touch briefly on some of the thematic issues and larger questions raised by the individual stories themselves.

1.2.2 Plot Summaries for the Works Translated

MEMBRANES

Membranes centers around the life of Momo, a young esthetician in her twenties born into a dystopian future in which the ozone layer deteriorated at the end of the twentieth century, forcing humanity to migrate en masse to the ocean floor to avoid ultraviolet radiation. She seems, at first, to have everything: her clinic is so successful that she is the most respected esthetician in T City, the biggest city in New Taiwan, and she has a distinguished clientele including such famous and wealthy patrons as the journalist Tomie Junji. She is very good at her job and has won accolades for her professional work, yet her personal relationships are very distant and she has no social life whatsoever, preferring to keep to herself. Only two personal relationships ever seem to tug at Momo's heartstrings: one is her strained relationship with her hugely successful mother, whom she has not seen for some twenty years, presumably because her mother has been too busy clawing her way to the top position of Macrohard, a major cultural publishing firm that sells discbooks on every topic to undersea consumers of every country. The other is Momo's childhood friend Andy, who died under circumstances unclear to Momo when the latter was only ten years old. Most of the story is spent constructing Momo's too-good-to-be-true life and explaining how she came to be such a successful yet isolated young woman. Yet subtle clues are planted throughout the story that Momo's world may not be as real as it appears: she has frightening nightmares of the desolated world on the surface; her friend Andy allows her to bite off one of her fingers in play, yet no blood flows from the wound; and even Momo's earliest memories of herself show her being born fully-formed from a giant peach in front of her expectant mother, just as in the Japanese legend of Momo Taro. We soon learn that Momo was ill as a child with the

“LOGO” bacterium, which required her to undergo a surgery to replace Momo’s body parts with those of an android surrogate. We as readers are then led to assume that this surrogate was Momo’s friend Andy, and that the operation was so expensive that it required her mother to work unusually long hours in order to pay for it. This seems to explain both Andy’s disappearance and Momo’s distance from her mother. But the author goes farther still, suggesting that Momo is not merely a human being with a robotic body, but a human brain in a robotic cage, kept alive by a mysterious corporation called ISM that specializes in the manufacture and repair of war androids for world governments and corporations. Momo’s world is revealed to be a composite of her own feelings and a script written for her in part by her mother and in part by ISM, and Momo herself is shown to be no more than a pawn in a vast geopolitical and emotional game, kept alive at the wishes of her mother and used by her employer (personified by her mentor / supervisor, the enigmatic Draupadi) to steal military secrets from the war machines she repairs, believing all the while that her work really involves giving her clients treatments of a revolutionary skin-care lotion called M-Skin. Momo almost discovers the truth when her mother comes to visit her on her thirtieth birthday; but though she learns that something is deeply wrong with her view of the world, she remains oblivious to her actual condition and is eventually brought home to rest by her mother at the time her contract with ISM was set to expire. The story ends with a dream in which Momo and her mother are at last reunited; yet in the dream, each of them wears a tearful Carnival mask and holds a caged canary on her head, suggesting that both mother and daughter have been trapped into playing roles that are both far more glamorous and far more onerous than either of them truly understands. The construction and deconstruction of the many layers (membranes) of Momo’s world allows the author to explore questions of human nature and sexuality, individual freedom (especially as regards decisions relating to one’s body), the reliability of our memories, and the impact of technology upon our lives.

L’APRES-MIDI D’UN FAUNE

The story begins with a chance meeting at a hot springs between two young men, A Suo and K. Both attend school in the city, both are looking to recuperate in the countryside, and, most significantly, both of them love fine arts. K. is a dancer, and dances Nijinsky’s *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* in a field for A Suo, who reciprocates by drawing a sketch of K.’s performance. K. then invites A Suo to come spend the night with him at his family’s home. A Suo is soon overpowered by the wine the two of them drink, and that night imagines that K. touches him sexually. The next morning, K. puts A Suo’s sketch in a picture frame and asks him to hang it on the wall, giving A Suo a

broken pocket watch engraved with the image of a faun as a memento of their friendship. While A Suo climbs a ladder and attempts to nail the picture frame to the wall, K. innocently strokes his legs, which causes A Suo to violently protest that he hates being touched and to murder K. by striking him on the head with the hammer in his hand. A Suo flees the scene and attempts to put the matter behind him, but soon finds that the ticking of the watch and his own heartbeat are so synchronized that he cannot sleep or live without it. A Suo becomes less and less himself, and ultimately decides to smash the pocket watch in the hope of finding a moment of peace. His hopes are vain, however: as soon as the watch is broken, A Suo dies, and the spirit of the faun engraved on the watch cover comes to life and escapes into the city. In the end, all that remains of the unfortunate encounter between the two young men is A Suo's sketch, carefully tucked under the bed in his apartment in the city.

THE WAR IS OVER

The story takes place in the twenty-first century, at a distant spaceport in the solar system. A war has just ended, and the victorious soldiers return to the spaceport to enjoy the peace. The soldiers are matched with "replicants," humanoid robots who are designed to fulfill the gastronomic and sexual needs of their masters. One of them, a domestic replicant named Meimei, is very unsure of herself, but learns to become more self-confident when she meets another replicant named Lola by chance at the supermarket. The two become friends, and Lola teaches Meimei how to cook, how to enjoy food, and how to enjoy the pleasure of looking at the stars and imagining a world where replicants are free to make their own decisions. Eventually their friendship leads Meimei into conflict with her human master, who can neither condone nor understand her friendship with one of her own kind. Meimei ultimately disobeys her own programming and her human master and strikes out on her own to go live with Lola, however uncertain the future may be. As in *Membranes*, the story raises questions about our natural inclinations and desires, how to find meaningful relationships with members of one's own kind, and what it means to be normal, moral, and ultimately, human.

NUIT ET BROUILLARD

The story is narrated by a reclusive night-owl who hosts a Saturday night radio show called "Intimacy," for which he usually plays music and takes calls from his unknown audience and spends the intervening time in existential speculations. When he invites a guest to join him on the program, everything suddenly changes: he is no

longer alone, his senses come alive, and even the music goes live as his guest commandeers a piano in the studio to play a highly idiosyncratic rendition of Chopin's Mazurka. The host becomes aware of his own homosexual feelings, while the guest experiences the catharsis of having someone like himself to listen to his sorrows. Both men thus experience a kind of intimacy that they had not thought possible, since both are people of the kind "who are not seen," as the host remarks to himself. Yet their experience shows them both just how real and valuable and intimate companionship with members of their own kind can be, and the story ends with the host warmly telling his guest: "I want to hear more of your stories."

11 SONGS FOR PERCUSSION

These eleven short stories have no real connection to each other, and indeed the author remarks of them that he wrote them as separate pieces without knowing who his audience was. The stories range from martial arts fantasies to contemporary Taiwanese society to science fiction set in the far future, each one presenting a unique, discrete slice of life for the reader to ponder. Though each of the eleven "Songs" is only roughly five hundred Chinese ideographs, the author uses them to explore many of the same themes and issues encountered in his longer stories and novellas. Questions of sexuality, community, identity, and human nature are all explored in these brief vignettes.

1.2.3 Section Summary

The stories translated here all raise a number of issues. Some of them, such as *Membranes*, deal prominently with the feelings and desires of the individual in contrast to the demands of society, and subtly question what it means to be human, how reliable our memories are, who has the right to decide what happens to our bodies, and even the nature of reality itself. Still others, such as *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, ask us to consider the complex tangle of coincidences and events that makes up our relationships with other people, leading us to question just how free we are to determine our own fate. Still other stories, such as *The War Is Over*, seem to assert that the ability to make our own decisions and to choose members of our own kind to keep us company is a basic right that, if violated, risks rendering us no better and no more useful than factory-programmed machines. *Nuit et brouillard* similarly suggests that the ability to find members of our own kind and be with them freely can be liberating, critiquing the rigorous and all too busy schedule imposed upon us by the dictates of society. *11 Songs for Percussion* encapsulates these many themes in

miniature, exploring the questions of individuality, sexuality, humanity, and freedom raised in many of the author's longer works. The result is a varied and deeply pointed critique of society in general (and, in particular, of the 1990s patriarchal Taiwanese society that struggled at once to confront and to embrace the vibrant *tongzhi* culture that was increasingly making itself visible). The works show the author to be a man deeply committed to the values of respect, tolerance, and acceptance for all people, *tongzhi* or not.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Overview

Comparatively little has been written about Chi Ta-wei's early fiction. The Taiwanese works on Chi's writings of which I am aware include the Master's theses by 查昱琪 Zha Yuqi, 九〇年代以降台灣科幻小說中的空間感——以洪凌、紀大偉作品為例 (*Jiuling niandai yi jiang Taiwan kehuan xiaoshuo zhong de kongjian gan—yi Hong Ling, Chi Ta-wei zuopin wei li*) [The sense of space in Taiwanese science fiction novels of the 1990s and later: a study of the works of Hong Ling and Chi Ta-wei], 李如恩 Li Ru'en, 九〇年代酷兒科幻小說中的後人類政治——以洪凌、紀大偉作品為例 (*Jiuling niandai ku'er kehuan xiaoshuo zhong de hou renlei zhengzhi—yi Hong Ling, Chi Ta-wei zuopin wei li*) [The post-human politics of 1990s queer science fiction novels: A study of the works of Hong Ling and Chi-Ta-wei], and 林育涵 Lin Yuhan, 情慾文本化與酷兒操演：紀大偉的書寫與實踐 (1995-2000) (*Qingyu wenbenhua yu ku'er caoyan: Chi Ta-wei de shuxie yu shijian (1995-2000)*) [The contextualization of sexual desires and queer performativity: Chi Ta-wei's writing and practice (1995-2000)]. There are also a number of Taiwanese magazine and newspaper articles on Chi's writings, including most helpfully 林建光 Lin Jianguang's 主導文化與洪凌、紀大偉的科幻小說 (*Zhudao wenhua yu Hong Ling, Chi Ta-wei de kehuan xiaoshuo*) [Dominant culture and Hong Ling and Chi Ta-wei's science fiction novels], and 張志維 Zhang Zhiwei's 從假聲借題到假身借體：紀大偉的酷兒科幻故事 (*Cong jia sheng jie ti dao jia shen jie ti: Chi Ta-wei de ku'er kehuan gushi*) [From "borrowing sounds for loan words" to "borrowing a frame for false bodies": Chi Ta-wei's queer science fiction stories]. The works cited here tend in the main to discuss *Membranes*, since it is a *xiaoshuo* or novella, but have little or nothing to say about the other stories that were later published with it in the story collection of the same name. The authors display an acute sensitivity to issues of Taiwanese culture, politics, and

geography, situating Chi's work firmly within the framework of contemporary concerns in Taiwanese society during the early 1990s.

A similar concern for issues of relevance to 1990s and contemporary Taiwanese society is also to be found in the Western translations currently available of Chi's works, all of them short stories. Australian translator Fran Martin has translated Chi's 香皂 *xiangzao* as "The Scent of HIV" and 因為我壯 *yin wei wo zhuang* as "I'm Not Stupid," as well as the story 一個陌生人的身分證明 *Yige mosheng ren de shenfen zhengming* as "A Stranger's ID." American translator Susan Wilf has translated the story 臍 *ji* as "Umbilicus." All of these stories deal with queer issues in 1990s and 2000s Taiwan, particularly homophobia, HIV, and the nature of queer sexual and loving relationships. There is also a Swedish translation of the story 牙齒 *yachi* by Anna Gustafsson Chen, published as "Tänder," which I have not seen and am not qualified to read as I know no Swedish.

I am not currently aware of any major mainland Chinese writings on Chi Ta-wei's fiction. However, a simplified character edition of *Membranes* was published by 華藝出版社 *Huayi chuban she* in 2003; and an expurgated simplified character edition of *Membranes*, containing the novella and four of the stories translated below (the exception being *11 Songs for Percussion*), was published by 人民教育出版社 *Renmin jiaoyu chuban she* and 重慶出版社 *Chongqing chuban she* in 2012.

A complete translation of the science fiction stories *Membranes* and *Queer Sexualities* has been made into Japanese, along with a translation of the short stories 早餐 "Breakfast" and 儀式 "Ceremony." The translations were made by Noriko Shirozu and edited by Huang Yingche and Chie Tarumi. Their introduction also focuses heavily on issues of context for Chi's queer fiction, both the stories set in contemporary Taiwan and those set in the distant future.

To my knowledge, my own translations presented here are the first translations of these works into any Western language.

1.3.2 Section Summary

The available literature on Chi's science fiction stories other than *Membranes* remains sparse in all languages, although Chi's science fiction works remain better represented in the scholarly literature of Taiwan and in Japanese translation than in the West. Western scholarship and translations have, by contrast, focused largely on Chi's short fiction dealing with contemporary Taiwan and explicitly queer issues such as homophobia, AIDS, and the marginalization of queer individuals in 1990s Taiwanese society. A fuller picture of Chi's works and the issues they treat of remains

to be drawn by both academics and translators, and it is hoped that the present translations may represent a small contribution to this process.

Chapter 2: A Brief Chronological Discussion of Taiwanese *Tongzhi* Literature

2.1 Introduction

Chi Ta-wei is a member of Taiwan's 同志 *tongzhi* community, a term which encompasses the meanings of the English acronym LGBT (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender)¹, and his writings, most of them from the mid-1990s, are generally classed as *tongzhi* literature, a literary movement by and about 同志 that was especially prominent in Taiwan in the 1990s in which Chi wrote. All of the works translated below are examples of *tongzhi* literature; and while I believe that no prior knowledge of the genre is strictly necessary in order to appreciate Chi's works, it can be helpful to consider them in context. Chi himself, in his *Brief History of Taiwan's Tongzhi Literature* just cited, traces the evolution of the genre and divides it into three broad chronological periods: 啟蒙期 *Qimeng qi*, or "Enlightenment," from the 1960s to the lifting of martial law in 1987; 發展期 *Fazhan qi*, or "Development," from the lifting of martial law to the end of the 1990s; and 沉澱期 *Chendian qi*, or "Settling Down," from the beginning of the 2000s to the present². Chi writings all belong squarely in the period of "Development," yet they elaborate on many of the themes and issues raised during the period of "Enlightenment"; and, in their turn, they continued to provide inspiration to many of the *tongzhi* writers and readers of the period of "Settling Down." The following rough chronological discussion of writers, works, and themes is largely adapted from Chi's own account in his *Brief History*, to which interested readers looking for more information are encouraged to turn.

¹ See Chi's 正面與背景：台灣同志文學簡史 *Zhengmian yu beijing: Taiwan tongzhi wenxue jianshi* (*Front and Background: A Brief History of Taiwan's Tongzhi Literature*), pp. 11-12).

² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

2.2 1960s

Although *tongzhi* literature's beginnings are usually held to be found in the works of 白先勇 Pai Hsien-yung, such as 1971's 臺北人 *Taibei ren* (*Taipei People*) and 1974's 紐約客 *Niuyue ke* (*A Visitor in New York*), Chi Ta-wei identifies a number of literary works from the 1960s that also deal with *tongzhi* themes. The earliest among these is 姜貴 Jiang Gui's 重陽 *Zhong yang* (*Rival Suns*), published in April 1961. The novel is generally viewed (correctly) as part of the anti-Communist 反共 *fan gong* literary movement prevalent in the 1960s, but Chi Ta-wei notes that it also raises the theme of male homosexual love. Another author whose works preceded those of Pai Hsien-yung was 林懷民 Lin Huaimin, whose novels, 變形虹 *Bianxing hong* (*Metamorphic Rainbow*) and 蟬 *Chan* (*Cicada*), published in 1968 and 1969, respectively, also feature gay male characters. In addition to Jiang, Lin, and Pai, Chi Ta-wei also includes 郭良蕙 Guo Lianghui's novella 青草青青 *Qingcao qingqing*, (*Fresh is the Green Grass*) published in 1963, some of whose characters might be said to have homosexual leanings. An important consideration when discussing 1960s *tongzhi* literature is that it is not quite as overt as the later works that were to follow in the 1970s and 1980s, although it certainly lays some of the groundwork for what was to come later.

2.3 1970s

Pai Hsien-yung's *Taibei ren* introduced Taiwanese audiences to a motley panoply of characters, some of whom were overtly homosexual, and both Pai and other authors were to continue introducing their audiences to openly gay characters in their works. In a work entitled 1972, published in his collection 年輪 *Nian lun* (*The Turning of the Years*), 楊牧 Yang Mu expresses his surprise and pleasure at discovering that some people find homosexual attraction, such as he felt for some schoolmates, to be perfectly natural. Another author whose works dealt with homosexual feelings is 李昂 Li Ang, whose short stories 回顧 *Huigu* (*Remembrance*), 莫春, *Mo chun* (*No Sex*), and 禁色的愛 *Jin se de ai* (*Love without Sex*), written between 1975 and 1977, deal with issues of homosexuality from a feminist and lesbian perspective. Another important author writing around this same time period is 光泰 Guang Tai, whose 1976 work, 逃避婚姻的人, *Taobi hunyin de ren*, (*The Man Who Fled From Marriage*), is singled out by Chi as being one of the few works published prior to the 1990s to deal explicitly with male homosexual desires. In the same year, Pai Hsien-yung's work, 寂寞的十七歲 *Jimo de shiqi sui* (*Lonely Seventeen*), included the short stories 月夢

Yue meng (*Moon Dream*), 青春 *Qingchun* (*Youth*), and the eponymous *Lonely Seventeen*, all of which feature overtly homosexual male characters. In 1977, 朱天心 Chu T'ien-hsin published her novella, 擊壤歌：北一三年紀, *Jirang ge: Beiyi San Nianji* (*The Song of Clog Throwing: My Three Years at Taipei First Girls' School*), which features stories of young women at a girls' school that have often been interpreted as having homosexual feelings for one another. Another work published in the same year, 蕭麗紅 Xiao Lihong's 桂花巷 *Guihua xiang* (*Osmanthus Lane*), deals with the relationships among women living in a country manor where men are forbidden to go. Both works are important for Chi because they describe what he terms 情境式同性戀 *qingjing shi tong xing lian*, or "situational homosexuals," people who feel a natural attraction for members of their own sex based on the close proximity in which they live and work (at the girls' school or in the country manor, for example). Another influential work from the late 1970s, 1978's 圓之外 *Yuan zhi wai* (*More Than A Girl*), by 玄小佛 Xuan Xiaofu, emphasized the concept of 湯包 *tangbao*, a transliteration of the word "tomboy" that, with slightly different connotations, was to be elaborated into the concept of the "T" or "butch" lesbian. (Incidentally, Chi's work, *Membranes*, which features only female human characters and is translated below, is set in "T City.") The idea of a *tangbao*, and the term itself, can also be found in Guo Lianghui's work 兩種以外 *Liang zhong yiwai* (*Beyond the Two Sexes*), also called 第三性 *Di San Xing* (*The Third Sex*), which identifies the "Tom Boy" (T.B.) as "a girl that acts like a boy." The abovementioned novels and novellas all tend to "idealize youth," 崇春 *chong chun*, as Chi notes, a trend also found in the works of another important author from the 1970s, 宋澤萊 Song Zemai, whose 1979 work, 紅樓舊事 *Honglou jiushi* (*Reminiscences of the Red Building*) deals at once with the thorny philosophical problems and complex sexual desires of a college student at what is probably (on the basis of clues provided in the story) National Taiwan Normal University. The work is notable for its focus (not an exclusive one) on the "Boy Love" between the protagonist and his friend, 李喬 Li Qiao. The preoccupation of the writers of the 1970s with questions of homosexuality, crossing gender boundaries, and the idealization of youth were major themes that emerged during the 1970s and continued to be explored by *tongzhi* writers in the 1980s.

2.4 1980s

The major Taiwanese *tongzhi* literary work from the 1980s is almost certainly Pai Hsien-yung's 孽子 *Niezi* (*Crystal Boys*), published in March of 1983, which relates the adventures of several young gay men and describes their activities such as cruising in Taipei's New Park (now 2-28 Memorial Park). Nevertheless, Chi Ta-wei

finds a number of other influential pieces of *tongzhi* fiction written during the decade. The first of these is 顧肇森 Gu Zhaosen's 張偉 *Zhang Wei* (*Zhang Wei*), published in 1984, which relates the story of an ordinary, studious young gay man who is extremely conscientious and faithful in his sexual relationships. Gu also wrote another *tongzhi*-themed novella entitled 太陽的陰影 *Taiyang de Yinying* (*Shadow of the Sun*), published at the end of the decade in 1990, in which the narrator grapples with his elder brother's homosexual relationships, their father's rejection of the brother's homosexuality, and even the devastations of AIDS. The novella also deals with the issues of racism, homophobia, and fear of AIDS that continued to be of importance to the later *tongzhi* writers of the 1990s. Another author, 西沙 Xi Sha, wrote in a more popular style, and Chi notes that his 1988 novella 錯愛 *Cuo ai* (*Misplaced Love*), helped bring the issues of homosexuality further into the public eye by making them part of the "public history" of Taiwanese literature and society. Even more influential than Xi, however, were the life and writings of 席德進 Xi Dejin (1921-1983), who could be considered the first famous Taiwanese who was self-avowedly gay. His 席德進書簡---致莊佳村 *Xi Dejin shujian—zhi Zhuang Jiacun* (*Selected Correspondence of Xi Dejin—to Zhuang Jiacun*), collected and published posthumously in 1982, the seventy-two letters reveal the life and thoughts of a gay painter in vivid detail. Yet not all of the writers whose works treated of homosexual themes during the 1980s approved of what they saw as the gay and lesbian culture of the times. 王禎和 Wang Chen-ho, in his 1982 work, 美人圖 *Meiren tu* (*Paintings of Beauties*) and his 1984 work, 玫瑰玫瑰我愛你 *Meigui meigui wo ai ni* (*My Rose, My Rose, I Love You*), wrote of the flamboyant behavior and sexual permissiveness of Taiwan's homosexuals as being inherently shameful and symptomatic of a Taiwanese people who, under the "New Colonialism" of the United States and Japan, lacked proper social inhibitions to rein in their behavior. Nevertheless, Chi is careful to draw a distinction between Wang himself, who presents homosexuality as being a decadent kind of play, with some of the critical appraisals of his books, which present homosexuals as suffering from illness. Still, for the public at large and certainly for the gay and lesbian communities themselves, it was the more positive vision offered in Pai Hsien-yung's *Crystal Boys* that remained predominant. In addition to novels, poets such as 陳克華 Chen Kehua and dramatists such as 田启元 Tian Qiyuan also wrote works in the 1980s in other genres that deal with homosexual themes. Still another important writer who in some ways followed the lead set earlier by Guang Tai (who himself continued to produce gay-themed works during this period) was 劉春城 Liu Chuncheng, whose 1987 novel, 不結仔 *Bu jiezai* (*Men Who Won't Marry*), deals with male characters who find companionship with each other but do not settle down into stable relationships, leaving the question of their homosexuality open to the reader's imagination. Finally,

the novels of 馬森 Ma Sen, such as 1984's 夜遊 *Ye you (Night Games)* and 海鷗 *Haiou (The Seagulls)* feature bisexual characters and prominent descriptions of male homosexual desires. Taken together, the *tongzhi* writings of the 1980s expanded upon the themes and characterizations presented in writings of the previous decade, giving them greater nuance, describing them more vividly, and situating them socially in ways that continued to advance the genre as a whole. At the same time, many of the pressing issues of AIDS and homophobia were raised in the literature in provocative ways, doing much to make both the general public and the *tongzhi* readership more aware of the deeply human problems involved. *Tongzhi* literature was by now well established, ready for a new decade and a new generation of writers to give it a voice.

2.5 1990s

The 1990s witnessed a veritable explosion of *tongzhi* literature from a wide variety of authors and a deep social concern on the part of *tongzhi* groups to make their voices heard, their grievances known, and their causes a more acceptable part of public discourse. Some of the writers, like the sisters 朱天文 Chu T'ien-wen and 朱天心 Chu T'ien-hsin, were older and had been known for quite some time; others, like 紀大偉 Chi Ta-wei himself, 邱妙津 Qiu Miaojin, and 洪凌 Hong Ling, were younger, fresh voices just then bursting onto the literary scene. All of them made homosexuality central to their writings: their characters were more likely to be unequivocally gay or lesbian and their writings to deal explicitly with themes of interest to the *tongzhi* communities in Taiwan. The lifting of martial law in 1987 also brought an increase in individual liberties, and the authors of this period come across as a number of very distinct, individual voices dealing with issues of moment both to them personally and to their readerships. Their output was also of high literary quality, and many of the most prominent *tongzhi* writers won prestigious literary prizes for their work during the decade. (Chi himself won the *United Daily* Novella Prize in 1995 for *Membranes*, translated below.) Another important literary development of the 1990s in which Chi directly participated was the anthologizing of *tongzhi* literature for an eager popular readership (see Chi's 酷兒狂歡節：台灣當代 QUEER 文學讀本 *Ku'er kuanghuanjie: Taiwan dangdai queer wenxue duben [Queer Carnival: A Reader of Contemporary Taiwanese Queer Literature]*, and 酷兒啟示錄：台灣當代 QUEER 論述讀本 *Ku'er qishi lu: Taiwan dangdai queer lunshu duben [Queer Archipelago: A Reader of Contemporary Queer Discourses in Taiwan]*, both published in 1997). Important works from the 1990s include Chu T'ien-wen's 肉身菩薩 *Roushen Pusa (Bodhisattva Incarnate, 1990)*, a short story often considered a forerunner of her even

more influential 1994 novella 荒人手記 *Huangren shouji* (*Notes of a Desolate Man*) and 曹麗娟 Cao Lijuan's 1991 童女之舞 *Tongnü zhi wu* (*The Maidens' Dance*), all of which deal with lesbian themes in the context of an all-girls' school and so continue the idealization of youth earlier identified by Chi in the works of Pai Hsien-yung, as well as the increasingly more overt description of lesbian themes. Also notable were 林裕翼 Lin Yuyi's short story, 粉紅色羊蹄甲樹上的少年 *Fenhong se yangtijia shu shang de shaonian* (*The Boy in the Pink Orchid Tree*), published in the 1992 collection 我愛張愛玲 *Wo ai Zhang Ailing* (*I Love Zhang Ailing*). The story is a coming-of-age tale that describes a young high school boy's shock at discovering his favorite male classmate and favorite male teacher involved in a love affair on the very night that he himself was to go with his classmates to lose their innocence by visiting a strip club. The work further expands on the theme of the idealization of youth while exploring the loss of innocence that sexual experiences and desires bring to young people's lives. Lin's story 白雪公主 *Bai xue gongzhu* (*Snow White*), from the same collection, on the other hand, discusses the frustration of a lesbian who can never publicly be seen with or express her affections for the woman she loves. The issue of "the closet" and of how openly a person might come out of it was brought into sharp relief by another author of the 1990s, 許佑生 Hsu Yoshen, whose public marriage to his gay partner in 1996 sparked controversy and brought greater attention to both the hurdles faced and the progress made by the *tongzhi* movement. This was an especially tumultuous time for *tongzhi* authors: only one year earlier, Chi himself came to prominence for his prize-winning *Membranes*, while the lesbian author Qiu Miaojin committed suicide in Paris in the same year. Qiu's works are especially important for an understanding of lesbian culture in 1990s Taiwan: stories such as 柏拉圖之髮 *Bolatu zhi fa* (*Platonic Hair*), and even more importantly, 鱷魚手記 *Eyu shouji* (*A Crocodile's Notebook*), published in 1994, went a long way toward shaping and defining the concepts of 拉子 *lazi* (for "lesbian") and "T" (a term roughly equivalent to the English "butch"). 紀大偉 Chi Ta-wei, for his part, is notable for his use of science fiction in 膜 *Mo* (*Membranes*) and in his earlier work 感官世界 *Gangguan shijie* (*Queer Sexualities*); a similar concern with the fantastic or unspoken possibilities of the future can be seen in the more fantasy-themed works of the writer 洪凌 Hong Ling, such as her 異端吸血鬼列傳 *Yiduan xixiegui liezhuan* (*Heterodox Vampire Chronicles*) which were published around the same time as *Membranes* and *Queer Sexualities*. The writer 陳雪 Chen Xue also dealt with fantastic themes in such works as her 惡女書 *E nü shu* (*Book of Wicked Women*, published 1995), which includes stories such as 尋找天使遺失的翅膀 *Xunzhao tianshi yishi de chibang* (*Searching for the Lost Wings of the Angel*), in which a young woman becomes involved in a lesbian relationship first with her mother and then with her

mother's avatar. Authors such as Chi, Hong Ling, and Chen Xue belong to a younger generation of *tongzhi* authors who reacted to the prevailing social, cultural, global, commercial, and sexual climates of their time to produce what some of them (notably Chi and Hong Ling) called 酷兒 *ku'er* literature, so named from a distinctly Taiwanese appropriation of the English term "queer." Because of its relative complexity, and because it is treated more fully in the section devoted to exploring the use of queer themes below, we can only mention it in passing in this discussion. We may note, however, that the feelings of sexual freedoms and openness and reaction to societal pressures, among others, were themes that continued to play out in the works of more mainstream *tongzhi* authors of the time. One such author is 吳繼文 Wu Jiwen, whose 1998 novel, 天河撩亂 *Tianhe liaoluan* (*Chaos in the Heavens*), depicts a homosexual character who has sex with others for money and personal gratification. In spite of his lack of sexual inhibition, however, he is reticent when confronted about his activities by his friends, insisting that "It was nothing, just having a good time, that's all" (沒什麼，就是玩玩 *mei sheme, jiu shi wanwan*). Other important *tongzhi* authors writing near the end of the decade include 林俊穎 Lin Chun Ying, notable for her works including 1997's 焚燒創世紀 *Fenshao chuangshi ji* (*Record of the Kalpa-beginning Fire*), which describes the adventures of a group of middle-aged gay men; 杜修蘭 Du Xiulan, whose 1996 novel 逆女 *Ni nü* (*Rebel Woman*) recounts the experiences of a lesbian protagonist; and 履彊 Lü Jiang, whose 1999 少年軍人記事 *Shaonian junren jishi* (*Record of a Military Cadet*) explores homosexuality from the perspective of an insider in Taiwan's all-male military.

2.6 2000s

Following the 1990s and the popularization of the Internet, Taiwan's *tongzhi* literary movement continued to develop both there, where texts were more open to immediate appraisal and change, and in the more traditional medium of print. Chi names a handful of prominent authors working in the first decade of the millennium, including 郭強生 Guo Qiangsheng, 徐譽誠 Xu Yucheng, 徐嘉澤 Xu Jiaze, 張亦綸 Zhang Yixuan, and 馬華 Ma Hua. Most of these authors were novelists who continued to explore the themes of sexuality, globalism, visibility, recognition, and the commercialization of society brought to the fore during the 1990s, particularly by *ku'er* authors such as Chi himself. Although a closer examination of their works is presently premature (and also outside the scope of the present study), we can at least say that they "settled down," however roughly, into the cultural and literary world bequeathed to them by their predecessors of the previous decades, both elaborating on prior themes and raising their own unique voices and concerns, continuing the literary

dialogue and tradition of *tongzhi* literature that traces its roots as far back as the 1960s.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The brief discussion of *tongzhi* authors given above traces the genre of *tongzhi* literature from its hesitant beginnings through to its remarkable development in the late 1980s and 1990s following the lifting of martial law through to the present. We see authors coming to grips with their homosexuality in a variety of ways, both recounting their personal experiences and creating fictional worlds in which similar experiences are possible for both gay and lesbian protagonists. The authors became increasingly more overt in their descriptions both of sexuality and in the prominence that they gave to their homosexual characters, reflecting an increasing public awareness of the issue of homosexuality and the considerable plurality of voices that made up the *tongzhi* movement. The greater freedom of expression made possible by the lifting of martial law in 1987 allowed writers such as Chi to experiment in other genres such as fantasy and science fiction, suggesting both ideal worlds in which *tongzhi* could live and the dystopian consequences of repressing or marginalizing them. Chi's *Membranes* and the short story, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, translated below are excellent examples of this. Still other stories, such as Chi's 親密關係 *Qinmi Guanxi* (*Nuit et brouillard*), reflect the struggles and preoccupations of the *tongzhi* community within the context of the modern Taiwanese society in which the authors wrote. This unique and not always wholly discrete mix of literary styles enabled Chi and other *tongzhi* authors to express themselves with considerable daring and originality, and to write fiction that still resonates with readers today, decades after it was first written. It is this originality, immediacy, and deep-seated concern of the *tongzhi* literary movement both for the *tongzhi* themselves and for Taiwanese society at large that continues to keep their stories fresh, modern, and compelling, even as the times and historical conditions that produce it continue to change and transform to meet the needs of new generations of readers and writers.

Chapter 3: Discussion of *Tongzhi*, *Ku'er*, and Queer Themes in the Works Translated

3.1 Introduction

Chi Ta-Wei's identity as a member of Taiwan's 同志 *tongzhi* and *ku'er* 酷兒 communities deeply informs much of his work and provides important context for it. Chi, along with Hong Ling, was one of a small handful of writers in the 1990s who self-consciously identified as a *ku'er* author, and much of the work translated here exemplifies the spirit he later summed up as: "*Tongzhi* work within societal norms, while *ku'er* challenge them."³ While Chi is careful to qualify his formulation by noting that *tongzhi* and *ku'er* are not necessarily opposing pairs, particularly in twenty-first century writings,⁴ the above quotation reveals the importance in Chi's writing of illuminating some of the ways in which *tongzhi* / *ku'er* interact with, are influenced by, and challenge the societies in which they live. Yet just as it would be a mistake to assume that *tongzhi* and *ku'er* are necessarily opposing pairs, it would be far too simple to reduce the concerns of these communities merely to "fitting in" or "standing out" against the backdrop of "mainstream" society.

The use of *tongzhi* as a term for lesbians and gays in Taiwan has its origins in the 1992 Golden Horse Film Festival, where it was used as part of the translation for the "New Queer Cinema" section.⁵ It gradually came to replace the more pathological 同性戀 *tongxing lian* in both LGBT and public discourse about homosexuality in Taiwan. The word *ku'er* originally stood as a transliteration / translation of the word "queer" and also arrived in Taiwan in the mid 1990s⁶; although, as Chi Ta-wei has noted, the term does not carry the same range of negative and positive connotations that it has

³ 同志順服社會，酷兒挑戰社會。 *Tongzhi shunfu shehui, ku'er tiaozhan shehui* (Zhengmian yu beijing, p. 15).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16

⁵ Martin, *Angelwings*, p. 9.

⁶ According to Fran Martin, the term was first used in Taiwan in an issue of the magazine *Isle Margin* in 1994, "just two years after the local appropriation of *tongzhi*" (*Angelwings*, p. 17).

in English.⁷ Chi also notes, however, that the term *tongzhi* had become “too elegant”⁸ by the 1990s for some members of Taiwan’s *tongzhi* community, who began using the edgier term *ku’er*, literally, “cool children” to refer to themselves. The term’s choice of ideographs made its meaning less readily apparent than *tongzhi*, whose characters mean “same ambition,” (the word is used in Communist / Nationalist political rhetoric to mean “comrade”) and so more open to self-interpretation by the members of Taiwan’s LGBT community who imported / created it. While *tongzhi* helped bring the lives and plight of homosexuals in Taiwan into the public eye after the lifting of martial law in 1987, *ku’er* in many ways allowed those members of that community who felt that society’s pressures to conform were too great or who felt that what was understood by *tongzhi* no longer adequately defined them as individuals to shape an identity for themselves that could both be based in *tongzhi* realizations of sexuality and identity and react to them. The two terms therefore played a role both in gaining acceptance for and spurring the growth and creativity of Taiwan’s LGBT community in the 1990s, enabling both the physical communities these individuals inhabited and the “imagined communities”⁹ across the island through which they shared ideas and collectively re-imagined their identities to exercise an important formative influence on the young LGBT men and women who came of age in the 1990s.

For these men and women, of whom Chi Ta-wei is a prominent example, the 1990s were a time of daring imagination and flourishing creative expression in which young LGBT individuals at once reacted against their native communities and formed new communities within them. Talented young authors such as Chi spearheaded the cultural foundations of this creative period, writing fiction that either overtly or subtly dealt with LGBT themes that was received with enthusiastic acclaim both by members of the general public and members of the LGBT communities themselves. As Fran Martin has noted, such was the explosion of creativity in this period that “it seemed at times that not a year went by without at least one prize being awarded to a *tongzhi*-themed short story, novella, or novel”¹⁰; while Chi Ta-wei notes that by the end of the decade, judges of literary competitions were voicing their exasperation with the constant stream of *tongzhi*-themed stories reaching their desks.¹¹ From these observations it can be seen that the *tongzhi* community in Taiwan were making their voices heard, their longings felt, and their sense of their unique identity apparent in ways that would have been unthinkable under the repressive cultural mores that

⁷ See the introduction to Chi’s *Queer Carnival* for a fuller discussion of the issues surrounding the use of *ku’er* as a translation for “queer.”

⁸ 過於雅順 *Guo yu yashun*, in *Zhengmian yu beijing*, p. 14.

⁹ Martin, *Angelwings*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹ See *Zhengmin yu beijing*, pp. 147-8.

prevailed under martial law in Taiwan only a decade earlier. This is not to say that Taiwan did not have literature dealing with *tongzhi* themes in earlier decades; Chi himself identifies Taiwanese literature produced as far back as the 1960s that deals with themes that would become important for Taiwan's *tongzhi* community in the following decades.¹² But the 1990s were unparalleled for the profusion of *tongzhi* authors and the variety of *tongzhi* themes addressed in the literature of the period.

The 1990s were also a decade of increasing globalization, commercialization, urbanization, and modernization in Taiwan. At the same time, conservative social values continued to play a role in marginalizing and harassing those who transgressed social, political, or cultural norms. These twin pressures combined to impel many *tongzhi* authors, such as Chi, to study abroad, and to bring back with them different cultural, political, and theoretical understandings of sexuality and the place of *tongzhi* in society. *Tongzhi* and *ku'er* fiction of the 1990s is thus a response to and a reaction against the tide of cultural, political, social, sexual, and other changes that washed over Taiwan after the lifting of martial law in 1987. Many of Chi's works (including those not translated here) bear unmistakable traces of the impact that the resulting melting pot of values had on Taiwanese culture and literature of this period.

As a result of these disparate influences, *tongzhi* and *ku'er* literature of the 1990s bears a number of unique characteristics that set it apart from earlier literature dealing with *tongzhi* themes. As Fran Martin has noted, Chi Ta-wei himself identified three important characteristics that set *ku'er* literature such as his own works apart: 1) "it highlights the mutation and performance of identity both through its preponderance of metamorphosing characters such as...androids (in Chi-Ta-wei's *The Membranes*); and also through its playful narrative strategies that often problematize or obscure the identity of the narrator or protagonist..." 2) "it emphasizes erotic fluidity and multiplicity rather than suggesting any clearly defined model of sexual identity"; 3) "[it] is marked by its highly committed political critique of existing forms of sexual and gendered power in present-day Taiwan."¹³ To these three characteristics Chi Ta-wei adds a further three preoccupations of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* literature: 家 *jia* (family or home), 内心世界 *neixin shijie* (the inner world of the heart / mind), and 烏托邦 *wutuo bang* ("utopia").¹⁴ Within these, Chi also cites concerns of representation, recognition, and contextuality as being of importance to *tongzhi* and *ku'er* authors.¹⁵ One further important consideration is noted by Fran Martin, who observes that "'to queer' [may be used as] a transitive verb, which may take a range of object....[this

¹² See *Zhengmian yu Beijing* for a fuller discussion of these works.

¹³ The preceding three quotations are taken from *Angelwings*, p. 19.

¹⁴ See *Zhengmian yu Beijing*, pp. 15-18.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, pp 12, 19, and 143.

sense of 'queer'] troubles by re-inflecting the expected, defining itself by its movements across categories; across places."¹⁶ With these concerns as background, then, we can begin to examine the ways in which Chi Ta-wei addresses and makes use of them in the works translated here in order to highlight different aspects of the *tongzhi* / *ku'er* experience in 1990s Taiwan.

3.2 Science Fiction and Fantasy in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

Many of Chi's early works, including *Membranes* and *The War Is Over*, are set in the far future and deal explicitly with science fiction themes and settings. Others, such as *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, incorporate elements of Kafkaesque fantasy. Still others, such as *Nuit et brouillard*, are more immediately concerned with contemporary Taiwanese society, but even these can be shown to have elements and themes in common with Chi's more explicitly science fiction- and fantasy-themed works. The present section briefly examines two important aspects of science fiction and fantasy that have been identified as important for understanding Chi's queer fiction: 1) Androids and cyborgs and the performativity of identity; and 2) Utopias. By examining these two themes as they play out in the five works translated here, we can see how Chi uses the supra-real and supernatural elements in his stories to depict the stark reality of his queer characters and to ask probing questions about the nature of their identity, humanity, and even the veracity and validity of their experiences themselves.

3.2.1 Androids, Cyborgs, and the Performativity of Identity in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

As Chi notes in the preface to the 2012 edition of *Membranes*, "Almost everyone is an android, bearing manmade parts either inside or outside their bodies";¹⁷ he further comments, "Android-like lives can be seen everywhere, flashing into view one moment and vanishing the next."¹⁸ Human beings are so dependent upon and attached to machines that they cannot function without them: they have become as vital and as intimately connected to our bodies as our organs, whether they are as simple as a wristwatch or as complex as a prosthetic limb. A prominent theme in Chi Ta-wei's fiction, and particularly in science fiction works such as *Membranes*, is how human beings transform themselves into machines and how, on the other hand,

¹⁶ See Martin's introduction to Chi's *Fetish: Stories*, p. vi.

¹⁷ *Prefatory Material*, p. i

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

machines become more and more human. Identity for these human machines (or humanoids) is thus partly biological, partly technological, and, even more importantly, highly performative as human beings fall into routines established by machines or, alternatively, as machines learn new routines and ways of living informed by human behavior. The conflict and intersection between humans becoming mechanized and machines being humanized is central to Chi's works, and allows the author to pose intriguing questions about where the boundaries of humanity lie, how technology can dehumanize its users, and how individuals can be human even if they do not fit societal (or even biological) definitions of the term. Just as Chi notes that android-like lives are everywhere on display, it is also true in his works that very human characters take the stage and act out their lives in ways both human and mechanical. The following paragraphs briefly explore the themes of androids and performative identity in the works translated here.

Androids in *Membranes*

The society of New Taiwan depicted in *Membranes* is in many ways defined by the presence of humanoid machines. Near the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, Momo, is forced by a work-related injury to replace one of her fingers with a robotic appendage. This cybernetic implant compromises her humanity and even threatens to ruin her career, but the surgery ultimately turns out to be routine and leaves Momo just as capable of doing her job as she was before. She herself looks upon the surgery with loathing, viewing it as a concession made only under duress. And yet the routine nature of the surgery and the ease with which it is carried out serve to underscore how important machines have become to humanity and also how easily the line between the human and the machine can be blurred. We later learn that Momo does all of her shopping via the Internet, gets her news online instead of from a newspaper, and spends most of her time indoors either "reading" discbooks or else secretly viewing the computer-encoded information she gets from the skin cream she applies to every client who comes to her skin-care clinic. She catches fleeting glimpses of war androids called MMs from beneath the protective membrane separating her undersea clinic from the world above; while her dreams are haunted by the sounds and images of machines on the desolate surface beyond the sea, hinting that all is not quite right with Momo's life beneath the waves. We eventually meet two androids named "Andy," one made in the image of Momo, the other made in the image of a well-known gardener. Through their interactions with Momo, we as readers are led to wonder where the lines separating the lives, bodies, and feelings of these metallic beings from human beings end and where true humanity begins. We

ultimately are led to believe that Momo and the gardener have become cyborgs through having their brains transplanted into host android bodies, sacrificing the “Andys” in the process. But, Chi asks us, is it the androids who lose their lives in joining with their human hosts, or humans who give up their humanity to become machines? Where does one mechanical life end and another begin? And can we even trust our senses to give us an unmediated view of the world? Ultimately *Membranes* strips even this confidence away by revealing that Momo is only a brain in a faceless android, her memories fabricated by her mother and by the corporation that uses her brain to steal military secrets from damaged MMs in the Asia-Pacific. Momo is not a human being and depends on machines for her very life; yet these machines are also carefully calibrated to ensure that she never becomes fully aware of the deception and instead experiences her life as that of a talented young woman with a distant, antagonistic relationship to her mother and an enigmatic relationship to her employer. Both mother and employer depend on machines for their work and interact with machines on a daily basis: Momo’s mother is a laptop-carrying executive for a major discbook company, while Momo’s employer is a surface-dwelling supervisor of an MM factory. Both women are fully human; yet both depend upon machines for their survival and occupy vital positions in driving the society that replaces humans with machines and machines with humans. Thus they, too, are a kind of cyborg and have the ambits of their lives circumscribed by machines. Like the Andys they have created, they are both more and less human than Momo, and they ultimately have as little choice in deciding their own fates as she does, as their work binds them to predetermined courses from which they cannot deviate.

Performativity is on display in virtually every character in the novel. Momo’s entire life is one giant script made out of the discs given to her by her mother and her employer, which her brain then “acts out” to create her identity of herself as a young woman and later as a successful aesthetician. Momo’s mother uses the discs she sends to “perform” her role of mother in her daughter’s upbringing, while she fashions a highly performative identity for herself through her work that unites her with the millions of people who read the disc encyclopedias she endorses. Momo’s memories of her mother also bind together the women in Momo’s life in a shared performative discourse of lesbian sexuality, motherly care, and fierce competition. Androids spend their brief lives “performing” the factory-made script created for them before they perform their fated function of becoming organ donors and body donors for their human hosts. And even the reader is placed into a performative role as he or she is forced to imagine Momo first as a young woman, then as a child, then as an android, and finally as a naked human brain, each new reading drawing the reader closer to her in the shared and shifting understanding of her humanity.

Androids in L'Après-midi d'un Faune

Although there are no androids per se in *L'Après-midi*, the two main characters, A Suo and K., are bound together by a series of bizarre mementos of their tragic meeting: a framed sketch, a hammer, a newspaper, and a pocket watch. The pocket watch is described as K.'s "second heart," a living part of him that he can only give to a bosom friend. After A Suo murders K., A Suo becomes the watch's "choice flesh," while A Suo himself becomes "a living part" of the watch. Much as Momo has her finger replaced by a mechanical substitute that bonds with her flesh in *Membranes*, so does K.'s pocket watch become a living, intimate part of A Suo's flesh, regulating his sleep and even becoming a vital part of his waking hours. As in *Membranes*, A Suo's humanity is compromised by the mechanical "organ" he receives: he can no longer function normally or be apart from it even for a moment, and it decisively marks him off from and isolates him from his peers who are not bound to a ticking machine, as he is. Ultimately, A Suo the cyborg realizes that the only way that he can regain his humanity is by destroying the pocket watch; yet when he does so, he becomes something even less human, the cage of a savage and primeval faun. The only testament to A Suo's humanity is his sketch of K., the young man he murdered; and even this remains out of reach, stuck safely inside a picture frame and tucked under A Suo's bed. The juxtaposition of man and machine in *L'Après-midi* is every bit as powerful as it is in *Membranes*: Chi makes us question how human we as readers can be when we are constantly surrounded by and inseparable from even such small things as our watches; and we are forced to confront the unsettling truth that our transformation from humans to cyborgs may be only a brief and transitory mutation on the path toward becoming something even more monstrous. Chi shows us that not even death may be able to provide us with the longed-for return to humanity.

A Suo and K. are joined by their shared passion for art and the performances of their skill which they give for each other. Each young man fashions his identity for the other by combining the isolated country setting with the refined artistic skills they both learned at schools in the city. Their shared birthdays and shared love of the arts ultimately bind them together as two persons in one body whose wild heart aches to give vent to passions larger than both of them. Through their actions the two boys form a common identity that ultimately transcends their own individual notions of self and drives them toward a shared death impelled by the power of their own thwarted artistic and sexual passions.

Androids in The War Is Over

The protagonist of *The War Is Over* is a replicant 人造人 *ren zao ren*, a type of android with a virtual reality system designed to allow it to think and function much like a human being. Although at first the replicant Meimei is bound to serve the culinary and sexual wishes of her¹⁹ human “Better Half,” after she meets another replicant named Lola, her life begins to change. Unlike the androids and cybernetic humans discussed in the previous stories who lose their lives and their selfhood in a sacrificial union of humanity and technology, Meimei in *The War Is Over* essentially spends the story learning to defy the directives of her factory-installed submissiveness to humans and becoming a free individual in her own right. She begins the story with the skills of a menial house servant and a sexual slave, but through her relationship with Lola gradually learns to cook and enjoy the pleasures of eating and experimenting in the kitchen for their own sake. At the same time, she forms a close bond with Lola, whose human “Better Half” has died, and learns to enjoy just being in the company of one of her own kind, whether they are talking on the phone, telling jokes together, or gazing at the stars in wonder at the worlds that lie beyond the space station that is their home. Meimei learns to genuinely care for Lola with a deep affection unclouded by sexual passion, and ultimately takes the momentous step of leaving her human “Better Half” to live with one of her own kind. While Meimei and Lola find an uncertain but real love together, the humans of the story are depicted as lonely, self-absorbed, and totally dependent on machines for their survival. For them, however, the replicants who serve them are nothing more than property, temporary replacements for the real humans who await their return to Earth. The love felt by the humans in *The War Is Over* for their replicants is a jealous, cruel, and lust-filled emotion utterly unlike what Meimei and Lola come to feel for each other. Humans behave no better than beasts or the lowest forms of machines, driven by greed for food and sex; the replicants, by contrast, experience a lasting attachment that literally transcends their basic functionality and elevates them to a higher plane. Chi’s replicants here ask us to consider what it is that makes us truly human, showing us through their humorous attempts to learn to do what only humans are supposedly capable of that whom we love and how we love others are as much learned behavior as a part of our upbringing, and that the most natural thing in the world is to be able to love one’s own kind free of the kinds of domineering and outside interference that so often plague human relationships. This is performativity as a kind of self-realization,

¹⁹ Although the replicants are referred to as 它 *ta* (literally, “it”) throughout the story, they both bear female names. For the sake of avoiding the awkwardness of constantly repeating “it” or “its,” I have chosen to refer to them in the feminine in this paper, although I have been careful to preserve their original gender in the translation.

as the replicants imitate humanity and so ultimately become more than they were ever meant to be through the shared discourse of human behavior that makes them at once more caring and more independent.

Androids in *Nuit et brouillard*

Although *Nuit et brouillard* features no robotic or android characters, it does feature a protagonist who interacts with the outside world through the sealed-off “music box” of the studio where he hosts a weekly call-in radio show. Like the androids discussed above, he is a person marginalized by his station in life, seemingly doomed to find “intimacy” only through the telephone calls that stream into his radio show in the wee hours of the morning. His audience is comprised of “people who are not seen,” people like himself whose very existence is overlooked or questioned by the majority of people who keep more regular hours. When he invites a member of his own kind, a night owl who keeps irregular hours like himself, to be a guest on his radio show, he experiences a revelation as the warmth of human contact arouses in him desires and sentiments of which he was previously unaware. The presence of his guest frees him from the nagging of the endless stream of nonsensical callers who would otherwise pester him, and he becomes free to relax in the now truly “intimate” space of his radio studio with a person who seems totally uninhibited. The intimacy reaches a crescendo when his guest begins, unbidden, to play Chopin on a large piano crammed inside the studio. The guest’s body heaves with emotion, sorrow, and a wild desire for musical catharsis; while the host becomes aware, for the first time, of all of his senses. Yet just as the guest relies on the piano to give vent to his emotions, so the host experiences his intimacy metaphorically through the image of a human-operated machine, feeling that his body has become the piano on which his guest has been playing. The host and guest both lose themselves completely in the music and become one with it, even going so far as to forget (and therefore temporarily escape) the passage of time itself. They have brought the “music box” to life for the first time, and experienced a true and highly performative intimacy that the machine-mediated outside world can neither interrupt nor understand. Here again Chi asks us to reflect on the price we pay for our electronic conveniences, the clocks that arbitrarily divide our days in such disparate ways that entire groups of people are marginalized and pushed into the shadows, and the various media proxies for intimacy that can never compare to the power of the real thing.

Androids in 11 Songs for Percussion

Many of the characters in this series of stories similarly find their lives defined by external objects: swords, flowers, keys, urinals, baseball uniforms, submarines and spacecraft, and even the tongues and sexual organs of other human beings. Although none of the characters in the stories is an android, their deep self-absorption and fixation on some external object to define their existence place them in a class similar to A Suo from *L'Après-midi* or Momo from *Membranes*. The characters themselves experience deeply human desires and sexual feelings of all kinds from the caring to the carnal, and the sharp relief into which each short “song” throws their humanity at once draws us to identify with it and holds us at a distance, reminding us of both our shared humanity and the loneliness of having to share that experience through a mediating “membrane,” even one as thin as the printed page. The author thus encourages us to deepen our humanity by both broadening our own experiences and reflecting on those we already possess, maintaining a balance of the human and the mechanical in our lives that can allow each component to complement the others.

Each of the characters in the 11 songs has a fixed role that is largely determined by the objects that imbue it with performative value: the swordsmen become skilled by vigilantly preparing and training for the opponents who will never come; characters become true comrades and team members by joining with each other in a physical intimacy both on and off the fields of battle and play. Students play out the roles that they learn in books and gain new understandings of themselves and their sexuality in the process. The characters in *11 Songs* show us that we all have a role to perform, and that only in performing it do we truly become the people we understand ourselves to be.

Section Summary

Chi uses the notions of androids / cyborgs and the performative nature of identity to ask questions about who his characters are, what makes them human, where the boundaries of “normality” lie, and what makes an individual’s experiences “authentic” or “real.” In this way Chi asks his readers at once to identify with his characters and also to reflect on them, to see in them something both foreign and familiar, and in so doing to probe themselves at these same points of foreignness and familiarity. The result is a sometimes uncomfortable but very illuminating experience as the readers discover themselves to be just as dependent upon machines for their survival and the maintenance of their identities as Chi’s characters, and find that their own realities are just as fragile and filled with surreal moments.

3.2.2 Utopia in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

“Utopia” from the Greek for “no place,” (Chinese 烏托邦 *wutuo bang*) is one of the more unusual recurrent themes identified by Chi Ta-wei in *tongzhi* and *ku'er* fiction. It suggests the creation of fantastic spaces where possibilities denied by ordinary society, home, and family can be realized, while simultaneously challenging the realities that relegate such places to the realm of nonexistence. The term is also suggestive of dystopia (反烏托邦 *fan wutuo bang*), a place where the positive possibilities of utopia are distorted to negative realities, and also of what we might call an “eutopia,” a good place where the desires, needs, and individuality of persons who are different or marginalized can be positively realized. (For lack of a concrete Chinese term, we might call such places 美托邦 *meituo bang*.) In the works translated here, Chi uses the concepts of utopia and dystopia to criticize the realities he sees facing 1990s Taiwan, while simultaneously suggesting eutopias in which the latent positive possibilities in utopian or dystopian reality can be given a place to thrive.

Utopia in *Membranes*

The world of *Membranes* is itself a dystopia, a place where ultraviolet rays from the sun have driven people underground and forced them to live beneath the sea. The world in which people live is as insular as a greenhouse, while the world above them is scorched, desolate, and populated by vicious war machines and the factories that maintain them. The world is also utopian in its conspicuous absence of straight male characters: a sexual freedom, particularly for women, exists in stark contrast to the largely patriarchal society of Taiwan in which Chi wrote. Yet there is also an eutopian world, the world of the protagonist, Momo, who believes herself to be living a dizzyingly successful life as a respected esthetician in the largest city in New Taiwan. Her world is populated by culture and glamour, by peace and prosperity, by convenience and comfort. Yet we soon learn that Momo's world is all an illusion, that her memories are all fabricated by her mother and her employer, and that she is in reality nothing more than a human brain being programmed to believe that it is living a successful human life. Momo herself comes at the end of the story to see the diaries of her memories that her mother has created for her, and comes face to face with a cavernous abyss when she tries to search for memories that have not yet been created. This is the utopia of her mind, the place that is no place that exists solely to conceal from Momo the truth that she is not human and that she in fact works to repair the very war androids who continue to devastate the world in which she

actually lives. Chi thus shows us that our memories tend to beautify and glamorize what is often the ugly destruction of our own homes and families, that dystopia lies in the very foundations of our modern, progressive, and democratic societies, and that we risk relegating both ourselves and others whom we refuse to acknowledge and accept to living in utopias, empty spaces that beggar description and leave both the mind and the individual no hope of escape.

Utopia in L'Après-midi d'un Faune

The idyllic world of the countryside offers the promise of a eutopia to the two young boys in the story: a place where they can finally give vent to the creative and artistic passions that their schools in the city forbid them to display. Yet the world quickly turns dystopian when one boy murders the other and flees back to the city, only to discover that his heartbeat is supernaturally linked to the pocket watch given him by his victim. When the murderer in despair finally decides to leave this dystopian world through death, a faun, the utopian creature of Greek myth and animal passion, appears and escapes into the world. Chi's story makes the subtle point that dystopias can often be caused by refusing to realize the utopian passions that lie latent within us all.

Utopia in The War Is Over

The War Is Over presents a utopian society living in a space station far from Earth at which human soldiers can come to rest and be waited on by replicants, androids who satisfy their needs for food and sex. Yet when the war ends and the utopian Age of Aquarius comes to the space station, things begin to fall apart for the replicants living there. The replicants are created specifically for the wartime needs of their human masters and serve as replacements for their families back on Earth. They are relegated to the tasks of providing food and sex to humans and keeping house when the humans go off to war. The replicants must comply with human commands and are forbidden to go out or interact with others without human consent. The peace that is so welcome to the humans threatens them with extinction. They thus live in a dystopian world that is almost the polar opposite of the eutopian life their human masters enjoy when on the space station. One of the replicants, Lola, dreams of a utopian world where replicants govern their own kind and are free to love one another without human interference. Another replicant, Lola's friend Meimei, decides to make this utopia a reality and willfully leaves her human master to go live with one of her own kind. The story shows us the great courage that individuals and communities

must display if they are to make their utopias reality, and also offers hope that it is possible to realize such spaces through the determined action of people working with “their own kind.” Chi thus holds out hope that Taiwan’s *tongzhi* community can create a utopian space for itself where it can thrive outside of the external pressures of society, home, and family.

Utopia in *Nuit et brouillard*

Characters such as the narrator of *Nuit et brouillard* live a lonely, often dystopian existence when they are ignored and even maltreated for refusing to conform to the schedules of modern Taiwanese society. Yet when the narrator invites a guest to his radio show, “Intimacy,” the two of them begin to experience the warmth and kindness possible among members of their own reclusive kind. Although they are only together for two hours for the duration of the radio program, together they turn the radio studio into an utopian space in which they can freely give expression to their feelings and desires. Again, Chi seems to show us that marginalized, and particularly, *tongzhi* individuals create utopias within an essentially dystopian world to give themselves a space to live and breathe as fully realized human beings in spite of the constraints imposed upon them by the outside world.

Utopia in 11 Songs for Percussion

Each of the eleven stories in this collection is itself a kind of utopia, a place where unrealized social, sexual, and political possibilities can come to fruition. Some are dystopian, such as the story of the doomed band of warriors in “The End of the Sword” or the story of the doomed sailors in “The Unsunk Yellow Submarine.” The story “Long Live the Forty-Five Degree Angle,” set in the Nazi Third Reich, is also dystopian. None of the stories is particularly eutopian, while many of the others present utopias whose nature is either obscure or ambiguous (such as “A Sleepless Night with An Abandoned Corpse,” “The Dark Side of the Moon,” and “Frog Organs.”) The stories seem to show us that utopias can be found both within modern Taiwanese society and outside of it, but whether they are eutopian, dystopian, or neutral depends very much on the nature of the individual who finds and creates them. For his readers, each of Chi’s stories in *11 Songs* offers a kind of utopia, an invitation to explore a world full of possibilities rarely seen or realized in modern Taiwanese society.

Section Summary

Once again, the fictional worlds of utopias, eutopias, and dystopias allow the author to explore many of the aspects of queer identity that were often obscured or repressed in the patriarchal 1990s society in which Chi wrote. The future holds out the promise of freedom and liberation to a minority that still frequently suffers from repression, although it is far from perfect, as it, like the present, is made by human beings and is beset by many of the foibles and frailties that trouble all people, regardless of their sexuality. This is a large part of what makes *Membranes*' initially "utopian" society seem quite dystopian by the end of the story: people cannot escape being human, regardless of their sexual orientation or the freedom to love the people they choose to, and they inevitably bring bitter suffering on each other. On the other hand, at times the freedom to be with members of one's own kind can be a kind of light shining in the darkness offering hope to those who are oppressed, as it seems to do in *The War Is Over* and *Nuit et brouillard*. There is nothing to prevent it from being both a blessing and a curse, as it seems to be in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and in many of the *11 Songs for Percussion*; being with like-minded people in places where individuals can act and love as they choose can often bring first feelings of happiness or congeniality and then later cause sorrow for all of the parties involved. Whether the world is utopian, eutopian, or dystopian is very much in the eye of the beholder, and Chi's writings invite us to consider the kinds of worlds and societies we make for ourselves and others, challenging his readers to start making society a better place from within the microcosm of their individual lives.

3.3 Sexuality and A Critique of Gendered Politics in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

Sexuality plays a key role in helping to shape both an individual's identity in general and a *tongzhi* identity in particular, so it is no surprise to find it being touched upon in Chi's works. At times, it appears explicitly, as in many points in *Membranes*, *Intimacy*, and *11 Songs for Percussion*; while at others, as in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, it is only hinted at. Chi's characters are not limited to mere binary categories of gay / straight or sexual / asexual, but experience and give expression to their desires along a more nuanced continuum. For this reason, we can say that one of the major themes under the general heading of "sexuality" that is of great importance to Chi's work is that of "erotic fluidity and multiplicity." At the same time as he is concerned to show his characters as complex beings with a multitude of varying sexual desires, Chi is also keen to critique the dominant patriarchal society in which he wrote that often denied *tongzhi* individuals their sexual rights or else demanded they fit into rigid categories

that could not possibly capture the diversity of their individual and sexual identities. Thus, a “critique of gendered power relations in contemporary Taiwan” underlies many of Chi’s writings, and is the second major subtheme that we will consider here.

3.3.1 Erotic Fluidity and Multiplicity

As a *tongzhi* / *ku’er* author, one of Chi’s concerns is to present a multiplicity of sexual practices, orientations, and identities through which individuals can give expression to their erotic desires. Sexuality is not a binary division between heterosexual and homosexual, but a continuum of different desires and performative acts through which individuals invent and establish themselves sexually. It is also important to remember that even those sexual acts that may appear unusual are not given a moral dimension; that is, sexuality is not amoral but rather *unmoral*, having a place in the lives of individuals without necessarily influencing their moral value(s) based on the choices they make. Sexuality is a freedom, even if it is not always recognized as a right, and we should not be surprised to find consenting adults indulging in it in whatever way best fulfills their erotic needs. The following paragraphs offer a brief discussion of the plurality and fluidity of erotic desires in the works translated here.

Erotic Fluidity and Multiplicity in *Membranes*

Membranes’ Momo lives in New Taiwan, a society in which people indulge themselves in a variety of sexual activities to satisfy their sexual needs. While Momo is hospitalized to treat her for the LOGO bacterium (and while she is still a human being), she has her first sexual experience (which she innocently believes is “eating”) when she playfully bites off the finger of her android companion, Andy, and Andy attempts to bite off her penis (Momo begins the novel as a biological male). Soon after her surgery takes place, Momo allows herself to be fondled by a male android, experiencing a new kind of pleasure and an intimacy all-too-often denied her by her busy mother. Occasionally she further experiences sexual pleasure from turning the showerhead on her newly female genitalia. Momo’s mother is also involved in at least two lesbian relationships which Momo witnesses, one with Momo’s mother’s friend Tomie that forms part of her birth story, and another with the esthetician Draupadi that Momo covertly witnesses by placing a scanner in her mother’s bedroom when she is ten years old. Yet Momo grows colder as she ages, and this childlike innocence and curiosity about sexuality changes when she imagines that she goes to boarding school, where Momo coldly rebuffs the advances of a young American girl in her beautician classes. She later refuses to become sexually close with any of her clients

or other individuals as she focuses on her career as an esthetician. Yet when Draupadi brings Momo a product called M-Skin, Momo becomes privy to all of her clients' physical lives, including their most intimate sexual secrets. She "reads" her clients' data using a scanner and Draupadi's M-Skin and experiences in her own body sado-masochistic relationships, homosexual and heterosexual relationships, and even one highly unusual orgiastic (and orgasmic) experience in which Tomie and two companions merge to form bubbles on the surface of the sea. All of these sexual experiences have a darker side, as they are secretly designed to get Momo to steal military information from her clients, who are war androids. Near the end of the story, Momo's bitter jealousy of her own mother leads her to use the M-Skin to gain access to her mother's diary; this semi-incestuous act of rape almost leads Momo to realize that she is in fact only a brain housed in an android body, and is only stopped by the timely intervention of Momo's supervisor, Draupadi. Sexuality thus represents one of the most vivid and significant ways of gaining information about oneself and the world, but it is also a highly transgressive act that breaches the boundaries between people and between the information contained in their bodies.

Erotic Fluidity and Multiplicity in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*

The story begins with the narrator going to a hot springs and finding his young body admired and his movements mimicked by a graceful young man, a scene with faint homoerotic overtones. When the young man, K., later takes the protagonist, A Suo, to a field, A Suo returns the admiring and imitative favor by drawing a freehand sketch of K. as K. dances Nijinsky's choreography to Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* in a field. The dance itself stars an earthy faun, the lusty Dionysian beast of Greek myth, as he chases after a band of nymphs. By putting A Suo in the role of the spectator, K. makes A Suo a passive recipient of the faun's erotic desires; A Suo's sketch immortalizes the faun's amorous gestures but places the focus squarely back on the dancer. By reciprocally placing each other in the passive positions in an erotic dance, K. and A Suo become involved in a very cerebral relationship that is the intellectual counterpart to their physical meeting at the hot springs. When K. later invites A Suo home for the night, A Suo feels that a young man's hand reaches into his underpants and fondles him before covering him with a blanket, further suggesting that K. has an erotic desire to take A Suo to bed and be with him. When K. invites A Suo to hang the now-framed sketch of him from the day before on the wall of K.'s home, he again moves their still unacknowledged erotic relationship back to the intellectual realm of the sketch. When K. attempts to return to the physical side of the relationship by stroking A Suo's legs as the latter stands on a ladder to hang the

picture, A Suo strikes K. on the head with a hammer, killing him and leaving the hammer stuck fast in his skull. This literally cerebral act of penetration again returns their relationship to the intellectual plane. Soon afterward, it is A Suo who wraps K. in the very blanket that had covered him the night before, in a sense taking K. to bed in his final resting place. This constant interplay of the physical and the intellectual in the homoerotic relationship hinted at between A Suo and K. continues as K.'s pocket watch becomes a "living part" of A Suo, while A Suo becomes the watch's "choice flesh." The two men are literally joined at the breast by the pocket watch, whose inlaid etching of a faun continually taunts A Suo with hints of an even more sensual, earthy relationship. The watch accompanies A Suo both to school and to bed, further emphasizing the erotic and intellectual relationship between him and K. and denying A Suo any intimacy between himself and other people. In a grim twist, when A Suo finally decides to destroy "his second heart" by smashing K.'s pocket watch with the hammer, he too falls dead in much the same way that K. had when the latter had previously been struck with it, and the faun rises exultantly from A Suo's corpse and escapes. The final triumph of the faun and his wild physicality represents a kind of consummation to the erotic relationship that bound the two young men ever more closely in life and ultimately united them in death. The story ends by returning to the sketch, the intellectual symbol of A Suo and K.'s mutual affection for each other, tucked safely under A Suo's bed, hinting that the relationship's initial intellectual and emotional stirrings have also been realized by the reunion of the two men in death. Here Chi reminds us that the erotic can have an intellectual component, while the intellectual can also be erotic, and shows that the lines between these two components of a relationship are often much more fluid than they initially appear.

Erotic Fluidity and Multiplicity in *The War Is Over*

Erotic fluidity is explicit in this story, with the ambiguous gender of its "Better Halves" and the neuter gender of the replicants who serve them. Both heterosexual and homosexual relationships of all kinds are possible for the characters in the story, the only limitations being the domineering power of the Better Halves that condemns the replicants to an unequal partnership, and the factory programming of the replicants, which delimits their intellectual and emotional freedom. Yet even this, Chi suggests, can be overcome through commitment and a willingness to try new things. When the replicants Meimei and Lola discover an attraction for each other, they begin to transcend both the societal and the programming norms that compel them to "love" and obey humans. The attraction to one's own kind is something innate, Chi suggests, whatever their sexual preferences and orientation might be (both replicants, in spite

of their gender, are named for women, giving the story homoerotic overtones). By obeying this innate attraction, we attain a kind of fluidity denied us by rigid social, familial, and emotional programming that dictates what a “normal” relationship should be, and can attain the true happiness of a full, equal, and loving relationship that is not defined by the overweening desires of someone who is, both sexually and socially, an outsider.

Erotic Fluidity in *Nuit et brouillard*

As in *The War Is Over*, the story focuses on the attraction of two individuals to “members of their own kind,” in this case night owls who have no fixed schedule and thus live beyond the pale of the rigidly scheduled lives of ordinary Taiwanese citizens and so are consequently beneath their notice. But “just because [people] are never seen doesn’t mean they don’t exist,” the story tells us, and the same can be said of their erotic desires. When the protagonist finally invites a guest to his radio call-in show, “Intimacy,” he experiences both physical closeness and an erotic attraction defined by all five of his senses. This attraction enlivens him even as it is hidden from the outside world (who, as demonstrated by the radio program’s final call-in, condemn it as perverted out of hand). Being with one of his own kind enables the narrator to experience a kind of synesthetic eroticism that only someone like himself can bring him, a feeling of intimacy in which the senses themselves are fluid and vie with each other for supremacy. This fluidity ultimately leads both the narrator and his guest to bond even more closely by sharing their stories as well as their space, showing that erotic fluidity can be both an end in itself and the path to a stable, caring relationship so often denied by societal, familial and sexual “norms.”

Erotic Fluidity in 11 Songs for Percussion

The disparate stories in this collection each showcase various forms of “forbidden” homoerotic love, both between rivals and comrades, between fellow students and between students and their teachers and coaches, between complete strangers, and even between the living and the dead. Chi provides us with a snapshot of each relationship in the roughly 500 characters that make up each “song,” just enough for us to get a glimpse of the profundity and passion behind each relationship before we move on to the next one. We as readers become voyeurs and spectators, forced to confront and be complicit in each different erotic relationship no matter what our own sexual orientations and feelings may be. We are made not only to see, but to see within a normative framework this vast array of erotic desires, challenging us as

readers to redefine the boundaries of what is a “normal” or “acceptable” erotic desire each time a new one is presented to us.

Section Summary

The erotic fluidity of the characters in Chi’s early works translated here once again highlights the complexity of his characters and the dangers of reducing them into simplified or convenient categories to fit preconceived notions of what sexuality ought to be. The characters thus invite readers to consider their own sexual and individual complexity, and to understand that there is no one “right” or “wrong” way to feel about one’s fellow consenting human beings. Sexuality is a natural part of the human condition, and only when it is revealed and accepted in all of its diversity can all individuals experience the joy and freedom of the sexual act and embrace the responsibility of healthy, loving, committed relationships.

3.3.2 A Political Critique of Sexual and Gendered Power in Contemporary Taiwan

Although Taiwan prides itself (with some justification) on being an open, tolerant, and democratic society, there nevertheless remain serious imbalances of power, particularly in the area of sexual and gender relations. As a Chinese-speaking society, Taiwan has a tendency to 重男輕女 *zhong nan qing nü*, or “give preference to males over females.” This goes hand in hand with traditional societal pressures for men and women to marry and produce male heirs to carry on the family line, and for a consequent disapproval of sexual relationships not conducive to the production of offspring. The military also remains the exclusive purview of males and is compulsory for all males who have attained the age of at least 18 and are not attending college. Additionally, as Fran Martin has noted, “police persecution of cruising under statues of crimes against ‘cultural decency’ remain disturbingly common,”²⁰; she further notes that “the increased visibility of *tongzhi* cultures within Taiwan’s public sphere has also precipitated the emergence of new forms of homophobic violence.”²¹ It is against the backdrop of these social and cultural pressures that the work of Chi and other *tongzhi* and *ku’er* authors make their critique.

Critique of Sexual and Gendered Power in *Membranes*

²⁰ *Angelwings*, p. 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

One of the most powerful ways *Membranes* critiques the imbalanced dominance of male-dominated, conservative viewpoints on gender and sexuality is by doing away with straight male characters entirely: not a single straight male human character appears in the work²². Instead, lesbian characters like Momo's mother and Tomie Junji and gay characters such as the gardener Paolo Pasolini are presented as the norm, and there are no stereotypical males to challenge the sexual freedom and comparative gendered power they enjoy. Momo herself is a young boy turned girl turned android turned genderless brain, and so straddles virtually all of the gendered and sexual roles presented in the story. The only child born in the novel is Momo, and her life is a tragic, imagined fantasy in which no future is possible. Traditional family and gendered relationships, the story seems to say, are a dead end that produces not healthy offspring but rather the sterile dreams of selfish or absent parents. The military is similarly so violent and merciless that humans no longer can participate in it, leaving their future entirely in the hands of machines. The only true source of happiness and enjoyment, the story tells us, is in the kind of cultural and sexual liberalism that the society in the novel makes possible. Although this society, too, is only the author's fantasy, a life happily imagined is always better than one lived under repression, and a bird that can fly freely is always happier than one locked up in a gilded cage, a lesson Taiwan's male-dominated, family-centric society would do well to take to heart.

Critique of Gendered and Sexual Power in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*

The story takes place in the countryside, far from the power of the protagonist's families or government control. K.'s family is absent, while A Suo's family is in the city and thus too far to exert any real influence on him during his trip. K. can dance and A Suo can draw freely as their passions dictate, free from the obligations to do military service or attend a school of their family's choosing. Yet this freedom is soon marred by the abortive intimate advances of K., which are murderously refused by A Suo. Yet though A Suo's violent response to K.'s touches temporarily restores his sense of being a real man with a proper heterosexual orientation, he is also a murderer, both of the young man he has killed and of his own repressed sexuality. The fact that he can no longer have normal relationships with his classmates shows just how worthless and unproductive such relationships can be when one's true passions have been violently repressed. That A Suo later chooses to take his own life by smashing his

²² *Prefatory Material*, p. v.

“second heart” and releasing the libidinous faun hidden beneath his urbane exterior are a further testament to the often fatal repression of perfectly natural desires imposed on us by society, and offer a damning critique of a world which would rather see its sons dead than involved in sexual partnerships with one another.

Critique of Gendered and Sexual Power in *The War Is Over*

The War Is Over offers perhaps the most nuanced critique of gendered and sexual power of the works translated here. The human characters are referred to throughout the story as 外子 *waizi*, a term that generally refers to husbands and emphasizes the gendered and sexual power men wield as masters of the house. In a twist, however, the term *waizi* is made a designation for military personnel (a male sphere in Taiwanese society) who may be of *either* male or female (or even theoretically transgender); at the same time, the gender of the protagonist's *waizi* is never explicitly identified, leaving open the possibility that the *waizi* openly engage in homosexual or other “abnormal” (不正常 *bu zhengchang*) sexual practices and relationships. Thus the military becomes a place where male gendered power is still nominally the norm but where females, too, can exercise dominance by virtue of their humanity. In the story, however, the *waizi* are also dehumanized to almost the status of wild beasts, incessantly craving food and sex. The android replicants who are supposed to satisfy these desires all bear female names but are referred to throughout the story using the pronoun 它 *ta*, a term of neuter gender generally reserved in Chinese to describe things. The nominally “female” replicants are thus objectified and turned into chattel belonging to their human masters, a placement that may be seen as a critique of the dominant patriarchal modes of thought that still govern many modern Taiwanese families. When the two replicants with feminine names begin a relationship that seems genuine and caring, they are denounced by the *waizi* as “immoral, abnormal, and not fully human,” even though they, like the humans, are only trying to have a relationship with members of their own kind. Indeed, it is the human *waizi* who have “abnormal” relationships with machines to satisfy their own cravings. Chi's point is clear: society places control over what is “right” both in terms of gender and sexual identity in its own, all too human hands, even when what is right or normal is clearly not a natural relationship between two consenting human beings. Chi goes even farther by showing that the *waizi* are in fact useless without the constant war against the Other that gives them their power. Similarly, there might be no use for the imbalanced gendered power structures in Taiwanese society if it were not always preoccupied by war with its outer neighbors (most notably China) or by vicious internal political strife between nativist and more pro-China political parties.

Critique of Gendered and Sexual Power in *Nuit et brouillard*

Though the story focuses on an encounter between two night owls with homoerotic overtones, the protagonists are literally placed in a closet—a cramped radio studio humorously dubbed a “music box”—from which they cannot emerge for the two hours of a radio program. They are denounced as “perverts” when they ignore the calls from the outside world that flood in, and the reader gets the impression that their relationship would be frowned upon by the highly patriarchal Taiwanese society. But *Nuit et brouillard*’s critique goes beyond the stern disapproval seen in other stories such as *The War Is Over* and focuses instead on the outright, willful ignorance of the Other in Taiwanese society. People who do not conform to regular schedules—and hence regular patterns of sexual and social behavior—are completely marginalized to the point where some even begin to question their very existence. Just because they are never seen does not mean that they do not exist, the story tells us; and if you look hard enough, you may have “friends waiting for you in the shadows.” Chi’s critique of Taiwanese society here is twofold: on the one hand, it *overlooks* those who refuse to conform to its social or sexual dictates; on the other, it *refuses to look inward* and see or recognize those of its members who deviate from its dictates in even the slightest way. Like *The War Is Over*, *Nuit et brouillard* emphasizes the naturalness of finding a relationship with members of one’s own kind and the unnaturalness of denying such relationships just because they are different from what one knows, does, or believes in one’s own life. In a sense, then, the true sealed “music box” is Taiwanese society itself, and it is only by relinquishing its vise-grip on normality that it can hear the stories of all of its members and become the truly open, democratic society it claims to be.

Critique of Gendered and Sexual Power in *11 Songs for Percussion*

The characters in these eleven short stories exemplify many of the traits of the other works by Chi translated here: characters experience sexual desires and act out gender roles that are different from those expected and accepted by society. Chi’s critiques are especially harsh: patriarchal power is placed in the hands of a dying leader of a traditional band of martial artists whose prized sword and secret teaching are forbidden to female disciples; yet they are ultimately transmitted to the sole surviving female disciple, as she is the only one who can survive and perpetuate her master’s teachings (full equality for women is still an unrealized reality in contemporary Taiwan). The two surviving male disciples, meanwhile, face death and

so have no opportunity to be true “heirs” to their master or to recruit disciples of their own. In another story, two homosexual characters are threatened with flogging for their acts and denounced as “not fit to be men,” only for the context of the story to make it clear that their denouncer is a proud supporter of the Nazi regime. In another story, two military men find love on a doomed and sinking submarine, the company of their own kind their only consolation for the death and oblivion from which their own society cannot or will not save them. Still other stories have the characters forcibly driven into the open and gawked at by modern Taiwanese onlookers, a possible reference to some of the homophobic violence mentioned by Martin. Another character experiences no love for his marriage and finds solace only in homosexual encounters in a men’s room; while other male characters find their sexual desires fulfilled only in the confines of a locker room, a sauna, or even a remote spacecraft. As in *Nuit et brouillard*, these men are all individuals whom society refuses to acknowledge, who have been driven to seek solace with members of their own kind by their own natural impulses, and whose place in society is confined to the margins because of it. Chi writes in his *Prefatory Material* to the collection that he wrote 11 *Songs* without knowing where his audience was,²³ but after reading the stories, one gets the sense that they are applicable to all sections of Taiwanese society, whatever their position on the spectrum of gendered or sexual power.

Section Summary

Without a committed critique of gendered and sexual power in a deeply traditional and patriarchal society such as Taiwan, there can be no real possibility of a change in the balance of power. Such a change may be unnerving and even frightening, Chi shows us, but it need not be impossible or even, for that matter, necessarily destructive. It is only when all members of a society, male and female, *tongzhi* and otherwise, are able to contribute equally to that society’s development without fear of repression and discrimination that society has a chance to truly grow and become better. Rather than being closed and exclusive, Chi suggests, societies should remain open to the possibilities of differences among their members, and of engaging in a productive dialogue about these differences to produce positive social change. The 1990s in which Chi Ta-wei wrote itself bore witness to some of this productive dialogue and change; but as Chi’s writings vividly show us, much work still remains to be done.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

3.4 The Individual and The Family in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

One of the most significant sources of tension for members of Taiwan's *tongzhi* community is that between their own personal and sexual desires and the demands placed on them by their families and society at large. These demands are particularly pressing when they concern the subject of having children, a hope imposed upon many individuals in Taiwanese society by their families that can be difficult or impossible to realize for those in homosexual relationships. There are also questions of acceptability that raise their heads, both of what is acceptable to the individual and what can be accepted by the members of a family. As these issues of individuality versus family frequently place the *tongzhi* individual in conflict with his or her friends and family and often also create inner conflicts that must be resolved, it is not surprising that these issues figure prominently in many of Chi Ta-wei's early works, including those translated here. For convenience, we might separate the issues raised into two broad categories: 1) the inner world of the individual's heart and mind; and 2) family and home. By examining these two issues, we can gain greater insight into the background that informs much of Chi's work and into the tensions that serve as driving forces in the early works of fiction translated here.

3.4.1 The Inner World of the Heart / Mind

Given the social and societal pressures faced by members of Taiwan's *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities, it is hardly surprising that the inner world of the heart and mind should assume an important place in the fiction they write. The inner world offers a relief from the pressures of the outside world and a safe space to express the true feelings and desires of an individual's heart. The inner world can be expanded through intimacy or contracted through loneliness or repression. The inner world is also often at odds with the worlds of family and society, and this conflict can produce both tragic and heart-warming consequences. The inner world of the heart and mind is an important facet of the works by Chi Ta-wei translated here.

The Inner World of the Heart / Mind in *Membranes*

The inner world of the heart and mind is central to *Membranes*' protagonist, Momo. Indeed, for her it is the *only* world, as all that remains of her is a brain resting in an android body. She acts out the script given to her by her mother and her

employer, believing that she is in fact a normal human woman living a successful life as a beautician. In her work as a beautician, Momo believes that she is working to maintain the health of her clients' skin and is preoccupied with the outer world of the body; in reality, her work involves stealing the innermost secrets of governments and corporations by secretly reading them from the damaged bodies of war androids sent for repairs to the factory where Momo works. Momo's mind causes her to feel a deep estrangement from her mother even as she lives out the memories her mother has created for her, and leads her to feel an attachment for her enigmatic supervisor, Draupadi, even though the latter is similarly manipulating Momo's thoughts to ensure that she does good work for their employer, the ISM corporation. Although Momo's memories are all implanted from the outside, Chi keeps the narrative focus on Momo throughout by sparsely using dialogue and keeping the narrative in the third person almost exclusively, forcing us as readers to come to terms with reality just as Momo does. Only near the end of the story does the narrative shift to the inner world of Momo's mother, and we begin to see her not as a cold and manipulative woman who sacrifices her daughter to her career but as a genuinely caring mother who sacrifices everything so that her beloved daughter can have the chance to be human. By focusing so strongly on the inner world of its female characters and then casting our understanding of those worlds into doubt, Chi makes his readers both complicit in and compassionate toward their plight, making them question the reality of their own inner worlds. In Momo's inner world, anything is possible, and Chi invites us as readers to accept both Momo's fabricated life and the lives of the deeply human lesbian characters who create it as deeply flawed yet wholly normal products of the human heart. If the inner worlds of Chi's readers are just as fragile and just as full of possibility, then they have the capability to expand to include people whose lives and sexual orientations are very different from their own, people whom the readers may seldom see but with whom they can emphasize if only they keep their hearts and minds open.

The Inner World of the Heart / Mind in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*

We see the inner world of the two male characters in the story most clearly through their artistic creations, A Suo's sketch of K. and K.'s playing and performing the story's titular dance. These are two young men in the countryside far from the city, and they therefore can freely express their artistic and creative prowess in a way denied them by the schools they attend in the city. On another level, however, their artistic creations become 信物 *xin wu*, or "tokens of affection", a bond of the friendly and faintly erotic relationship that they establish with each other. The most powerful of

the *xin wu*, however, is K.'s pocket watch, which acts literally as a second heart to them both, binding them together as one flesh. The watch not only keeps time, but also contains within it the spirit of the faun, the ultimate symbol of the untrammelled desires of the heart. Only when the faun is finally released do both boys find a release from the cruel circumstances that have brought them together; only when the restraints on their "second heart" are shattered is the true creative power of their inner world released and allowed to find its place in the outside world.

The Inner World of the Heart / Mind in *The War Is Over*

With the exception of some descriptive passages and short bits of dialogue, the story is told entirely in the first person, giving us as readers direct access to the inner world of the replicant Meimei. Throughout the story we see Meimei struggle to define herself as an individual, going from a piece of property locked within her human master's apartment to an independent "person" in her own right, someone who can live with and love one of her own kind exactly as her heart dictates. Significantly, she comes to realize that her own social programming, given to her by the factory that created her, is nothing more than "human logic," as are the dictates of her increasingly tyrannical human master. By rejecting these outside dicta as foreign to the inner world of her heart, Meimei is able to realize herself as an individual and attain a chance at a true and loving relationship unmarred by external considerations of ownership or humanity.

The Inner World of the Heart / Mind in *Nuit et brouillard*

As in *The War Is Over*, with the exception of a few short descriptive passages and some dialogue, the story is told entirely from the perspective of the reclusive radio host who serves as its protagonist. We see him move from an uncertain affirmation of his own existence and the possibility that there might be others like him to the undeniable realization that reclusive people like himself are everywhere, if only one knows where to look for them. When a guest joins him on his radio program, the host feels a deep sense of connection to this member of his own kind, experiencing life with all of his senses simultaneously as though for the first time. The man whose outer life is reduced to that of an unnoticed shadow through his refusal to conform to society's schedules becomes a full human being in his own right, and we as readers follow this progression and sympathize with him. Having watched the narrator and his guest literally come alive by virtue of their shared intimacy and then having walked together out of the closet-sized radio studio where both of them have "performed" on

the air, we are hardly surprised to see the narrator earnestly tell his fellow recluse that he would like “to hear more of [his] stories” and so explore his guest’s—and, by extension, his own kind’s—inner world more deeply.

The Inner World of the Heart / Mind in *11 Songs for Percussion*

Many of the stories in this collection feature first-person narratives, giving us direct access to the thoughts and attitudes of their characters. We see the characters struggle with questions of their own mortality, questions of who has the authority to govern their lives, questions of their sexuality and sexual desires, and questions of their identities as individuals and members of the societies in which they live. We follow their inner narratives as readers and are drawn to empathize with them, each story just long enough to give us insight into one aspect of its characters’ inner world—and by extension, our own—before moving on to the next.

Section Summary

By giving us insight into the thoughts and feelings of his individual characters, Chi Ta-wei allows us to appreciate their complexity as human beings. Their lives are far from simple and are constantly influenced by the relationships they form with others and by their own uncontrollable emotions. Readers are invited to empathize with Chi’s characters on a personal level and to understand that they have thoughts, feelings, and concerns just like our own. In this way he reminds his readers that *tongzhi* identity is only one component of a person’s individuality, as natural and valid as any other and thus worthy of understanding and even approbation. Individuals must ultimately make their own decisions, whether others approve of them or not, even if this brings them at times into conflict with the dictates of family and society.

3.4.2 Family and Home in Chi Ta-wei’s Fiction

The Chinese word 家 *jia* can mean both “home” and “family,” and is an important preoccupation for Taiwanese *tongzhi* and *ku’er* authors such as Chi. Frequently Chi’s works contain a critique of traditional concepts of home and family and present a vision of a freer, more open world in which people are not tied down by blood relationships but are able to make informed choices about the people with whom they want to form kinship relations. As Chi notes in his *Prefatory Material* to *Membranes*, “in the web of our android-like lives, even kinship can be virtual (this is already an established fact, even though we are never willing to admit it outright).

Blood may be thicker than water, but information is thicker still than blood.”²⁴ This freedom to choose our own partners and families based on the information both of our senses and our mechanical aids such as the Internet makes possible what Fran Martin has referred to as “nontraditional modes of extrafamilial intimacy—encompassing modes of collective sociality based on *tongzhi* identification as well as same-sex relationships...”²⁵ These extrafamilial relationships are often in conflict with traditional Taiwanese notions of home and family, and the ways in which characters succeed or fail at resolving this conflict is an issue at the heart of many of Chi’s works, including those translated here.

Family and Home in *Membranes*

Membranes challenges the traditional notions of home and family right from the beginning by presenting the reader with a lesbian family and their transgender child. As previously noted, *Membranes* contains no straight human characters, so the “nontraditional” families of homosexuals are presented as normative in a society in which sexual freedom has opened up new possibilities for people wishing to escape the more traditional patriarchal families of Taiwanese society. Interestingly, however, the lesbian characters in the novella (Momo’s mother, Tomie, and possibly also Draupadi) choose to express their understandings of family and intimacy in terms of the most traditional of their cultures’ stories: the tale of Mi Zixia (originally from the pre-Christian era Chinese work *Han Feizi*), the legend of Momo Taro, and the *Mahabharata*. The cultural industry in *Membranes* allows societies such as New Taiwan to bind themselves more closely to their histories even as they shed some of their most ancient patriarchal values, allowing them to establish a virtual kinship to their forebears even as they found families with people who share their sexual orientations and preferences. Yet traditional family values are not absent from *Membranes*, either: Momo’s mother is accidentally given a boy as her test-tube baby, showing the often unconscious but still powerful preference for male heirs in Taiwanese society; Momo herself is sick with the LOGO virus from birth, a sign of the increasing commercialization that infected Taiwanese society with especial virulence in the 1990s.²⁶ The homeland of old Taiwan above the protagonist’s heads is blighted, desolate, and home only to machines and the people who operate them; the rest of humanity lives in a “greenhouse-” like structure under the ocean covered by protective membranes. This is the world of Momo’s mother, whose constant and very

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. i.

²⁵ *Angelwings*, pp 11-12.

²⁶ See *Chi Ta-Wei de Ku’er Kehuan Gushi*, p. 116.

traditional devotion to her work alienates her daughter from her; only later do we learn that by resigning herself to a twenty-year separation from Momo will Momo's mother ever be able to bring her daughter home. Momo, too, literally lives in her workplace, whether it be the undersea skin-care clinic of her imagination or her android body in the factory where she works in the surface in old Taiwan. The pressures to work, provide for a family, and protect one's homeland are as pervasive in *Membranes*' New Taiwan as they were in the Taiwan of the 1990s when Chi Ta-wei wrote; while the commercialization of virtually every aspect of life has only worsened, with disastrous consequences for the Taiwanese people's traditional "home." Even the newfound freedom to choose one's own family has a dark side: Momo's mother is abandoned by both Tomie, Draupadi, and finally her beloved daughter Momo itself as each of them makes choices to pursue what is most important to her. Even though Momo and her mother do eventually go home together at the end of the novel, the home and the family they return to is worlds away from the one they initially possessed, and the sense of loss is keenly felt by the reader. As the judge Wu Nianzhen said in giving the *United Daily News* novella prize to Chi Ta-wei for *Membranes* in 1995, "the real meaning of all this [the rampant commercialization and scientific advances in the novella] is that [the reader is] very likely one of the people who help the real world along to its destruction."²⁷ And what is the real world if not humanity's home? By being complicit in traditional family values that repress the individual, we destroy the happiness that only loving families who choose to be with each other can build; but by focusing too much on individual freedom, we risk destroying the very home in which those families must live. Chi's work is a warning that we must walk a careful middle path between freedom and responsibility if we are to protect the families and homes that are dear to us.

Family and Home in L'Après-midi d'un Faune

The two main characters of the story escape their families by going to the countryside and initially form a friendship based on their shared passion for the arts. Yet A Suo is forced to abandon his artistic studies by his family, who disapprove of an artist's low economic prospects, while K. is forced to abandon his dance studies from a motorcycle accident that killed his closest friend. The two are united by their shared unease with life in the city, where social and familial pressures are constantly bearing down on them, and are brought together at K.'s family house in the countryside (K.'s family has moved abroad for reasons he never discloses). Yet this "home" soon

²⁷ *Prefatory Material*, p. ix

becomes the scene of K.'s murder by A Suo, who returns to the cramped apartment in the city where he studies for school. A Suo is increasingly haunted by the pocket watch K. gives him prior to the murder, to the point where he becomes unable to have normal interactions with his classmates. Unable to bear his increasing lack of a "normal" life, A Suo eventually takes his own life by smashing the pocket watch and releasing the faun, the ultimate symbol of unrestrained sexual liberty and personal independence, from its perch within the etching on the watch cover. The message seems to be that familial pressures can destroy the happiness of the heart, which alone has the ability to make the things we do meaningful; the people we know, family; and the places we live, home.

Family and Home in *The War Is Over*

The War Is Over features temporary families living in temporary homes during a war that keeps them from their true home of Earth. The humans in the story are constantly away either working or fighting (a criticism of Taiwan's military in particular and work-obsessed society in general), while their "families" consist of domestic replicants who keep their temporary houses for them and provide them with food and sex when they return. The replicants themselves take the place of the human soldiers' true families on Earth, and are denied any rights or status of their own. Though they are ostensibly "loved" by their human masters, the replicants are part of the house that their humans inhabit (the unspoken 内子 *neizi* to their human *waizi*) and can only perform the functions of family: they do not experience the feelings that bind families together except as dictated by their factory programming (another criticism of Taiwanese society, where family members are supposed to love and respect each other based on their blood relationship, irrespective of whatever real feelings they may have for one another). When the two replicants of the story began to find love with each other, they are denounced as "immoral, abnormal, and not fully human," and yet their relationship, freely chosen and between members of their own kind, comes the closest to that of a "real" loving family of that of any of the characters in the story. It is perhaps significant that when the replicant Meimei decides to go live with her fellow replicant Lola, she has literally to leave behind her home and her livelihood in order to make a new life, suggesting that traditional family relationships and homes may have to be altered or uprooted if they are to be able to accommodate *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, or other sexual and social orientations of their members.

Family and Home in *Nuit et brouillard*

Though family and home *per se* do not play central roles in this story, it is worth noting that the two main characters are marginalized precisely because they do not obey the rigid schedule of work / school and family time dictated by traditional Taiwanese society. By finding relationships with non-conformist night owls like themselves (members of their own “kind” or “clan”), they are able to join a much larger extended family of whose existence even they are largely unaware. This “virtual kinship” between the night owls allows them to experience at least some of the solidarity and support denied them by their lonely nocturnal existences.

Family and Home in 11 Songs for Percussion

The characters in this collection of short stories are generally isolated individuals who are united by the virtual kinship of the groups to which they belong rather than by ties of blood. Whether they are members of armed bands or the armed forces, students, or married men living dissatisfying family lives, all of the characters find some kind of kinship with members of their own kind, whether it be fraternal, sexual, or otherwise. Though each story is a self-contained world, the act of reading performatively binds all of the characters together into a single “family” in the mind of the reader, giving them a home in the reader’s heart and mind even if their physical home is only hinted at on paper.

Section Summary

Family is both something we are born into and something we choose for ourselves, something that compels our obedience and something against which we react, something we grow up in and perhaps finally grow out of in our search for new and more fulfilling relationships. Chi’s works invite us to see that even though family will always be with us, home is ultimately where the heart is, and if the two conflict, we can do no better than to follow our hearts. Families can be supportive and give us strength; they can also be restrictive and wear us down. Finding one’s proper home against the backdrop of family and societal pressures is no easy task, but it is an essential one if an individual is to achieve self-realization and self-fulfillment. Rather than hide from questions of *tongzhi* identity and sexuality that may be taboo subjects in many Taiwanese families, Chi’s works suggest that we should do our best to be brave and face any potential conflicts head on. If this proves impossible, then it is at least possible for the individual to find other members of his or her own kind with whom to build a family, and this new family can provide much needed support if one’s birth family refuses to provide it. Exactly how to best negotiate the questions raised by

tongzhi and individual identity and one's position in the family is not a matter that can be settled easily, and Chi's characters, true to life, adopt a variety of solutions depending on the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

3.5 Context in Chi Ta-wei's Works

"Context" is more than just background information or a general sketch of the characters in a work: it serves to locate the characters and worlds of a work, and the work itself, in relation to the real world, in relation to other works, and even in relations between different parts of the same work. Without context, it can be harder to appreciate a literary work, since one lacks a point of reference from where to begin; but once a contextual point of reference is found, appreciation of a work, its style, and the effects it has on its readers becomes possible. Under the broad heading of "context," we might put a further four subheadings which are helpful for understanding Chi Ta-wei's use of queer and *tongzhi* themes in the works translated here: 1) representation, which seeks to show how and what a thing is in relation to other related things; 2) recognition, which seeks to identify what a thing is or else to make it visible by making it stand out from the background that forms a part of it; 3) contextuality, which relates things in a work to contemporary issues and concerns or to other things within the same work or body of works; and 4) "queering," a process which deliberately plays upon and upsets our expectations of context by placing certain characters, places, or other key contextual elements in relationships or positions which we do not anticipate, thereby forcing us to reevaluate our prior understandings.

3.5.1 Representation in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

Representation has to do with the manner in which characters and themes are portrayed in fictional works. It is generally done for some emotive or thematic end, to draw the reader closer to the characters or to put distance between them, or else to clarify or obscure thematic connections that might otherwise go unnoticed. Chi's works of *ku'er* fiction present a largely favorable portrait of *tongzhi* living within or on the margins of their society. The following is a brief discussion of some of the ways *tongzhi* are represented in the works translated here.

Representation in *Membranes*

Perhaps the most important thing to note about *Membranes* from the standpoint of representation is its treatment of homosexuality as normative. As has already been noted, there are no straight human characters in the story, Momo herself is transgender, and Momo's mother is sympathetically portrayed as being in at least two lesbian relationships. This representation is further developed by Chi's sympathetic description of a varied sex life as a desirable luxury good: homosexuality is elevated to the status of a thing to be coveted and enjoyed rather than shunned, shamed or ignored. Although it could be argued that the failure of Momo's mother's relationships or the lecherous behavior of the gardener Paolo are negative representations of homosexuality, we should be careful to note that the end of Momo's mother's relationship with Tomie is presented like any other breakup between lovers, while Paolo's behavior and subsequent violent death are a reflection of his flawed humanity rather than of his homosexuality. The characters are given a fair hearing and portrayed in a way that allows the reader to judge their individual failings without having to pass judgment on their homosexuality, which in the world of *Membranes* is simply the natural outcome of attraction between members of the same sex. Momo's life is presented as something that frequently transcends concerns of sexuality and is clouded instead by commercial and anatomical issues that literally render her dead to the outside world. She is in many ways the living embodiment of both worlds she inhabits, the glamorous, fantastic world of a beautician working and living under the ocean and the horrific, dystopian, and routine life of an android living on the surface. Momo represents both the failures of old Taiwan and the dreams of New Taiwan, the relics of the past and the hopes for the future. Through this dual representation Chi allows us to see the birth of a new society from the margins and castaways of the old, underscoring the important role of *tongzhi* culture in creating a more just, free, and equitable society.

Representation in L'Après-midi d'un Faune

The violent murder and fantastic retribution at the heart of this story in some ways obscure the representation of *tongzhi* characters within it. The hammer with which A Suo murders K. can be seen as a representation of the martial law that repressed and oppressed homosexuals in Taiwan in 1987. A Suo's sketch of K. can be seen as the representation of the creative power of the mind when freed from the stifling constraints of home, family, and city. The pocket watch that unites K. and A Suo can be seen as a symbol of the kind of strained, concealed and often painful intimacy shared by members of Taiwan's *tongzhi* community, while the bestial faun

can be viewed as a representation of the dangers of forcibly repressing natural homoerotic passion. The monster is born of a society that refuses to tolerate homosexual unions and is thus also a symbol of the decadence, hypocrisy, and violence of Taiwanese society that prided itself on having become so open during the decade of the 1990s.

Representation in *The War Is Over*

The space station on which the main characters of the story live can be seen as a representation of the island of Taiwan, an isolated place that is denied recognition by the denizens of Earth but nevertheless is as full of life as any place on the planet. The human *waizi* represent both the overbearing military and the dominant patriarchal culture of Taiwanese society, while the replicants represent those who, like *tongzhi*, have been marginalized and repressed by it. The replicants also represent the naturalness of true, non-oppressive love, while the *waizi* represent the hypocrisy of those whose own sexual and moral practices may be even more deviant than the practices of those they condemn. The stars in the story represent both unrealized possibilities and the fixed, unchanging nature of our inborn impulses; while the roses represent both life in its full, natural bloom and the death that ensues when this natural state is disturbed. Chi's *tongzhi* characters are sympathetically represented here as attempting to be all that they can be and, at least to a limited degree, succeeding in realizing their ambitions.

Representation in *Nuit et brouillard*

The cramped radio studio in which much of the story takes place may be said to represent "the closet," while the piano is a symbol of the passion, intimacy, and harmony of homosexual relations. The telephone represents the unfeeling demands and pressure of the outside world, which the protagonist and his guest are free to ignore. The roses represent both affection and passion, while the photograph that looks nothing like its subject represents the multiplicity of identities possible in *tongzhi* culture and the refusal of *tongzhi* to fit into a single stereotypical mold determined by Taiwanese society. The two men themselves represent "the people who are not seen" and thus stand as symbols of the often marginalized *tongzhi* who nevertheless remain in the shadows, waiting to be discovered by anyone who cares enough to look for them.

Representation in 11 Songs for Percussion

The various scenarios and characters in this collection are all representative of the struggle of *tongzhi* to find their place in society and the world and to satisfy their individual and sexual desires. Whether they face death or oppression alone or in groups, whether they find passion with their fellow students or with their coaches, commanders, and teachers, and whether their desires are realized or frustrated, they all represent some aspects of the incredible resilience and diversity of Taiwan's *tongzhi* communities. Here Chi uses his characters to represent the rainbow of manifold possibilities, both positive and negative, facing Taiwanese *tongzhi* culture in the 1990s.

Section Summary

Through his skillful use of representation, Chi allows his fictional worlds to show themselves to the reader without having to explicitly point to and identify them. He thus opens up his work to a rich level of interpretation, in which the worlds he creates become microcosms for Taiwanese society at large, his characters have hopes and aspirations that can be readily identified in contemporary society, and his fictional creations can serve as commentary on the real world of both his own day and that of the reader who encounters him later. Through representation, Chi's works gain an immediacy and personal appeal that they might lack if Chi were to write more directly, and avoid becoming dry, dogmatic statements of a political or philosophical position.

3.5.2 Recognition in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

"Recognition" was a key ideal for Taiwanese *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities in the 1990s. On the one hand it meant social, political, and sexual equality with their heterosexual peers, recognition in the sense of "acceptance" and "acknowledgement." In line with this concern was the pressing need by *tongzhi* communities to increase their own visibility and so enable them to counteract the prevailing social trends to marginalize and discriminate against them. On another level, "recognition" refers to the "self-recognition" of the individual, a person's understanding of herself both within her respective community and in society at large. Self-recognition also implies a knowledge of and acceptance of one's own abilities and limitations. Recognition is an important concern in Chi Ta-wei's fiction of the 1990s and will be briefly discussed below.

Recognition in *Membranes*

The characters in *Membranes* are not encumbered by the hostile forces of an aggressively straight, patriarchal society, so they are much more visible than the often marginalized *tongzhi* communities in the Taiwan in which Chi Ta-wei wrote. Indeed, some characters, such as Momo's lesbian mother, are so visible that they are virtually omnipresent, appearing in advertisements in nearly every electronic medium of the day. Momo's mother is acutely aware of the importance of her role in the cultural world and of her need as a mother to provide for her daughter, but her visibility to the reader is obscured through the membrane of her daughter's false understanding until almost the end of the novella. Momo herself is an exile on the desolate surface of the world, a member of a group too marginalized to be noticed by the vast majority of society. At the same time, Momo is only a human brain in an android body and so lacks the capacity for true self-recognition or self-realization. Her fabricated memories also serve to obscure the true nature of the Earth's desolation to the reader, diminishing the visibility of the planet itself with the exception of those moments when Momo dreams or reads discbooks about it. Then there are the android characters, particularly the male "Andy," who recognize the unfairness and brevity of their own existence and ultimately resign themselves to being able to "become a part of" the humans who created them. The androids receive no such recognition from their human masters, who treat them as chattel (with the notable exception of Momo, whose female "Andy" remains the greatest friend of her life and for whom she constantly pines). The resignation by and lack of recognition for the android characters in many ways mirrors the plight of *tongzhi* in post-martial law Taiwan as they struggle both to receive a better place in society and to define their roles as individuals both within and without it. Recognition and visibility are not always easy to deal with, and often lead the recipient, like Momo, to confront the terrifying abyss in which central questions of their own selfhood await them. Fighting for recognition and being willing to accept the revelations of self-recognition takes great courage, and Chi does not sugarcoat either the benefits or the costs of this struggle.

Recognition in L'Après-midi d'un Faune

The failure by the two male characters in the story to recognize their mutual affection ultimately leads to their deaths, while their failure to confront their desires to express themselves artistically confines them to a space in which the only recognition they receive is from each other, and that in a field in the middle of nowhere. The characters do not have great social visibility; but the absence of other members of society does serve to heighten their visibility to the reader. Ultimately, it is their

unspoken passions, in the form of the monstrous faun who escapes at the end of the story, that clamor for recognition. Finally, the mention of A Suo's sketch of K. tucked safely under his bed at the end of the story pays subtle recognition to the happier possibilities that might have come to fruition if their passions had not been so coldly repressed by their society, home, and family.

Recognition in *The War Is Over*

All of the characters in the story suffer from a peculiar lack of visibility due to the author's decision not to give any of them definite genders. The plight of the non-human replicants is further underscored by the use of the character 它 *ta*, usually reserved for things, to refer to them: they are not recognized as individuals in their own right. Yet when the replicant Meimei meets fellow replicant Lola, the two of them form a bond based on their shared experiences as domestic servants, and they begin to recognize and treat each other as equals. Lola even encourages Meimei to learn to cook, recognizing Meimei's latent talent and helping her to grow as an individual. It is Lola, too, who dreams of a world where replicants have a home for themselves without human masters, a place where they possess both the visibility and the recognition to live in peace with members of their own kind. Yet it is Meimei who boldly defies her programming and decides to make Lola's dream of a home for replicants a reality by moving in with her. In so doing she stands up to the prejudices and demands of human society and her human "family," using the self-recognition she has gained to demand recognition for herself and Lola, no matter how fleeting this recognition may be.

Recognition in *Nuit et brouillard*

Of all the stories translated here, visibility is of the highest importance to *Nuit et brouillard*. Its characters are "not seen" because they refuse to conform to the social and sexual schedules set out by Taiwanese society. Nevertheless, the narrator recognizes that such marginalized people are all around us, if only we care to look for them. Even more importantly, by finding and recognizing another night owl like himself as a "member of his own kind," the narrator experiences a kind of intimacy and connectedness he has never felt before, and becomes surer of his own existence through the increasing sensitivity of his senses. Intimacy requires mutual recognition, and it is open to all people, provided they are willing to both recognize their own potential and to give the same recognition to members of their own kind. The story thus suggests that increased visibility means not only visibility within larger Taiwanese

society, but visibility within and among the various *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities who make up such a vibrant part of it.

Recognition in 11 Songs for Percussion

The characters in this story collection often achieve self-recognition in the face of their own loneliness, when faced with their impending deaths, or through reminiscences about the past. In achieving this recognition, they are able to give expression to their sexuality, no matter how brief or solitary such expression may be. The visibility of the characters is limited by the short length of each of the stories in the collection; yet this very brevity makes them all the more visible to the reader. The multiplicity of the characters' experiences also increases the likelihood that the reader will recognize some part of them in herself, moving the struggle for acceptance and understanding by *tongzhi* communities one step closer to its goal.

Section Summary

Recognition makes it possible for readers to see in Chi's characters those aspects of themselves that they might otherwise have ignored or of which they might have been unaware. At the same time, the struggle for recognition on the part of Chi's characters leads the reader on a similar journey of self-discovery, opening up ways of thinking and ideas that may have been inconceivable before. A central concern with respect to recognition is visibility, which enables the thing recognized to stay in the reader's mind and be appreciated it, just as the characters in Chi's works themselves become more fully-fleshed out and realistic as they become more visible to themselves and others. When made visible and recognized, those aspects of Chi's worlds that may seem unfamiliar or strange at first, including his *tongzhi* characters, become points of entry for the reader to empathize with what had previously seemed foreign and thus to gain a broader understanding of both himself or herself and the everyday world in which the reader lives.

3.5.3 Contextuality in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

"Contextuality" or "contextualization" refers to the social, political, sexual, cultural, and individual background against which a story takes place. It is thus a kind of counterpart to representation, which looks at the meaning of the elements of a story against the backdrop that contextuality provides. For Chi Ta-wei's 1990s *tongzhi* / *ku'er* fiction, this context includes the increasing urbanization of Taiwan, increased

political and social freedoms following the lifting of martial law in 1987, the commodification, commercialization, and appropriation of global cultures during the decade, increased visibility of the *tongzhi* and *ku'er* communities, and the increasing presence of technology in Taiwanese people's lives, among others. These diverse contextual factors ground the elements of science fiction, fantasy, and romance that are integral parts of Chi's fiction, helping them to become familiar and recognizable even as they appear in unfamiliar forms and settings.

Contextuality in *Membranes*

Perhaps the most important contextual factor in the story is culture, which gives meaning to virtually all of its characters and settings. Characters such as Momo's mother work to preserve the vanishing glory of the cultures of Earth's civilizations even as those civilizations are being destroyed by their own most impressive cultural accomplishments. Peace for human beings means relinquishing all of their great cultural monuments on the surface, which stand as ruined testaments to the folly and futility of the societies that built them; while an endless army of androids wages constant war on the surface to satisfy the greed and desire for entertainment of the people who seal themselves off in their societies beneath the sea. Commercialization and technological advance feed this constant cycle of war and destruction, while the increasing commodification of every aspect of human life produces horrors such as the LOGO bacterium, a germ that can lay waste to the human body, leaving behind nothing but a brain hyper-stimulated by the pseudo-grandeur and glamour of a life devoted to maintaining the bodies and minds of the wealthy while basking in the glory of uninterrupted success and acclaim. Such is the world of Momo, the novella's protagonist; yet we learn that not only are all of her accomplishments false and vain, but she is even an unwitting participant in the wars that continue to ravage the land above the society in which she lives. Moreover, although her society enjoys a sexual freedom only dreamed of by *tongzhi* in 1990s Taiwan, Momo herself is asexual, Momo's mother's lesbian relationships end unhappily and leave her practically wedded to her work, while sexual libertines like the gardener Paolo have their bodies replaced with android parts to maintain their youth, only to meet violent ends at the hands of their lovers. Android lives become increasingly human, while human lives become increasingly mechanical, and the ideals of free love, cultural achievement, and social progress become increasingly the stuff of fantasies such as the discs that make up Momo's memories. Only a non-human like Momo can truly find both satisfaction and security in the world of *Membranes*; and this is ultimately possible only because the true nature of her condition is carefully hidden from her. Without this

constant deception, Momo's world literally falls apart, and the increasingly mechanized, hedonistic, and commodified cultures that comprise it are literally swallowed up in an abyss. Momo's tragedy is the tragedy of the entire world; the plight of New and old Taiwan is the result of forces sweeping the globe that have spun nightmarishly out of control. Ultimately, human beings, whether they are as fully deceived as Momo or not, are no better than canaries in cages, singing merrily and blissfully unaware of both their own confinement and the doom that potentially awaits them around every corner.

Contextuality in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*

Urbanization is an important contextual factor in the story; the two young men who are the story's main characters meet in the comparatively undeveloped countryside at a hot springs where, like many Taiwanese, they go to escape the pressures of work, school, home, and family. Nevertheless, the countryside is only a resting place for the two young men, whose schooling takes place in the city. A Suo is forced by his family to endure the fiercely competitive college entrance examinations twice because they disapprove of the supposedly poor economic prospects open to a painter; K., by contrast, is allowed to attend a dancing school, but has hurt his shoulder and lost his close schoolmate in a motorcycle accident that is a product of the city's hectic traffic. The hearts of both boys become connected by a pocket watch, its clock serving as a potent reminder of the busy and time-centered lives of modern Taiwanese citizens and also of their dependence on technology. The faun etched into the watch is a symbol of the boys' unrealized passions, is a creature of the countryside yet is released only in the city and serves as a symbol of the urban migration from the countryside that was a major factor in the growth of Taiwan's cities in the 1990s.

Contextuality in *The War Is Over*

The rigid, patriarchal Taiwanese military serves as the main point of context for this story. The military frowns on non-conformist or outside relationships among its members and demands their total and unquestioning obedience, much as the *waizi* in the story demand the obedience of their replicant companions. When the war finally ends the authority of the military becomes less pervasive and the human soldiers become next to useless, suggesting the futility of patriarchal, domineering power systems in an enlightened age. When the replicant protagonist of the story realizes the futility of her relationship with her human master, she takes matters into her own

hands and assumes control of her own life, something her now obsolete human masters cannot seem to do with their own. Although threatened with destruction now that the war is over, the story's replicant protagonist finds a self-realization impossible while the war was still being waged. In this way Chi skillfully critiques the dominant military culture in Taiwan prior to and just following the lifting of martial law in 1987, and suggests that traditional patriarchal notions of home and family stifle the development of individuals and destroy the true happiness that can only be enjoyed by those who are willingly joined with their own kind.

Contextuality in *Nuit et brouillard*

The primary point of context for this story is the cultural phenomenon of call-in radio shows, which became increasingly popular in Taiwan in the 1990s. Although a virtually ubiquitous part of the workdays and ordinary lives of most Taiwanese, they and their hosts are frequently treated as no more than background noise; the hosts are people who are never seen and never truly known even by the people who listen to them. This tendency to treat what is overly familiar or utterly unknown as part of the background of "ordinary life" reduces those who do not conform to it to the margins of society and denies them the intimacy of being with their fellow human beings. The story points out that such ignored human beings are everywhere, often unknown even to their own kind, critiquing the excessively individualistic, time-focused lives of Taiwanese people that relegate "members of their own kind" to the shadows. Such people have meaningful stories to tell, however, far more than can be told on the superficial medium of talk radio, and much to contribute to society. It is only when we listen to their stories and put them into context that we can get a full and unbiased picture of the richness and breadth of Taiwanese society and culture in all its forms.

Contextuality in 11 Songs for Percussion

As noted above, Chi wrote of this story collection that he had no idea where his audience was when he wrote it. The disparate characters in each of the eleven short "songs" seem on one level to be without context, yet they have perhaps the richest contextual tapestry of all of Chi's early short stories. Schools, spaceships, and cityscapes meet with countrysides, saunas and locker rooms. Ancient and modern, civilian and military, recreation and work, passions repressed and expressed all collide in the span of a few short pages. All of these areas give context not only to the stories but also to the society of Taiwan in which Chi wrote them, making their

characters and places understandable and possible to relate to for Chi's Taiwanese readership, both in the 1990s and today.

Section Summary

Contextuality allows us to relate Chi's fictional worlds more directly to the world in which we live. Although the worlds described are not strictly "real," they have definite similarities with Taiwanese society in the 1990s in which Chi wrote, and these similarities enable the reader to engage in reflection upon some of the problems facing both Taiwanese society in particular and modern society in general in a way that might have been impossible had Chi been writing nonfiction instead. Whereas representation and recognition might be said to bring our world closer to the fictional worlds of the author by embedding contemporary concerns and characters that we can empathize with squarely within the fictional worlds created by the author, contextuality brings the author's worlds closer to our own by pointing out and delineating distinctly recognizable pieces of our world in his fiction. Thus we can see both the ruins and the vestiges of Old Taiwan in *Membranes*' depiction of the world of New Taiwan; and the contemporary settings of other stories, such as *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *Nuit et brouillard*, leave no doubt that they could well have taken place during the 1990s when the author wrote. Contextuality helps us to reflect on the very modern problems posed by fictional works such as Chi's by giving them a recognizable analogues in the real world and so reminding us that what we read has bearing not only on some imagined future, but on the here and now when we are reading.

3.5.4 "Queering" in Chi Ta-wei's Fiction

Each of the works translated here contains a number of "queerings," modes of thinking, acting and being that problematize or challenge the reader's (or society's) expectations. This can be as simple as an individual finding intimacy in the closed confines of a radio studio, as in *Nuit et brouillard*, or as complex as the fabrication of the protagonist's entire world, as in *Membranes*. These queerings trouble us, but they serve an important function by shaking up our pre-established notions of what is possible and opening us up to the normality of ways of being that we might otherwise marginalize or ignore.

Queering in *Membranes*

Membranes features perhaps the most far-reaching of all the queerings in the works translated here. As noted above, there are no straight human characters in the story, a queering of the heterosexual “norm” of 1990s Taiwan society that was increasingly challenged by *tongzhi* and *ku’er* movements and writings during the decade. The only family presented in the novel is a lesbian couple with a transgender child, further queering the dominant patriarchal social and familial culture in Taiwan. Momo’s entire world is one interlacing set of membranes, social, cultural, political, and gendered memories that are entirely the product of the cultural and military industries that dominate the world her brain believes that it inhabits, a queering not merely of society but of life itself. Finally, while Momo’s transformation from a human girl to an android is strongly hinted at in the story, the ending of the story, in which Momo is revealed to be nothing but a human brain temporarily housed in an android body, can be seen as a kind of queering of the generic conventions of science fiction itself. These queerings challenge the reader to reject the notions that society and commercial culture present as normative and to be receptive of and open to those individuals and outcomes who fail to conform to all-too “generic” modes of being available.

Queering in L’Après-midi d’un Faune

The combination of the mechanical pocket watch and the fantastic faun is perhaps the most notable queering in the story. Two ostensibly normal boys are drawn into a weird world of repressed passions, murder, cybernetic connections, and posthumous hauntings. The “normal” world of Taiwanese city and country life is queered not only by the artistic leanings of the two young men (who might be expected, as A Suo is, to pursue more lucrative careers or even join the military, as K.’s injury prevents him from doing), but by the supernatural connections that bind their lives and ultimately, their deaths. This juxtaposition of the everyday and the surreal can be seen as a queering of an otherwise ordinary story of small-town murder and hints at the vast web of often unnoticed linkages that join individuals together in modern society in often unexpected ways.

Queering in The War Is Over

Chi offers a multilayered queered critique of the patriarchal culture of Taiwan’s military in this story. The human characters are paired with android replicants who satisfy their needs for food and sex, offering a queering of the normal human relationships that make up and support the rank and file. Furthermore, women are

allowed in the military and human / replicant sexual combinations of all sexes are allowed, overturning the all-male gendered balance of power expected in the military in Taiwan. The military fights for peace, but becomes obsolete as soon as the peace is achieved, putting the erstwhile soldiers at the mercy of their replicant slaves. This balance of power is further upset when the two replicant characters in the story seek a supposedly “unnatural” homosexual relationship that is in fact more natural than the human / replicant pairings arranged by the military because it involves a loving relationship by two beings of the same kind. The imbalance of gendered power in the military thus subverts what is natural by forcing beings of different kinds to join together as families, and this unnatural relationship is at once queered and “straightened” by the two replicants who defy both their factory programming and their human masters to seek a natural and loving relationship with each other, forming a family based on ties of affection rather than ties of duty. As in *Membranes*, this queering encourages the reader to see society’s dictates as external and homosexual relationships as natural and normative, challenging the reader’s perceptions of family, love, and solidarity.

Queering in *Nuit et brouillard*

The principal queering in this story involves the titular radio show “Intimacy” itself; it is only by closing himself off to the outside world by sealing himself inside the studio that the host can bring “Intimacy” to his listeners in the outside world. When the host invites a guest to his program, however, the opposite is the case: the host finds personal intimacy only when he shuts out the outside interference of his listeners and gives free reign to his own five senses. Only by finding a fellow recluse does the host truly find his own intimacy, and only through a musical performance unfit to be broadcast are the host’s senses brought to life. The host sees “a person who is not seen” and so realizes that people like himself are everywhere, and that intimacy lurks in the shadows, the very places where the host had hidden from it. The homoerotic relationship between the host and his guest is also a queering of the traditional relationship between a talk show host and his guest, as the guest frequently “leads” his host rather than the reverse, and even briefly steals the spotlight when he plays the piano near the end of the program. Chi’s queerings here show us that intimacy can be found in both public and private spaces, that homoerotic relationships between “members of one’s own kind” may be perfectly natural, and that sometimes the best way to listen is to silence the voices that clamor most to be heard and turn one’s attention to hitherto unknown individuals and situations.

Queering in 11 Songs for Percussion

The eleven short stories in this collection all feature some sort of queering of the expected: the two male characters in “The End of The Sword” choose to face death at the hands of their adversaries by giving their only weapon to their sister disciple, yet their homoerotic relationships with each other and with their foes may prove to be their salvation; the character in “The Young Swordsman” is ignored by the one rival for whom he has been waiting his entire life, and passes on his skills to an entire clan of similarly determined swordsmen who are forced out of a park and onto the streets of Taipei years after the young man’s death, their swords, like his, unstained by blood and forever waiting for the rival who will never come; the Nazi soldiers in “Long Live the Forty-Five Degree Angle” turn their salute to their commander into a homoerotic gesture; the protagonist imagines his impending death in an imploding submarine as a giant orgasm in “The Unsunk Yellow Submarine”; teachers and students become involved in homoerotic relationships that are taboo even while they maintain that they “do nothing wrong” in “The Dark Side of the Moon”; a purported hater of baseball for its fascist overtones murders and rapes a star baseball pitcher to steal his uniform in “Murder on the Baseball Field”; a married man finds sexual release in the urinals of a men’s restroom in “Frog Organs”; a city melts away like ice cream in “The Ice Cream Machine”; a rugby player and his coach experience an off-the-field homoerotic relationship that brings fond memories to the young player in “The Rugby Locker Room”; a space trooper on patrol has a necrophiliacal relationship with a young man he finds floating dead in a coffin in space in “A Sleepless Night with An Abandoned Corpse”; and a young man longs for a sexual “brain surgery” in “An Offering of a Head.” Each of these stories presents the reader with social and sexual possibilities far outside of those she might otherwise know, and invites her to consider as valid and even normative a range of experiences that turns the expected on its head.

Section Summary

Queerings deliberately disturb and provoke us, shocking us out of our everyday understanding of things by pointing out the normal within the abnormal and the abnormal within the normal. They encourage us to broaden our understanding, to accept things we might have overlooked, and to find common ground with those whose behavior might at first have seemed shocking or repugnant to us. At the same time, we become more aware of the complexity of our everyday lives and more open to questioning the realities we are compelled to face. Queerings can thus serve not only a shocking or destructive purpose but a constructive one as well, driving us to

seek ways to better both ourselves and our society and to free ourselves from entrenched modes of acting and thinking.

3.6 Conclusion

Through his use of themes and characters of special importance and relevance to Taiwan's *tongzhi* and *ku'er* readerships, Chi explores the vast range of social, political, cultural, and sexual experiences and identities available to his readers. Some of the themes touched upon, like acceptance, recognition, and equality for Taiwan's *tongzhi* community, remain goals that have yet to be fully realized. Still others, such as the acceptance of *tongzhi* communities by one another, urge readers to join together by virtue of their shared humanity to effect their vision of a better world. By challenging accepted notions of reality, gender, sexuality and, politics, Chi points out just how far the *tongzhi* community has still to go to realize its aims, while simultaneously criticizing the members of society who, through their active or tacit complicity with existing homophobic social norms, prevent Taiwan from evolving into the free, just, and democratic society it prides itself on being. Chi's writings at once acknowledge his readers' humanity and encourage them to broaden it by accepting experiences and individuals whose ideas and practices may be foreign to them, but whose shared humanity binds them more tightly to the reader than even blood ties of family or oaths of duty to one's country. Chi's vision of the future encompasses both the fantastic and the real, the dystopian, eutopian, and utopian potential in every individual, the homosexual and (by extension) the heterosexual, the queer and the straight. As he states in his preface, Chi's writings translated here offer up both the pain and the pleasure of a "high" to the reader, and will no doubt continue to inspire readers for many years to come.

Chapter 4: Translation Strategies, Solutions, and Viewpoints

4.1 Introduction

In researching references for my translation of *Membranes*, I came across the following lines in the translator's preface to K. M. Ganguli's English version of the *Mahabharata*, completed between 1883 and 1896:

The object of the translator should ever be to hold the mirror up to his author. That being so, his chief duty is to present so far as practicable the manner in which his author's ideas have been expressed, retaining if possible at the sacrifice of idiom and taste all of the peculiarities of his author's imagery and of language as well....To the purely English reader there is much in the following passages that will strike as ridiculous. Those unacquainted with any language but their own are generally very exclusive in matters of taste. Having no knowledge of models other than what they meet with in their own tongue, the standard they have formed of purity and taste in composition must necessarily be a narrow one. The translator, however, would ill-discharge his duty if, for the sake of avoiding ridicule, he sacrificed fidelity to the original. He must represent his author as he is, not as he should be to please the narrow taste of those entirely unacquainted with him.²⁸

As I worked on and revised my translation, I often could not help but sigh at the prescience and clarity of this remark. My work as a translator is indeed to hold a mirror up to my author; but I am conscious that a mirror distorts every time it reflects, and that what is seen is thus necessarily an imperfect reproduction of the original. All that I have been able to do is to reproduce, so far and so faithfully as it was possible, this reflection of the text as it appeared to me. Where the text appeared clear, I have tried to use language that is clear; where the text appeared to me opaque, I have not attempted to throw any more light on the translation than I was able myself to shine

²⁸ This quotation is taken from the version in the public domain at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m01/m01001.htm>, accessed on January 5, 2014.

on the original. I cannot say that I gave much conscious consideration to the audience to whom my translations were to be presented; but I certainly hoped for them to be curious, broad-minded English speakers who might, if the stories moved them enough, wish to read the original if it were in their power. The truth of the matter is, however, that I never anticipated that my translations would be published at all, and so felt freer to try to reproduce the style and feel of the original than I might have if encumbered by considerations of publication. I have put equally far from my mind translation theory in its many incarnations, which has always seemed to me better equipped to deal with texts already translated than to inform those currently being translated. I am keenly aware that as a translator my tendency to stick very close to the language of the source text, to reproduce what Ganguli calls the “peculiarities” of the original has often led me astray and often exasperated those who have read my translations; but I would rather err on the side of reproducing the reflection of the text as it seemed to me rather than distort it further by adducing extratextual considerations whose function and purpose is to represent the author “as he should be to please the narrow taste of those entirely unacquainted with him.” The domain of my work and the proper object of my loyalty is the text itself, and beyond that, with the exception of revisions to it in light of my own changing understanding, I dare not go.

The foregoing is not to say that, in making my translations, I have not availed myself of various translation strategies to better navigate the nuances I perceived in the text as I translated. I have in fact made use of several different translation strategies, a number of which will be discussed below.

4.2 Annotations

Chi Ta-wei’s works translated here, and particularly *Membranes*, abound in literary and cultural references. As I translated, I felt both a natural curiosity to delve deeper into the author’s world and a sense that the many cultural references in the story were a vital part of the richness and life of the author’s vision. I therefore decided that I would provide annotations to *Membranes* to make the cultural landscape of the novella as readily apparent as possible, anchoring the thematic tapestry that forms the backdrop to the story in a string of clearly identifiable references. Given that the protagonist, Momo, also learns of these references through “reading” about them on discbooks, I felt that part of my fidelity to the author involved making these references as quickly and easily accessible as they are to the characters in the story. Chi Ta-wei himself writes that “the most important of these parts [which make up the story of *Membranes*] are the internal and external references and allusions in the text, most of which come from foreign films, theory,

literature, painting, and music. Without these imported foreign parts, the stories would cease to function.”²⁹ It was thus important for me to research and provide succinct summaries of all of the references I could find so that the story could work its full effect on the reader’s heart and mind.

At the same time, the stories themselves often provide ample context for an understanding of their themes, characters, and concerns, and attempting to add footnotes to the shorter works translated here would only burden them with unnecessary information and prevent the reader from directly engaging with the brief snapshots of the world they present, something the author himself told me in a personal communication was contrary to his intentions. I have therefore decided *not* to add footnotes to the short stories I have translated, with the single exception of *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, whose French title obscures the meaning to the English reader, while the Chinese title, 牧神的午後 *mu shen de wu hou*, is as clear to the Chinese reader as “The Afternoon of the Faun” would be to the English reader. In the interest of retaining the clarity of the original Chinese text while respecting the author’s written communication to me that he meant to use the French title, I have added a footnote clarifying the meaning and implications of this title to the reader, while leaving unannotated the rest of the story (save for a brief note about a sentence I decided, on the advice of my adviser, to omit) and the remaining three short stories I have translated here. The French title of *Nuit et brouillard* is, however, explained in a footnote to clarify both its meaning and that of the Chinese, 親密關係, which means “intimacy.” One further exception is a brief note on a discrepancy in the text of *The War Is Over* that I decided to correct, following the practice of giving a brief annotation for a similar textual discrepancy that I corrected in *Membranes*.

4.3 Issues of Gender and the Balance of Power

In many of Chi’s early works translated here, problems of gender and power relations exist which the translator must do her best to resolve. One example from *Membranes* is the gender of the dog Andy: the reader is initially informed that the dog is “sexless,” (頁 31) and thereafter the dog is referred to as 牠 *ta*, a word that refers exclusively to animals and does not denote a fixed gender. Because English does not usually refer to animals using the neuter gender, the translator is faced with a conundrum: assign a gender to an avowedly sexless dog, sacrificing the peculiarity of the original for smoothness and readability, or else resort to some circumlocution

²⁹ *Prefatory Material*, pp. i-ii.

such as “the dog” or “Andy” and do one’s best to avoiding repeating the same words too often in a short span. I have chosen the latter option because I believe that keeping Andy’s gender hidden is central to the surprise of the story (the dog is actually a machine that monitors and controls Momo’s brainwaves while her brain rests in its android cage). Assigning the dog a gender would be problematic when it is later revealed to be a machine, while denying it a gender keeps the uneasy feeling that something is wrong with Momo’s reality present in the reader’s mind (how can a “real” dog be “sexless”?).

A far more profound problem of gender and power relations exists in the short story *The War Is Over*. Human characters, all soldiers, are referred to as 外子 *waizi*, a term usually used to refer to husbands that means something like “master of the outer chambers (of a home).” Yet the story makes clear near the beginning (頁 159) that both males *and* females can be *waizi*, making it inappropriate to refer to them by the male gender alone. Further complicating the problem is the relationship between the *waizi* and their android replicant companions / slaves, characters who are described as literally belonging to the house in which they live and who must obey the instructions of their *waizi*. The replicants are given female names, but are referred to throughout as 它 *ta*, an ideograph that is usually used to refer to things and has no fixed gender. Chinese can repeat the words *waizi* and *ta* frequently without sounding strange or tiresome to the reader, but English requires variation in its pronouns and titles if it is not to sound stilted and mechanical, something the original definitely does not. The first part of the problem is how to deal with the term *waizi*: what terms can suggest both a spousal relationship and a balance of power favorable to the person referred to? I initially tried the term “paramour,” because the *waizi* and their replicants were brought together for the purposes of “love,” of satisfying the *waizi*’s desires for food and sex. Yet this term can also suggest that the *waizi*’s relationship is of questionable legality or morality, something not intimated by the Chinese word. I next tried “commander,” which had the advantages of being gender neutral, of placing power firmly in the hands of the *waizi*, and of relating to the military context of the story. Yet I soon realized that the intimate, spousal connotations of the word *waizi* were missing from “commander,” and I tried to find a term that would better express the connubial (or at least cohabitational) relationships between the humans and their replicant servants. I finally settled on the English term “Better Half,” which has the advantage of being a term of endearment used by couples that can refer to people of either gender. At the same time, the “better” in “better half” suggests a balance of power favorable to the individual being referred to and is thus indicative of the greater power placed in the hands of *waizi* vis a vis replicants. While by no means a perfect

solution, it does at least address the major concerns of gender neutrality and power imbalance that I felt were central themes of the story.

A related problem arose with how to deal with the word *ta* used to refer to the replicants. It certainly has a dehumanizing function and strips the replicants of the gender they might have identified with had they been human, so I felt it would have been inappropriate to refer to the replicant characters as “she,” even though both have female names. At the same time, I felt that the recognition by the replicant characters that they are of the same kind and thus share a far more natural relationship with each other than that they share with the humans mitigates somewhat the harshness of the term *ta* when they use it to refer to each other. I finally settled on the expedient of enclosing the word “it” in quotation marks whenever it is used by a *waizi* but leaving it unmarked when used by the replicants themselves. In this way I felt that I was able to accentuate the foreignness of the *waizi* and replicants to each other and the shared kinship experienced by the replicants between themselves.

A third concern arises when so many non-gendered terms are used in a short span of prose to refer to both humans and replicants. To avoid having to repeat “Better Half” so many times that it would have interrupted and stilted the flow of the prose, I have chosen at times to translate sentences that refer to the *waizi* actively doing something to the replicants as passive sentences written from the replicants’ point of view. By doing so I reinforce the unequal power relations that are implicit in the Chinese original while avoiding repetitions that could suggest a less lively prose than seemed present to me as I translated the work. Some examples:

(外子每回去空港，特別囑咐我不要接送……) (頁 156)

Trans. 1: (Every time my Better Half returned to the Space Port, my Better Half told me not to come meet my Better Half...)

Trans. 2: (Every time my Better Half returned to the Star Port, I would specifically be told not to come welcome my Better Half home...)

Or again:

外子每次放假回家，都會向我描述太空站之外的激烈戰狀……(頁 161)

Trans. 1: Each time my Better Half came home on leave, my Better Half would describe to me the fierce conditions of the war outside the space station...

Trans. 2: Every time my Better Half came home on leave I would be told about the fierce battles being waged beyond the confines of the space station...

I felt that the use of the passive voice in these and similar passages better conveyed the sense of subordination and passivity in the replicant characters than a translation in the active voice would have.

4.4 Style and Punctuation

Chi's works, like those of many Chinese authors (and unlike English), often employ long sentences strung together by commas in presenting their narratives. This is common for Chinese prose but would dramatically slow down the pace of the narrative if repeated in English, and I wanted my translations to read as quickly and fluidly as the original seemed to me to read. I have therefore followed a strategy of using commas as sparsely as I felt it was possible to do without disrupting the flow of the narrative, speeding up the pace of the story and so in a sense imitating the swiftness with which information can be retrieved, especially in stories such as *Membranes* which make such heavy use of reading via discs and computers.

Another strategy I have employed to increase the speed and flow of the stories is to remove repetitious sentences. I have been careful to note where I have employed this strategy and have used it sparingly because I did not want to omit anything the author had written, but after suggestions from my thesis adviser I have sometimes deleted portions of the original text. The most notable instance of this is the scene in *Membranes* where ten year-old Momo browses a discbook store and finds it packed with discbooks so inferior to the ones that her mother brings her every day that she almost weeps with boredom. The author employs three long clauses that all express the same sentiment in slightly different wording. Although this certainly heightens the sense of Momo's boredom for the reader, it does so at the risk of boring the reader herself, something I felt that the Chinese original did not do. I therefore condensed these three clauses into a single sentence instead of three, retaining the author's meaning without slowing down the pace of the story on a comparatively minor incident. The following is a comparison of the original Chinese, my initial translation, and my revised translation of this passage with the deleted sentences highlighted in boldface:

這些暢銷書，在家裡多得是，媽咪每天回家都會帶好幾套回來，默默並不覺得逛書店特別有趣。由於媽咪在出版企業工作的關係，默默家裡總充實了一套套最新最受歡迎

的光碟書，比店中陳列的那幾種更有可看性——如此一來，何必上書店？默默究竟要感到可喜還是可悲呢？她家的書比電腦店書架上的商品精彩，她似乎應該感到幸運；可是她就是看膩了家中的光碟書才來逛街呢，如果外頭賣的光碟書更是無聊，她可真要欲哭無淚了，呀無趣的童年。（頁 79）

Trans. 1: These books were bestsellers, but they were also the same kind that Mommy brought home every day by the handful and of which she already had plenty, so Momo wasn't especially interested in browsing a discbook store. **Since Mommy worked for a publishing company, Momo's home was always filled with stacks of the latest and most popular discbooks that were more readable than anything in the rows of books in the store**—since that's how it was, what was the point of her going to a bookstore? Was Momo supposed to feel glad or sad at the sight? The books she had at home were far more interesting than anything on the shelves in this computer electronics store, so she should probably feel fortunate and happy; then again, the whole reason she had come to the store was because she couldn't stand to read any of the books she had at home, and if the books she could find outside were even more insipid than the ones she already had, she'd be bored beyond tears, so dull was her childhood.

Trans. 2: These books were bestsellers, but they were also the same kind that Mommy brought home every day by the handful and of which she already had plenty, so Momo wasn't especially interested in browsing a discbook store—since that's how it was, what was the point of her going to a bookstore? Was Momo supposed to feel glad or sad at the sight? The books she had at home were far more interesting than anything on the shelves in this computer electronics store, so she should probably feel fortunate and happy; then again, the whole reason she had come to the store was because she couldn't stand to read any of the books she had at home, and if the books she could find outside were even more insipid than the ones she already had, she'd be bored beyond tears, so dull was her childhood.

Another example of deletion comes from *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, where I have deleted the parenthetical phrase, 懷表成為阿索身上的臟器，阿索也成為這隻表的一塊肉……（頁 195）“The pocket watch had become one of A Suo's vital organs, while he had become a piece of the watch's flesh...” which is present just two paragraphs earlier. This minor deletion was suggested by my advisor and subsequently approved

by the author himself. By deleting this one phrase, I was able to improve the flow of the story without greatly tampering with the author's original intentions or being unfaithful to the pace of the story as it appeared to me.

Chi does, however, sometimes use punctuation for dramatic effect, causing the reader to pause or jolting the reader out of complacency. One of the most frequently used of these dramatic devices is the placing of the comma directly after the word 但 *dan*, a very abrupt usage in Chinese, which more frequently prefers the two-syllable 但是 *danshi*. The effect is to jolt the reader awake and to draw attention immediately to what follows. Although I initially attempted to replicate this effect literally in English, I soon found that using the comma immediately after the conjunction, as Chi did, actually tended to *reduce* the immediacy and impact of the phrase. I thus felt that the effect in English was often better achieved by omitting the comma, keeping the following phrase short, and limiting the conjunction to a single word such as "yet" or "but." In this way the impact of the conjunction is given its full-force, while the conjunction itself remains monosyllabic, as in Chi's original. The following sentence translated from *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* will give some idea of this effect:

但，既然沒有佩掛懷表時得不到一夜安眠，恐怕，永遠的安眠也因此不可求的罷…… (頁 194)

Trans. 1: Yet, when he didn't put on the pocket watch, he couldn't get a night of peaceful sleep. He was afraid, that he might never be able to sleep peacefully again because of it....

Trans. 2: Yet when he didn't put on the pocket watch he couldn't get a night of peaceful sleep. He was afraid that he might therefore never sleep peacefully again....

Another example can be found in *The War Is Over*:

但，不懂，是我的錯？ (頁 164)

Trans. 1: But, that I didn't understand, was that my fault?

Trans. 2: But was it my fault that I didn't understand?

In each of these cases, removing the author's original punctuation while keeping the monosyllabic conjunction adds both speed and weight to the original sentences without making them seem stilted in English.

In other instances, Chi puts the comma in unusual places for emphasis. One example of this comes from *Membranes*, when Momo has just received an e-mail for her mother and is unsure of whether to reply to it or delete it. The Chinese reads: 回信給，媽咪？ *Hui xin gei, Mami?* (頁 43) Standard Chinese usage would either omit the comma or else place it after *hui xin*, which is properly the main verb of the sentence. By putting the comma in this unusual place, Chi emphasizes both Momo's hesitation and the word *mami* that follows. I could have chosen to follow Chi's usage and written: "Reply to, Mommy?" But because Momo and her mother use e-mail to communicate, I opted to use a common e-mail formulation, "re: Mommy?" to translate the phrase, putting the pause in roughly the same place as the Chinese original and retaining Chi's emphasis on Mommy at the end of the sentence.

Another instance of unusual punctuation occurs at the beginning of *The War Is Over*, where the comma would not normally fall after the word 誰 *shei* (who), but is placed there for emphasis:

還有，是誰，將陪我一道沉浮？（頁 155）

Trans. 1: And yet, who was it, who would accompany me on my drifting?

Trans 2: But who would accompany me on my drifting?

In still other cases, Chi uses the period or full stop to add emphasis to his words. In some cases, as in the story "An Offering of a Head" from *11 Songs for Percussion*, the clauses are short and, unusually for Chinese, almost all end with full stops rather than commas, and I have followed Chi's usage as faithfully as possible here to reproduce this effect. In another example from *Membranes*, Chi writes of "A liquid sky" 液體的天空 *yeti de tiankong* (頁 25), setting this phrase off from the surrounding text by full stops. As a verbless sentence like this is extremely rare in Chinese prose, I have chosen to follow Chi's usage and similarly separate this sentence from the surrounding ones for dramatic effect. Another example in which I have tried to reproduce Chi's punctuation and phrasing comes near the beginning of the story, after Momo asks about her birth story and resolves never to lose her friends as her mother has done:

我要和心愛的朋友永遠在一起。永遠的。一定。（頁 23）

Trans. 1: I want to be with the friends I love forever. Forever. I will be.

Trans. 2: I want to be with my dear friends forever. Forever. I mean it.

Here, Chi's Chinese phrases grow progressively shorter, from the three-ideograph *yongyuan de* to the two-ideograph *yiding*. I have tried to retain the heartfelt emphasis of the original by employing the opposite device of using a one-word phrase followed by a multi-word phrase, using the emphatic "I mean it" rather than the more literal "certainly" or "I will be" to keep the original's emotional impact upon the reader.

In other cases, however, particularly when the sentence set off in this way does have a verb of its own, I have felt that the narrative pacing in English would be better served by using a comma and joining the sentence to the preceding one rather than using a full stop. I realize that I could just as easily have reproduced the punctuation of the original; but I felt that the break occasioned by a full stop before such short sentences containing their own verb would just as effectively be produced by using a comma, which has the additional effect of emphasizing the sentences so joined by making them complete the thought of the preceding sentences rather than standing as short, disjointed phrases on their own. An example of this is the sentence in *Membranes*:

可是她覺得，大人嫉妒她和安迪的關係。媽咪尤其如此。(頁 75)

Trans. 1: But she felt that adults were jealous of her relationship with Andy. Especially Mommy.

Trans. 2: But she felt that adults were jealous of her relationship with Andy, especially Mommy.

At other times, I have added to the punctuation and phrasing of Chi's original to better capture the tone of the text, as in this bit of dialogue near the end of the story:

我們還是來慶祝我的生日吧。媽咪。(頁 110)

Trans. 1: "We might as well go celebrate my birthday. Mommy."

Trans. 2: "We might as well go celebrate my birthday. Let's go, Mommy."

It is important to note that the punctuation conforms to standard Chinese usage; I have combined sentences or used differing punctuation in English in an effort to better capture the register of the original.

Considerations of punctuation are a particularly important stylistic concern when translating Chi's early works presented here as he tends to use dialogue very sparsely. The vast majority of his stories are straight narration occasionally interspersed with bits of dialogue or, more rarely, long conversations. Sometimes Chi even uses unexpected punctuation to represent the thought processes of mechanical beings, as in the strings of thought punctuated by asterisks in *The War Is Over*. I have also followed all of Chi's uses of ellipses and long dashes, even when this results in slightly unusual phrasing. Maintaining the speed and flow of the story in English by carefully regulating punctuation is a concern that cannot be overlooked by a translator looking to capture Chi's unusual narrative style.

One final consideration of style concerns Chi's use of sentences imitating the style of other authors. Two such sentences from *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* stand out for me in particular. Both sentences contain echoes of Kafka, whose works serve as one of the thematic elements binding the two characters K. and A Suo together. The first sentence describes the flow of blood from K.'s head after he has been struck by A Suo with a hammer. The sentence describes blood "flowing in a radial pattern" 放射狀態 *fang she zhuangtai*, a phrase that has parallels in Kafka's works *The Castle* and *The Trial*, which perhaps not coincidentally also feature main characters named K. The other noteworthy passage is the final sentence in the story, which describes a photograph as 沉浴在冬日鄉間的午後微笑裡 *chen yu zai xiangjian wu hou de weixiao li*, "bathed deep in the smile of that winter afternoon in the countryside." Both sentences puzzled my Taiwanese classmates and thesis adviser when they initially read them, and puzzled me as well until I tried to render them into English. By putting the Kafka-esque sentences into a Western language, what had initially seemed to be inscrutable seemed to make more sense as a deliberate choice of words for stylistic effect. It is important to note that the author, in a personal communication to me, denied deliberately imitating Kafka in the sentences just cited; but I feel it would be strange indeed if Kafka's writings, at least in translation, did not exert some perceptible influence on the author as he wrote this very Kafkaesque story.

4.5 Conclusion

The foregoing is a representative sample of the considerations that faced me as I translated the works presented here. I have endeavored during the translation

process to hold a mirror up to my author and to faithfully recreate both his words and his stylistic idiosyncrasies, but I have also been keenly aware of the fact that at times such re-creation involves altering the exact form of the original in the translated text to avoid producing effects that I felt were not present or intended in the original. I have not always been successful; and there are no doubt many instances where my practice of following the author as closely as possible has put me in error or at fault. I believe, however, that strict considerations of audience, translation theory, and even the likelihood that the work will be published are not properly the sphere of the translator as she is translating, who must engage with the text as directly as possible and put all other considerations from her mind. While my understanding of the author's works undoubtedly will continue to undergo revision, I hope that the works as I have presented them remain a faithful reflection of the author's vision insofar as I was able to see it, and that I have not dressed his words in so outlandish a fashion that they will be incomprehensible to anyone who is capable of comparing my rendition with the original.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

Translating Chi Ta-wei's works has been an inspiring and exhilarating journey, both a great challenge and a great pleasure. It has been filled with frustrating moments in which I grappled with the text only to find myself defeated again and again until I found a solution I was comfortable with; and it has also been punctuated by happy moments in which I hit upon solutions to the problems of translation which taxed my ingenuity without unduly taxing my patience. It has been a painful journey in which I experienced the joys and sorrows laid out for me by the author; but it has also been a wonderful journey of self-discovery and growth as I learned about myself both as a human being and as a translator.

In making this journey, I can confidently say that while I have not *broken* any new ground, I have *trodden* new ground and beaten new paths for the reader interested in learning more about Chi Ta-wei's works to follow. I have tried to serve as a guide, illuminating both the smooth and rough portions of the work just enough to enable the reader to navigate them for herself if she chooses. I have tried to hold up a light to my author and faithfully describe what I have seen; but I have also tried, insofar as this was possible, to meddle as little with the text as I was able, to let the reader bring her own feelings and ideas to the text and to present the text as clearly to the reader as I myself saw it.

In so doing, I will undoubtedly be criticized for sticking too close to the original text, even at the risk of sounding foreign or unusual, and so disappointing the English-speaking audiences that Lawrence Venuti has criticized as "aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to the foreign, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other."³⁰ I will also certainly be roundly criticized by those in the translation community who believe, with Howard Goldblatt, that "the thing that's really killing translation in our field is literalism....You need to overcome your fear of the text, put some distance between you and it."³¹ In my view considerations of an audience such as Venuti describes and

³⁰ Venuti, p. 12.

³¹ Cited in Lingenfelter 2007.

of literalism such as Goldblatt advocates are dangerous conceits for any translator to hold. The translator's loyalty must always be to the text, which is necessarily a protean thing in her hands. As with the mythological Proteus, the translator must get as close to the text as possible when translating it in order to capture all of the subtle shifts in shape that the text presents to her if she is to have any hope of finally grappling with and pinning down with her vision the heaving, ever-restive mass before her. The reader may be uncomfortable following such an unfamiliar and foreign display; but it would be worse for the author and the reader if the translator were to produce a Proteus in the image of Pallas Athena, fully formed from her own head, in the sole interest of relieving her own and the reader's headaches. The reader deserves every chance to grapple with the original text that the translator can give her, and the best translations inspire in their readers the desire to read the original for themselves. To do otherwise is to be utterly unfaithful to the author, the text, and, ultimately, the reader. To translate too freely with extratextual considerations such as the desires of the audience or the market for publication seems to me to be a case of 沐猴而冠 *mu hou er guan*, "dressing a macaque (to fool people into thinking it is a person)"; no matter how much the translator's audience may be partial to a certain kind of person, it is her responsibility to make sure that if macaques or any other unusual or unexpected beings appear in her text, they are recognizable as such, and no considerations of audience or freedom in translation should sway her from that responsibility.

I have tried to faithfully capture as much of the spirit, vigor, and idiosyncrasies of Chi's text as I have been able. In holding up a mirror to the author as closely as I have, I hope that I have at least provided readers and future scholars with a framework for approaching the works that I have translated here, and that I have laid the groundwork from which even more profitable translations of and research into the colorful and wonderful worlds of Chi Ta-wei's fiction may be done.

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Part II: Translations

English Translation of Membranes and Other Works

Prefatory Material

Preface to the New Edition

This new edition of *Membranes* collects a number of my previous works: *Membranes*, first published by *United Daily News* in 1996; *Fetish Stories*, first published in 1998 by *China Times Publishing Company*; the never-before collected very short story *Breakfast*, written in 1999; and the never-before collected novella *L'Année dernière à Marienbad: In Imitation of a Webpage Novel*, written in 1997. Thus there is almost double the amount of content in this new edition of *Membranes* than in the original edition.

All of these works were written before I went to study in the US in 1999.

Fast-forward to 2011, and “android,” “clone,” and “replicant,” are almost ubiquitous concepts: movies, video games, and mobile phones all feature android models. In the academic world, “posthumanism” has been in fashion for more than a decade now. But in the 1990s when I was in my early twenties, “android” was still a fresh concept. Back then my e-mail address was android@ms4.hinet.net. In 1999, after I flew to UCLA in California to read for my Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, I used the e-mail address android@ucla.edu.

Life finds its way; “the Other” also finds a way to enter our lives. Almost everyone is an android, bearing man-made parts either inside or outside their bodies: stents for internal organs, prosthetic limbs, contact lenses, protective talismans obtained at temples, tattoos on the back, and the smartphones that never leave our hands, to name but a few. Without these man-made parts, our bodies would cease to function. Then there are the countless “friends” from Facebook (or Twitter, MSN, etc.) who accompany us to work and school: they are also parts of our android nature, since people believe that through Facebook they can extend the reach of their lives, even as Facebook extends its reach through them. Facebook is an external organ of the human body, even as each member of Facebook is a part of its inner workings. In the works collected here, I wrote of “virtual kinship”—in the web of our android-like lives, even kinship can be virtual (this is already an established fact, even though we are never willing to admit it outright). Blood may be thicker than water, but information is thicker still than blood.

This new edition of *Membranes*, in collecting several short stories, is also like an android body and is composed of several different parts. The most important of these parts are the internal and external references and allusions in the text, most of which come from foreign films, literature, theory, painting, and music. Without these imported foreign parts, the stories would cease to function. This tendency to rely on foreign imports is a relic of “history” (of the Taiwan of the time in which the works were written, and of my own age during that time). “Colonialism,” “internationality,” “modernity,” and “postmodernity,” long ago became the parts of which Taiwan and my generation were composed. Because of “historical” forces during the years in which these works were written, I studied in the Foreign Languages and Literature Department in college and graduate school in Taiwan, then later went to study in the US “as a matter of course,” and after spending six years in the Western part of America subsequently spent another five in the Eastern part of the country. But “history” had already moved on by then.

As soon as a photo is taken, its subject dies; as soon as a sci-fi novel is written, the fantastic parts of it go out of date. As modern readers read these old stories, they may feel that they are hard to understand because the technology of the era has disappeared. Some examples: the characters in the stories use BBS to receive e-mails, but today’s readers may not use BBS or even need to use e-mail to communicate internationally; the characters in the stories need a phone line to connect to the Internet and can’t use their phones for as long as they are online, but for today’s readers a wireless Internet connection is par for the course; the stories make no mention of mobile phones because at the time I wrote the stories mobile phones had not yet become widely available, but today’s smartphones are so versatile that at times they can even replace computers. I myself had only a pager and no mobile phone until 1999. I brought my pager with me when I went to the US, and stared at its red light going out on the flight over, as though it represented the life force of an android slowly fading away, as if it were the end of an era.

But I still look at old photos and read old stories. Even if the subjects of old photos are no longer with us and the frames of the old novels have grown rusty, I still rummage among the ruins of my thoughts and words for the shattered radiance that has continued to shine during the more than ten years from the time the stories were first published until today. As I looked over my old drafts at school in preparation for republishing them, I reread most of the works collected here for the first time in more than ten years—it was like walking in a daze to the old address of an abandoned hotel, or finally reacquainting myself with and looking again, for the first time in more than ten years, at the old photographs of myself.

I was reminded of one of my motivations for writing *Membranes* in the first place. Before I went to the US I frequently rode a motorcycle. Once, when I took it in for repairs, I noticed a dismantled motorcycle split neatly into two halves lying on the floor of the shop, and I immediately thought of the cut strips of beef and pork hung out for sale in the meat markets. My thoughts then abruptly shifted to thinking about cutting open the human body. The motorcycle that I had sent in for repairs was just like an android.

After going to the US, I became one with my car. When I was in Los Angeles, my favorite pastime was driving fast on the freeway in the middle of the night. Seeing the doors to Universal Studios on the Hollywood Freeway was like seeing the doors of my own home, since the room I rented was nearby. When I moved from the Western part of the US to the Eastern part of the country, I drove all the way from Los Angeles to New York, then turned and drove up to New England. When I had to send my car in for repairs, I felt again and again how closely I had bonded with the machine. Later, I started having to send the dogs I had raised to the vet, one after another. Dogs grow old, too. As the dogs' bodies lay on the stainless steel examination platform, the circumstances felt all too familiar to me. People are like machines and machines are like people, but pets are like both. After I had come back and resettled in Taiwan, I went to the hospital to visit a sick friend. This man, after having endured numerous invasive medical checks, pretended to sit peacefully on his bed. At the head of his bed lay the thick, heavy foreign novel I had sent him, while our forthright friend did his best to put on a brave face, laugh, and encourage us all to eat imported cherries, since it was after all the Night of the Sevens.¹ Android-like lives can be seen everywhere, flashing into view one moment and vanishing the next.

The life lesson hidden in these old stories is: "How to return home after a life spent wandering." What I mean by "home" is not just the home of our parents or the home we build with our partners, and isn't even necessarily restricted to the island of Taiwan. "Home" is a space where people can rest easy for a moment or contentedly settle themselves for a lifetime. Even if it's just another person's palms, shoulders, or scent, so long as they can enwrap another person and make him or her feel at ease, then they, too, are home. An American saying holds that "home is where the heart is." During the first six years I spent living in the US, I often went to the beaches of California to look at the sea, but at the time I never thought of gazing toward my home country across the Pacific Ocean; during the next five years, I saw the sea from the Eastern part of the US. In Connecticut, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, New York City, Boston,

¹ So called because it is the seventh day of the seventh month on the Chinese lunar calendar; it is roughly equivalent to Valentine's Day in the West.

Cape Cod in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Highway 95. Only as I faced the Atlantic Ocean with my back to East Asia did I begin to see Taiwan. I wonder if what I saw was a mirage. But if it was, why did it appear so vivid to me? My thanks to all of my elders in the academic and literary world who called me back to Taiwan, to my forthright friends, and to everyone I love.

Chi Ta-Wei, National Cheng Chi University Institute of Taiwan Literature, December 2011

Preface: A HIGH Place for Writing

In my acceptance speech for the award for *Membranes*, I wrote: “Thank you to the judges and to *United Daily* Publishing for giving me the strength to keep up the HIGH which enabled me to write. “HIGH” is a slang term originally denoting the rush of happiness brought on by drugs rather than “high level” or “surpassing.” For me, the act of writing simultaneously brings both great joy and great suffering, hard as an itch to resist, and always plunges me deep into an abyss: this is when writing becomes a high, or a HIGH place.

I have no wish to lock myself and my writings in my study, since this is only a way or torturing or comforting myself—what I hope is that my works can climb out of the study and jolt into a high the ostensibly open and tolerant but actually very conservative social order and thereby bring it to a HIGH place. Only such a stimulating challenge could give me the motivation to rashly continue writing and turn my flesh, blood, heart, and mind into a shaved *katsuboshi* fish into which I dug in and tore out my work page by page with my teeth. If the world outside my study were calm and clear, my writing would probably dry up. I am twenty-three this year, and perhaps the itch was too great; for in addition to working myself to the bone to finish *Queer Senses*, I also churned out a novel of around 100,000 characters. *Membranes* is the work born of these labors begun in the beginning of autumn in 1994 and finished at the end of summer in 1995.

The novel for which I won this award, *Membranes*, is a science fiction novel about the virtual sexual desires of lesbians. In Taiwan’s literary sphere, science fiction is neither considered good writing nor does it draw a large audience, but I believe the genre has spaces worth cultivating and is especially suitable for exploring issues of sexuality (European and American feminist science fiction is a shining example of this fact). So I plucked up my courage and set my pen to paper. The content of the novel centers on the interactions between women (there are no human male characters)—this was a challenge I set for myself and also an homage to feminist literature. It was also a dangerously presumptive gesture, but I believed that the danger lay more in the necessity of the act of writing—since writing that is safe and takes no risks has no reason to exist. I began to take this risk on Children’s Day (April 4) in 1994, and finished the weighty computer-typed draft in time to send it out in the middle of May. For a month during that time, between my work on the novel and my heavy course load in graduate school, I was incredibly hard on myself. During the writing process, my companions were the movies of Almodovar and Atom Egoyan, Ito Junji’s horror manga (the character Tomie in the novel is an homage to Mr. Junji), the Internet, the music of Nino Rota, Vangelis and Ute Lemper, *tongzhi* theory, and the

endless dog hair and incessant dog barking that I could never stop. It was a miracle that I didn't get sick after turning in the draft; and at the end of May I re-energized my spirits and busied myself with amusements and preparing for the GLAD....

The other works in this book were written at various times both before and after *Membranes* and are both a warm-up and a cool-down for the main work (since that worrisome itch demands to be scratched). These short stories appear at first glance to be quite different from *Membranes*, but they are all animated by common feelings and scope of thought. Of these, I feel that the stories published in the *China Times* under the title of *11 Songs for Percussion* are especially unique; although each of these pieces is no more than 500 characters long, the cold process of drumming them out on the computer made it quite difficult for me to sleep at night. As I wrote those stories, the roof covering my apartment was powerless to keep out the winter chill, and I could only wrap myself up and pour all the warmth left in my body onto the keyboard, but I had absolutely no idea where my readers might be....In short, to be able to see these mini stories that almost never saw the light of day collected here helps relieve at last some of the sense of being lost I felt then.

Membranes and *Queer Sexualities* were anthologized not far apart from each other; and I do not deny that *Membranes* is a continuation of *Queer Sexualities*. This kind of continuation is proof that I maintained the sincere perseverance of my queer writing—but doesn't this imply that I ought to take a change of pace and use some different method to keep up my HIGH, lest I continually trod over the same ground?

With a little distance between the worries and the youth of my twenty-third year, I hope that I can leave the chalk circle of *Queer Sexualities* and *Membranes*, wash my face, and continue to explore the endless possibilities of sexuality, politics, and literature.

Thanks to my friends at *United Daily* Publishing and the *United Daily Literary Supplement* for all of their help in getting these crazy, boyish works of mine published. I spent a lonely part of my boyhood working at the company, and I never imagined that I would later have the chance to be published by it. My grateful memories and feelings are thus so complex that I may need to write another science fiction novel just to explain them clearly. Finally, thanks to MO for keeping me company and lending me his shoulder to lean on. Its sweet warmth and almost ephemeral character gave me the courage I needed to face the cold depths of every new day.

Written at Yung-Ho in Taipei during the 1995 Golden Horse International Film Exhibition

Award Acceptance Speech: Keep Up the HIGH

Thank you to the judges and to the *United Daily Literary Supplement* for so boldly affirming this young man's work and allowing this queer to keep up the HIGH.

Membranes is a novel of sexual politics, a queer science fiction novel, a work done from a false female perspective: since the writing is not true to life, it is both unnatural and immoral. But whose "morality" do those works which we are now forced to recognize as "natural" follow? When it comes to the matter of "the closet," my works can't help but raise both their voice and their anger.

Just like Momo in the story, I send and receive e-mails. Readers from both within and outside of the closet who are interested in developing the novel's fantasy world with me can write to this address: android.bbs@bbs.ntu.edu.tw. Queer games have no ending, and the rainbow can stretch on forever.

I have only provided a skeleton in the novel, but MO provides both its soul and its flesh (I would even go so far as to say that the title of the novel comes from the name "MO"). I dedicate this work, therefore, to MO.

Judges' Comments: Cruelly Stabbed in the Heart by the Author (Wu Nianzhen)

Although the real world is already facing extinction from pillaging, wars, and pollution, yet in another, man-made world, she employs her unique professional skills to create or recreate youth and beauty; or, we might say, hope and self-confidence.

She conceals herself from beginning to end in an almost impenetrable world, and her only contact with the real world is through “reading”—reading the limited, disparate information taken from the skin of her clients, analyzed by computer, and transmitted to her.

Reaching this point in the novel, you get the impression that the author is watching you as he coldly smiles—yes, watching you, dear intellectuals.

From here, the author never stops cutting away, spreading out the truth before your eyes and telling you that your body, your memories, and even the things you say to others, no matter whether you yourself believe that they are well-meant creations or recreations, none of them are yours; all of it is transplanted, copied, or even a virtual reality that can be added to or deleted from at any time. The real meaning of all this is that you are very likely one of the people who help the real world along its path to destruction.

By using a science fiction setting, the author manages to imperceptibly sneak past our feelings of happiness in reading to stab us cruelly in the heart, a reading experience all too rare in recent years. I believe that this is the main reason why *Membranes* deserves to win this award and be read by more people.

Of course, the author's insistence on maintaining the structure proper to a novella in preference to the popular MTV-style narratives employed by the other works presented to our panel makes his work even more endearing.

After our deliberations for the awards were over and learning that the first prize winner was both a Taiwanese and a young creative writer, I felt very happy; thinking about it now, I feel I will not escape censure for indulging in feelings of national pride.

Membranes

1

Momo reached out her hand and stroked the yellow wallpaper of her bedroom, then lightly bit into a greenhouse-grown peach, whose smooth, soft skin yielded to the fruit within. And yet—she couldn't be certain whether the neural network beneath her skin had really bared itself to feel the yellow of the wallpaper, and she didn't know whether her taste buds had really seized upon the sweetness of the fruit—wasn't there always an impassible barrier between the physical world and the human body?

Momo saw the world through membranes. She was thirty, and she had always felt that there was at least one membrane that separated her from the outside world. Of course this membrane wasn't the skin-care facial coverings she used in her work, but the kind of membrane you couldn't see, and it made her feel like a water flea wrapped up neatly in a bubble, swimming freely in the ocean. Although the ocean enveloped her whole body, it never really touched her....

Momo was a cosmetician who specialized in skin-care. She felt that in addition to the layers of algae, carmine, and other creams she used in her work, there was another protective membrane between her face and her fingers that separated her from her clients. She could never really get close to people; there was something extremely fine and inexplicable that got in the way. Strangers felt she was mysterious, while regular clients felt she was withdrawn.

Something got in the way, as though she were still living in the amniotic membrane inside her mother's body. Momo was secretly aware that she couldn't completely adjust to this world and sometimes even fancied that she shouldn't be living in it—it wasn't that she wanted to die, but that she felt she should be living in a more suitable time and place, a different world entirely: she was like a peach that, dissatisfied with the tree on which it grows, wants to go live on another peach tree. Some people might say: But they're all peach trees; so isn't it all the same no matter which one you grow on?

But it wasn't the same.

Two peach trees are two completely different universes.



Momo's fate was intimately bound up with peaches. Their sweet fragrance always made her feel warm inside, as though whenever she held a piece of fruit in her

mouth, she could return to the fairytale years of her girlhood. During the ten years she spent studying hard at boarding school, every night before she went to sleep she would savor an expensive greenhouse-grown peach to give her weary body some much-needed vitamins and to reward herself for her hard work, letting the sweetness of the peach bring her a night's sweet dreams.

Perhaps because of her fondness for peaches, even though Momo was unpredictable and difficult for outsiders to approach, there was one thing everyone agreed on: this girl who loved peaches, whose white face was suffused with pink, was sweet as a peach herself. Her name was Momo, which meant “peach” in Japanese while her Chinese name, Momo, meant “silent.”¹

When Momo was little, she had asked Mommy, where had she come from?

She hadn't sprung from a womb, nor was she pulled out of a trash heap. Her birth wasn't some kind of simple, perfunctory sex education story. Mommy said that a long, long time ago she had gone on a trip with a friend, the two of them strolling hand-in-hand among the hills. They walked along until they came to the foot of a peach tree at the top of a hill. The peaches on the tree gave off a bewitching scent that caused your whole body to go limp as soon as you breathed it in, you felt so happy. Mommy's friend didn't worry about whether there were pesticides or whether she might be caught stealing, but asked Mommy to hoist her on her back, and then reached out her hand and pulled. The two girls worked together to get the biggest peach from the tree, one so big it was as large as a person's head. Mommy was very happy and said to her friend: there's an old Chinese legend that says cutting a peach in half to eat with a friend, or 'sharing a peach,' is a lucky phrase, an expression of extraordinary friendship that outsiders can't understand—so let's cut open the peach and each eat half of it to bring good fortune to our friendship!²

In the story Mommy told her, they cut open the peach, but they never imagined that scarcely would the knife cut the skin than a wail would come out from the fruit: there was a little baby inside the peach! Both of the girls were extremely surprised, but they felt that this little baby was meant to be their daughter, just like in a fairytale!

The baby's face was red all over and gave off a sweet scent, since she really was a peach's daughter. Mommy's friend suggested they should call the child “Peach.”

¹ The text actually says, “Her English name was Mo-Mo.” The characters used in her name are 默默.

² This story comes from the Warring States text *Han Feizi* and is also recounted in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. The King of the state of Wei was walking in an orchard with his favorite male courtier, the beautiful Mi Zixia. Mi Zixia took a peach, ate half of it and, finding it sweet, offered the other half to the king. The king was enamored with Mi Zixia's good looks and praised Mi Zixia for loving his sovereign so much that he forgot his own appetite in his effort to give his king good things to eat. In later years, Mi Zixia's looks faded and he offended the king, who then found fault with him for once having given him a half-eaten peach to eat. The expression “sharing a peach” (分桃 *fen tao*) is now used by some *tongzhi* to refer to their affection for their partners, and so suggests that Momo's mother and her friend were involved in a lesbian relationship.

Mommy's friend was Japanese and said that in a Japanese legend, a little boy was born from a peach, and his name was Momo Taro³. "Peach" in Japanese is *momo*, so her name was decided: using Chinese characters with a similar pronunciation, she was named "Momo."

That's right, Mommy said to her, that's where you come from.

This strange story had seemed incredible to Momo as a child, since she was born in the twenty-first century, after all, and she had a basic understanding of sex. However, Momo also felt that the whole thing was very intriguing, so she might as well accept it. She was even a little proud, since it was the stuff of legend.

But, Momo wanted to know, where had Mother's Japanese friend gone? Who was she? And why hadn't Momo ever seen her?—We quarreled, Mommy answered evasively. There's nothing unusual in friends quarreling and then going their separate ways. That's why only Mommy was there to take care of their little peach, Momo.

Young Momo thought to herself: *When I grow up, I, at least, am not going to quarrel with my friends: I want to be with my dear friends forever. Forever. I mean it.*



Thirty-year old Momo toyed with a peach, light and soft as a breast, in her hand. *Ah! It's not just my friends! I haven't even seen Mommy once during the past twenty years!*

Mother and daughter truly hadn't seen each other in a long time. It had been twenty years! But was there really any need for them to see each other? Their relationship had long since grown so distant that it was beyond repair, with nothing left but a few polite phrases....

Would Mommy be the least bit curious to see how Momo had turned out now that she was all grown up?

Momo couldn't deny that she too was curious to see how Mommy had changed.

Momo looked carefully at the middle finger of her right hand that was holding the peach. Even though it was brand new, it was as nimble as her natural fingers. It reminded her of her operation today.

For a while now she had occasionally felt stabbing pains in her right middle finger and it hadn't been as responsive as she needed it to be. Only after a screening from the Community Automatic Health System did she discover that her middle finger suffered from a problem common to members of her profession. Because of Momo's special physical condition, she had had to undergo a robotic surgery and have her

³ Momo Taro, or "Peach Boy," is a traditional Japanese folktale about an elderly childless couple who one day find a giant peach floating down a stream. When they take it home and cut it open to eat it, they find a baby boy inside, who declares that Heaven has sent him to be their child.

finger completely replaced. Momo loathed surgeries, and her robotic surgery was a memory she would have especially liked to block out. But she needed to replace her finger for the sake of her career.

Robotic finger-replacement surgery wasn't expensive, nor was the procedure especially bothersome or painful—all you had to do was go to the specified station at the hospital, stick your finger inside and wait for a model to be made, then return the following day to go under local anesthetic, and within half an hour the hospital could attach your new robotic finger. After the surgery, you only had to rest for an hour to allow blood flow to return to normal, and then you could go to work as usual.

Momo hated her finger-replacement surgery. Was it because she was worried her reputation would suffer?—not entirely. It was true that skin-care artists like Momo could easily earn a bad reputation if they had any problems with their fingers. Her professional excellence rested with them completely, like a pianist: no matter how much virtuosity she possessed, she had to rely wholly on her fingers to display it. The piano Momo played was her clients' bodies: no matter the quality of the piano, by relying solely on her fingers, she could save even the most hopeless song. The agile fingers of a skin-care specialist were just like those of a pianist: her fellow professionals would wait for a slip in her technique, while her clients would easily lose their faith in her—but Momo didn't trouble herself about these sorts of things: it was she who told the media everything about her finger replacement, with no fear at all for her reputation. She was confident that in her handiwork, her work would make up for any fault of her hand.

So her trepidation over her finger surgery did not stem from any worries over a loss of reputation: this was not what she feared.

She loathed any memories that had anything to do with surgery.



Momo pushed a button on the remote control panel, and the skylight above her head opened a crack, revealing the half-transparent, water-resistant membrane above. A liquid sky.

This was a high-class residential district, so the protective membrane above the community was especially clear, with no anemones or coral blocking the view. If she lifted her head, Momo could see across the impregnably vast distance to the silvery-blue breakers outside the membrane, endlessly crashing and floating up without pause. In the world above the protective membrane a school of chrome-yellow croaker swam by in neat rows. Just then a darting black shadow speedily skipped across the waves—Momo rested her head in her hands and thought:

It must be an MM, the kind of sniper that moved between land and sea; she had heard that there had recently been some military action on land, so it was no surprise to see an MM guerrilla flit across the sea.

When Momo was little she had wanted, perhaps out of childish curiosity, to go to the surface to have a look at the world beyond the sea; but she couldn't fulfill her desire, since the law mandated that for the protection of children's safety only adults could visit the surface. At thirty, however, Momo was happy to be living in a residential district on the ocean floor and didn't have an especially strong desire to visit the surface. Her excuse was that she was too busy at work and so had never once set foot on the mainland of her dreams a million miles above her; but how curious she had been about the land on the surface when she was a child!

She took a deep bite out of a peach and slowly swallowed.



When Momo fell asleep, the peach pit rolled out of her hand.

Momo dreamed that she was living on the surface, and an ear-splitting noise seeped into her slender, fishlike body. Her whole body was exposed to the white-hot sunlight, and ultraviolet rays pierced the pores of her delicate, lifelike skin, but she was powerless to resist.

Such were the nightmares of those who dwelled on the ocean floor in the year 2100.

2

Under the beams that fell from the skylight, Tomie was completely naked, like a cherry embroidery pattern on a piece of silk, reclining on the massage table in front of Momo.

When Momo finished massaging her, the skin on Tomie's back showed a healthy red glow beneath its whiteness. Even though Tomie was past fifty, her body hadn't lost a bit of its somber, quiet beauty. This was of course due to Momo's exceptional skill.

Momo hadn't expected that Tomie would bring the dog she had been telling her about.

It was only a few weeks old, a ball of beige fur, whose oil-black eyes flashed as it looked at people. Tomie knew full well that Momo liked to live in peace and quiet by herself, yet she had still brought the dog and wasn't afraid that Momo would be upset.

“Momo! Don’t think of my bringing you this dog as giving somebody an ordinary pet. This is no ordinary dog, and you’re not just anybody. I’m not doing this because of the story I told you last time, either. This dog’s very quiet, so there’s no need to worry that he’ll disturb you.”

Momo didn’t refuse.

“What are you going to call it, Momo?”

Momo said, *Call it Andy.*

“Quit kidding around, Momo! This is a real live flesh-and-blood dog, not a robot! How can you name it that?”

Momo stubbornly replied: *But I like the name Andy.*

Tomie Junji⁴ was Japanese, and one of Momo’s regular clients. She often came to Momo’s skin-care clinic for scheduled checkups. The charming Tomie was a top reporter for a Japanese disczine posted to Taiwan. She often worked as an undercover investigative reporter, so she made quite a bit of money on the side. Momo’s services weren’t cheap, so all of her customers were wealthy spendthrifts.

Momo was very calm by nature and didn’t like to get involved with others. But as a skin-care specialist, she needed to get intimately close to her clients. She had made a name for herself at twenty, and at thirty was on solid financial footing, so she bought herself a solitary domed apartment where she could live and work. The two portions of the complex faced the street like two eggs, forming a figure-eight pattern. Momo only did business with regular customers and only by prior appointment. She also required her customers to make appointments through the more traditional means of e-mail, sending a message to her inbox when they had arranged a visit. E-mails were quieter and more to her taste, as she couldn’t stand taking video phone calls: they were noisy and intrusive, and Momo especially hated taking phone calls when she was in the shower. Did anyone really expect her to come running to answer the phone with her bare bottom dangling in the air, anyway?

Momo was used to living a simple life: she preferred writing letters to phone calls; she seldom went out, as it was enough for her to get her news via computer. Besides, using the Gopher search system⁵ was more convenient than flipping through a newspaper; and if she wanted to buy anything, she could just order it via e-mail without ever having to go outside. Her body hadn’t changed in years, so she had no need to go to the gym—the social interaction afforded by the exchange of flirtatious glances there held no attraction for Momo. So she stayed all by her lonesome in her

⁴ Tomie gets her name from the horror manga *Tomie* about an immortal girl who drives her admirers to madness, and her surname from the manga’s creator, Ito Junji.

⁵ Gopher is an alternative to the now-standard HTTP web protocols that was popular in the early 1990s.

figure-eight-shaped home, occasionally listening to a recording of arias sung by the classical *castrato* Farinelli⁶.



Momo was as quiet as her name implied, but that didn't mean that her name wasn't well-known, as she was the best skin-care specialist and the most respected esthetician in T⁷ City. But the image she presented to the outside world was silent and mysterious, not at all like her fellow practitioners, who preened themselves like peacocks at every opportunity.

Precisely because Momo was so mysterious, Tomie had used her to make a profit, recouping no small part of the money she had previously spent on skin care:

A while ago, Tomie had planned a special report for her disczine done in an extremely retro style commemorating Mother's Day with the plain, humdrum theme, "Mommy and Me." Tomie's fellow reporters were secretly delighted, since they thought she was at her wit's end and had only come up with such a run-of-the-mill topic because she had run out of ideas. They little imagined that such a sentimental disc would sell like hotcakes, as elderly readers bought it to fondly reminisce about their feelings for their mothers, while younger readers embraced it because they had nothing else novel to admire and because bringing back old things was fashionable. This issue of the magazine increased advertising revenues by 119%. However, the real selling point of the article was the handful of special interviews it contained.

Tomie used the longstanding relationship they had developed to convince Momo to do an interview talking about her mother, even though she had previously declined all interviews—just imagine, in this new age that emphasized physical beauty *and* intellectual beauty (by which Tomie meant reading discbooks), how relevant and moving an interview it would be: T City's most mysterious skin-care specialist talks about her relationship with her mother, the president of Public Relations at Macrohard Publishing Company!

During the interview, Momo matter-of-factly described to Tomie whatever memories she happened to think of at the time, and casually mentioned her recent finger surgery, not in the least worried that her customers would stop visiting her clinic just because she had had a finger replaced. But when Tomie wrote up her story, the interview was full of a daughter's longing and resentment for her hugely successful

⁶ Farinelli was the stage name of Carlo Maria Michelangelo Nicola Broschi (1705-1782), an acclaimed *castrato* opera singer.

⁷ Although "T" may bring to mind Taipei and other cities in Taiwan, the word is also a slang term for lesbians somewhat analogous to the English term "butch"

mother, while Momo's mother became an uncaring woman who never even bothered to ask about her daughter's upcoming finger surgery even though she knew that her daughter depended on her fingers for her livelihood.

This disczine, along with Momo's interview, set everyone talking. Momo read the two new BBS topics that popped up on her computer: one was the "Find Your Mother" craze inspired by the magazine; while the other consisted of indignant, cynical criticism: the BBS posters maintained that the magazine clearly exposed the hypocrisy of society, of which the president of Macrohard's Public Relations Division was a fine example. She exploited her sweet, motherly façade for the greatest possible commercial gain while neglecting to care for her only daughter....Eventually, the Public Relations Division was forced to publicly issue an official clarification over BBS announcing that it was all just a misunderstanding and imploring customers to continue to put their faith in Macrohard's excellent reputation. Momo read it coldly and declined to join in the debate.



"I'm never doing an interview again," she complained to Tomie, furious with herself for having let herself be manipulated.

"And don't you dare leak my e-mail address, either. I don't want my inbox flooded by reproaches from over-enthusiastic readers."

Momo's fingers skillfully danced about, her new middle finger in perfect harmony with the others, not affecting her work in the least.

"Mommy and I have nothing more to say to each other."

The last time Tomie had come, she had told Momo the story of the little dog. Momo's clients liked talking to her, not just because Momo was a good listener, but also because she never spoke much and so was unlikely to cause trouble by gossiping with other clients. Momo's clients included famous people of every stamp from government, business, cultural, and artistic circles, and people of all sorts, young and old, male and female. They were all bigwigs, and all of them were vain enough to want to become the topic of other people's conversations, but they were also extremely anxious lest other people should speak of them as less than respectable....

Tomie had previously told Momo many big secrets from the outside world and wasn't afraid that Momo would reveal any trade secrets. But what Tomie told her this time wasn't information you could sell for a profit but rather a trivial matter from her own life.

Tomie had spent a lot of money to raise a real (and therefore valuable) mixed-breed dog. Because it was shy and skittish by nature, it loved to hide among the ginkgo

leaves that covered the ground beneath the floorboards of Tomie's Japanese-style house. After it became pregnant, it came out even less, and only occasionally showed its face for a moment when it had to eat, drink, or relieve itself. Finally, one day when Tomie was eating *yōkan* and drinking *matcha*, it suddenly occurred to her that she hadn't seen the dog in a long time, and she worried that it had gotten trapped beneath the floorboards—the smell of blood emanated from underneath, and she could tell that something was seriously amiss—she hurriedly pried open the boards, and almost fainted at the sight that greeted her: a huge puddle of dark purplish blood, among which were strewn several balls that looked like intestinal tumors! The dog had given birth beneath the floorboards, but it was too weak to pull itself out and hungry and tired besides, so it just lay there waiting for the slim chance that it would be rescued. Tomie had always steeled herself to be able to ruthlessly look upon anything the world might show her, but she never expected that she would be so shocked by the sight before her as to be at a loss for what to do.

Tomie calmed herself down and took another look at the balls of flesh in the pool of blood, counting six altogether: they were all puppies. But she wasn't a veterinarian and had no idea how to deliver them. She could only take a pair of scissors and cut away the umbilical cord connecting the puppies and their mother. More blood gushed forth from the place where she had cut. Only then did Tomie pull the mother out of the floorboards, feed her and wash her. But what about those balls of flesh she had cut free? There was a membrane surrounding each of them.

Should she cut the membranes? Tomie wasn't sure, but she had no choice but to give it a try: of the six puppies, she cut three from the membranes and left three inside. After her exertions, Tomie was covered in blood, exhausted, and nauseated to the point of vomiting. She threw the puppies into the trash can and replaced the lid, too angry to think about them, then took a shower and went to bed.

“Can you guess what happened next?”

In the middle of the night, Tomie had been awakened by a faint but incessant whining. Searching for the source of the noise, she found the three puppies she had cut out of the membranes whining with hunger. The three puppies that she had left wrapped up had already suffocated to death.

“Momo, at that moment I had an epiphany: I thought of the words of an old Chinese monk: ‘Sorrow, rejoice, give away, gather up’⁸. I didn't grieve that I had lost three dogs that I could have sold, nor was I happy because I had three that I could.

⁸ The words come from a song called “Farewell” 送別 *songbie*, by the Buddhist monk Hong Yi 弘一 (1880-1942). In Chinese, the words are 悲、欣、交、集 *bei, xin, jiao, ji*.

Nor was I sad for the three puppies that had died, or glad for the three that had lived—”

“The puppies that remained perfectly wrapped up in their membranes and died are not necessarily more pitiful than the three who wormed their way out and lived.”

“Exactly! I raised them, they’re all sexless, very cute, and not noisy at all—would you like one, Momo?”

“Don’t try to placate me; you’ve given me enough trouble already.”

“I’m not selling it to you, I’m giving it to you. It’s not some manufactured robot dog, but a live mixed-breed dog, worth a lot of money, far more than a common cur in the twentieth century. Even though it’s a real dog that shits and so isn’t as clean as a robot dog, it isn’t everybody these days who’s lucky enough to smell real dog shit.”

Tomie stuck out her nose dramatically. “I have a little beige puppy who’s very quiet and well-behaved, easy to care for. I’ll give him to you.”

“Why should you give him to me?”

“He came out of a membrane, so he made me think of you.” Tomie had a mysterious look on her face. “Momo, you’re just like the little beasts that died stuck in their membranes! A loner who lives at her clinic with no assistants and no lover to go out with her. I bet you don’t even have a sex life; no wonder you’re so pitiful. Let the puppy stay with you. I’m doing this to be nice, I don’t have any ulterior motives. Besides, as you said, you have a serious illness, and sick people shouldn’t be by themselves. It would be great for you to have a puppy to stay with you. It’s not as complicated as people and it’s easy to get along with.”

“Tomie, I only underwent a mini surgery, and a successful one, at that. Please don’t describe me as a terminally ill patient.” Momo wasn’t used to talking about personal matters. “Tomie, what kind of treatment do you want today?”

“Momo, don’t be stubborn. I’ll bring the puppy with me next time—”



Momo gave Tomie a full-body massage with her fingers to relax Tomie’s muscles. Then she slathered her body in skin-cleansing lotion. It wasn’t to cleanse Tomie’s real skin, but to remove the M-Skin that covered her body.

All of Momo’s skin care clients got a treatment of M-Skin just before their visit was over. This was a specialty of Momo’s that you couldn’t get at other skin-care clinics.

M-Skin⁹ was a second layer of skin that looked like any other cream and was applied to the client's full body after treatment, forming a protective membrane around the skin. It was a little bit like lacquer applied to wood or a layer of icing on a cake, but Momo's M-Skin went beyond mere physical qualities. A naked body covered in M-Skin had a special luster, and the M-Skin helped maintain the tautness of the client's own skin so that wrinkles wouldn't develop. It also protected the skin from damaging elements in the air. Add to this M-Skin's densely nutritious biochemical structure, and it was like an all day, twenty-four hour skin-care treatment.

What's more, M-Skin was called "skin" because it was just like the real thing. Some clients thought that the "M" in M-Skin stood for "More" and meant that they really were getting an extra layer of skin. M-Skin was totally unlike any other skin care cream out there: it wouldn't be washed off by sweat or alcohol, nor would its protection be broken even if the wearer made passionate love all day, every day for a week. Only Momo's skin-cleansing lotion could separate M-Skin from real skin. But M-Skin wouldn't make the clients treated with it uncomfortable, as it was even more ephemeral and odorless than perfume, and many of her clients completely forgot about the extra layer of skin covering their bodies. There was nothing wrong with that: as long as Momo remembered to give them a new treatment of M-Skin when they came in for their next visit, there were no problems.



Momo painstakingly removed a layer of M-Skin from between Tomie's legs.

She wouldn't pull Tomie's pubic hair; Momo, like M-Skin, was tender and gentle. After the M-Skin had been totally peeled away, Tomie's naked body was once again touched by the air. But Tomie was oblivious to the feeling of reunion between her skin and the air, since people couldn't tell the difference between when they had on M-Skin and when they didn't; it was too subtle to notice.

Momo carefully put the peeled-off M-Skin into a paper bag and placed it inside one of the short, silvery-black drawers of her cabinet.

"Hey, Momo? How come you're always so careful about putting away the M-Skin once you take it off?"

"To recycle it." Momo shot Tomie a glance. "The materials for M-Skin aren't cheap. So you have to recycle it. That's just the way it is."

⁹ The Chinese characters used for the English name "M-Skin" (also in the original text) are literally "membrane skin" 膜膚 *mo fu*.



“Recycling” was the word for a new, progressive concept in the twentieth century; but the twenty-first century was so desolate that you had no choice but to do it. People often said that there were great resources in the oceans—there were indeed great resources, but it wasn’t at all convenient to turn them into things that people could use. At least, it wasn’t as convenient as it used to be when people still lived on land.

3

It wasn’t easy for those living on the ocean floor at the end of the twentieth century to imagine what life was like earlier in the century. But what was hardest to imagine was that people in the twentieth century with time and money had actually considered such a dangerous activity as letting the sun bake their skins the color of antique bronzes to be a fine thing.

Nevertheless, even though the sunlight on the surface was frightening and the air and water were polluted, it was still easier for those living on the ocean floor to get sunlight, water, clean air, and other necessities for life from there. Solar energy, in particular, had to be collected on the surface and converted into a form that ocean-dwellers could use.

Prior to the twenty-first century, you could still find wild peaches on the surface that you could pick and eat. But starting in the middle of the twenty-first century, peaches and other fruits and vegetables all had to be grown in greenhouses on the ocean floor, and these greenhouses that preserved what remained of humanity all required vast amounts of vast numbers of resources to maintain, which made the scientific questions of how to obtain sunlight, fresh water, fresh air and nutrients particularly complicated.



Near the end of the twentieth century, beginning in the 1980s, people discovered a hole in the ozone layer over the South Pole—the ability of the ozone layer to filter ultraviolet rays weakened, and the number of cases of skin cancer skyrocketed. Tanning your skin dark was no longer fashionable, but seen as a way of tempting fate, and the original purpose of sunglasses took on a new importance as they ceased to be seen as merely a way to look cool or to cover your face if you were shy.

The scientific community began to call for a ban on the use of chlorofluorocarbons and other chemical compounds that damaged the ozone layer, but the scientists already knew it was too late: even if they could reduce the amount of air pollution, they could only slow the pace of environmental destruction—

This world was already beyond all hope of recovery; the hole in the ozone layer was irreparably large.

The ozone layer gradually deteriorated, ultraviolet rays struck the Earth with unprecedented intensity and by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of deaths from skin cancer was greater than the number of deaths due to all other malignant tumors and cerebrovascular diseases combined. Because AIDS had been successfully eradicated in the beginning of the year 2009, people's dread of AIDS shifted to the various forms of skin cancer sweeping the globe.

But the damage from the sun wasn't something that could be stopped by the various branches of medicine or by anything else except an exorbitantly expensive, heavy, bulky space suit—the kind worn by astronauts, not the gaudy, felt-lined parkas sold in wholesale clothing outlets in olden times for 300 old New Taiwanese Dollars and jocularly called “space suits.” People of all skin colors feared the sunlight, but black people's skin offered them some protection, leading many white people to finally change their long-held prejudices and actually envy black people, faced with the undeniable evidence of black people's superiority.

Beginning in 2010, tensions caused by the sun and interracial tensions started to blend together in the US: in Los Angeles in the year 2012 alone, there were sixty-nine race riots involving more than one hundred people, most of which were started by whites attacking blacks, since white people suffered from disproportionately higher rates of skin cancer. White people seethed with resentment that once God had opened the heavens He made plain His preference for blacks and didn't love whites after all. A number of religious groups made their membership exclusive to colored people including Christianity, Yiguan Dao¹⁰, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Voodoo, and the revived ancient Egyptian faith (the ancient Egyptians were black Africans, after all). They spread their message far and wide: the Maker of Mankind was not white but black, and the skin cancer afflicting white people was the deity finally exacting retribution for millennia of racial discrimination. Many Native Americans and Asian-Americans joined these religious movements.

Nevertheless, Christianity remained the most influential religion in the US, and many prominent religious figures of all races maintained that ultraviolet rays were the

¹⁰ A syncretic religious movement popular in Taiwan that attempts to combine the teachings of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and other faiths.

second Flood striking Christian believers: ultraviolet rays were like floodwaters drowning every inch of land and covering the back of all that had life. Humanity desperately needed a place of refuge, as making alterations to buildings and the quality of clothing wasn't enough to prevent the problems of exposure to the sun; moreover, plants and animals, too, were being exposed to ultraviolet radiation. Of course, humans placed most emphasis on themselves and on those plants and animals that were most closely linked to the economy: the livestock industry, the breeding industry, the tropical cultivation industry, etc. (other animals and plants seemed unimportant at the time). According to Christianity, during the last Flood it was only thanks to Noah's Ark that humanity was able to perpetuate itself; to face this new Flood of ultraviolet rays, a new Ark was needed.

But where was this Ark to be found?

Some governments and trust companies were very interested in becoming the new Noah. As it happened, they all reached the same momentous conclusion (thanks to advances in intelligence agencies and spy networks in the twenty-first century, classified government and commercial information flowed freely and rapidly, allowing the whole world to develop at the same pace): humanity would need to undertake a mass migration (animals and plants would naturally go with those who were responsible for them). The scale of this migration was unprecedented in human history, paralleled only by the movements of the dinosaurs during the Ice Age.

These global VIPs all thought of the sunken land of Atlantis. Many of them had seen the quaintly chauvinist classic movie starring 007 James Bond, *The Spy Who Loved Me*¹¹....

Where was the Ark to be found? The answer was already obvious: on the ocean floor.



The ocean was the perfect protective membrane, a layer thick enough to separate all creatures from the dangers of ultraviolet rays.

In fact, the ocean was the ancestral home of all plants and animals: during the Archaean Eon¹², when no life existed on Earth, the ancestors of plants were first incubated in the oceans, then animals were born in the waters through the slow process of evolution—originally, both plants and animals had to remain in the water because the sunlight striking the land was lethal to them and the ozone layer had yet

¹¹ The movie is called *The City At the Bottom of The Sea* (海底城 *haidi cheng*) in Chinese.

¹² Approximately 2.5 billion years ago.

to form, so there was nothing to filter out ultraviolet radiation. Only when the particles released by life in the water had broken the ocean's surface and accumulated in the atmosphere was the ozone layer formed, and only under its protection did the first group of organisms immune to the sun's effects bravely crawl upon the surface and let the sunlight fall upon their bodies.

No one ever imagined that a billion years later in the twenty-first century they would be returning to their old home in the oceans.

Humans couldn't swim in the water like fish or shrimp, so they had to construct cities on the ocean floor. Fortunately, the ocean's resources were abundant and only needed to be properly converted to be suitable for use by communities on the ocean floor. Techniques for harnessing solar energy were also constantly improving, allowing solar energy collected on the surface to be efficiently transferred to the ocean floor. Since it was the sun that had forced humanity to move to the ocean floor, it was only fair that they take some of its energy in return.



In the middle of the twenty-first century when habitable land became scarce everywhere, humanity finally and formally moved to the ocean floor en masse, euphemistically calling it "migration." During this "pioneering" phase, new crude oil fields were constantly discovered on the ocean floor, increasing the motivation to build and providing a solution to the problem of high unemployment. So the migration to the ocean floor turned out to be a wonderful thing! People did their best to be humane and brought many plants and animals with them to their undersea cities; yet while they certainly didn't bring any cockroaches and mosquitoes with them, they neglected to bring many important plants and animals. The disturbance and destruction to the ecology of the ocean floor brought by the waves of human migrants was naturally unavoidable; but people felt that they had done their best to be humane, and were very sorry that there was nothing more they could do.

In the year 2060, most of the human population had migrated to the ocean, with only one percent remaining on the surface to eke out a living. Nearly all of the products of human civilization had gone to the ocean floor, including the industrialized commercial agricultural and husbandry industry. All that remained on the surface were the giant relics of antiquity that couldn't be moved, such as the Pyramids or the 2-28 memorial plaques¹³ that were ubiquitous on the island of Taiwan (so there were

¹³ February 28th is an official holiday known as Peace Memorial Day in Taiwan, held to commemorate the memory of indigenous Taiwanese victims of violence at the hands of the recently established KMT government from mainland China.

still archaeologists and tourists who went to the surface). Also remaining were those buildings the ocean-dwellers didn't want to take with them, such as heavily polluting factories and nuclear reactors (those who worked in these factories and reactors were therefore trapped on the surface and not allowed to go into the oceans). Instruments of punishment and prisons remained, as well (governments everywhere realized that leaving convicts on the surface to roast in the sun was a very convenient and enlightened form of punishment—let the sun serve as executioner to the convicts, and you could spare yourself the trouble of having to use the electric chair!). The surface that had once scarcely been able to support its human population was now practically deserted. Even though the major powers struggling for control of land and sea were unwilling to give up their legacies on the surface upon entering the ocean, eventually all of these great works, both on the surface and elsewhere, gradually went the way of the Great Wall of China: to think that these great marvels of engineering, whose construction had so oppressed the common people, would later become mere playthings of the tourism industry! Their magnificence was a fittingly ironic footnote to their futility.

New man-made scenery was also created on the surface. This new scenery would have been unimaginable to people of earlier times and was even more extravagant than the works of the twentieth-century environmental artist, Christo¹⁴, but also much more practical. For example, there were the interlocked panes that spread out like a mass of cancer cells called “Solar Fields”: their linked array of solar panels extended like a field to harvest solar energy, gathering power needed by those living on the ocean floor.

In addition to the “Solar Fields,” a number of new industries sprang up on the surface, the most noteworthy of which were the android factories.

An “android” was, in the simplest sense, a man-made creation that was midway between human beings and robots; you could even say that they were half human and half machine: although on the outside they looked uncannily similar to people, they could withstand high temperatures and long exposure to direct sunlight without suffering the lethal effects of ultraviolet radiation, and they were able to work as hard and as long as machines. Although androids and robots were both manufactured, androids were different from robots in that they could work with the finesse of human beings rather than mere brute force. For this reason, androids could replace humans in producing exquisite handicrafts, as their hands moved more skillfully than robots' and they were more efficient than humans; androids also possessed a basic capacity

¹⁴ Christo (born 1935) is an environmental artist famous for works which involve wrapping both natural landscapes and historical monuments in large quantities of fabrics.

for learning and thought. Because of their usefulness and convenience, androids were quickly accepted both on the surface and in the cities on the ocean floor:

On the surface, androids could replace humans in carrying out jobs that didn't require complex decision-making, such as prison workers, custodians and ticket-takers at ancient monuments, workers at heavily polluting factories, and drivers of shuttles between the surface and the ocean floor, which prevented things from grinding to a halt on the surface due to a lack of human laborers willing to risk exposure to the sun; androids could toil on the surface in place of humans. There were also androids in the cities on the ocean floor, but they weren't considered human beings: they were not citizens, they had no rights, they were incapable of reproducing, and they were no more than factory products with serial numbers. But androids were also very similar to humans: the structure of their internal organs was similar, although they possessed considerably greater stamina. For this reason, androids were considered ideal organ donors, since people didn't have to wait for them to be brain-dead before doing transplant surgeries: by using androids, you could avoid the hassle of legal issues and the bother of questions of human dignity.

Nevertheless, the most common use for androids wasn't in medical transplants, but in the military. The biggest business for android factories came from ever-increasing orders for MMs.

MMs were a type of android that was capable of moving and acting independently and bearing the weight of human beings. Starting from the middle of the twenty-first century, they became specialized transit tools; but beginning in 2075, as anticipated, they became the guerrilla war machines of the world's nations and major corporations.

By the middle of the twenty-first century, large-scale wars had ceased to be waged, but guerrilla warfare continued both on the surface and in the seas. There were still too many things worth fighting over.

In the middle of the twenty-first century, humanity labored hard to carve out a living space in the sea, and it was as though they had fallen again into the ancient ways of colonialism—in keeping with the progressive spirit of the times, the world's nations and corporations devised defensive measures of unprecedented scope and complexity. Although the surface exposed to the sun was becoming daily more desolate, the world's nations still sent out their standing armies, fearful lest anyone might seize a slice of their land in an unguarded moment. In the oceans, the great powers were even more anxious to occupy territory; at first, it was a free-for-all as each country scrambled for power, relying on their might alone. Fortunately, in 2079 the New San Francisco Accords were signed (in the San Francisco in the sea) to appease each country's appetite, taking a proportion of territory based on the amount

held on the surface to parcel out the lands beneath the sea—only then did the world's nations gradually cease their buffet-style power grab.

“Buffet” was originally a term used in European cuisine to describe an all-you-can-eat meal: you could eat until your stomach was full, but those who ate too much would suffer from diarrhea—later, historians would use the term as a metaphor to describe the expansion into ocean territories that occurred in the twenty-first century. The world's nations finally agreed on the “principle of proportionality”: but the “proportions” weren't based on the population size or amount of territory of each country prior to the migration to the oceans, but instead were based on each country's relative political, economic, and military strength: thus, although France had occupied less territory than Algeria, the New France under the oceans was six times the size of the New Algeria. Three-fourths of the vast territory of the Pacific Ocean went to the three nations of the United States, Japan, and China, while the remaining one fourth went largely to Panasonic, Mitsubishi, Toyota, Formosa Plastics¹⁵, and Nintendo; the numerous tiny island kingdoms of the Pacific were forced to retain their small size when moving beneath the ocean's waters.

As for New Taiwan, although it didn't get a satisfactory allotment of territory in the Pacific, the territory it did get was the envy of other countries in the South China Sea, allowing New Taiwan to at least establish itself as a major player in the region and to become the financial center of Southeast Asia, where its influence was unrivalled.



These historical developments were the result of countless struggles and battles, both military and otherwise. However, perhaps due to the nightmarish wars of the previous century, humanity had no wish to bring the fires of war with them to the beautiful new world they had established on the ocean floor—they wanted to leave everything ugly and evil on the sun-scorched surface above. According to the New San Francisco Accords, if war must be waged, then the main theaters should be on the surface, while armed conflict was prohibited in the oceans. Thus, a totally new form of war appeared: the main actors and heroes became those with neither blood nor guts to spill, the utterly cruel MMs. People remained, quite civilized, enlightened, and safe, in their nations on the ocean floor, availing themselves of every kind of electronic device to watch the never-ending spectacle of the various warriors clashing in the hellish wastelands, just as they might watch a Nintendo game being played by

¹⁵ A major Taiwanese plastics maker.

someone else. But this game was absolutely real, and the fate of every spectator was at stake.

Beneath the purple sky, beneath the surface, in the waters of the ocean beneath the water- and earthquake-resistant protective membrane, it was as though people were living their lives in a greenhouse.

But people weren't flowers.

People were removed from the realities of war, but they still fled them, trapped in a kind of virtual reality life.

People believed that it was real.

4

The little dog Andy lay obediently at Momo's feet. She turned on her computer as usual to see if any clients had made an appointment.

An e-mail she wasn't expecting popped up.

It wasn't from one of her clients.

Momo required her clients to use a special format in their e-mails to her. She didn't want to read the insipid messages that people were always sending out: they were like the spam¹⁶ that constantly filled inboxes or the unknown callers in the middle of the night that plagued the end of the twentieth century.

Momo cursed to herself before opening the message: this was probably a result of the controversy generated by Tomie's report. Some idiot reader had tracked down her e-mail address and sent a harassing letter right to her doorstep!

But she didn't delete the message—she opened it and skimmed it over and was caught by surprise; in fact, however, she wasn't terribly caught by surprise. It was just that Momo had long ago imagined just this sort of letter appearing in her inbox.

She never expected that it would actually appear before her eyes¹⁷:

NEW TAIWANNET, E-MAIL BOX

TO: MOMO.BBS@NEW-TAIWAN.NEW-ASIA.EARTH.SOLAR

FROM: PRESIDENT.BBS@SALES.MACROHARD.EARTH.SOLAR

Momo:

I heard that you recently had a surgery. I'm very worried about you, and I

¹⁶ The original reads DM, short for "Digital Marketing."

¹⁷ My spelling in the headings of this e-mail differs slightly from the original.

regret that I can't come to visit you in person. I also heard that your finger replacement hasn't affected your work at all, and I'm very happy for you. I remember that when you were little and sick and living in the hospital, I wanted so much to be with you! Your thirtieth birthday is coming up soon, right? We haven't seen each other in twenty years, so we really ought to get together! Fortunately I have some free time these days. Please don't be angry at Mommy for not being able to be with you these twenty years—I've had things so hard! Send me a reply and let me know when you're free, and I'll come to see you, all right?

Mommy

05-05-2100, 11:59 PM

PLEASE CHOOSE: (R) REPLY, (C) CANCEL, (E) EXIT

Should she hit R and reply to the message?

Or C, and get rid of it?

Or E, and pretend like this letter were nothing special?

She was sure that she would hit C or E, but when her computer flashed to the next screen, she realized that she had hit R.

Re: Mommy?

Mommy had written to her. But why had she waited until now—after Momo had complained in the magazine that Mommy had neglected their relationship, and readers had suspected Macrohard's leading saleswoman of hypocrisy—when things were like this, to stuff her extremely neat and awkward letter in Momo's hand? She said that she "just happened" to be free: wasn't it rather that Macrohard had forced her to take time off in order to squelch the rumors about her? She would come see Momo? It had been a long time since Momo's successful surgery!

Yet Momo didn't type her suspicions and resentment out on the keyboard.

She just typed out a suitable date for them to meet.

She might as well set the date for her own thirtieth birthday. How ironic, that the mother and daughter who hadn't seen each other in twenty years were going to be reunited on the daughter's thirtieth birthday.

She successfully sent the e-mail, and the message sped off to some infinitely distant place.



Mommy was currently President of Public Relations at Macrohard Electronic Publishing Corporation and a legendary figure in the culture industry of the day. Ironically, the success of the new advanced-technology publishing industry depended on the traditional skills of direct marketing, and Momo's mother in her early years was just a lowly saleswoman working to open up markets in the tiny direct marketing industry.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the market for printed paper reading materials contracted sharply as the paperless electronic publishing industry seized the opportunity to swallow up the former's markets and reinvigorated the reading interest of consumers worldwide.

This successful cultural movement gained the support of national governments, as they felt that they had not been able to bring their countries' cultural heritage intact with them when they moved from the surface to the oceans and therefore keenly felt the importance of cultural preservation. Discbooks were ideal as cultural repositories, since all you had to do was take humanity's enlightened civilizations and put them onto a disc to give them immortality. Even unenlightened civilizations could be preserved in discbooks without having to worry that their reputations would suffer, so the governments of all countries actively promoted the discbook market.

Thus, the New Age Renaissance began. Not only was its name inspiring, but on a practical level it allowed writers in the twenty-first century to continue plying their trade without having to starve on the streets. This New Renaissance could justly be compared to the ancient European Renaissance, and it even had its own Medici of Florence¹⁸, Macrohard. Macrohard's Disc Publishing industry arose in the early years of the twenty-first century from a bitter rivalry with Microsoft (the corporation behind the globally successful Windows operating system at the close of the twentieth century) and at present was a mainstay of the publishing industry. Macrohard Corporation was quite pleased that its visionary name was also weighty and sounded strong and powerful, although people were always complaining that the name was too pompous and ostentatious.

Mommy was one of the earliest direct marketing discbook sellers recruited by Macrohard. Mommy's excellent work performance led her to join the Direct Marketing Division as a research assistant, where she rapidly climbed the ranks until she was President of the division. The secret to Mommy's rise to the position of President was her decision to include a free Panacea Antivirus disc with each set of encyclopedias she sold, which included tutorials showing customers how to remove the most frequently encountered computer viruses, and additionally included instructions on

¹⁸ The Medici family were notable patrons of culture and the art during the Italian Renaissance.

how to remove both foodborne and airborne bacteria and viruses, which had become much more common in the twenty-first century. The free disc even included instructions on how to do drugs without becoming addicted. The Panacea Antivirus disc was a huge hit with consumers, and encyclopedia sales quickly surpassed one million copies, assuring Mommy of promotion. After all, Mommy had done everything in her power to promote sales of the disc, even serving as a model in the illustrated instructions; her kindly face was extremely persuasive, and when readers saw her on their computer screens demonstrating how to get rid of viruses, she made a deep impression on them.

When Mommy was promoted to President of Direct Marketing, Momo was only twenty-three and had just earned her cosmetician's license in skin-care. Momo loathed the thought of relying on her powerful mother to advance her career, so she gritted her teeth and worked hard to manage her own career, and it wasn't long before she found herself, as a newcomer to the profession, honored with the Asia-Pacific Creative Cosmetics Prize; her award-winning work involved remodeling a beautiful Indonesian girl to look like a mythical canary: the work was called "The Unbearable Lightness of Being"¹⁹. The work earned her both fame and fortune, and she opened her own clinic, which she named "The Canary." People began to take notice of her, and only then did they discover that she was the darling daughter of Macrohard's President of Direct Marketing.

"Please don't put so much stress on the fact that I'm her *darling daughter*, which suggests that I only got my present professional position by relying on her. I'm completely independent, I started from nothing, and I never relied on any special status or background. Please respect the effort I've made in my line of work!"

She initially didn't want to do any more explaining to the media, but at the urging of one of her clients, who was a reporter, she was forced to make a statement explaining herself. The reporter was Tomie Junji.

But the media took the opportunity to hold her up as a model youth:

Independent, driven, accomplished, and extremely successful, she was a new star rebel for this new age, the coolest there was. Momo didn't want to bother anymore about this distorted reputation she had gained; she just wanted to hide away in her newly-purchased clinic / apartment. The gossip of the electronic magazines embarrassed her, but it also ensured that her clinic would receive a steady stream of business. It was a good thing Momo wasn't pushy and aggressive and didn't love the limelight, or the crowd of her envious fellow professionals might send some terrorist to blow up "The Canary."

¹⁹ A reference to the book of the same name by Czech author Milan Kundera published in 1984.

Yet, wasn't all this just the successful career Momo had imagined for herself?



But she felt that she had never enjoyed any of the fruits of her success, that she was still battling for every inch of it, always looking to move in a direction she wasn't yet sure of.

Battle at its most basic involved bugs or beasts or people going head-to-head with each other to see who would emerge the victor.

Momo was engaged in an indirect and tedious battle, and the time for this competition had been extended indefinitely. She even felt that battling like this was utterly absurd, since her opponent thought nothing of all her hard work, but Momo couldn't stand it and held her ground. This continuing contest wasn't a show put on for the benefit of outsiders, and wasn't even about showing her might to her adversary, but was done for only one purpose: to show that Momo could live with herself. She felt that as long as she kept standing her ground, she was sure to win—at the very least, she would by no means be considered the loser, since her opponent had too many resources and had to be overcome without coming to blows.

But if Momo abandoned the battle, the contest would come to a halt, victory and defeat would no longer hold any meaning, and all of the effort and mettle she had poured into it for so long would be utterly in vain....it would all be no more than a bubble in the air, floating to the surface of the ocean where it would be burst by the light of the sun....

It sounded incredible, and even Momo felt it was absurd, but she felt that you couldn't consider all of this rationally because it was all motivated by a righteous impulse: her adversary was none other than Mommy.



She resented Mommy.

Momo felt that all of the unhappiness of her childhood was Mommy's fault. That was why she had decided that year to leave home and go to boarding school, so she wouldn't have to deal with Mommy—but what made Momo angriest was that she had expected Mommy to be in very low spirits and try to be nice to her, to try to make up with her, to tearfully plead with her to come home—but Mommy hadn't done any of that! Mommy hadn't even bothered to ask about her arduous life as a cosmetology student!

Fine, mother and daughter would battle it out to see which of them bowed first!

But—Momo couldn't help but wonder sorrowfully to herself, is there only room in Mommy's heart for Macrohard and no room for me....

Later, Momo thought that maybe all that existed between her and Mommy was just a simple familial relationship. As for the so-called "heavenly bond" that existed between relatives, wasn't it all just externally imposed cultural significance? If she and Mommy just happened to meet like this in the world for a time, what of it? Why make such a fuss over it?

But every time she looked at a discbook and saw Mommy's saleswoman smile, her heart was filled with a nameless anger. You, you hypocritical mother! You've forgotten your own daughter, and you can still go off smiling to meet your customers!

She said to herself: Even without you, I can still have a good life, just you wait and see.

And now that woman she was competing with really was coming to see her.



Under the beams of light from the skylight, in the space enclosed by the yellow wallpaper, Momo and Andy sat on the floor staring at each other, not saying a word. Between girl and dog there was no need for words. A very quiet and clean little cur, it was almost as easy to care for as a robot dog. Momo cut off a slice of peach and fed it to Andy.

She couldn't help finding it strange: she had always refused to have housemates or roommates, and yet here she was, taking in a dog! And the reason she took it in wasn't because she was lonely. Thirty-year old Momo was used to dealing with every sort of client and carrying on professional conversations with them and she basically never got close to people, since she liked to live quietly by herself. Ten years ago she had graduated from skin-care school and begun working, and as a newcomer she couldn't help but work with other new hands in a large general-purpose club—it was affiliated with Microsoft Corporation: Momo didn't want her boss to be from Macrohard, too! The young estheticians all worked in small treatment rooms the size of pigeon cages, waiting on the customers who came into the club. She couldn't stand that an art like skin-care could be practiced in a place so utterly lacking in an artist's spontaneity:

She had no control over the time, since the company strictly regulated the length of each skin-care session. She had no control over her clients, since so many people with whom she couldn't get along or communicate insisted on going to her room. She had no control over the place, and she had only to think that she was only one of many new estheticians working in pigeon cages on the same floor of the club than

she felt as if she were one of the metallic androids laboring on the Earth's surface, mechanized and without a spark of creativity! She didn't enjoy the daily grind of going to and getting off work, which made her feel like she was just a cog in a machine—she didn't want to be just a cog in a machine, she had already put in enough time doing that when she was at boarding school!

By dint of her hard work, when she was twenty-three Momo earned higher-level certification as a skin-care specialist, and it wasn't long before she won the Asia-Pacific Creative Cosmetics prize and finally earned enough money to leave the large corporation and set up her own clinic, which she named "The Canary."

During the twenty years she had been immersed in the skin-care industry—from the time she was ten to the time she was twenty, she had gone to boarding school, while from the time she was twenty to the time she was thirty she had worked as a skin-care professional—she couldn't help having to get close to people: skin-care meant not only having to look at other people's faces, but having to see, touch, and penetrate their bodies, and naked bodies, at that; this kind of physical closeness might at times cause sexual arousal in others, whether it be her former classmates or future clients, but Momo didn't care for this kind of intimacy.

In the year when Momo's breasts began to bulge and her first pubic hairs appeared, a passion for her swelled up in the girl partnered with her in their practicum class. During class, the students were paired with a partner and took turns giving each other massages, applying lotions to remove keratin, and other activities, and Momo was paired with this girl. Lola, the poor girl, was a white girl who had emigrated from the New United States to the Asia-Pacific region, with a face fair as an old-time Barbie doll's; during class, she touched Momo's body, and after several days, she desperately wanted to give her heart and soul to Momo to caress: Lola had fallen hard for Momo. The girl told Momo her feelings, but Momo ignored her; the girl wondered: "Momo, can it be you aren't a girl? Do you not like girls? Can it be that you like boys?" Momo was furious, feeling that she had been humiliated, and ignored her even more coldly. Momo felt strongly that what she did during skin-care sessions and her private feelings were entirely separate things. The girl couldn't stand it and went into Momo's room completely naked, where she wrapped herself up in Momo's white bedding and begged Momo to hold her; but Momo just sat at her desk reading a discbook while she slowly and deliberately trimmed her fingernails. Momo believed that people's bodies were their private property, which she was able to manage—treating her clients' muscles was just like trading stocks for them—but she wasn't interested in getting involved and wasn't interested in sharing.

"Momo, you've touched me before, in class, why won't you pay attention to me now?"

That night the girl, Lola, ran weeping out of Momo's room:

Momo took the nail clippers and carved a scar on Lola's pale white throat: her hand turned in the shape of a new moon, breaking the flesh and sending blood gushing out—Momo hadn't meant to hurt Lola, just to frighten her into going away, and also to test her own ability—she was confident that during class she could restore Lola's scar to its original smoothness. But Momo never got the chance to display her skill: she believed that intimacy in the public sphere and intimacy in the private sphere were two completely different things, but she didn't know that conflicts in the private sphere could spill over into the public sphere; the girl was utterly crushed and refused to work with Momo any longer in class.

Similar events kept happening in Momo's life, but her reaction was no longer so unexpectedly violent, and she could understand why other people were attracted to her; she still maintained a cool detachment between herself and others and the people who fell for her were probably driven crazy by her cold, distant beauty. But there was absolutely nothing they could do about the distance Momo kept between them, so they could only admire her from within the safety of it.

Seen from this perspective, wasn't Momo's decision to enter the skin-care profession a silly mistake?

Why should her heart be so set on being an esthetician?

Back then she could have chosen a more solitary profession, like a novelist's: why should she have chosen a job that required her to get close to others?



When Momo decided that year to become a professional esthetician, it was entirely her own decision, and she had stubbornly stuck with it for twenty years.

In 2080 when she was ten, she left home and Mommy and went to a faraway boarding school to study a very difficult craft; she had graduated at twenty and then worked until now. The reasons that led Momo so stubbornly to persist in her desire were so complex that even now, at thirty, Momo didn't really understand them; now that she was grown up, she sometimes suspected: the reason she had this kind of life at thirty wasn't the result of her working hard to achieve her goal, but was due to too many entangled, invisible hands pushing her to her present position. Maybe she was like a chess piece, or like some screw in a factory on the surface, driven by the heat-resistant hands of an android deep into the body of an MM—

Why was she so stubborn? Why did she so often make harsh decisions that weren't necessarily best for her and then force herself to carry them out?—Momo knew very well: she was stubborn because it enabled her to make her own decisions;

in her young life there were already far too many important decisions that had been made for her by others. If the decisions to be made were going to be unreasonable anyway, she would rather make them herself than give in to someone else's desire.

She didn't want to be a screw in a factory anymore or a hospital patient forced to be anesthetized, to suddenly fall unconscious and go under surgery, only to wake up long after it was over to find out that her vital organs had already changed beyond all recognition and been removed from her body!

Momo read in a discbook how at the end of the twentieth century, the organ trade was already very well-developed, and many wealthy Arabs who wanted to have their kidneys replaced would simply bribe doctors to trick some poor person in the Indian interior into entering the hospital for a health check and then secretly give him anesthesia, then dig out the poor patient's kidney and quickly transplant it into the body of the wealthy Arab lying in the adjoining operating room. The poor Indian would awake in a haze and leave the hospital only to discover that his body inexplicably bore the scars of a knife, and only when he paid his next visit to the hospital would he discover that his kidney was missing!

Who had the right, ultimately, to make decisions regarding another person's body or another person's life?

Momo's hair stood on end, and she felt the sad truth of this question in her own heart²⁰.

Perhaps this could also explain why the ailment in Momo's finger made her so uneasy and unhappy:

On the advice of a third party she had again given her body to others to dispose of! Did her body belong to her or to other people? Or did it belong to the craft of skin-care? If her body belonged to her, could she decide for herself whether to keep her finger or not, even to keep using it until it rotted away, since it was her finger anyway and had no connection to other people?—And yet, for the sake of her work, she had finally dutifully gone and had her finger replaced; it was the only exception she had made in thirty years, and she had only made it under duress.



²⁰ The Chinese reads 心有戚戚焉 *xin you qiqi yan*. This is a quotation from *Mencius* I (7). The ancient Confucian philosopher Mencius was discussing with the king of the state of Liang why the latter had refused to allow an ox to be killed when he learned that it was going to be sacrificed. They discuss a number of possibilities, the last of which is the quotation here. The characters *qiqi* may mean either "sad" or "kinship, match," so the king's statement could be read as meaning either "I felt sad in my heart," or "I recognized that my heart matched what you [Mencius] have said about it." Both interpretations are relevant to the story, and I have tried to bring this out in my translation.

Momo rejected the intimacy of others; but she had never become self-obsessed—

Momo believed that inside the human body there was a kind of gland or organ she couldn't quite put a name to that might better be described as a kind of hormone:

This kind of hormone could stimulate people to be intimate with others; people with high levels of this hormone enjoyed social intercourse, while those with low levels of it were loners. As for Momo herself, she felt like an Indian from the twentieth century who never knew when or on what date she had been pushed onto the operating table: the gland that secreted that hormone had already been taken out before she was even aware of it....probably long before she reached puberty.

Momo felt that the place where her wounds from the removal of that gland had healed was tender, sensitive, and hard to face. That all that now remained of that gland that had once been so strong and well-developed was a pitiful scar was the bitterest irony of all!

The most important of all of Momo's vital organs had been taken out when she was still very little.



Momo stubbornly insisted on living alone, and yet she had been forced to accept Andy from Tomie Junji. She didn't like to accept other people's decisions and didn't want a roommate—even if it was a dog. Was this, too, one of Momo's exceptions?

Momo knew that this time it had nothing to do with making exceptions.

Maybe this was because the dog's name was "Andy."

Whether or not Andy was a factory-made robot dog wasn't that important to Momo. Andy was a real dog and therefore very rare and valuable—but Momo didn't love the dog more for these reasons; the real dog's need to eat, drink, piss, and shit annoyed her, but Momo didn't dislike the dog because of it. Andy was unusually well-behaved, and wasn't dirty other than the fact that it loved to lick people; nor did it bark much or make trouble when clients came in to visit, only going off to one side, wagging its tail, and looking at them wide-eyed. Momo went out very seldom, and Andy had never been out at all—perhaps Andy had no desire to leave their home; the dog had come to Momo's house when it was still very little and probably wasn't even aware that there was another world outside the house.

Was this what a mythical canary was like?

Andy's four paws touched the floor, its body pulled back like a bow, its front paws pressing the ground, its butt sticking up in the air. Andy gave a big yawn and its mouth opened wide while its beige fur pricked up, leaving the dog looking very satisfied.

When Momo and Andy were alone together, Momo would talk to Andy and stroke the dog's neat, delicate fur, its moist pink gums and its bright white teeth. Andy wouldn't say anything, nor would it bark, but just stick out its purple tongue to lick the open pores on the backs of Momo's hands.

There was another Andy dear to Momo's heart, even quieter and yet even more agitated than this one—



Momo knew well that this other Andy existed only in her head. It was like a baby she was pregnant with. But her relationship with this Andy wasn't that of mother and daughter, but of elder and younger sister.

Momo was sure that it was this Andy inside of her who brought her those montage-like dreams that were filled with chrome-colored fragments of the machine civilization on the surface.

She once dreamed that she saw MMs battling in the street, heard the raw buzz of an android factory, and saw solar fields and desolate wilderness everywhere she looked—

She dreamed that she lay in the heart of the burning Asian desert, where ultraviolet rays soaked into her brown-black hair and the strands of her hair dried out into pieces of limestone while she lay there, utterly alone—



Momo was used to living on her own, having been solitary for as long as she could remember. If it weren't for her work, she could practically live by herself with only a computer on some irradiated desert island. Momo didn't mind Andy entering her life, and was always saying sweet nothings to Andy.

Andy also reminded her of the origins of her earliest memories, of how long, long ago, counting backwards from her thirtieth year, her sweet life had come to an end and her solitary career had begun.

Her earliest memories were of her living in the children's ward of a hospital deep under the ocean.

They took place during some extremely ordinary decade near the end of the twenty-first century.

When Momo was a child, her health was very poor.

In 2077, when Momo was seven, she was admitted to the hospital.

According to her doctors, she suffered from many strange symptoms, a result of becoming infected with the LOGO bacterium. Only by undergoing a complex and difficult series of operations could she be fully cured of her illness.

While the hospital was researching and preparing for her surgeries, she was kept in a sterilized room, ostensibly in order to prevent her from catching more infections in her weakened condition; in fact, however, the hospital seemed more concerned with keeping her cooped up like a lonely and helpless little bird. She was an extremely impatient child, so in her memories Momo always found herself stuck waiting in an endless grey area from which no one could save her. The adults administered all kinds of robotic tests to her and constantly gave her anesthesia in order to perform small-scale experimental surgeries. They said it was all for the sake of Momo's health.

As her hospital stay lengthened, she seldom saw even Mommy: Momo's illness was unusual and very costly to treat, and the National Health Insurance subsidies amounted to no more than a drop in the bucket. At the time, Mommy was only a low-level direct marketing saleswoman for Macrohard Cultural Publishing Corporation and had to work very hard and take out loans to cover the costs and only occasionally had time to give Momo a video phone call; every time she called she would see Momo on the screen, lying alone in her sickbed and pouting.



It was around that time that Momo began to hate video phone calls:

Video phone calls had completely replaced voice-only phone calls in an effort to provide a more comprehensive communicative experience; but even then, young Momo understood: this more comprehensive communicative experience was hugely ironic—people couldn't get close enough to hug each other, so they worked hard to invent a communications device that could replace giving someone a hug. It was all so absurd!

Mommy hadn't hugged her in a long time, the female doctors and male nurses²¹ didn't hug her, and they all said it was because they didn't want to give her any germs from outside her room. Her life in the hospital was her first experience of solitude, and when she later looked back on it, she couldn't imagine a sadder or more unbearable weaning period.

²¹ Lit., "doctor aunties and nurse uncles."

It was ironic that the hospital was aware of Momo's loneliness. Their concerns were more pragmatic:

The hospital worried that young Momo needed to make friends with healthy children her own age if she were not to have trouble reintegrating into society after she left the hospital and grew up—so they brought her a perfectly clean playmate.

One dark afternoon, when Momo was still in a daze as a side effect of the anesthesia and faint from having her blood drawn for a health check, Momo saw for the first time, as if in a dream, the closest friend of her whole life: Andy.

The doctor told her that her friend was named Andy and that Andy's body had been completely cleaned of all bacteria and viruses, making her one hundred times cleaner than all the doctors, nurses, and Mommy, so she was ideally suited to be Momo's friend. Andy was Momo's same size and height and like her had peach-colored cheeks, but she was sweeter and better-behaved than Momo and didn't always pout like Momo did.

When Momo first saw that there was another girl in the room, she couldn't help but be suspicious and protest—young Momo believed that adults loved to trick children, and this new person was probably just another trick! Just like when Mommy had tricked her into going into the hospital!

But lonely Momo finally relaxed, since she didn't have anywhere else to go, and besides, her new playmate was adorable: the two girls became friends, just as the hospital had hoped. Momo totally accepted Andy, and from then on the girls were together twenty-four hours a day, eating, sleeping, and showering together.

Momo had read a discbook primer on psychological analysis that had mentioned the twentieth century French psychologist Jacques Lacan.²² Lacan maintained that infants were incapable of distinguishing between themselves and others. Only when they had reached the age of between six and eighteen months and seen their image in a mirror—it didn't have to be a glass mirror, but could be anything with similar properties or any person or event with a similar function—would they develop a consciousness of themselves as individuals. While the toddlers were looking at themselves reflected in a mirror, they discovered that there was a child in the world similar to themselves but whose left and right movements were the opposite of their own and would mimic theirs, but who was distinct from them. Only in the face of the existence of this other would the toddlers' own independent existence become apparent to them. This period from six to eighteen months was known as the "Mirror Stage."

²² Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), French psychoanalyst noted especially for his theory of the "Mirror Stage" of human development, which posits that infants' experience of their mirror image as an "other," and their subsequent attempts to assimilate and master it, play an essential role in the formation of the Ego.

Momo felt that the time she spent living together with Andy in the hospital was her second Mirror Stage: Andy looked like her, but wasn't her. Only when Andy appeared did Momo realize how lonely she had been before! She needed someone to be with her and not just to be by herself all the time.



Sometimes the doctors and Mommy would look at the monitor and watch Momo and Andy playing a game like "house". Momo hated it when other people watched her from outside the room and didn't like the sneaky adults. Other than Mommy, the only one she could stand was a thin, dark-skinned, beautiful woman who occasionally appeared. The woman looked like she was South-Asian.

While out on assignment, Mommy gave Momo a call: "Momo, are you having fun playing with Andy?"

"Mommy! How come Andy doesn't have a weenie, but I do?"

"Momo, after your operation you'll be just like Andy."

"Can I give my weenie to Andy to play with?"

"No more playing "doctors and nurses" for you! You should read more of the discbooks Mommy brought you."

Mommy had set up a multimedia computer for reading discbooks in Momo's room.

Aside from playing "doctors and nurses" (Momo had never understood even when she had grown up why, since she so hated seeing doctors and living in the hospital, she had loved playing at being a doctor), Momo also discussed serious matters with Andy, like the discbook children's version of *Hamlet* which had been published by Mommy's boss.

In the discbook, Hamlet said: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count / myself a king of infinite space, / Were it not that I / have bad dreams."²³

Both girls thought this reasonable, but they felt the title of "a king" should be changed to "a pair of princesses." They made a pact that when they left the hospital they would marry and live happily ever after and give birth to a pair of princesses.

Mommy called again to see how she was doing: when she saw that Momo and Andy were talking and laughing, she asked what they had been talking about.

"It's none of your business."

This was Momo's stock phrase when she was in her sickroom.

"Momo—"

²³ *Hamlet* II.ii.254-256.

“This is our secret and it’s none of your business!”

“Momo—your operation is coming up soon. Are you scared?”

“None. Of. Your. Business!”



In her room, separated from the outside world, Momo could hug and kiss Andy all she wanted without worrying that she would catch infection, since Andy had gone through the intense heat needed to kill germs and wasn’t like ordinary people. For the first time Momo felt an intense emotion stronger than “need”: before, she had felt a “need” for Mommy—but once Momo had Andy, she transferred her former affections for Mommy to her.

Momo even hoped that she could enter Andy’s body and Andy could enter hers—back then Momo still didn’t know what “sex” was—in her imagination, it meant “eat”—she wanted to eat Andy up into her belly and for Andy to eat her, too. Young Momo thought that if they both ate each other up, then even if they only ate one piece of flesh it would be enough, for then Momo and Andy would be merged together and would never be separated. Andy wouldn’t leave her like Mommy had.

So Momo told Andy, I want to eat a piece of your body. Andy didn’t refuse, spreading out her fingers in front of Momo’s face. Momo wasn’t greedy, but took Andy’s left middle finger in her mouth and bit down hard, then worried that it would hurt Andy—but Andy’s face wore a peaceful expression. With great difficulty, Momo finally bit off Andy’s middle finger, but no blood came out. She patiently chewed, but the finger was very tough, and she hurriedly spat it out: she thought she might as well let it go, since her teeth really hurt. But she wanted Andy to have a mouthful of her, too, yet she wasn’t willing to part with one of her fingers, so she hiked up her little skirt and asked Andy to eat her weenie—she didn’t like her weenie, but felt it was an excess piece of flesh, since Andy didn’t have one, and she wouldn’t, either, once the surgery was over, so it wouldn’t matter if she gave it to Andy to eat first—

Except, it hurt!

Andy had hardly bitten down, hadn’t even broken the skin than Momo was rolling on the ground in pain: in the end, she couldn’t just have someone bite off that piece of flesh she didn’t want....

She and Andy didn’t play at eating each other again.

Yet just because they didn’t play at it didn’t mean they wouldn’t be caught by the adults. The doctor saw on the monitor that Andy’s middle finger was missing. The doctor quickly found out what had happened, but strangely, she didn’t especially scold Momo, merely admonishing her:

“You keep on playing as much as you can. It’s almost time for your operation, and after that you’ll regret it if you don’t play together now. But let’s not have any more eating each other, or all our hard work will be for nothing.” The doctor said: “Momo, you may have bitten off Andy’s finger today, but in the future it will come back to haunt you.”

Momo didn’t understand the meaning of these words.

There were many things that she heard as a child that she didn’t understand until she had grown up.

When Momo had her finger replaced at thirty, she felt the weight of those words even more deeply.



Momo’s surgery was over and done with almost before she knew it.

That day, the nurses gave her anesthesia like they usually did and she fell fast asleep, thinking that this was just another minor surgery, never imagining that this would be her last, most important, and most complete rite of passage. The extremely difficult, large-scale operation required thirteen surgeons simultaneously wielding their knives to carry out, and Momo’s body was like some last supper or a piece of dead meat lain out on the table. Anesthetized as she was, Momo couldn’t see herself becoming the main attraction amid the blades and blood of the operating table, but she did see something else that no one but she could see:

In the dark space between heaven and earth—two pure, white human figures floated into view. It was the two girls, Momo and Andy, wandering about in a city crisscrossed by canals. What city was it? Momo vaguely remembered that she had read about it in the discbook of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*....they broke through a thick fog, and on their faces were gold and silver masks painted with tears like the little dots on a playing card. They held hands and danced and tried to kiss, but the masks prevented their lips from touching. Andy lifted Momo up high, higher and higher, until Momo was sitting on top of Andy’s head.

Andy pressed Momo up against her head so hard that Momo’s body pierced her skull like an IV needle piercing a vein. In Andy’s skull, Momo heard her whisper:

YOU ARE A CANARY LOCKED UP IN A CAGE



Then Momo woke up.

Mommy was sitting next to her. But they weren't in her old sealed and sterilized hospital room. She saw an open window, and from the window she could see a tree with one withered old leaf on it that shook in the wind. The window was definitely open and a slight breeze from outside blew over Momo's body in her bed: it wasn't just the air conditioner.

"Momo, your surgery went great. I'm so happy! Now you don't have to live in that sealed and sterilized room like a birdcage anymore, you can stay in a regular hospital room with a window and look at the leaves outside."

"Mommy, where's Andy?"

"Momo, I have some good news for you: Mommy got promoted. I'm not just a regular saleswoman anymore, I'm a sales manager. Now we can live more comfortably."

"Where's Andy?"

Mommy didn't answer. Momo just told her two pieces of good news (but Momo couldn't see what was so good about them): one was that her surgery went great and that Momo could leave the hospital right away (but Andy had disappeared!); the other was that Mommy had been promoted (but didn't that mean that Momo would see Mommy even less in the future?).

Before leaving the hospital, Momo asked one last question:

"Mommy, what's a 'canary?'"

"'Canary?' Momo, honey, when we get home we'll look it up in the animal encyclopedia, OK?"

Mommy said she would love her dearly.

The year was 2080, Momo was ten, and she had lived in the hospital for three years.



Only many years later when Momo was a young woman at boarding school studying to be an esthetician did Momo chance to read information about canaries.

As a teenager she had almost forgotten the word, but when she looked up "Gold Leaf" in the encyclopedia, the word "canary" flashed before her eyes²⁴, and reminded her that someone had once told her the name of that bird. As for "Gold Leaf Cosmetics," it was a fashion craze in the Asia-Pacific region during Momo's student days and involved applying a thin layer of gold leaf to the face. This cosmetic style

²⁴ The Chinese for "(yellow) canary" is literally "gold canary" 金絲雀 *jin si que*, which is why the word appears near the entry on gold leaf.

was most popular not in Egypt—even though Tutankhamen’s golden facemask had come from there—no, the primary market for gold leaf cosmetics was in New Taiwan—because the gold-loving Taiwanese hadn’t forgotten their salutary notions of “applying gold to the face²⁵.” Momo couldn’t understand it. She could only look it up in the encyclopedia to try to dispel her confusion.

In the entry on canaries, what caught her eye most was a news story from the spring of 1995 in old Japan.

The discbook stated that on an ordinary spring morning of that year²⁶, there had been a gas attack in the Tokyo subway system in which many innocent passengers had been seriously injured or even killed. The Japanese government suspected that the attackers had been members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult. When the police raided the cult’s headquarters, they found unmixed chemicals needed for making the gas. The police conducting the raid all wore military uniforms and gas masks, and the severity of their attire made everyone feel that a major disaster had just occurred and that these policemen were conducting a major manhunt, all of which was severe enough to keep a smile from crossing anyone’s face. The only thing unusual enough to arouse anyone’s amusement was the caged canaries each officer carried.

Yes, they were carrying canaries. Wasn’t the sight of all those officers in their formal and imposing attire carrying canaries up the mountain an amusing scene? But what a tragedy it was for those caged canaries! Those beautiful, fragile birds were never allowed to fly, constantly made to sing, and could only follow the officers in their search. Because the officers were fully equipped with gas-resistant clothing, they couldn’t tell if the colorless, invisible gas were present or not, or, if it was, where it was coming from—this wasn’t the sort of thing you’d send people to sniff out, after all! So people used canaries as their sacrificial lambs, allowing the sarin gas to take the lives of the canaries in place of those of the officers.

The canaries were the worm on the officers’ fishhook: if the caged birds fainted or died, then the gas must be close to their cages. Without the canaries, the officers had no way to locate the gas; death for the canaries meant life for human beings.

Momo didn’t know how many canaries had been lost during that operation, since the information wasn’t important enough to be included in the encyclopedia.

Among green hills....a line of black-clad officers left a grey factory....among the green grass were strewn the chrome yellow petals of dead flowers....each one was a dead canary....the sarin gas was the birds’ elegy.

²⁵ This Chinese proverb means something like the English “blow your own trumpet” or “stick a feather in your own cap.”

²⁶ The attack took place on March 20. The attackers carried plastic bags of sarin gas onto the subway, which they subsequently ruptured using umbrellas.

Canaries had wings but couldn't fly, kept trapped in their cages and not allowed out by their human owners. They were locked in their cages not because people loved and valued them, but only so they could be sacrificed when the time came.

Why, Momo thought to herself, did Andy say I was a canary?

Momo thought to herself and realized that she had seen the word "canary" a long time ago, in a twentieth-century Argentine novel she had read called *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*.²⁷ The book mentioned a panther-woman—half human and half beast, a woman who could transform herself into a panther. When she was in full possession of her humanity, she could happily play with her caged canaries; but when her bestial nature was in the ascendant, the canaries died as soon as they smelled her breath. Most readers of the book would feel sympathy for the plight of the panther-woman; but not Momo, who pitied even more the canaries overlooked by everyone else: at least the panther-woman could enjoy a brief moment of biting down on bloody morsels; at least her claws and teeth didn't come out for no reason and weren't just useless luxuries. But for the canaries to go their whole lives with wings and never be able to fly, never to leave even their wire cages! The outside world was full of terrors and beauties that they would never know, doomed to remain locked in a toy box, forever at the mercy of others.

Momo also remembered that when she was in the hospital, she and Andy had read Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the first scene of act five, the female lead Miranda speaks the famous lines revealing her understanding of human society: "O, wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in it!"²⁸

At the end of the play, just as she wishes, Miranda returns to human society, that brave new world in her mind's eye; and she herself is just like a canary that had flown free from its cage. But in the play, Momo never read about what happened to Miranda after that: did Miranda regret returning to her father's land—outside of her cage, could she escape the poisonous gasses and panthers? Once she had flown free of her cage, how did she know that the outside world was not another cage, just a few inches bigger than the last?

Perhaps because of her conflicted feelings, even though at thirty Momo had established a name for herself, she still preferred to live a simple, solitary life in a clinic called "The Canary," without worrying that other people would associate it with the beautiful isolation of an old-style birdcage. Even though she was famous in T City, Momo had never been involved in any sex scandal, no one had ever heard of her

²⁷ *El Beso de la Mujer Araña*, by the Argentinian writer Manuel Puig, published in 1976. Chi himself translated the novel into Chinese.

²⁸ *The Tempest*, V.i.181-184.

having a girlfriend or a boyfriend, and she didn't subscribe to the disc versions of any sex magazines such as *Playgirl*, *Playboy*, *Sappho*, or *Dyke*. Momo lived by herself, pure and simple, seemingly without fear of loneliness and without any sexual needs. But she didn't have any plans to live a spiritual life, nor did she have any religion.

Momo said that this was the way she was comfortable living.



Of all the famous estheticians in T City, few were as isolated and withdrawn as Momo. Because their economic and social statuses were both quite high, very few of them could stand to live a quiet life.

The skin-care business had become one of the most enviable professions in the twenty-first century.

Even though humanity had already completely retreated to the ocean floor and avoided the threat of lethal doses of ultraviolet radiation, people's psyches were permanently scarred and using skin care to reduce the damage of ultraviolet radiation had become a habit. Furthermore, living in the entirely man-made environment on the ocean floor had weakened the natural protective qualities of the skin, requiring people to work that much harder to take care of it. Unfortunately, the compulsory vaccine against AIDS could easily cause allergic reactions—for all of these reasons, taking care of their skin became a major preoccupation for all people, young and old, male and female, in the Asia-Pacific region in the twenty-first century. Moreover, since the close of the twentieth century, the skin-care profession had rapidly evolved and had become a major driver of both consumer needs and consumer desires. All of the glamour of twentieth century trendsetters had transferred to the twenty-first century skin-care business.

The twentieth century Spanish director Almodovar had shown off trendy European clothes in *High Heels*²⁹, *Kika*, and other films, while Robert Altman's *Prêt-à-Porter* presented an even more carefully arranged series of famous bodies wearing "the latest" fashion designers' experiments; but these were all historical pieces out of touch with the fashions of the times. At the beginning of *Prêt-à-Porter*, Altman remarked: this movie is not about fashion but about the naked body, and about the ways in which people use fashion to cover their naked bodies. And yet, the movie seemed to be too full of pretty clothes and didn't show enough skin. Retro movies from the past needed to place their focus on the body itself, like in the movie *The Soft Skin* by French director Truffaut—its older Chinese translation was the

²⁹ Spanish *Tacones Lejanos*.

hackneyed *Soft Jade and Warm Fragrance*, which held no appeal for modern viewers, since only people from the twentieth century would emphasize sensuality over skin quality. The big names in the fashion industry such as Chanel, Calvin Klein, Versace, Amani, etc., had long ago followed the example of Lancome, Christine Dior, Shiseido and other brands, moving the focus of their operations to beauty products: because once the AIDS vaccine had removed that terror from people's lives, having an active, varied sex life became a normal and, indeed, the most sought after of all human leisure activities; and in bed, having fine, lustrous skin was better sexual etiquette and more leisurely than having a brand name pair of expensive, elegantly-patterned lingerie. It was a sad fact that in this day and age a young girl who hadn't gotten skin care treatments had more elephantine, wrinkly skin than an old lady who took good care of her skin (note: according to Macrohard's animal encyclopedia, an "elephant" was a terrestrial mammal that lived prior to the twenty-first century). Very seldom were people willing to spare a thought during their lovemaking for extinct animals. For these reasons, a respected esthetician enjoyed higher status than twentieth century fashion designers Rei Kawabuko and Issey Miyake, and made enough money that she could live the life of a socialite. Master estheticians enjoyed a never-ending succession of multicourse banquets, and the choice morsels on the banqueting table included flesh, money, and power, with so much of each that even the most prodigious gourmand could never eat it all. They were culture itself. They were the true movers behind T City's 3B movement: Body, Book, Beauty. A healthy, beautiful body matched with refined reading habits was an undeniable beauty. Thus estheticians who were as accustomed to solitude as Momo were very rare indeed.

She almost never went out; for her relationships with the outside world she relied completely on two machines:

One was her Internet-connected, multimedia PC; the other was her "scanner." The computer and the Internet offered her convenient access to information, while the scanner satisfied her sensual needs.

In addition to catching up on the latest information in the cosmetics industry, she used her computer to keep track of her clients. Using her computer she could manage appointments, set up her daily schedule, and record any special features of her clients' skin:

Was the client elderly? Did the client have acne? Ichthyosis? Was the skin more acidic or basic? How strong was it at resisting air pollution and ultraviolet radiation? Were there any allergic reactions to the AIDS vaccine? Could alpha hydroxy acids be applied to remove keratin? She recorded all these and other minute changes to her clients' bodies.

Momo was a careful, professional worker. She didn't delegate small tasks to others but personally keyed in all of the information. Each client's file had its place on her hard drive, just as the stars had their fixed places in the heavens. She kept a record of the results of each use of M-Skin on her clients so she wouldn't miss even a single important feature. The reason she had the patience to enter this mass of information that made ordinary medical histories look positively mundane was because she found it enjoyable. In keeping such detailed records of her clients Momo naturally used every available means to keep them confidential, such as firewalls and multiple discrete passwords that could keep her data safe from prying eyes. If this kind of classified information were ever secretly read by any of Momo's fellow professionals, she would undoubtedly lose all of her business, since no one would dare trust her with their bodies again.

Even in such a decadent age, too grave a breach of morality could still shock most people.



When Momo was ten she had played with a toy called a "scanner." Once the scanner had wirelessly interfaced with the computer, it could search for far away images and transmit them to a computer screen where the user could conveniently read the data provided.

There were many different types of scanners and not all of them came with lenses, radar, or cords. There were even some highly sensitive scanners that worked like emulsions, and most people had no idea what they really were. Humanity's endless and insatiable curiosity drove the production of the huge variety of scanners available. At thirty Momo still played with scanners, but these were very different from the ones she had used when she was ten: the latest generation of scanners was more complex, could display images in three dimensions and at higher fidelity, and couldn't be bought at most computer electronics stores.

Not long after Momo had opened her own clinic, the Indian woman who had never aged, Draupadi, came to the door. Momo hadn't seen her in many years, but she had never forgotten her.

"That's an unusual name you've chosen for your clinic, 'The Canary.' I'm sure your work is just as beautiful," the woman in her memory said. "I simply must know: who is the canary you're referring to? What does the name mean?"

It was Draupadi who had brought Momo her new scanner as a congratulatory gift on the opening of her new clinic.

You couldn't buy this new scanner on the market; it might even have been contraband: it was simply too amazing! Not only was the scanner immensely beneficial to her career, allowing her to more deeply understand her clients' bodies; it also threw Momo deep into a vast, rich sea of guilty pleasures: there was no fine line between "understanding her clients' bodies" and "secretly peeking at her clients' bodies." She could indulge herself in the most intimate experiences of a hundred thousand people and could see an endless succession of vistas from within her little room....

With this scanner Momo had no need to fear that she would ever be lonely.



M-Skin was a vital part of this scanner's design. Its primary function was not to maintain the skin, but to carry out a far more unusual mission.

The M-Skin was applied like a lotion to a person's whole body and could sense every kind of sensation received by the skin it covered and categorize them (painful? Numb or itchy? Hot or cold? Comfortable? Had the skin come in contact with other people's bodies? What was the sex of those partners? Or was it plastic or metal the skin had touched?). Everything was digitized and recorded by the M-Skin.

M-Skin was short for "Memory Skin." Once it was applied only a special cleansing cream could remove M-Skin from the real skin with which it was joined. Once removed, the information it contained could be sent to the computer's scanner, where it could be deciphered and read.

Take the M-skin she had just removed from Tomie Junji as an example: Tomie came to "The Canary" every seven days for a new treatment of M-Skin, so the M-Skin "remembered" everything her skin had felt in the last week: this might include cuts, mosquito bites, work, making love, eating and drinking, relieving herself, etc. The information recorded by the M-Skin on different parts of the body was very different: the kinds of stimuli experienced by the fingers were many times more numerous than those experienced by the buttocks, since fingers were less often covered by clothing; yet these multifaceted and complex data could easily be sorted and organized by Momo's computer and scanner. Once the data from the M-Skin had been entered into the computer, the screen would display each stimulus for each moment (taken at ten-second intervals) of each part of the body.

The data, in extremely simplified form, had three symbols, \$, #, and @, each of which represented one of three different kinds of stimulus (the actual number of stimuli recorded was not limited to three); the profusion or paucity of the symbols represented the relative intensity for that interval.

A chart like the following only displayed seventy seconds out of seven days (6048800 seconds) of Tomie Junji's life, or 1 / 8640 of the total data. And this was just from Tomie's left groin, which was only a tiny portion of all the skin on the human body! The kinds of stimuli it had received were not limited to the three kinds of \$, #, and @, but because the number of possible stimuli was too great, Momo just chose a few related factors to look at (\$, #, and @ were all associated with sexual pleasure).

File: Tomie Junji NO: B1069 / Location: Left Groin

Intensity³⁰

9				\$	\$		
8				\$@	\$		@
7			#	\$#@	\$	@	@
6	\$	\$	#	\$#@	\$	\$@	@
5	\$#	\$	\$#	\$#@	\$	\$#@	@
4	\$#@	\$	\$#@	\$#@	\$#	\$#@	#@
3	\$#@	\$#	\$#@	\$#@	\$#	\$#@	\$#@
2	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@
1	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@	\$#@
0	0:01:00	0:01:10	0:01:20	0:01:30	0:01:40	0:01:50	0:02:00

Time: 02-08-2100 12:00

From this you could see that a complete set of M-Skin data was both varied and huge. Luckily Momo had a lot of computing power, so she could efficiently read and organize the mysteries of the universe contained within and then take all this code and all of these charts and put them onto a disc, which was the only thing with enough storage to hold everything. The M-Skin and discs that Momo carefully collected in her clinic were the most faithful and realistic diaries of her clients' physical selves.

Of course, she wasn't going to tell any of her clients about M-Skin's "memory" function; they would never understand how important this information was to Momo's work but would instead be frightened, as though Momo had peeked at their most personal diary entries. Momo just said that M-Skin was an essential treatment that you couldn't get at other clinics and none of her clients suspected the truth of this claim, since every famous esthetician had her own line of special products whose mysteries couldn't be fathomed by either her fellow professionals or her clients.

³⁰ This column is unlabeled in the original.

No, they couldn't be fathomed. And as for those pretty boys who had come to "The Canary" earlier, how could they even imagine that Momo could use the skin-care product on their bodies to pry into their secrets? Momo could use M-Skin to discover: who was constipated and when; who had made homosexual or heterosexual love and whether they had spiced things up with S & M leather whips or a Kirin Beer Mayim; who was popularly known as a Don Juan and Medusa but spent most of his sex life masturbating alone....

Even Momo herself couldn't fathom the mysteries of M-Skin. Why had Draupadi given her this "scanner" so marvelous it was almost a form of divine aid? Draupadi seemed to want to pass on her secrets to the next generation: was it because she had recognized Momo's outstanding talent in their shared profession that she had bestowed such a powerful gift on Momo? Maybe. Momo wasn't sure.

One thing she was sure of was that Draupadi had been a formative influence on her initial decision to enter her line of work—Draupadi could almost be seen as a second mother to her—but Draupadi had taught her to read another kind of discbook, the secret diaries of the body.

However, having to use her computer, the scanner, and discs to read M-Skin's body diaries was too indirect an approach. The charts and code that flashed across her computer screen could never be as intense as what you felt with your own flesh; the diaries of the body were best understood with your own body and not by reading them with your eyes.

Draupadi also taught Momo how to read M-Skin with her body.

Once the M-Skin had been saved to a disc, it could be output on Momo's own body:

As long as Momo had applied M-Skin to her own naked body, the scanner could transmit the data from other people's M-Skin treatments to her, allowing Momo to experience for herself everything that her client had experienced during the past week.

To put it more simply, imagine the body as an old-style cassette recorder and M-Skin as the recording: each stimulus experienced by Tomie Junji was like a sound encoded in the M-Skin on her body; when Momo took the cassette and transcribed it, she could play it back on the cassette player that was her own body. During playback, she could feel the incoming sounds being drummed out upon her body, like an extremely rich, violent symphony that had no notes.

But because of this "playback" ability, she knew far too much about what happened to the bodies of Tomie Junji and her other clients. Once she put on M-Skin and connected to her computer, Momo could experience:

At midnight last weekend, Tomie and a young girl and a young man....had sped up to the waters above the protective membrane and gone swimming naked....the three of them swam across the Mariana Trench....And came to the coral reefs in the South China Sea....They held each other and kissed among the schools of fish....Then transformed into bubbles....

Oh, it was a beautiful bodily experience.

Momo sighed. She had felt everything. She had experienced this ecstasy in every pore of her body.

She had no need to go out to faraway places; her clientele expanded the scope of her sensory experience for her. As long as one of her clients had been to the ends of the earth, Momo's bodily experience, too, could go that far.

FAR AWAY, SO CLOSE.



Maybe Momo didn't actually loathe physical intimacy between people. She just didn't like the emotional entanglements that came with a physical relationship.

She feared that this kind of relationship would become repugnant to her or disappoint her or even vanish altogether. The intimacy that was worth cherishing might also easily come to a premature end. She knew the pain of bereavement only too well and she never wanted to suffer it again. She had suffered before.

6

Momo's feelings for Mommy were a complex tangle of emotions.

She needed Mommy, but she didn't need a warm and loving relationship: all she needed was for Mommy's beautiful image to be imprinted on the codes of her memory to have the courage she needed to keep on living.

When did she start having these feelings?

She must have first felt them when she was younger and living in the hospital:

At that time Momo's need for Mommy was pure and simple, and all she asked for was to be hugged and held. But Mommy couldn't satisfy her needs, since Mommy said she had to work overtime to pay for the cost of Momo's treatment. But Momo wondered: was Mommy just sacrificing her to advance Mommy's career? She saw Mommy looking at her on the monitor outside her sterilized sickroom. The first few times Momo saw Mommy look in on her like this she had felt warm inside; but as her stay at the hospital lengthened, Momo came to feel that Mommy was laughing at her as she looked in from outside the sickroom. Why had Mommy left her, a poor child,

alone inside that sickroom and used the excuse of keeping germs away from Momo to keep anyone from coming close to her? Nobody kept her company, and the only things Momo had to while away the time were the discbooks Mommy brought her when she wasn't too busy selling them.

Momo entered the find code on the discbook encyclopedia: "Average length of hospital stays for children in twenty-first century Taiwan (one time)," only to discover that they were many times shorter than her own! She felt she was being abused; she looked up the encyclopedia entry for "Miscarriage of Justice" and read: children may also be victims.

Thankfully, Andy finally came to keep her company. But she felt that the grownups were all jealous of her relationship with Andy, especially Mommy.

Momo remembered that once Mommy had asked her during a video phone call, "Momo, how come you haven't talked to me in so long? Didn't you always use to talk about children's stories with me? Is it that the discbooks I brought you are too boring?"

"I don't read children's stories anymore, they're too puerile. I'm reading Shakespeare with Andy."

"Did you understand *Romeo and Juliet*?"

"None. Of. Your. Business."

"Momo—"

"Never mind. I'm going to go read with Andy."

"Momo! How come you only talk to Andy and ignore me?"

It was perfectly obvious that Mommy was unhappy with the close relationship between Momo and Andy.

She was jealous.



That was why, after her surgery was over, when Momo saw that Andy was gone, she immediately suspected that it was Mommy's doing.

Even though Mommy later explained to her that Andy wasn't really gone, that she was still with Momo—Momo only vaguely understood what Mommy said and thought that Mommy must feel secretly delighted at Momo's misfortunes, even though her face wore a sad expression.

Momo wasn't at all clear just how that final, decisive surgery had begun or in what way it had ended. That day, Momo had thought they were just going to do some ordinary tests. They gave her anesthetic as normal, but when Momo woke up, she felt that things were very wrong: her body seemed to have undergone some changes (her

weenie was missing, for example), and even the environment around her seemed to be a little different.

That was it. Andy was gone.

When Momo realized that Andy wasn't next to her, she didn't immediately start to cry and throw a tantrum—though that wasn't because the doctors had given her anesthesia and dulled her feelings—but because she had long expected that the grownups would take Andy away from her, just as they had previously taken away her freedom before she was even aware of it and locked her away in that lonely, dark sickroom. If her unhappy prediction that Andy would be taken away had come true, Momo was simply too weak to cry or complain.

Big, big changes. But Momo felt that the changes weren't just limited to the disappearance of her weenie and of Andy—though she couldn't put her finger on what else had changed—

Young as she was, she didn't know:

This time the change was more unimaginable than anything in her wildest dreams or her craziest thoughts.



When she left the hospital and returned to the home that she had left so long ago, Mommy stayed with her and read the encyclopedia with her for a few days. But it wasn't long before Mommy was again swamped with work, since she had been promoted, after all.

Momo was not yet ten and left home alone, and she felt incredibly bored. She took off her clothes and touched her body—breasts—belly—but her weenie was gone. Mommy had said that Andy was still with her, but where had Andy gone off to? She couldn't find her. Momo ran bare-bottomed into the bathroom and took a shower, and the water from the showerhead poured against the place where her weenie had been cut off, making it tingle exquisitely, which was probably what the encyclopedia described as “pleasure.”

It was a pity Andy wasn't there, or she could have let Andy experience this tingling, too—.

But she had already lost Andy.

Andy was gone, and Mommy had arranged for her to have a new room all to herself when they came home, so Momo had no help for it but to accustom herself to sleeping alone, which wasn't easy to get used to.

“Mommy! Why can't I sleep in the same room with you? Before I went to the hospital, I always slept in your room.”

“Momo, you’ve already grown up—and when people grow up they have to sleep by themselves.”

“But the people on the discs I watch always sleep together, two of them in the same room. And they’re all adults, they’re not kids.”

“Silly girl, only good friends who love each other sleep together. Just like you and Andy used to sleep together.”

Momo didn’t want to listen to what Mommy said, since she felt Mommy was just taking indirect revenge on her for having had such a beautiful time living together with Andy that it had made Mommy and everyone else jealous. Of course Mommy was jealous of Momo!

Mommy knew, of course, that Momo³¹ was bored at home, so she tried to find a playmate for her by inviting the other children in their community over to play—but Momo didn’t want anyone else: she wanted Andy.

Mommy herself sometimes brought friends home with her, and if they came home at night, the friends would stay in Mommy’s room. Of course, Momo wasn’t allowed to go in but had to go sleep in her own room. Every time Mommy brought a friend into her room Momo felt a wave of anger. She remembered that she and Andy had once been together that intimately—no! They had lived together even more intimately, but now it was all over! But Mommy always had friends to keep her company, just as though she were trying to put Momo in her place!

But in addition to her anger, Momo was extremely curious: just what were Mommy and her friend doing together in their room? Did they just go to sleep as soon as they lay down on the bed? Momo didn’t believe it. Did the two of them lie in bed telling each other things meant for them alone, just as Momo and Andy had done? Or did they play at “Doctors and Nurses?” The two of them surely wouldn’t just spend their time reading discbooks! Or were they like the people on the discs Momo watched, holding and embracing each other tightly?

Momo felt angrier and angrier, but she was still curious and wanted to find out for herself just how things were. But Mommy wouldn’t just open the door and let her in to observe: so how could she spy on them without being noticed? She didn’t have a monitor like the one at the hospital nor could she use the video phone and hope that Mommy would answer her bothersome call. Whenever Mommy’s friends spent the night, Momo was bored out of her mind and could only take out a discbook to relieve the tedium—but it was all so dull. After it was light outside, before Mommy went out, Momo would stop her and complain.

³¹ The text actually reads “Andy,” here, but this seems to be a mistake.

“I want Andy!” These words of protest were the most direct and most pregnant with meaning that Momo could muster.

Mommy looked helpless and didn’t know how to comfort Momo, so she just took out a corporate MasterCard with the Macrohard logo on it and gave it to Momo; it was a premium debit card for buying discbooks.

“I can’t have you throwing tantrums like this! If you don’t want to make new friends, then go read some more discbooks. Take this card and go buy the books yourself so I won’t have to worry that you won’t like the books I bring home for you.”

Momo took the MasterCard in a fit of pique and got on the MRT³² to the community shopping center.



The community MRT was entirely aboveground, so Momo could see the ripples in the waves and the blue shadows of fish flashing by outside the window.

What was really happening in the world outside the window?

The encyclopedia said that the Earth was just like an apple. In the twentieth century, when people lived on the surface, it was like they lived on the waxy layer on top of the apple skin; the people in the twenty-first century had burrowed underneath that transparent waxy layer, and lived between the wax and the skin. The ocean was just like a waxy membrane.

Living underneath the waxy membrane was such a hassle—Momo thought how interesting it would be if she could crest the surface of the sea and return to the lands on the surface of the Earth where people had once made their home, if she could breathe in the oxygen so different from the heavily filtered kind she breathed on the ocean floor and even see the infamous sun for herself—it was a pity that the laws of T City stipulated that only adults could go to the surface to see it, and even then only if they had applied first to the relevant authorities and donned the incredibly bulky, heavy sun clothes to protect their skin. She had heard Mommy say that in addition to a few ancient ruins, most of it was barren wasteland, since the famous rainforests and grasslands would never recover; between the metallic factories and solar fields that spread over the land, you could sometimes see MMs from every country engaged in guerrilla warfare or terrorist activity for their masters.—Mommy couldn’t understand why there were so many lunatics—like tourists, scholars of humanity, or factory

³² The Mass Rapid Transit system (Chinese 捷運 *jiéyun*) is a shuttle system connecting various parts of the city like a subway, although it may sometimes travel aboveground.

technicians seeking preferential treatment—who would want to go to the surface and bake in the sun. What if they met an MM and were killed by mistake?

Young Momo could understand the way those lunatics wanting to go to the surface felt: she had read a discbook explaining how so many people in the twentieth century who lived on land had been willing to leave behind their peaceful, settled lives on the surface and take the risk of entering the oceans. If the people who went up to the surface in the twenty-first century were adventurers, then the people in the twentieth century who went down to the oceans were tempting fate even more. Momo had seen a movie on disc called *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, which was a biography of the female film director in ancient Nazi Germany, Leni³³. She had made the two infamous propaganda films, *The Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, and in her old age after World War II was frequently reviled; nevertheless, Leni bore all this patiently. In the later years of her life she was still in full possession of her faculties and was fascinated with diving and underwater photography, not in the least outdone by younger male divers. Leni could wear her black scuba gear and carry both a camera and the oxygen tanks on her back without feeling fatigue, sporting with the swimming fish. Her fingers brushed against the tail of an enormous skate, black as the cloak of Count Dracula, without the slightest sign of fear. Her fingers caressed the bodies of the fish, mysterious and beautiful. Momo thought to herself that if in such a technologically backward time as the twentieth century the surface dwellers still dared to move from the land into the sea, what was there for a twenty-first century ocean dweller to fear in going to the surface?

Momo also hoped that she could go see the surface for herself when she came of age, where she would stretch out her hand to caress the carcass of a war MM and then, when no one was looking, she would take off a sun-resistant glove and let her hand bake in the burning glare of the sunlight, to indulge a secret pleasure that others could neither understand nor forgive....

And yet the Momo who sat in the MRT car had never even touched real sea water. She stuck her tiny hand to the car's glass window. Outside the glass window there was still the water-resistant protective membrane, and the ocean was on the other side of that.

The ocean was a membrane on the surface of the giant apple.



³³ Helena “Leni” Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl (1902-2003), German film director, actress, and dancer.

When she arrived at the community shopping center, Momo passed a long, fresh strip of grass, where she saw a gardener proudly strutting back and forth trimming it while the intoxicating fragrance of the grass permeated the air.

She went into a computer software store and saw the shelves filled with discbooks by Macrohard and Microsoft. These books were bestsellers, but they were also the same kind that Mommy brought home every day by the handful and of which she already had plenty, so Momo wasn't especially interested in browsing a discbook store³⁴—since that's how it was, what was the point of her going to a bookstore? Was Momo supposed to feel glad or sad at the sight? The books she had at home were far more interesting than anything on the shelves in this computer electronics store, so she should probably feel fortunate and happy; then again, the whole reason she had come to the store was because she couldn't stand to read any of the books she had at home, and if the books she could find outside were even more insipid than the ones she already had, she'd be bored beyond tears, so dull was her childhood.

Just when she was feeling at a loss for what to do, she saw the name of a new toy in the corner of the store: a "scanner."

The packaging explained that the scanner could pick up images which could then be sent as data to a computer and read from there. The scanner wasn't a camera; it had no lens but only a sensor beam. When the data sent by the sensor was read by computer, it could instantly produce a high-fidelity image of whatever was scanned. The scanner's method of gathering information was a little bit like a bat's (bat: a rat-like mammal with wings capable of flight that lived prior to the twenty-first century), but its ability to capture images was comparable to a camera's. The scanner had no need for a photographic lens, and was small enough that it could be placed almost anywhere without being easily noticed by others. It was also wireless and could be controlled by a computer at great distances, making it perfect for spying. In fact, the scanner was only the size of a Band-Aid and was just as easy to use.

"Do you want a scanner? They're pretty interesting little computer toys." The store clerk came over to check on her.

"This is a toy?" Momo was a little disappointed, since she had thought the scanner was like some secret weapon in a spy novel. So it was only a toy made to trick young children!

"That's right, a really interesting one, too. Are you disappointed just because I called it a 'toy?' This scanner's really good for capturing images; it can even zoom in on things. It's just a pity that so many people are working so hard to make its best features ineffective, and the main buildings of a lot of organizations have jamming

³⁴ For the sake of brevity, I have omitted two clauses here that repeat the same sentiments in different wording.

facilities installed to prevent people from secretly gathering intelligence, so there are a lot of places where it's totally useless. Scanners aren't the ideal tool for secret agents, but they are the ideal toy for kids: at the very least, they're great for when you're playing "Cops and Robbers."

"I'll take two of them."

When she paid the bill, Momo took out the MasterCard Mommy had given her, but she asked the clerk not to write down what she had actually bought on the bill.

"Don't put 'scanner' on the bill. Since you said scanners are toys, put them down on the bill as 'computer toys.'"

Momo didn't want Mommy to know exactly what she had bought just from looking at the bill.



Ten-year old Momo sat in front of her computer monitor waiting for the images the scanner had captured to appear on the screen.

She had bought two scanners to take home. Even though they were only "children's toys," they were also secret weapons, and they weren't cheap.

Before Mommy went out, Momo placed one scanner on her briefcase, then waited until after Mommy had left to place the other on the corner of the table in Mommy's bedroom: she wanted to see what Mommy actually did every day.

But as soon as Mommy took her briefcase out the door, the scanner was useless and transmitted nothing but static to Momo's computer: just as the store clerk had said, the major corporate buildings in the city all had jammers installed to prevent spying, so the scanner couldn't worm its way into Macrohard. The scanner she had placed in Mommy's bedroom worked very well and had a one-hundred, eighty degree spread. From her computer in her own room Momo could see everything that the scanner transmitted from Mommy's room, and all it took was a click of the mouse for her to take mini pictures. The picture transmitted by the scanner itself was crystal-clear, and by zooming in Momo was even able to see a curled hair that Mommy had left in the center of the mattress.



That night when Mommy came home she brought someone over for dinner. The woman's name was Draupadi. Momo had seen her several times before.

Even though Momo didn't like Mommy neglecting her for her friends, Momo didn't dislike Draupadi. Draupadi was tall and slender with bright black skin, and

Momo had heard she was from India. Momo later looked her up in the electronic encyclopedia of people, *Who's Who*, and discovered that her name appeared in the ancient epic, the *Mahabharata*. Momo thought Draupadi was very beautiful; only after a long time did Momo realize that she had seen Draupadi before when she was living in the hospital, but she had thought Draupadi was just one of the doctors then. It had been a long time since Momo had seen an adult this beautiful; but Momo didn't tell Mommy how she felt about Draupadi. She was angry at how unfair things were: she had lost Andy, but Mommy had such a beautiful playmate!

Draupadi was very attentive to Momo during their dinner, but as soon as they had finished eating, both of the adults went into Mommy's room to discuss things, telling Momo to go find a discbook to amuse herself—Momo wanted to pull out all of her discbooks and tear them to shreds with her teeth then and there. Discbooks were the only things that ever kept her company! Cold, unfeeling discs!

Momo returned to her room pouting, turned on her computer, and picked out a discbook at random to read—she grew angrier as she saw that it was yet another Shakespearean tragedy. She couldn't bring herself to read anymore and thought of Hamlet's loneliness—in her hospital room, Momo had been all alone, and even though later Andy had come, she had lost Andy, too. She had thought that Mommy would keep her company once she got out of the hospital, but that hadn't happened at all.

Could it really be that her whole life long only computers and discbooks would be her companions? Mommy didn't keep her company but got herself an Indian friend instead. She remembered that when she was living in the hospital, Mommy only occasionally came to look in on Momo on the monitor outside her room or during a video phone call—

Luckily, she still had the scanner.

Whatever Mommy and Draupadi were doing in Mommy's bedroom, Momo would soon see for herself on her computer screen!

She typed on the keyboard to boot up the scanner, only to find that Mommy's room was completely empty—even though she had placed the scanner at an angle, there were still blind spots; Mommy and Draupadi were probably standing outside the scanner's range. And yet Momo's scanner was pointed right at the master bed, so surely the two women couldn't avoid it forever?

It wasn't long before Draupadi came into view. She had made some changes to her dress: she let her hair hang loose behind her head, and had replaced the dark-blue dress she had been wearing with snow-white tights. Soon Mommy came into view—and she was completely naked.

Momo was pleased, since she was finally going to see what it was that Mommy and her friends did together.

Momo thought of how long it had been since she had seen Mommy's naked body; it had been long before she had been admitted to the hospital. Mommy's naked body looked plumper than Momo remembered it. Momo adjusted the scanner's view to look more closely at the dark hair between Mommy's legs and saw that she didn't have a weenie, either. In the view from the scanner Mommy sat on the bed sticking out her breasts, looking like some carved Buddha statue. Draupadi was whispering in Mommy's ear.

Unfortunately, Momo couldn't hear what she said. The scanner could only pick up images, not sounds.

In the image, Draupadi spread out a large blue-black cloth and Mommy climbed onto it. Mommy's face was pointed toward the scanner, her eyes were closed, and she looked very comfortable. Draupadi's dark fingers danced as they massaged Mommy's fair, naked white back, applying a semi-transparent, milky lotion. Mommy opened her mouth and said something, but her eyes remained closed.

Momo's elation at her success in spying on her mother receded, and jealousy took its place:

How come Mommy and her friends could play such soothing, comfortable games, while she could only secretly watch from another room?



As Momo watched, she became aware that there was another pair of eyes watching her: in the image Draupadi's white eyes offset by dark pupils were staring straight at Momo as she watched from her screen. Momo started, and, afraid that Draupadi would discover the scanner spying on her, hurriedly adjusted the scanner's angle, zooming out—but Draupadi moved her head in turn and kept staring at Momo. Had she really discovered the tiny little scanner? But Draupadi's gaze showed no trace of displeasure, no trace of anger, and not even the hint of having been provoked: what that pair of eyes wanted to tell her was: I know the scanner is focused on me—so I respectfully return your gaze—

Momo immediately shut down the scanner. She thought of an old horror novel she had read once, *Misery*. The author, Stephen King, quoted the words of the philosopher Nietzsche in the epigraph to the book:

When you look into the abyss....the abyss also looks into you....

Yet Momo couldn't restrain her curiosity and started up the scanner again—if the two women in the room really knew what Momo was up to, what would they do? The image of Mommy's room came up again on Momo's computer screen. Mommy lay down before as if in a stupor, while Draupadi massaged her back and stared fixedly at the scanner. Draupadi said something to Mommy—she walked toward the scanner—but she didn't tear it off from its place on the table—in the image, Momo saw Draupadi turn on the three-dimensional, surround sound-enabled HDTV at the head of the bed—then her computer screen was filled with static.

Draupadi obviously intended to jam the scanner's sensor: she had definitely seen it. Would she tell Mommy?



At the time Momo believed she had been privy to a great secret that she couldn't tell anyone else—but at the time she hadn't wondered: If the other scanner she had put in Mommy's briefcase returned only static because of outside interference, then why didn't the scanner she had put in Mommy's bedroom also return static, and why wasn't it also affected by outside interference? Mommy played such a pivotal role at a big corporation that she ought to work hard to protect the secrecy of both her public and private lives for the sake of protecting company secrets; how could she not have set up some protections in her own home? The scanner placed in Mommy's room transmitted a very clear image, but the image wasn't reliable just because it was clear; it might still have been censored first.

It was only much later that Momo began to doubt the fidelity of the scanner: if she couldn't even trust her own two eyes, then why should she trust the eyes of a machine?

But that left open another question: could the eyes of an android, midway between flesh and machine, be trusted?



Momo turned off the scanner and inserted a disc encyclopedia in its place. She wanted to know just what it was that Draupadi and Mommy had been doing.

She was an esthetician.

Draupadi was a famous esthetician.

Momo later realized that Mommy's inviting Draupadi to come home with her hadn't been entirely unreasonable: Mommy's grueling work took its toll on her body, yet the nature of her work also required her to maintain a pleasing physical

appearance, so it was only natural that she should spend a bit of money to hire someone to help her maintain her beauty.



Draupadi left as soon as it was light outside and Mommy hurriedly left for work, leaving Momo home alone.

Ah, another boring day! Momo wasn't willing to stay cooped up inside her room, since she was already over her illness, so she decided to go to the community park to play. The wind outside was fierce and cold, but Momo cleverly thought of borrowing one of Mommy's hats, so she dashed into Mommy's unlocked room to get one.

There was a down bed sheet on Mommy's bed, so straight there were no wrinkles and so clean that not even a single hair could be found on it. Had Mommy really lain on the bed and let Draupadi massage her back last night? There were no traces that any of it had happened.

The strip of scanner that she had placed on the corner of the table wasn't there, either. Had Draupadi torn it off? Did Mommy know about it?—but Momo saw something that caught her attention even more.

Mommy's Palm Pilot was lying on the table; she had forgotten to take it with her.

Momo knew that Mother recorded many things in this personal organizer, including bank accounts, her diary, and work plans. It was a very mysterious item, since Mommy often sat in some far corner of the house deep in thought while she entered notes onto the tablet and had never allowed Momo to see its contents.

But now this tablet had fallen into Momo's hands! All she had to do was peek at the contents to know Mommy's deepest secrets!

Momo opened the notebook emblazoned with the Macrohard logo—it was unlocked!

When she opened it, she saw a tiny screen, about the size of the screen on an ATM machine, on which appeared these words:

--Please enter your password.

Password? How was Momo supposed to know what Mommy's password was?

Mommy's password was several digits long, and Momo didn't know any of them. She would just have to try her best guess.

Momo entered the numbers for her own birthday, June 6, 2070, or 20700606—but she got an error message. So she tried Mommy's birthday, December 24, 2050, or 20501224—wrong again! Maybe the password used English letters instead of numbers? So she entered: ILoveAndy—which of course didn't work, either.

A message appeared on the screen:

There have been three successive invalid login attempts. This notebook is now locked.

That was no fun! Momo hadn't seen anything! She might as well go to the park!

Momo took a paper wipe and cleaned her fingerprints from the personal organizer—if Mommy found out that Momo had tried to look at her notes, she would be angry.

Momo picked out the smallest peaked cap she could find in the wardrobe, put it on her head, then ran out the door.

She hadn't been to the park in so long; the last time had been before she went to live in the hospital. She loved to play on the swing, let her skirt fly high in the air and let the wind pour inside it.

She ran inside the park. There was virtually no one else there, since it was still early morning, but someone was already sitting on her favorite swing. It was an adult. When the adult saw Momo approaching, the adult stared at her and smiled, but said nothing.

It was a man.

Momo sat on the swing next to the man's and the man continued to look at her. Momo thought of two articles she had read in the encyclopedia: "Pedophile" and "Sexual Harassment."

Momo put on a brave face and said to the man:

"Hi! You know what? I used to have a weenie, but now I don't."

"Oh?"

"Do you want to stick your hand up my skirt and feel for yourself?"

The man hesitated for a moment, then stuck his hand up her skirt.

Momo again felt that comfortable, achy-tingly sensation! But the man's hand was gentler than the water from the shower nozzle. The man gazed into her eyes with a look of intense focus. She had thought at first that she would bite (aiming for his hand) and kick (aiming for his groin), or else scream, since that's what the discbooks had taught her to do. But she put up no resistance. She didn't want to resist, since that would have made her a bad, mean girl, and she felt the sweet sensation of revenge. Although on whom she wanted to get revenge, she wasn't exactly sure—

"How come you don't have one?"

"I had an operation and they cut it off."

"Oh."

"Hey, want to pull down your pants and let me see your weenie? There's nobody else around here, so there's no need to be shy." Momo felt that this made her even more depraved.

"I don't have a weenie."

“How come? You look like a man.”

“Actually, I’m an android. I’m a robot designed to resemble a person. My skin and hair are just the same as real people’s, but I’m not a man. I’m specially designed to look like my owner did in his youth, and I’ve only been out of the factory a month.

A-N-D-R-O-I-D.

Momo thought she had read this word somewhere in the encyclopedia, but she hadn’t paid very close attention to it.

“So you’re an android?”

“You’ve heard of them? People call me ‘Andy,’ which is short for ‘android.’”

Momo understood.

Her legs started to shake. So “Andy” just meant “android.”

“My name’s Andy. What’s yours?”

“My name’s Momo....your name’s just ‘Andy’? You don’t have any other names?”

“Nope. As soon as I came out of the factory, people called me ‘Andy.’ My owner didn’t go to the trouble of picking out some more fitting name for me; and he couldn’t just keep calling me by my serial number, you know? That’s ten numbers to remember. Lots of androids have been named ‘Andy,’ so it’s become a kind of pet name; it’s like robot dogs, ones with white coats are all called ‘Whitey,’ ones with speckled coats are all called ‘Spot,’ so dull. Every time I think about how every day there are more androids with the same name as mine entering society I feel so bland. Why don’t they pick out some more interesting names for us; it would at least make our short independent lives more interesting.”

This ‘Andy’ seemed like a very talkative “person”; as Momo listened to him endlessly chattering on she found she could forget for awhile an inexplicable unhappiness in her heart—

“Like your name, it’s really interesting. ‘Mo-Mo.’ Sounds tasty.”

Momo couldn’t keep herself from laughing out loud even though she was really too sad for words. “Why do you say that?”

“When people eat peach cake, they go ‘mm—mm,’ the same sound they make when they’ve had a nice bowl of soup. When my owner and his lovers kiss, they also ‘mm—mm’ for a long time, just like they thought each other’s lips and tongues were tasty and delicious.”

“You’re really something....An-dy”—Momo felt so unhappy when she said that name. She felt that the name ought to belong to her long-lost little Andy, and not to a whole batch of androids she didn’t know—

“Hey, Momo! I like the park, so I come here a lot to play. But I’ve never seen you before.”

Momo only nodded, as she didn’t have the strength to say more.

Big Andy had only been out of the factory for one month, during which time Momo had been stuck in the hospital; going to play in the park was something she had done before she went into the hospital, and the swing where Andy was sitting was the one Momo had liked best, since you could swing highest in it.

Andy continued, "Last night my owner stayed at his lover's house, so when I got up early, I found that I was the only one home and I was really bored, so I came to the park again. Besides, if I don't have fun now, I won't get another chance. Tomorrow I have to go in for surgery, too."

"How come?"

"Transplants. My owner thinks his own body is too old, and his belly is flabby and sags, so he wants to use my body instead. That is, in the hospital they'll take out the parts of his body that he doesn't want and replace them with mine. After the surgery's over, I'll be united in body with my owner." The android chuckled. "But he still wants to keep his own weenie to service those boys he chases after, he says it's more honest and intimate that way, so there's no need for a new part *there*. Tch!"



After Momo came home that day, she immediately took off her clothes and stood in front of the mirror looking at her naked body, feeling at once estranged from and familiar with it.

She immediately dressed again in a fit of rage, put on a heavy coat, then wrapped herself up in a blanket, trying to forget that there was a body attached to the base of her skull. She knew what had happened, but she didn't know how to face her own body. Mommy had said that Andy was still with Momo, that she would always be with Momo; but had she meant that they would be joined in a single body? Were these two hands Momo's own or had they come from Andy? Whose stomach was this? There was no weenie, so this soft place beneath her belly button was surely Andy's flesh! There were no scars and she couldn't tell which parts of her body had been attached. What about her fingers? Were they Andy's? But Momo had bitten off Andy's middle finger. She couldn't understand it.

Momo started to complain to Mommy as soon as she came home from work; Momo didn't know where to begin, so she just started to ask to have Andy back. She knew now that there wasn't just one Andy; the one she wanted was the one in her heart—

"Give me back Andy!" This was the most direct and plainest form of protest, and it came out loud and clear from Momo's mouth, but Mommy just thought she was throwing a temper tantrum.

“Momo, you know what? Do you know how much it cost to make this germ-free, sentient android and carry out a perfect, scar-free surgery?”

Mommy later solemnly explained things to Momo. “Andy’s skin was specially designed to grow naturally when placed on your own and to undergo natural biological changes. It was the latest and most advanced product available. To help you get used to Andy’s body and keep you from rejecting her, the hospital specially designed her to be your playmate. Since you like Andy so much, you should be happy about this surgery.”

“Andy isn’t here with me! Andy’s gone! You all killed her! You cut up her corpse! It’s just like in a mystery novel! A case of murder!”

“Momo, you don’t know how much this surgery cost—”

“I don’t care! Stop saying I don’t understand! I understand more than you think! You have no idea that I understand *Hamlet*! I’ve read *The Merchant of Venice*, too! Don’t think I don’t understand! I know it was you who killed Andy!”

“Momo, that’s enough—”

Momo refused to be quiet, but screamed even more wildly:

“You’re the most selfish person of all! You took away my friend! You can have your friends, you can even bring them into your bedroom and take off your clothes and touch each other!”

She slammed the door and hid in her room, where she played a computer game to vent her anger. She played for fifty minutes, then saw the Macrohard logo appear on her computer screen, which made her so angry she refused to play anymore.

She wanted to run out of her room and yell at Mommy again, but—

She didn’t know where Mommy had gone. She didn’t come home all night.



When Momo awoke the next day, she had no idea whether Mommy had come home or not. The more she thought about things, the angrier and less happy she felt, so she went to the park again. Big Andy was already on the swing. Momo came out and sat next to him—when she had rushed home the other day, she had lost her cap, but she wasn’t angry at this Andy.

“Momo, you look upset.”

“You made me think of another Andy. She was a girl about my size.”

“Then she must have been made from your measurements, right? She must have been really cute. What was her name?”

“She was called ‘Andy,’ too—”

Momo had difficulty saying it aloud: that name that she held so dear, that she believed to be unique in all the world, was after all just a common nickname—

“Oh.” Andy looked a little disappointed. “Just like me.”

“Mommy said that Andy and I are now joined in one body.”

“Many Andys are designed to be joined with their owners. I am, too. We’re designed according to the size and measurements of our owners’ bodies.”

“Hey, don’t you have to go in for surgery today?”

“The surgery’s this afternoon. So this is my last time to play on the swing. Once I’ve been joined with my owner, I certainly won’t come back here, since my owner only likes going to bars and saunas to pick up boys—” As he spoke, it suddenly dawned on him: “That’s right! Only after this full-body transplant will my owner’s body really improve, and only then can he really go to the sauna to strut his stuff!”

“Who’s your owner?”

“Paolo. He’s the best gardener in this community.” Big Andy’s expression was not a little proud.

Because grass and trees were very rare and valuable in the Asia-Pacific region in the twenty-first century, gardeners who took care of the grass and cut out weeds were naturally members of a very respectable profession. Only in the yards of wealthy people were there grass lawns, and gardeners weren’t people whose services could be used by just anybody. The people who had the money to have custom-made androids were either like this new-age yuppie of a gardener or else people like Momo’s mother who devoted their lives to making money.

Momo had seen this gardener, a young-looking man, trim the grass in the community association garden with godlike skill, planting his feet squarely on the green grass, since stepping on the grass was a gardener’s special privilege. It was a pity he was a little fat and drummed on his big belly as he cut the lawn.

“I know him. But he doesn’t look old at all. Why does he need to have a surgery? Mommy says that these days people who worry about their looks just have to go to a beautician to keep their skin young and flexible.”

“Silly girl, beauticians can only deal with problems in your looks; if you have a problem inside your body, they’re no good. My owner does often go to a beautician for treatment, of course. But his body isn’t in good shape; he’s got problems with his stomach. Do you know what MMs are?”

Momo nodded.

Models of MMs were the hottest children’s toys. Even though Momo didn’t love to play with toys, she still knew about those.

“MM” stood for “Master Monkey,” and was named for the ancient Chinese “Monkey Pilgrim” Sun Wukong³⁵. It was a kind of high-end android first developed and successfully produced by an ethnic Chinese engineer named Tang. It was called an MM to emphasize its incredible agility and its high attack capabilities (just as Sun Wukong displayed while escorting his master to the Western regions) as well as its great plasticity (just as Sun Wukong had his seventy-two transformations). It could be made according to a client’s specifications.

Androids were midway between humans and machines, while MMs were midway between androids and robots: the MMs possessed the android’s basic artificial intelligence, but the materials from which they were made were far stronger and sturdier.

“Then I’ll use an MM as an example to explain it to you,” Andy continued. “If an MM has only a surface defect, all that’s needed is to add a layer of protective coating to strengthen its exoskeleton; but if there’s a problem with its insides, then you’ve got to open it up and replace maybe half the parts. The reason I used MMs as an example is that an MM’s body is very similar to the human body: for external problems, you get a beautician to take care of them; but for internal problems, you’ve got to have surgery. For example, in large-scale organ transplants, it’s best if the organ comes from another human being—but human death rates are too low, and the number of people who end up brain-dead and are also organ donors is too small. Of those precious few organs that do get donated, most are reserved for people who are seriously ill and aren’t available to people like my owner who want new body parts just for the sake of their appearance. The simplest way for people like them is to order a custom-made android, and then they can replace any body parts they want.”

“But if that’s how it is, then isn’t the android sacrificed in the process? Aren’t you afraid?”

“There’s nothing I can do about it. People with money and power have us androids made, and they decide our fate. We’re not allowed to be our own masters.” Andy shrugged. “Besides, the whole reason I came out of the factory was to be with my owner, and that only so I could give him my flesh, blood, and internal organs. He should have spent more time with me before today—”

His eyes reddened: “Of course I don’t want to leave this world. But when I think about how I’m going to become part of my owner’s body this afternoon, as the song³⁶

³⁵ One of the heroes who escort the monk Sanzang to India in the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記 *Xiyou Ji*).

³⁶ 你儂我儂 *Ni Nong, Wo Nong*. The poem 我儂詞 *Wo Nong Ci* (“You and I”) is by 管道升 *Guan Daosheng* (1262-1319) of the Yuan Dynasty. When her husband felt that her looks had faded and wanted to take a concubine, she is said to have replied with this poem, which made him reconsider. The words of the poem, which include those quoted by Andy, were expanded and recast as a popular ballad by the Taiwanese composer

goes, 'You and I are one; I am part of you and you are part of me,' I ought to be moved to tears of joy—"

"Will I still be able to see you after today?"

"Whenever you see the best gardener in this community, you'll have seen me, since then I'll be completely contained in his body."

Momo thought of a crucial point:

"But will I still be able to hear you speak?"

"I don't know—"

Andy's face grew pale: "My owner will have complete control over the power of speech; all I'm doing is giving him new organs to use if he wants—"

It had been a long time since Momo had spoken with her Andy.

Mommy said that Andy's body was inside Momo. What Big Andy said confirmed how people had used the body of Momo's Andy android. Momo liked being with Andy, but not through such drastic means as this kind of surgery. She liked to read books with Andy, shoulder to shoulder; even if Momo now had Andy's eyes to read with, this couldn't bring her the same feeling of togetherness she and Andy had shared. Besides, she liked talking with Andy and hearing Andy's voice; now, even though she and Andy were permanently joined together—it was like hot coffee with cream in it; she was the coffee, Andy was the cream—she couldn't talk to Andy anymore:

Coffee with cream added might have a different flavor, but it was still basically coffee; but the cream was completely dissolved into the coffee and vanished without a trace. Would Andy speak from within Momo's mind?

After the surgery, a voice would sometimes cry out from the depths of her body: but was it a lingering effect of the surgery, or Andy whispering inside her body?

After the surgery, Momo started to hear some tuneless, fragmentary voices in her mind, an indescribable montage of images: had Andy died inside Momo's body, was Momo an android graveyard, and had Momo's heart begun to reverberate with Andy's revenant voice and ghostly image?...

Momo would dream of an icy cold house under the stars where the sound of massive chrome machines ground noisily on without cease while pearly-white gears in turn gave off a reflection like a mirror—it was just like Big Andy had described; the sights and sounds were just like those of a munitions depot on the surface....

"I can't talk with you anymore. I've got to go get ready to go under the knife."

"I hope your surgery goes well."

"Momo, I hope I can see you again. I'll try to find a way to get my owner to say hello to you...."

Momo grasped the chains of the swing with her hand and let the wind fly inside her skirt (she wasn't wearing any underwear), into her large intestine, into her small intestine; she felt so cold inside her stomach, as though it were snowing in there, and the snowflakes covered Andy's corpse.

She came back home after dark: Mommy was there, but she didn't speak to Momo. Mommy was utterly silent.



From that day forward, mother and daughter spoke to each other far less than before. They didn't speak unless absolutely necessary.

When Momo asked to go to a faraway place to study, Mommy raised no objections.

"I want to study cosmetics. I want to be a professional esthetician. Once I've completed my studies, I'll repay you my tuition and miscellaneous fees in full, with interest."

Mommy again raised no objections.

When Momo won her award at twenty-five and earned a lot of money, she remitted a large sum to Macrohard's headquarters. Mommy sent an immediate e-mail reply: it was just a receipt; there were no wasted words.

After Momo went to boarding school to study, she never saw Mommy again. After she graduated, she was even busier with her career, and the only time she saw Mommy's face was on advertisements for new books from Macrohard.

As for the gardener's Andy, he got his wish to become a part of his owner, so she ought to call him by the gardener's name—she never saw him again, because she never went back to the swings in the park, nor did she ever return to see the community of her childhood years.

Before the gardener died, had he ever taken Andy back to the park?

She never knew.



Momo read the news of the gardener's death on the Internet at school.

The headline read:

Has History Repeated Itself? Paolo Pasolini³⁷ Dies Tragically!

³⁷ Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) was an Italian writer, film director and intellectual who was murdered by being repeatedly run over by his own car.

The gardener had been deliberately hit by a car, his skull had been repeatedly run over and crushed to pieces, and no robotic surgery, no matter how advanced, could save him from that. The basic requirement for a robotic surgery was that the human brain still be alive.

Why would someone want to do such a horrible thing?

The news continued in a gossipy tone: Paolo, the middle-aged gardener well past his prime who had spent such a fortune on an android, was not stingy either in spending large sums for sexual favors from the rash young men of the community. After being raped by one of the young men, the latter refused to continue their relationship, instead violently knocking Paolo out by smashing a wine bottle over his head, then using a car to crush his skull, putting an end to the life of this Casanova gardener who had deflowered so many.

Was the fact that the gardener had been killed by a young man he loved an occasion for sorrow or elation? Some people said that it was better to die in the heat of passion than to die an ordinary death; the gardener was a man of deep feelings and an artist and probably had no regrets. Ah, truly artists didn't fear death, while those who feared death were not artists.

Momo cared more about Paolo's Andy. Would he have felt happy and blessed to be thus martyred together with the owner he so loved and respected? She doubted it. He had died for his owner, but had his owner even given a thought for Andy the moment he had been run over? No doubt Paolo's dying thought had been for the young man who raped him!

Besides, hadn't Andy already died earlier, long before the car accident?—In the instant he became one with the gardener during their surgery, Andy had lost his independent life, and all for the sake of perfecting his owner's good looks and sex appeal. In that case, Andy's second death wasn't really death—although it was probably more terrifying than his first: this death violently revealed that his sacrifice for his owner had been in vain, and everything was smashed to pieces....

Momo couldn't help thinking of the Andy inside her body. Could she say any words of apology or thanks to her? Andy's death had allowed her to be who she was. She was like a birdcage locking in the canary that was Andy; this canary neither sang nor flew in its cage, almost as though it were a corpse.

Momo lived alone in her birdcage, later taking in a common cur. She could endure it because she believed that dogs weren't cats and so wouldn't eat birds. At least those were the rules of the game handed down from the twentieth century.

So she believed.



During the time she pursued her studies and lived away from home, from the time she was ten in 2080 to the time she was twenty in 2090, Momo lived a very simple life, even as her mother's position in the publishing empire steadily rose. She didn't want to rely on Mommy, but she made a small exception: while she studied hard she couldn't avoid using Macrohard Publishing's products, since the books Mommy sold really were both numerous and high-quality.

Mommy put her heart and soul into her work at Macrohard and personally handled any big business deals: things had even reached a point where Mommy's smiling figure would appear on the screen advertising Macrohard's encyclopedias every time Momo turned on her computer: in the twenty-first century, computers were like the TV of the twentieth century, and advertisements would appear on the screen at set intervals.

Even the few movie theaters that hadn't died out broadcast Mommy's advertisements for movie encyclopedias; Momo had seen the ads herself. She once was a big fan of a popular old-style Italian movie theater, Nuovo Cinema Paradiso³⁸, which had played a northern-European film featuring classical costumes, Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*.³⁹ Mommy's kindly, motherly lips moved up and down in the advertisement, while her position at Macrohard soared. Momo left the movie theater alone, returning to the space between her computer table and her massage table.

Momo's fingers were very busy. During her beauty school practicum classes she had to use all ten fingers at once: first to massage, then to put on skin-care lotion, and finally to massage the skin-care lotion deep into the muscles. When using her personal computer, her fingers never left the keyboard: she wrote her homework, surfed the Internet, read e-mail or discbooks. She was a serious student.

She was a serious girl. At fifteen, Momo had once stuck her hand in the space between her thighs where she could play the sonatas she could never play by day: while she was blissfully masturbating herself, she could see herself riding a bubble and floating to the surface of the sea, her feet falling on the sun-scorched, parched limestone, her fingers massaging the broken, scattered pieces of the corpse of a defeated MM. The bloodless wreckage received the endless oblations of the sunlight—as she stroked the MM's death and face, she saw that it was Andy's face, the MM and Andy were both androids—Andy was an android and not a human, so did she even experience birth and death?—

³⁸ Title of a 1988 film written and directed by Giuseppe Tornatore.

³⁹ Swedish *Höstonaten*, released 1978. The film tells the story of a famous pianist forced to confront her long-neglected daughter.

As Momo calmly thought about all this, her whole body relaxed into an orgasm, and she couldn't keep going.

She decided to take a shower to wash away the tangles of her distracted thoughts, so she stripped off her clothes and stood under the showerhead, her fingers stroking her body as the water rushed over it. Her body was smooth and bore no scars, as though this beautiful young body had never undergone a surgery—but was it hers, this body? Was this body her own? Or was it Andy's? Andy's organs that had been transplanted into Momo's body could grow and develop as she did, so Andy's fetus lay buried in Momo's outstretched womb....but Andy couldn't reproduce, so Momo had never had a period....Were her womb and lower body naturally like this, or did they come from Andy?

Sometimes, Momo couldn't help but wonder: after the transplant surgery, was it Andy who had become part of Momo, or Momo who became a piece of Andy's flesh? Since her surgery was such a major one, then a great deal of Andy's body must have been transferred to Momo—but how much? What percentage? Surely it couldn't be higher than ninety nine?

Surely it couldn't be that after the surgery, all that remained of Momo was her skull and her brain and her memories, while all the rest of her body came from Andy?

Surely not. She loved Andy, but she didn't want to become one with her like that. She was like a canary locked inside a beautiful cage.

7

"That's an unusual name you've chosen for your clinic, 'The Canary.' I'm sure your work is just as beautiful," the woman in her memory said. "I simply must know: who is the canary you're referring to? What does the name mean?"

Draupadi came as an unexpected client to Momo's private clinic soon after she opened it. The year was 2095, and Momo was twenty-five. Even at that time Momo had already laid down her ground rules: she only accepted clients by prior appointment and she paid no heed to those who came knocking on the door of her clinic without notifying her first. But when Draupadi came like this, she couldn't turn her away. Draupadi was the first esthetician Momo had ever met and her senior in the profession; back then, if it hadn't been for Draupadi, Momo would never have chosen this line of work.

"Momo, it's been such a long time. Do you still remember me? Your face is still pretty as a peach, but even rosier now that you've grown up."

Draupadi was wearing a purplish-blue sari and carrying a small violin case. The case was just like the kind terrorists used to use in olden times to conceal

sub-machine guns, strange and mysterious. Draupadi didn't look old at all, her figure still charming and attractive with bright black skin, exactly as Momo remembered her. She was after all an accomplished esthetician, so she had her ways of taking care of her body. But maybe it was just that Momo felt a little abashed: she saw in Draupadi's body a kind of pride and self-confidence that left her unable to look at her directly.

Draupadi entered the clinic without wasting any more words, put down the violin case, and began to loosen her clothes. She was so thin that it had looked as though she were only wearing one purple sari; but when she removed it, there was another deep indigo sari underneath.

Momo was astonished, but Draupadi smiled and said: "I'm wearing too much, is that it? Do you know why I'm called Draupadi?"⁴⁰

Draupadi took off the second sari, and sure enough, there was another azure sari underneath. She took off this third sari to reveal a fourth, green. Next came a yellow sari, followed by an orange one. The seventh sari was red, and only after removing it was Draupadi's naked body finally visible. Momo thought of a twentieth century novel, *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler*,⁴¹ which described a woman who wore several layers of clothing, and assumed a different role with each one she removed—"You're thinking of Calvino's *If on A Winter's Night A Traveler*, right? But that's not how I am; I haven't changed roles, and whether I'm wearing clothes or not, I'm still Draupadi. Did you know that the name Draupadi comes from the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*? The Draupadi in the legend has an endlessly long sari, so even though others want to strip her naked, they are incapable of doing so."

Draupadi sat naked on the massage table. She had looked very thin when she was still wearing her clothes, but her nakedness revealed a subtle fullness of figure. Her dark skin seemed to breathe in the oxygen of the air, giving it a smooth and vigorous appearance, supple and pliant.

Momo stared at the picture of health before her and the breasts that protruded without the slightest hint of sagging as she summoned up the nerve to ask, "But haven't you taken off all your clothes?"

"The reason the Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* had an endlessly long sari was because she was forced to disrobe. But I'm perfectly willing to be naked here."



⁴⁰ In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi's husband loses her in a game of dice, after which she is brought to the court of their enemies and ordered disrobed by her captors. Although she is wearing only one sari when she arrives, because of her timely prayers to Krishna, the god makes a new sari appear around her each time her clothing is about to be removed, preventing her from suffering the humiliation of being naked before the men of the court.

⁴¹ *Se Una Notte d'Inverno Un Vaggiatore*, by Italian novelist Italo Calvino, published in 1979.

Momo did not dare hold back but employed all of her skill in playing a tune on Draupadi's naked body. She put all her strength into the massage, carefully modulating it as she rubbed algae cream into each line of Draupadi's flesh. She was like a pianist who had just left her simple abode in the countryside, while the piano she played was the embodiment of a master pianist she both feared and respected.

She couldn't help thinking of a movie she had seen when she was a student—was it Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*? In the film the mother was a renowned pianist; when her daughter, who also studied piano, came of age, she played for her mother using all of her strength and skill until she could hardly go on, all because her audience was her mother the master pianist. Momo felt just like the girl, except that in her case, the piano, music, and audience were all joined in a single body.

On the massage table, Draupadi seemed to succumb to the spell of Momo's fingers, for she said nothing and kept her eyes closed, only occasionally letting out a moan: the sound of the moan was like the popping of a balloon, or like a droplet of dew joyously releasing a burst of freshness....Momo remembered that when she was ten and had used a scanner to spy on Draupadi giving Mommy a massage, Mommy's face had also worn the expression of bliss she now saw on Draupadi's face on the massage table....would Draupadi bring up that time when Momo had spied on her with the scanner? Momo didn't want to think about it....she was too embarrassed of her act of childhood folly.

When the two-hour massage session was over Draupadi sat up and opened her eyes as though awakening from a beautiful dream. She seemed extremely satisfied and said she wanted to give Momo a priceless reward. She stood up naked, not in the least hurry to put on her saris again, and picked up the small violin case. When she opened the case, just as Momo had suspected, there was no violin inside, but neither was there a weapon—just what looked like tubes of toothpaste filled with liquid. It must be skin-care cream! There was also an IC card.

"Did you think there was a musical instrument or a weapon in there? I'll bet. These are musical instruments. They are also weapons."



Draupadi took out a tube of cream, squeezed the cream into her palm, and spread it evenly over her whole body—when she finished, the brightness of her skin had dimmed: Draupadi's skin had begun to peel—

She was like a snake shedding its skin from the animal encyclopedia. A layer of semi-transparent but otherwise normal skin peeled away from her body, like a balloon made in Draupadi's image.

“Now I’ve taken off another layer of clothing. So how can you be certain that I was naked just now?” Draupadi’s gaze was keen and full of meaning. “This is my second layer of skin. It’s called M-Skin.”

The little violin case was packed full of tubes of the strange new lotion. It was Draupadi’s congratulatory gift for Momo on the opening of her studio, “The Canary.”

“Momo, this is a next-generation body scanner. You played with a scanner before when you were little, remember? So I’m sure you’ll be able to handle this one like a pro. It’s a physical game, designed for adults.”

Draupadi’s words were full of allusions. She knew everything!

“You can’t buy this kind of ‘scanner’ even on the black market. Plug this IC card into your computer; I’ll teach you how to read the human body.”



As she was leaving, Draupadi asked about Mommy.

“Have you and your mother seen each other recently?”

“We don’t often—” the truth was that from the time Momo was ten and had started living at boarding school, she hadn’t seen Mommy even once. She only saw Mommy’s face on Macrohard’s advertisements.

“Tell her I asked about her.”

Draupadi never came to Momo’s clinic again after that. She left Momo with the M-Skin scanning cream and the M-Skin removal lotion. The formula for M-Skin was very dense and had to be heavily diluted before it could be applied, so Momo had enough to use for years without worrying about running out.

As Momo thought about it later, she realized that it was probably Draupadi’s close relationship with Mommy that had led her to give Momo such a wonderful gift. If that was the case, Momo didn’t know whether to be happy or angry, since it meant she was living under Mommy’s shadow once again—

There is nowhere shadows don’t reach....

An unknowable shadow was constantly drawing near to Momo’s unknowable body.

8

All right. Our tale up to now has been full of complicated details, but now things are about to get interesting.

Mommy was coming to see Momo on her thirtieth birthday. Momo couldn’t help smiling bitterly, coldly, stupidly: was Mommy really finally coming to see her on her

own initiative to repair their relationship, all because Tomie Junji's disczine article had created such a controversy that she couldn't help but come to see her beloved daughter for the sake of maintaining her motherly appearance? Was she coming to see Momo or to see her daughter's new finger? If she had really wanted to see her own daughter, why wait twenty years before making the trip?

In 2094 Momo was twenty-four and had just won the Asia-Pacific Creative Cosmetics prize. It was the finest moment of her life, and as Momo stood on stage with her prize-winning work, the beautiful girl she had transformed into a canary, countless spotlights and eyes were all on Momo—but Mommy, who had just been promoted to President of Direct Marketing at Macrohard, where was she among the throng of people offering congratulations in attendance at the awards ceremony? Momo was deeply suspicious. Perhaps Mommy had not even heard that her daughter had won an award? If she had, then why hadn't Momo received any congratulatory e-mail from Mommy that year when her inbox was flooded with them? Or in 2095, when Momo was twenty-five and had started her own skin-care clinic, "The Canary," Draupadi had come in person to offer her congratulations, but Momo hadn't seen so much as Mommy's shadow—she never imagined that only on her thirtieth birthday would it finally occur to the president of Macrohard's Direct Marketing division that she should go and look in on her daughter!

Hysterical complaints rushed about in Momo's mind; she believed that her weaning period had been far too long and drawn out, but she felt that it wasn't her fault at all!

To be incapable of being weaned—was it the infant's fault to be so self-obsessed that it never grew up?—or was it the mother's fault, because she doted too much on her child?—or else was it the fault of neither:

What was wrong with never weaning? Why did you have to compel the child to grow up? If the child refused to grow up, why did you have to blame either the child or the mother? Why did the child have to grow up, or else?

Why did people maintain such an overbearing rule among themselves?



Mommy had finally come. Momo greeted the event apprehensively, just as she had her surgery in 2080 when she was ten, which made the thing that bothered her most come barreling down on her in the blink of an eye—

Mommy had said in her e-mail that she could find Momo's clinic and that there was no need to come and get her.

Momo thought this was just as well, as she didn't want to show any weakness toward her mother.

Mommy came to the door of Momo's figure-eight-shaped house.

Before Mommy had even walked in the door Momo had seen her enter the doorway on the monitor—Momo was so shocked that for a moment she was at a loss for what to do. There was no doubt about it; it was Mommy, and she had aged considerably in the twenty years since they had last seen each other.

But the Mommy Momo saw on the monitor wasn't the beautiful and self-confident woman she was used to seeing in advertisements, but a woman with red circles around her eyes.

Was Mommy too overcome with emotion?

Momo started and suddenly felt that time had played a trick on her, so that she wasn't the thirty-year old in 2100 but the ten-year old in 2080. A gentle yet somehow familiar fear welled up in her mind: she remembered having a similar feeling on the day when she left the hospital. When she was ten, the surgery was a success, Andy was gone, and Momo moved from a sterilized hospital room to an ordinary sickroom, finally able to count the days until she would leave the hospital. On the day she left, Momo saw Mommy, who had made time to come take her home, from where she lay on her sickbed, slowly approaching her as though in slow-motion like in an old-style movie. On that day, too, Mommy's eyes were red from crying.

Mommy said, Momo, we can go home now; you haven't been home in such a long time.

Mommy pressed the doorbell, then pushed open the door and walked in.

The Mommy who stood outside the door was the same as the one she had seen on the monitor; she was dressed simply and showed none of the overweening confidence she displayed to the media, but her eyes were clear and dry—had Momo been imagining things just now when she had looked at the monitor?

The two of them hadn't seen each other in so long that for a moment they didn't know what to say to each other—

Just as things were getting awkward, the usually quiet Andy suddenly started to bark like mad at Mommy.

Momo hurriedly petted the dog: "Be good, Andy, don't be afraid, this is Momo's Mommy."

Mommy said:

"Momo—"

(What Momo seemed to want to say for Mommy was: Momo, we can go home now. You haven't been home in such a long time....)

Mommy said: "Momo, your little dog's name is Andy, too?"



Starting the conversation about the little dog seemed to put both mother and daughter at ease.

"Is its name really Andy? Momo, you've never forgotten her, have you, just like a child. But you've really grown up. I'm so happy."

After talking about the dog, the two fell silent again, as though there were nothing more for them to say.

"Momo, how's your finger?"

"Great. I got a new one, and it hasn't affected my work at all."

"That's good."

There was another awkward silence.

"Momo, what made you decide to raise a dog?"

"One of my clients gave it to me, a wealthy Japanese reporter."

"A Japanese reporter? Oh."

"Mommy, how come you have time to come see me today?"

"Momo, today is your thirtieth birthday—"

"But I had birthdays last year when I was twenty-nine, and when I was twenty, and when I was fifteen, too. Why didn't you come to see me earlier instead of waiting until today when I turn thirty?"

"Momo, I've had things very hard and haven't been able to come see you until now."

"You must have been busy with work. You're such a bigshot in the cultural world." Momo saw Mommy's Palm Pilot notebook, imprinted with the Macrohard trademark. She had seen that notebook once before.

Even when Mommy came to see *her*, she didn't forget to bring her work with her!

"Momo, I hope you'll give me the chance to explain everything."

"You've brought your computer workbook with you. You're such a hard worker! I can loan you my clinic to be your presidential office for a day."

Mommy's eyes welled up with tears.

"We might as well go celebrate my birthday. Let's go, Mommy."

But Momo had another plan in mind, one that involved her scanner.

9

Finally, Momo opened up Mommy's notebook. She knew the password this time.

Mommy had drunk deeply the spiked apple cider Momo had given her and wouldn't be waking up anytime soon.

Momo couldn't help herself. She was just too curious. Just what had Mommy written down in this notebook that she had kept so closely guarded for twenty years?



Her designs on the notebook began from the moment she had seen Mommy carrying it:

Momo insisted on giving Mommy a full-body massage, but to her surprise, Mommy was too embarrassed to remove her clothes. But when Momo had seen Mommy naked when she was ten in 2080, Mommy had been totally relaxed as Draupadi gave her a massage. So she was unwilling to be naked in front of her daughter? Well, that was no problem. Momo applied M-Skin to Mommy's hands. Momo knew that a workaholic like Mommy would have to open her notebook sooner or later. And if she used her notebook, she would have had to enter the password that Momo had never been able to guess.

Once Mommy had accessed her computer, Momo gave her a glass of rich, intoxicating wine. Mommy soon fell fast asleep, after which Momo carefully washed Mommy's hands in removal lotion to take off the M-Skin which had faithfully recorded the password as Mommy had typed it in.

Momo took the M-Skin and entered it into her computer—each key on the keyboard occupied a different position and represented a different character, so Momo's computer could easily read the ones Mommy had typed in as her password.

Mommy's password was a set of seven different passwords.

Seven passwords? Why be so cautious about a computer password? Seven passwords were as complex as astronomy and impossible for even the smartest of secret agents to guess. If it hadn't been for Draupadi's scanner and M-Skin, she could never have cracked the passwords.

Mommy occupied an important and high-ranking position at a major cultural company, so it was no wonder she took so many precautions to prevent the contents of her notebook from being read by others. That way, even if she lost it on the street she wouldn't have to worry that someone would take it and get into her files, nor would she even have to worry about trying to get it back. She could just get a new notebook to replace the old one.

Even though it was called a "Notebook," it didn't actually contain any data. It was just a portal to the cloud, remotely accessing distant data centers, and a user carrying it with her had only to make a request in order to link up with a main terminal. That's

why it made no difference if you lost it, since it didn't store any valuable data itself; all the data was kept in secure servers at a distant location; the notebook was just a passageway to the stored data, and it was secure enough if outsiders were kept from getting in, just as it was enough for the legendary forty thieves to lock away their treasure with the invocation, "Open sesame."

Momo was Ali Baba. She stood at the entrance and keyed in the seven-password invocation.

Even though Momo knew the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, she had forgotten an important moral of the tale:

The story's calamities only began after Ali Baba burst into the undisturbed treasure cave.

"Treasure cave" and "dig one's grave" were practically synonyms.



The screen on the notebook looked like the screen on the ATMs you could find everywhere on the street, and in purple characters were displayed the words:

--Please enter your password.

Momo entered the password and was greeted immediately by a screen of small indigo characters about an inch wide:

--Please enter the next password.

So she entered the next one. The process repeated itself in different colors, the size of the characters decreasing with each successive entry. Momo reached the seventh screen, this time with red characters, and entered the last password.

The screen went black, and several seconds later the following two skin-colored options appeared:

On the left was "Work," while on the right was "Personal."

Momo didn't hesitate to choose the right option.

She was greeted with nine different options arranged in a Cartesian grid like the character 井 *jing*. The option in the very center was labeled "Momo."

This was naturally Momo's first choice.

Her hand shook as she chose the middle option and the screen changed to show the following table:

2070	2071	2072	2073	2074
2075	2076	2077	2078	2079
2080	2081	2082	2083	2084
2085	2086	2087	2088	2089

2090	2091	2092	2093	2094
2095	2096	2097	2098	2099
2100	2101	2102	2103	2104

What was the meaning of this table?

The arrangement by date was just like Momo's filing cabinet system for storing her clients' M-Skin data, everything neatly in its place.

Were they diary entries Mommy had made of Momo?

Momo selected "2094" and pressed the enter key on the notebook.

The following words crawled across the screen:

--2094. Momo 24, "Wins Asia-Pacific Creative Cosmetics Skin-Care Prize."

Did Mommy care about that after all?

Another button appeared on the bottom right-hand side of the screen: "View."

View what? Momo selected the "View" option and pressed the enter key.

The words on the screen disappeared and were replaced by an audio-visual recording. Momo was worried that the sound from the video would wake Mommy up, so she turned the audio setting to "OFF—"

Ah, she had seen the image on the screen before! The picture, the angle, she remembered them all perfectly. It was as though she were watching a historical documentary recording or disc movie, except the content of the recording was her winning the Asia-Pacific Creative Cosmetics Skin-Care prize at twenty-four, the finest moment of her life: her prize-winning work, the beautiful girl she had transformed into a canary was onstage with her, and countless spotlights and pairs of eyes were all turned directly on her—the screen was like the eye of a camera, sweeping across the ceremony, but Mommy was nowhere in the scene. Even though Momo had switched off the volume, she could imagine the sound of the room being filled with thunderous applause. And it was all for her.

Mommy wasn't in the picture—

Could it be that Mommy had been there that day as a camerawoman? Had Mommy used these images to make a diary of her daughter?

Momo, oh Momo! Do you still blame Mommy for ignoring you?

She cared only too much for you!

Momo brushed away these irrelevant thoughts and continued watching. Her whole body was feverish, as though it were burning beneath the sunlight.

She exited "2094" and selected "2080."

The screen displayed the words:

--2080. Momo 10, "Momo's Surgery A Success," "Momo Goes to Boarding School."

Momo selected “Momo’s Surgery A Success” and pressed the “View” button. Yes, it was exactly as she remembered it: she lay in a regular hospital bed. A withered leaf fluttered in the wind outside the window. Mommy walked to her bedside and told her that she could leave the hospital.

But Mommy was in the picture this time. Mommy couldn’t have filmed *this*. Or had she used a completely automated camera to ensure that she would be in the movie, too?

Mommy was a real stickler for details. She had filmed the details of many important scenes from Momo’s life.

“Momo’s Surgery A Success” was too long to watch in one sitting, so Momo exited the movie. She didn’t feel like watching “Momo Goes to Boarding School, either. So she selected “2070.”

The screen changed. 2070, “Momo is born and named ‘Momo’, meaning ‘peach.’”

Now that was interesting! Mommy had even recorded an event as long ago as Momo’s birth.

Momo pressed “View.”



How should one describe this blurry image?

It was far too distant, out of focus, and the pearly color of old photographs.

The two faces Momo saw on the screen were difficult to make out because they were so distant from the camera lens that they were very tiny, but if you looked carefully, you could make out that they were two women. They walked hand-in-hand among the misty hills at a slow and happy pace. They walked to the top of the hill and sat down on a peach tree to eat seaweed-wrapped onigiri and sing folk songs. At that moment the camera moved closer and Momo could see that one of the women was Mommy. But who was Mommy’s friend? The scene only showed her back. The two women continued to chat and laugh, but Mommy’s friend kept her back to the camera.

As the scene moved on, Mommy’s friend asked her to carry her on her back, then stuck out her hand toward the peach tree and pulled, and together the two women succeeded in taking the biggest peach from the tree. The peach was as big as a human skull. Mommy was very happy and spoke to her friend—Momo couldn’t help but turn on the volume, since she wanted to know what Mommy was saying. So she turned up the volume a little—

In the picture, Mommy was saying—Mommy’s clear voice was the same as always, it had never changed—she was saying that in an ancient Chinese legend⁴², cutting a peach in half to give to a friend to eat, or “sharing a peach,” was a lucky phrase, an expression of an extraordinary friendship that other people couldn’t understand—so let’s cut open the peach and each eat half of it to bring good fortune to our friendship!

So they cut open the peach, but scarcely had the knife pierced the skin than they heard the sound of an infant’s wail coming from within the fruit—this was the moment of Momo’s birth.

Momo couldn’t help but smile bitterly: what modern child with a solid sex education would be fooled by such a fantastic, fairytale birth story? It must have been done for a laugh. She never imagined Mommy would have such a childish streak that she would make a melodrama out of this story to keep in her diary.

The face of the child on the screen was red all over and gave off a sweet scent, since she truly was a peach’s daughter; so Mommy’s friend—that girl whose back was to the screen spoke—suggested that they should name the girl “Peach.” Mommy’s Japanese friend said that in an ancient Japanese legend, a little boy was born from a peach. His name was Momo Taro....”Peach” in Japanese was “Momo,” so the girl’s name was decided.

Momo had heard that Japanese girl’s voice before.

She had heard her voice, but—

Was it really her Momo had heard? How could it be her? And why had she never said anything about it to Momo?

Mommy’s friend was none other than Tomie Junji.

Momo was one hundred percent sure of it.



The “documentary” of Momo’s birth was obviously a fabrication; but why was the second woman Tomie? Did Tomie and Mommy really know each other well? Tomie was one of Momo’s oldest customers, but Momo had no idea that she had known Mommy, too! In that case, was Tomie’s disczine article for Mother’s Day just an elaborate joke she had played on Momo? No wonder Mommy had hurriedly sent Momo an e-mail after reading the interview with Tomie. Were Mommy and Tomie in league together in playing a prank on her? Had Momo fallen for it?

Just what kind of diary was this, anyway?

⁴² See note 2, p. 93.

How many secrets still lay buried inside? This was a record of Momo's life, but there was something she couldn't quite understand about it. She had to figure it out!



Momo switched to the next decade: 2095.

2095, Momo 25, "Founds Her Clinic, 'The Canary.'" "Draupadi comes to see Momo."

Momo was shaken to the core—

Drau-pa-di? Why did Mommy know that Draupadi had come to see her? Why was there a record of it in Mommy's notebook?

Momo selected "Draupadi comes to see Momo" and adjusted the volume to fifteen percent—she didn't want to wake Mommy—

The picture and audio began to play.

Momo could scarcely believe her eyes and ears—not because what she saw and heard were unbelievable, but because she knew everything she saw and heard by heart!

It was exactly the way she remembered it....

Even the angle of the face pointing toward her was the same—

It was perfectly clear without any static—

...."Your clinic has a really unusual name, 'The Canary.'" I'm sure your work is just as beautiful," the Draupadi on the screen said...."I simply must know, who is the 'canary' you're referring to? What does the name mean?" Draupadi was wearing a bluish-purple sari and carrying a violin case. "Momo, it's been many years since we saw each other last. Do you still remember me? Your face is still as pretty as a peach, but even rosier now that you've grown up...." Draupadi entered the clinic, and without wasting any more words, put down the violin case and began to loosen her clothing....She was only wearing a loose purple sari, but when she had removed it, there was a deep indigo sari underneath...."I'm wearing too much, is that it? Do you know why I'm called Draupadi?" Draupadi took off the second sari, revealing a third, azure sari underneath. She removed it too to reveal a fourth, green sari; then a fifth, yellow; then an orange sari; and finally a seventh, red sari. Only after removing this last sari did Draupadi stand naked....She got onto the massage table....When Draupadi had been clothed she had looked very thin, but her naked body displayed a subtle fullness of figure....Her dark skin seemed to breathe in the oxygen of the air, giving it a smooth and vigorous appearance, supple and pliant.... As Momo watched the image on the computer screen, she saw that it was a complete, perfect copy of her memory.

Momo noticed something else that was strange. In all the scrupulously faithful reenactments of her life she had just watched, the most important person of all never once appeared in the picture—

Momo had never seen herself in any of the recorded images.

Her face never once appeared in the diary.



If Mommy were the one who had filmed all these videos, then *she* shouldn't appear in any of them—but that wasn't right, either, since Mommy couldn't possibly have been there to film during Draupadi's visit!

Momo felt a deep sense of foreboding strike her heart—she couldn't help thinking of the crude scanner she had played with as a child—but that was impossible; could someone really have placed a scanner somewhere in Momo's living environment and transmitted all of the images to Mommy's notebook?

Momo longed to shake Mommy awake and demand that she explain what was going on. How could she secretly spy on her daughter's life in such an underhanded way?—But then the thought occurred to Momo: wasn't she secretly peeking at Mommy's notebook just now? Since both of them had spied, who had the greater justification for it—?

If Mommy used a scanner to spy on Momo's private life, she must certainly know about Momo's use of M-Skin to spy on her clients! But, wasn't there a contradiction here—if Mommy knew what Momo had done by using a scanner, why was she willing to let Momo give her a treatment of M-Skin?

Maybe Mommy didn't use a scanner after all?

Another explanation came to Momo's mind, but she couldn't really understand it:

The sounds and images in Mommy's notebook weren't machine-made recordings at all. They were everything Momo had actually seen and heard in her life. Otherwise, why were the framing, angle, and coloring exactly the same as she remembered them?

Could it be that, just as "Open sesame" granted entrance to the treasure cave and the notebook served as a portal to data on distant servers, all of the data experienced by Momo's senses passed into not only Momo's mind but also into some unknown database?

Spies are always spied upon by others....

Then was the world of the senses really so unreliable?



Momo couldn't hold back her fingers and continued prying—she was like the poor girl in the fairy tale, “The Red Shoes”⁴³,” who could never stop her feet from dancing.

Momo thought to herself that if all of the recordings in the notebook came from her own memories, then what about her present and future experiences? The notebook also had entries beginning in 2100; so if she picked 2101, then wouldn't she be able to see her own future?

She first selected “2100.”

2100, Momo 30, “Finger Replacement Surgery,” “Mommy Comes to Visit.”

She selected “Mommy Comes to Visit.”

The picture that unfolded before her eyes was all a scene in her subjective memory:

....She saw Mommy enter the door on the monitor....Andy began to get agitated....Mommy came in....The little dog barked wildly....Mother and daughter ate peach cake together....She applied M-Skin to Mommy's hands....Mommy drank the wine Momo gave her and fell asleep....Momo took off Mommy's M-Skin to learn her notebook password....Momo got into Mommy's computer notebook....She entered the password successfully seven times....

The images that flashed across the screen were the same ones she had just seen—2094, of her winning the Asia-Pacific Cosmetics prize; 2080, of her lying in her sickbed waiting to leave the hospital; 2070, of the baby Momo being discovered inside a peach; 2095, of Draupadi bringing M-Skin....

She had seen all of the recordings of the past. They were exactly the same as Momo remembered them, right down to the relative angles and positions of things. Though all of it was a step behind the actual events, her senses already experienced everything she saw with a terrifying feeling of *dèjà-vu*....

The image Momo saw before her on the screen was the same image at which she herself was staring....it was an endless loop: in the screen Momo saw the very screen at which she was looking, and in that screen was displayed the same screen again, and in that screen was displayed—



⁴³ *The Red Shoes* (Danish: *De røde sko*) is a fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen written in 1845. The protagonist is a young girl named Karen whose arrogant pride in her red dancing shoes leads to her being punished by God by having her feet dance madly whenever they are in the shoes—even after her feet have been amputated.

A Latin word flashed into Momo's mind: *ad infinitum*—

When things reached a state of *ad infinitum*, the world which had seemed so neatly constructed began to fall apart at the seams, a state of “deconstruction.”

A philosopher of the past⁴⁴ spoke of *différance*, where one's desire to pin down the ultimate meaning of reality resulted in an endless series of changes and divergences, and meaning was an endlessly elusive, ephemeral chameleon. The philosophers called it *mise en abyme*: no matter how many times you turned them over in your search for meaning, there were always more clothes underneath the clothes you could see, passwords beyond the first ones you entered, and an abyss that stretched farther than you could fathom.

Momo found that she could see nothing. The world she had conjectured had already utterly, completely abandoned her.

It was as though she had returned to the time she was ten when she had been forced into the operating room to undergo her massive, life-changing operation: icy, cold, utterly oblivious to the world and utterly powerless to resist.



Among the jumbled montage of memories she saw while anesthetized, Momo dreamed again of Andy, her sister: Andy had turned into a canary and flown away, so high, so high. Momo wanted to call Andy back, but found that she was powerless to utter a sound. She drowned in silence.

10

“How do you plan to take care of Momo from now on?”

On the scorched, crimson surface of a certain island in the Asia-Pacific, there was a building shaped liked the eye of a fish, half occluded and half transparent. Although its dome was transparent, it was able to block out the dangerous ultraviolet rays. It was an MRT station on the surface; in a few minutes, an express MRT bound directly for T City was about to embark, and would arrive at its scheduled destination in under an hour.

Draupadi and Momo's Mommy were sitting at a corner table in a café near the back of the terminal.

“Momo did a lot of good work for our organization. We're very grateful for her cooperation,” Draupadi said. “If she hadn't decided on her own initiative to pry into

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), known especially for his work on deconstructivism.

classified materials, we would still be very willing to employ her. Luckily she didn't mean any harm in her prying and the things she read weren't too sensitive material, so her superiors won't make an issue of it."

"It's better to let her come home. She's been in your factory for twenty years. That's long enough."

"What do you plan to do when you get back?"

"I'll ask Momo what she'd like to do and see whether she wants to have an android body or just a computer interface. She should have the chance to make a decision about her own life this once."

Mommy held a glass box in her hand. The box held a thin network of tubes comprising an automatic life support system. The fragile, pink organ bundled within the life support system was Momo.

Momo had been separated from her Andy.

Momo was coming home with Mommy at last.



In 2080 Momo was ten years old. After living in the hospital for three years, she finally went into the operating room to undergo the complex surgery for which everyone had been preparing for so long. Thirteen surgeons simultaneously plied their knives on Momo's body as she lay on the operating table. Momo was completely under the effects of the anesthesia by then and had no idea that her playmate, Andy, was also in the operating room with her.

The original plan for the surgery was to replace Momo's unsalvageable organs with Andy's. Since Andy was designed based on Momo's own body, Momo wouldn't reject her either physically or psychologically, so the transplants wouldn't be a problem. But the surgery hadn't gone neatly according to plan.

When the thirteen surgeons opened up Momo's body, they discovered to their horror that it was in even worse shape than their tests had shown. Her face, skin and muscles, digestive system, reproductive system, circulatory system, and lymphatic system were all seriously infected with the LOGO bacterium and needed to be completely replaced with Andy's. Momo had lived for three years in a sterilized room, but the doctors were only able to slow the pace of the damage done by the LOGO bacterium, they had no fallback plan in case things went wrong and they couldn't just send Momo back to her sickroom. Since they had already started to cut Momo up, they might as well finish the job and complete the surgery. The doctors hooked Momo up to life support and removed her infected organs: in the end, only her brain was left

intact. Momo's brain was the only healthy, uninfected part of her body left, and the only part that she was able to keep.

So did the doctors just take Momo's brain and transplant it into Andy's body? In that case, was it Momo who had gotten Andy's body, or Andy who had gotten Momo's brain? Maybe the philosophical question of who played host and guest in this case was moot; what mattered was this: could Momo survive and live the life of a normal girl once she had been transplanted into Andy's body?

The answer was no. A definite no. There were too many artificial organs for her human brain to cope with—or perhaps we should say that there were too few human organs for her android body to survive. Andy's designer had never imagined that so much of Momo's body would be unsalvageable. If Momo and Andy were to be joined, Momo's young brain would be incapable of controlling the android body. The medical technology of 2080 wasn't yet capable of solving this problem, and even if there had been an even more advanced android body available to Momo it would have been useless.

Just as the surgeons in the operating room were at a loss for what to do and were worrying that they couldn't keep Momo's brain alive, Draupadi arrived to offer a plan.

Mommy took Draupadi's advice: the most important thing was to find a way to keep Momo's brain alive, and everything else was secondary. They signed a contract.



When Momo was living in the hospital, Draupadi had come to check up on her several times. She said she was a representative of the ISM Corporation.

ISM Corporation possessed a formidable reputation and had good relations with all of the governments and major corporations of the Pacific Rim. Its operations principally involved MMs, the android warriors who could move between land and sea, and the company's reputation rested on its work in building and repairing them. You could say that ISM was the new major player in the military industry behind the new world order.

The company's name had an awe-inspiring, godlike ring to it, and also called to mind many soul-shaking visions that had shaped the world: imperial-ISM, colonial-ISM, capital-ISM, fasc-ISM, national-ISM, sex-ISM, heterosex-ISM, rac-ISM, fundamental-ISM, post-modern-ISM....etc. Since Draupadi was ISM's representative, who would dare to trifle with her? The hospital administration were shocked by Draupadi's sudden visit, but there was nothing they could say to stop her.

Draupadi had seemed to know even while Momo was still living in the hospital that the medical treatments available in 2080 could do nothing for her. Draupadi's thoughts on robotics differed from most people's:

There were two ways in which people and androids could be joined together. The first, and most common, was to take organs or other parts needed from an android and transplant them to a human patient to allow the patient to recover her health. But you could also go the other way and take human parts and give them to an android to enable it to more closely resemble humans: this was the second option. Either way, these two methods could be beneficial to humans and extend people's lifespans, so was it really necessary to stubbornly insist on giving up the second option on humanistic grounds in favor of the first, anthropocentric method? As ISM Corporation's representative, Draupadi promised to put Momo's brain in ISM's care; the corporation had already designed the newest, cutting-edge android within whose exoskeleton a human brain could comfortably fit. It was the perfect place for a human brain to rest.

Draupadi also promised that even though this android had extremely high artificial intelligence, it lacked a human's sensitivity in dealing with tasks that required extreme finesse and so needed a human brain to guide it. The problem was that the number of people willing to lend out their brains was extremely small, so Draupadi had to go in person to the hospital to get them.

Mommy ultimately signed the contract to deliver Momo's brain safe and sound to ISM.

The first clause of the contract stated that ISM would do everything in its power to help Momo's brain develop fully and healthily inside the android's body and that her brain was to be allowed not only to survive but also to think its own thoughts. All costs, including the medical costs of Momo's three years in the hospital, were to be borne by ISM.

Such a massive cost could only be repaid by twenty years of service: Mommy had to promise that for twenty years, ISM would have sole custody of Momo's brain. If Mommy wanted to come visit Momo, she would first have to seek approval from ISM, and she was to have absolutely no say in Momo's future upbringing. Additionally, Momo's brain was obligated to work for ISM. At the conclusion of the twenty-year contract period, the concluding parties would meet again to decide on whether or not to renew the contract.

Mommy agreed. As long as there were a chance for Momo to survive, no matter how slim, Mommy had to take it.

In the operating room, Andy's useless body was disposed of, and most of Momo's infected organs were incinerated, leaving only a small portion for the

purposes of medical research. Momo's brain was placed in a special glass box with a life-support system, like Snow White in her glass coffin, and taken by Draupadi to ISM's headquarters. ISM's headquarters weren't beneath the ocean, but on the far distant surface.

What could Mommy do for Momo? She had given her daughter into the charge of a huge conglomerate situated in icy cold buildings built on the scorched and barren land. It was an institute, a trust. She knew that ISM was, like Macrohard, difficult to oppose and that she could likely only maintain a passive position. But she couldn't leave things at that.

She would write a diary for Momo.

11

Momo lacked sensory organs and so had no means through which to know the world.

But Mommy hoped that during the twenty years Momo would spend at ISM, Momo wouldn't have to feel that she was only a brain and not a real person and so feel a lack of self-worth; Mommy hoped Momo could be like any healthy girl and have a rich and fulfilling life story: it should have longings, a fairytale, sex, relationships with other people, studies, a career, a girlfriend or a boyfriend or just being single, and it should include thoughts about their relationship as mother and daughter. Mommy worried that Momo's brain wouldn't get the chance to experience these things that ordinary girls experience. So Mommy used her diary as a means of stimulating Momo's neural network.

Since Mommy worked at Macrohard, it wasn't hard to have discbooks custom-made. Mommy wrote in stages and sent off her work to the manufacturing division, where each shiny new disc in the diary was produced. Mommy then hurriedly sent the discbooks up to Draupadi on the surface, asking ISM to play them to stimulate Momo's brain and allow her to believe that what she saw in these discbooks were actually her memories.



Mommy titled the first disc in the diary "Momo Leaves The Hospital." The script was as follows:

Momo Leaves The Hospital

Time Momo 10, some afternoon day in 2080

Location A regular single-person sickroom, with a white sickbed and a window, the wind blowing in; a tree outside the window with one leaf on it.

Dramatis Personae Mommy and Momo

Dialogue

(Momo wakes up, Mommy sits next to her)

(Momo looks out the open window as a slight breeze blows in on her)

Mommy: Momo, your surgery was a success. I'm so happy! You don't have to stay cooped up in that sterilized sickroom any longer. You can stay in a regular sickroom with a window so you can look at the leaves on the trees outside.

Momo: (Leave blank, let Momo's brain respond naturally)

Mommy: Momo, I have some more good news for you: Mommy's been promoted. I'm not just a regular saleswoman anymore. Now I'm a sales manager. From now on we'll be able to live a better life.

Momo: (Leave blank, let Momo's brain respond naturally)

(Several days later, the paperwork for leaving the hospital is completed and in good order)

Location Same as above

(Momo is lying on the white hospital bed in her sickroom)

(Momo sees Mommy, who has made time especially to come get her and take her home, approach her step-by-step, slowly, as though in slow motion as in an old movie)

(Special effect: Mommy's eyes are wet)

Mommy: Momo, we can go home now. You haven't been home in such a long time....

Mommy choked with sobs as she finished the script.

She had to hurry and finish the disc and send it off to the surface for Momo to read so Momo wouldn't suffer unbearable loneliness from having nothing to think about while at ISM.

As time went on, Mommy never forgot to set aside time from her work in sales, staying up late to make her disc diary for Momo. She first wrote the disc describing Momo's school years, then went back and wrote the story of Momo's birth: she wrote a fairytale in which she and her old friend Tomie Junji went to the mountains to pick peaches....

Mommy sent all these disc diary entries to Momo to read. Momo never knew the truth, believing that all of these scripted diary entries were her actual life.



In reality, during the twenty years Momo worked on the surface for ISM, Mommy never had a chance to come see her: Mommy couldn't leave her work at Macrohard, and ISM placed every obstacle in the way of Mommy's requests to come visit. ISM did make discs of Momo's thoughts and life (though of course ISM wouldn't go into *too* much detail about what she did, since ISM was a military corporation that demanded strict secrecy) and send them to Mommy in T City under the ocean; and this exchange of discs became the only form of communication between Momo and Mommy.

In ISM's disc diary, Mommy could see Momo's brain placed inside a faceless, mechanical android body. The android had no face because its work did not involve any interactions with people. Momo's body looked like a mannequin in a department store, with no distinguishing features except for a ten-digit serial number etched into the neck.

From what Mommy could see in the discs, Momo's new body worked in a factory on the surface responsible for repairing MMs. The factory did high-precision work, so its facilities were more extensive and complete than an ordinary factory's. In Momo's brain, the factory was a figure-eight-shaped clinic. Momo's work generally involved inspecting MMs sent in for repairs, and included restoring their exteriors, adding oil, and replacing screws. These rough tasks could all ordinarily be handled by a regular android, but the MM models of ISM's superpower clients required the finesse of a human brain to properly repair; and it was for this that ISM required Momo's services. ISM didn't deny that Momo's brain was their first experiment in using a human brain to supplement an android's work; but ISM also made it clear that it wouldn't harm Momo's brain, so Mommy needn't worry. Besides, the more a brain was put to use the healthier it became, and it was better for Momo's brain to be able to exercise its faculties than to be locked up inside a glass case.

But—it was such monotonous work! Mommy's heart ached at the thought of it. But there was nothing else Mommy could do other than write more disc diary entries for Momo, lest Momo have nothing interesting to think about, lose her self-control, and become aware of the true circumstances of her life. Mommy also wrote in the diary about the progress of her own career at Macrohard.

And yet, in the discs ISM sent to her at fixed intervals, Mommy could see what Momo thought about: Momo never realized that she was just a brain working in a factory on the surface servicing androids, but believed that her surgery had been a success and that she had gone to boarding school to pursue her studies. But Momo also often felt full of loneliness and blamed Mommy for focusing only on her career and ignoring Momo herself.

How unfair you are to me! Mommy screamed as she watched the discs ISM sent her. But what could Mommy do about it? She could do her best to stimulate Momo's thoughts, but what Momo actually thought about was totally out of Mommy's control.



On the surface inside an android in ISM's MM repair factory, there were three forces that shaped Momo's thoughts:

One was the false diary entries that Mommy sent her.

Another was the thoughts that ISM put directly into her brain.

The third was Momo's own thoughts from the time before her surgery.

The confused merging of these three forces made up the world as Momo saw it.

For example, Momo believed that she was a skin-care specialist. This was because ISM didn't want Momo to know that her work involved repairing weapons of war, so they deliberately misled Momo, making her believe—

That whenever she worked on an MM, she was working on a naked human body; that whenever she gave an MM a tune-up, she was giving a person a massage; that whenever she restored an MM's coat of paint, she applied lotion to a patient's body; and that her own room in the factory was actually her skin-care clinic.

Mommy also had a hand in making sure that Momo thought this way: she would rather that Momo live forever in this beautiful lie than discover the cruel, bitter truth about her life. Mommy worked hard to provide Momo with beautician disczines to read to ensure that Momo believed that she was T City's most respected esthetician.



Momo used her own thoughts to fashion an explanation for the information she received from Mommy and ISM.

For example, the name Tomie Junji frequently appeared in the discs Mommy sent to her; Tomie was Mommy's old Japanese friend and could be thought of as a second mother to Momo—what Mommy had never anticipated, however, was that Momo would see Tomie's body on every MM sent in by Japanese corporations, since both they and Tomie came from Japan.

Mommy wrote in her disc diaries how she had met Draupadi in the hospital, which in Momo's mind became the physical encounter Momo had seen on the scanner.

Another time, Momo had been repairing a US MM and accidentally cut its body; in her imagination, Momo cut a circular scar like a new moon into a white girl's neck—

When Mommy learned of these crazy thoughts, she couldn't help both laughing and crying, but what could she do about it? She couldn't just reveal the truth.

Then there was the little dog, Andy. Of course ISM wouldn't let a real dog loose on its factory floor; it was actually a "brainwave stabilizer." After working at ISM for many years, Momo's brainwaves produced static that interfered with the quality of her work, and when she received a new robotic finger to help with her work, she felt a throbbing in her mind (Momo still bore a loathing of surgeries in her mind from her operation many years ago). So ISM set up a brainwave stabilizer in Momo's workspace to help Momo's mind readjust. ISM hinted to Momo that this was a little dog that Tomie had given her—and Momo believed it.



But the thing ISM most needed to deceive Momo about was M-Skin. ISM didn't reveal anything about M-Skin to Mommy.

Draupadi brought M-Skin in 2095, the year Momo believed she had opened her clinic. This was ISM's newest and most top-secret product.

Momo believed that M-Skin allowed her to stealthily access the secrets of her clients' bodies and that the act of spying gave her pleasure.

Of course, Momo's clients didn't have human bodies but were MM war androids. But applying M-Skin to the body of an MM was indeed a way of secretly gaining access to information. These weren't physical secrets but military secrets. Momo's pleasure at reading the data she collected was a reward from ISM that was also intended to encourage her to use M-Skin and read the data from it as much as possible. But the biggest reward of all went to ISM, not Momo.

The M-Skin that Momo removed from so many MMs contained these MMs' experiences: combat experiences, espionage experiences, training experiences. The bullet holes and beam marks recorded by the M-Skin were a valuable store of classified military information. Think for a moment of how many discs Momo had compiled from M-Skin data. This priceless military information became another source of incalculably great wealth to ISM.

In the twenty-first century, the military industry became increasingly privatized and the role of private corporations in military affairs became increasingly complex, with the result that no country or corporation had the ability to monitor all aspects of the whole military system. ISM thus became a military supplier specializing in MMs, and many countries and corporations not only purchased their MMs from ISM but also sent them to ISM for maintenance.

Did these countries and corporations really not suspect ISM of spying on their military secrets?—Of course they did. Of course they took precautions. But what they never imagined was that with the invention of M-Skin, Memory Skin, ISM could easily record in detail the combat history of each MM without its clients ever becoming aware of it. M-Skin was ostensibly just part of the refurbishing of an MM's surface, and no one aside from a few highly-placed people at ISM was even aware that it had any other purpose.

Even Momo, who used M-Skin more than anyone, didn't understand what the data she gathered really were.



ISM never expected that as Momo's term of service was nearing its end, she would read on her own initiative highly classified files stored on ISM's servers as she waited for Mommy to come see her (this time Mommy had come to take her home for real)—luckily, Momo only read the files pertaining to the diary that Mommy had sent. Fortunately, Draupadi was inspecting the factory then, immediately discovered the breach, and shut down Momo's consciousness.

In any event, Mommy's contract with ISM had almost reached its term and Momo's brain had made significant contributions to ISM, so ISM let the matter drop and gave Momo's brain back to Mommy, who had come to the surface to get her.

ISM was searching for even more, even younger, even nimbler and even more tractable brains to recruit to its service. Momo's brain was merely a product of the first stage of ISM's experiments in this area.



As Mommy was about to board the express train heading back to the undersea T City, Draupadi said:

"Please don't be angry with ISM for taking away the twenty years when your daughter was growing up. She lived a good life here; her brain enjoyed an extremely active existence. During these twenty years she never once discovered that she wasn't a normal person. She really believed that she lived just like anybody else."

"I know." Mommy's expression was very calm and steady.

"Do you plan to get her a new android body?"

"No, thanks. I don't want her to find out the truth; I would rather she live forever in her mind's dreams, beautiful and whole. It's 2100, so it won't be that hard to find a

life-support system for her. Let her stay on life-support and rest. I'll give her new books to read to help her pass the time."

"Momo is a very cute child. I really like her."

"I know. Thank you."

12

Sitting in the capsule of the express train, Mommy stroked the glass case containing Momo's brain.

The train sped into the ocean, stirring up the waves and bursting the bubbles outside the window.



--Momo, do you remember Almodovar's *High Heels*? After I saw it I wrote the story on a disc and sent it to you. Did you watch it? The movie tells the story of the reunion between a mother and her daughter. Initially they have a huge misunderstanding, but eventually they come to have a close and loving relationship again. Then there's Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*, which is also about the relationship between a mother and her daughter. I wrote about it in the disc diary I sent you. Do you still remember it? I remember that as I watched that film, I felt sadder and sadder. Back then I had no idea how many days I would have to wait until I could bring you home with me! I left you on the surface with ISM only because I had no other choice; at the time, ISM were the only ones who could keep your brain alive. But to have to sign a contract for twenty years! It was too long, too long.



There was another movie, too, Visconti's *Death in Venice*.⁴⁵ Do you know Venice? It was a city on the surface, a very peculiar one with more canals than roads, so people there used a kind of little boat called a gondola to get around. Did the Venetians live on the mainland or on little islands? It's hard to say. There were lots of bridges built to cross the many rivers there. Crossing a bridge was like going to a new world, so the Venetians crossed into countless new worlds every day. The Carnival season in the city was also very unusual: some people wore masks of crying faces,

⁴⁵ *Morte a Venezia*, directed by Luchino Visconti and released in 1971, based on Thomas Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig*. The film stars a middle-aged man who has a forbidden infatuation for a young Polish boy he meets while on holiday in Venice.

but their hearts were filled with joy. As I watched *Death in Venice*, I lost myself in the film. When the old man, played by Dirk Bogarde, died at the end of the film, I felt that I had died, too. The old man dearly loved his daughter, but she had died in childhood. The old man became totally infatuated with a young boy he saw on the canals of Venice, but they never touched, they merely exchanged covert glances. The old man didn't care at all that his own face had already been ravaged by the cholera epidemic. He never got the kind of real, lasting happiness that you can touch. He could only love the young man with his eyes; but none of them escaped death. The old man died of a cholera infection on his white beach chair, and the young boy vanished forever when the old man closed his eyes for the last time. So the father, daughter, and young boy all died. The film's theme music is the *Adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, and the notes are soaring and sorrowful. My forehead was so contorted with grief that it ached when I heard that music.



--Momo, ah, Momo! Do you know why you're named "Momo"? I had an old friend named Tomie Junji with whom I wanted to raise a daughter in memory of our friendship. So we went to get a test-tube baby.

--There were peach trees on all four sides of that hospital, and some overripe peaches fell and rolled in front of us. Tomie had a sudden inspiration and said, Ah, this child is really like the boy Momo Taro in Japanese legend. When we open this test tube a little baby will pop out, so we might as well call it Momo, which means "peach." But I said, Our little baby is a girl, so how could she be like Momo Taro? Momo Taro is a wild boy! Tomie agreed, but even though Momo Taro wasn't cute, a peach is a fruit that you can't help but like, so that's why you were named "Momo."

--But we never imagined that the baby the hospital would give us would be a boy, complete with a weenie. The hospital had made a huge mistake. Tomie and I had no choice but to accept it. Luckily, the little boy was very cute. But there was an even bigger problem ahead of us: not only was our little Momo a boy, but its whole body was infected with a disease prevalent at the time, the LOGO bacterium—you got infected when you were still in the test tube, but didn't show any symptoms until you were five, and by the time you were seven you had to go live in the hospital. The hospital said that you had to undergo a large-scale organ transplant. They said that during the surgery they could probably change your sex to female. They also told us that it would be best if we had an android prepared in advance to provide the organs necessary for the transplant. At the time I could only meekly nod my assent, since all that mattered was to find a way to keep you alive. What other choice did I have?

--Did I make a mistake when I sent you to the hospital then?



--I don't know. I was very young then and there were many things I hadn't thought through clearly. I only knew that I should send you to the hospital and that I should do everything in my power to earn money for the sake of our little girl. At that time I was very lonely, just as you were in the hospital, and like you I slept alone in my own room.

--Maybe you'll ask me: What about Tomie Junji, your Japanese friend? She left me long, long ago when you were still little. Don't ask me why, because I don't have an answer for you now. I only know that I miss her so much. I even went so far as to repeat her name over and over in the discbooks I sent you because I believed that you would read them. That's why you imagined that Tomie was your regular client. In fact, she was a second mother to you.



Mommy's finger stroking the glass case suddenly started to spasm. She knew that when she got back to T City she should go to the health center for a routine checkup. Even if she had to have her finger surgically replaced it would be no big deal, since Mommy was an important person at Macrohard Corporation and could just bill them for the cost of her medical expenses.



--Your name, Momo, sounds similar to the English word "memo." There are many things that you don't need to note down and won't easily forget, but people need memos as another way of keeping their memories.

Momo: Can you believe that Mommy, really, really loves you?

13

The thin fog was like a membrane encaging the city crisscrossed by canals.

Amid the darkness of the fog, the outlines of the land and a river floated into view.

Momo lay in the center of an arch bridge, slowly awakening from a deep dream.

It was the end of Venice's Carnival season, the troupes of costumed dancers had long since passed by the bridge, and the merry chatter of people's voices bubbled

away toward the edge of the city, far away from Momo. Momo clearly remembered that among those costumed dancers, some were dressed as vampires, some were dressed as the madman Hitler, and some had even dressed up as the sexy Marilyn Monroe: the people dressed as beautiful women were all men, of course. Even more people used the more traditional Venetian costume of a face mask with tears made of silver and gold buttons, adding jewelry to their garish costumes such as a ringing alarm clock or an Intel computer IC card, or else went at once even more retro and more avant-garde with seven-colored condom balloons.

As for Momo herself, what costume was she wearing?

She stood up, in no hurry to cross over to land, but rather stretching out her neck toward the river in order to catch a glimpse of her reflection in the water. The deathly still river perfectly reflected Momo's appearance:

Momo was also wearing a costume, and also had a tearful mask upon her face. But the top of Momo's head was a little unusual. On top of her head was a small birdcage. Inside the cage was a canary. The little bird neither sang nor hopped about, as though it slumbered deeply in the dark cave of a beautiful dream.

The people had all gone far away.

Momo didn't know where she should go. Which bridge should she cross, and which plaza should she go to? Or should she go down the little bridge, take off her facemask, and splash herself with water to wash her face?—

Just as she was feeling unsure about what to do, she heard a familiar voice calling to her.

It was Mommy. She was walking toward Momo in slow-motion like in an old-style movie, walking toward her daughter. In the special effects for this scene, Mommy's eyes were wet from crying.

Another little canary perched atop Mommy's head, locked inside a cage. The fog, like a white membrane, remained above the rivers of the city.

Mommy said: "Momo, we can go home. You haven't been home in such a long time."

--Winner of first prize for a novella at the 1995 7th annual *United Daily* Literature Awards.

--*United Daily*, *United Daily Publishing*, serialized from October 15, 1995 to January 1, 1996.

US World Daily, *Novel World*, initially serialized on October 30, 1995.

***L'Après-midi d'un Faune*¹**

The ticking of the pocket watch was like cold, mocking laughter, incessantly arousing his anxieties and not letting him forget the details of his nightmare. In his mind, the dream began like this:

That day of winter vacation was A Suo's birthday. The bus passed through the thick shade of a bamboo grove and brought him, spaced-out as he was, to the little township with hot springs. Shadows of the bamboo zigzagged across his body, as though the sunlight with gleaming knives and glinting swords had hacked his body into a thousand pieces. He had in fact fled to the countryside wounded and scarred; he didn't want to think about the farce of the city anymore. He had neither rented a cab nor booked a hotel room. A Suo passed by a field and arrived at the little township's hot springs.

The hot springs divided the circular concrete shed of the bathhouse into two parts. In the steaming water some nude male figures could be seen either bathing or reclining on one of the sides. A Suo took off his clothes and lost himself in the steam until he was jarred awake by the sight of himself sitting on the opposite side. Was it a mirror?—he stretched out his hand to check—and his double on the bank stretched out the opposite hand in response and added a smile that floated among the steam. A Suo started, then realized that it was a trick; the other's smile broke the illusion—it was really just another bather on the waterside across from him, whose body type and age were about the same as A Suo's own and who had deliberately mimicked his actions to trick him into thinking there had been a mirror. A Suo wasn't sure how to respond, since it would have been impolite to just stare at the other boy, so he only lowered his head and continued bathing himself.

After getting out of the hot springs, A Suo went back alone to the deserted bus stop to wait, planning to go to the next stop on his itinerary. Why did he want to go to the next stop—A Suo couldn't think of a good reason: he had thought up this trip when he was still back in the city, and only after coming to the little township with hot springs did he realize how different things were from how he had imagined them. So

¹ The title means, "The Afternoon of a Faun," and comes from the seminal symbolic poem of the same name published in 1876 by Stéphane Mallarmé. The piece describes the revels of a faun as he drinks, plays the flute, pursues various nymphs, and finally slumbers on a pastoral afternoon. The poem inspired Claude Debussy's *Prelude a L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, which was later used as the music of the dance, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky and first performed by the Imperial Russian Ballet in 1912.

when a motorcycle suddenly appeared in front of him, A Suo was caught off guard—it was his double from the hot springs.

“Waiting for the bus?” the driver asked, his twenty-year-old smile still on his face, as though he wanted to make up for the trick he had played earlier. “But you’ll never catch one here; they don’t come this way. Trust me, I’m a local. Where do you want to go? I’ll give you a lift.”

A Suo wasn’t entirely sure where he wanted to go, so he could only get in the car and let this fellow take him to some even more unfamiliar place.

“What’s your name?”

“Call me A Suo.”

“You can call me K....Yeah, I like Kafka. You too, right?...So where do you want to go, anyway? We’ve just gone in a circle and come back to the hot springs. If there’s nowhere special you want to go, then let’s sit on the mound here and chat. There’s nowhere else worth going to in this township, anyway....”

K. walked onto the mound, pulled out a harmonica, and played a lively tune with a bucolic sound. He said it was Debussy’s *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*. K. said the melody was suitable for playing in the open fields, even though it was winter, the loneliest season, and he had only a harmonica instead of a faun’s flute.

“You look too much like you come from the city, K. Are you really from around here?”

“That’s right. My family home is here, but I’m like all the other Taiwanese kids, I’ve got to go do my time in the city, and only when I’m tired do I come back here to the country to go soak in the hot springs. Now that I’ve finished bathing in the hot springs and played *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, it’s time to dance.”

“Dance?”

“*L’Après-midi d’un Faune* is the setting for a dance. Have you heard of Nijinsky? I’ll show you his dance. One of my closest schoolmates taught it to me.”

K. put down his harmonica and began to dance in the fields, as though the music he had just played had not faded away but were wrapped around his body. In A Suo’s eyes, the sight of K. dancing in the field was like a snake twisting about. A Suo stood by and watched for a while, then took out pencil and paper to sketch the faun dancing on that winter’s day.

“Have you studied drawing?” K. jumped down next to A Suo.

“I originally wanted to study Fine Arts, and my score on last year’s college entrance exams was good enough to get accepted to Fine Arts schools. But my family wouldn’t allow me to study Fine Arts, no matter how much I wanted to, so I just had to suck it up, go to a downtown cram school, and prepare to retest into an academic field with better economic prospects. I had to give up on drawing.”

"I don't know whose luck is better. You wanted to study Fine Arts, but couldn't; I like to dance, and I actually go to a dancing school. But you can still draw whatever you feel like, while I can't devote myself to dancing. I broke my arm, so when I danced just now, I wasn't totally relaxed....In the fall, my friend and I got into a motorcycle accident. I broke my arm, so I couldn't attend dance classes and had to take a leave of absence. Since my injury was serious, I didn't have to do military service while on leave, so I came straight home to nurse my injuries, soak in the hot springs and recuperate."

"And your friend?"

"My schoolmate? He died."

"—I drew this sketch of you. You can have it."

"That's great! Today just happens to be my birthday! I thought I'd have to spend my birthday all by myself. I never thought I'd get a birthday present...."

That night, A Suo stayed at K.'s family home. It was the kind of one-building, three-story house common in the countryside, with several fields separating it from the nearest neighbors. At that time K. was the only one living there, which made it seem even gloomier and emptier. They bought some wine and food to take back with them, and talked into the evening; but the wine soon overpowered A Suo, and he fell fast asleep before midnight. In his dreams, A Suo experienced a strange sensation—it seemed as though someone's palm reached into his underwear and wantonly fondled his body. In his sleep, he felt that it was a snake that had wrapped itself around him so tightly that he couldn't break free—the snake was unusually warm, not at all cold, but was all the more shocking for that....So, muddleheaded as he was, he wasn't completely convinced when he woke up the next morning that the snake from last night was the blanket covering his body....

"Last night I tried to call you to bed, but I couldn't wake you, so I covered you with a blanket."

As they were eating breakfast, K. brought out a picture frame, inside of which sat A Suo's sketch of him.

"I threw out all of my family photos and put your sketch in their place. My family's all moved abroad, anyway. Shall we hang it up in a minute? Also, I wanted to give you this. Please don't be offended and please don't refuse, OK?"

It was a pocket watch. Fine lines spread across the cover of the case, like the smooth back of a young boy. The back of the case was inlaid with a relief showing a miniature faun. K. said that he was giving it to A Suo because he knew that A Suo would take good care of it, since it wasn't something he could give to just anybody—this was K.'s second heart, with a beat of its own—K.'s schoolmate who had died had given it to him after seeing K. dance *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. K. didn't

want to see the watch anymore because it held so many painful memories, but he couldn't bring himself to throw it away. By passing it on to A Suo, K. hoped that the pocket watch could become part of A Suo's life, a token of a friendship that would never fade.

(And yet, neither of them imagined what would happen when A Suo left that day—)

K. gave A Suo the hammer and asked him to stand on a ladder and drive a nail in the wall so they could hang up the sketch. K. stroked A Suo's legs and was telling him the story of his accident again, when A Suo suddenly shouted:

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me! I can't stand it when other people touch me!"

A Suo had no idea he was so tightly wound up (could he really still be intoxicated), nor could he be certain of what he had just screamed, since he couldn't ask K.—He didn't know when it happened, but K. had been standing behind him, and then suddenly the hammer that had been in his hand was stuck hard and fast in the center of K.'s forehead. K. groaned, then fell to the ground, where he remained, blood streaking out in rays across his forehead.

A Suo calmed himself, then carefully picked up the hammer, the sketch, and the pocket watch. K. hadn't made much noise when he fell. There was no one else around for miles. When they went to buy food, only K. had gone in the stall, and no one had noticed A Suo. K.'s family had all moved abroad, so no one was likely to come looking in on the old house any time soon. He carefully wrapped K. up in the blanket as snugly as if a snake had coiled around him, and then stuffed the bundle in the wardrobe. Aside from K., no one even remembered that A Suo had come to the little township with hot springs.

....I want to go back to Taipei....None of this ever happened....I must have had too much to drink....I still need to take the college entrance exams....I hate it when people make advances toward me....I don't even know him....Who even knows who he is....

As A Suo left the little township, a cover of an old song was playing at the general store.



A Suo started paying attention to the local news sections of major newspapers, but for several days in a row he didn't see any news about the little township with hot springs, to say nothing of the matter of K. Perhaps the whole affair was nothing more than a liquor dream. For A Suo, living as he did in Taipei, the faraway township with hot springs was so inconsequential as to be unreal. But A Suo couldn't forget everything that had happened. The pocket watch, the sketch, and the hammer, those

accursed tokens of affection, were all stashed away under his bed in the little room in the apartment he rented while studying for his exams.

Yet, A Suo couldn't get rid of the pocket watch, nor could he keep himself from taking it out from under his bed and putting it in his pocket; for he had truly become the pocket watch's choice flesh—from the time he left K., the pocket watch had become a second heart to him, a heart from K. The pocket watch's ticking seemed to be in tune with his own heartbeat, to have become a concerto with it—that was why, when it came time to sleep at night, A Suo could fall asleep only after hearing that the pocket watch's ticking and his heartbeat were in harmony. He tried listening to the sounds of other timepieces: wall clocks, watches, ordinary pocket watches, all to no avail—only K.'s pocket watch was his second heart. Thus, whenever his worries kept him awake in the middle of the night, or if he worked hard until it was light outside, A Suo could only shove all his other clocks to one side and fasten on K.'s pocket watch before he could get to sleep. But how he would have liked to forget that watch's curse! At times, in the middle of the night A Suo would throw aside the pocket watch and take a sleeping pill—but he couldn't sleep. An hour later he would take a second sleeping pill, then a third, a fourth, a fifth.... A Suo worried that he might injure himself by taking too many sleeping pills—but, since he hadn't fastened on the pocket watch, he couldn't sleep in peace, and he feared that he might never sleep in peace again.... A Suo wasn't willing to see a psychiatrist, since he didn't want to be forced to talk about the things he most wanted to forget. The pocket watch had possessed his body—perhaps the spirit that possessed it was the faun's, or K's....

A Suo dutifully wore the pocket watch when he went to cram school so he wouldn't miss out on his afternoon naps—his classmates noticed the watch hanging from A Suo's breast pocket, and also noted his increasingly withered, yellow face. Sometimes they would be curious and ask about the story behind the pocket watch and clamor for him to open the cover and let them see it—but A Suo always shouted at them to get away.

"Open the cover" was perhaps a phrase with several meanings—the pocket watch was exquisite and absolutely deserved to be opened to allow people to admire it; but A Suo, too, needed to open the cover he kept tightly closed on himself, for he was extremely irritable and was feeling less like himself with each day of class. *Open the cover.* This was the last thing A Suo wanted to hear, but he never ceased to hear it. *Open the cover. I want to show myself,* shrieked the faun from within the pocket watch, shrieked K., wrapped in the blanket and stuffed in the wardrobe. Their cry was in synch with the pocket watch, and rushed about in the chambers of A Suo's heart, boring deep, deep, but only A Suo could hear it. *Open the cover.* His sleep and the shout within his body were intertwined, and his two hearts—one made of flesh, the

other of metal—were completely linked together. The two hearts were connected, and his blood flowed between them. The pocket watch had become one of his vital organs, and A Suo had become a living part of the pocket watch....

Open the cover. the faun's protest. I want out. K.'s protest. Open the cover. the sound of the blood pulsing through A Suo's veins.

All right. I'll let you out.

A Suo couldn't take it anymore. On that Sunday afternoon just before the arrival of spring, he was very high-strung, and, bare-chested, he began hurling his test prep books to the floor of his room. He turned around toward the space below his bed, looking for the hammer wrapped up in the old newspaper (the date on the newspaper was K.'s birthday, which was also A Suo's birthday) to put a stop once and for all to the noise made by the pocket watch. A Suo's lustrous young back glistened with sweat. If he really smashed the pocket watch—his heart's accompanist—then wouldn't sleep forsake him forever? But A Suo didn't care. He just wanted to stop all the screaming. He pulled off the pocket watch, took the hammer out of the old newspaper—the relief of the faun howled from within the pocket watch, as though it were wailing piteously, or else roaring with laughter.

He finally picked up the blood-stained hammer and swung it at the pocket watch. The clang of metal being struck: *one, two, three*. The cover on the pocket watch cracked, but A Suo couldn't strike it anymore.

He groaned, then fell to the ground, where he remained²—A Suo's supple young back was suddenly scored by the same cracks that marred the cover of the pocket watch: it was as though his backside had been sliced open by the pocket watch's chain. Blood and pus gushed forth from the wounds, and his spine resembled the watch chain. A Suo didn't have a chance to see this—a blood-soaked creature leapt out from his split-open back: it was half human and half beast, the spitting image of the pocket watch's relief of the faun. The creature kept roaring as it danced the same dance that K. had done in the fields, then threw open the door and went out, escaping and disappearing among the stairs of the apartment building.

The sketch of K. remained safely tucked away under A Suo's bed, bathed deep in the smile of that winter afternoon in the countryside.

Central Daily News, China Daily Publishing, 03 / 07 / 1995

² The author here repeats the phrase, "The pocket watch had become one of A Suo's vital organs, and he had become a living part of the pocket watch...." I have omitted it for the sake of brevity and clarity.

The War Is Over

The starry sky swirled across my sight. My vision caressed the star chart, feeling out the constellations one by one. The stars were all part of a cluster that formed a blooming white flower adorning the black lawn. These countless flowers brought me different sensations before and after the war had ended:

Before the war ended, I was very curious about my Better Half's voyages: in which quadrant of the Milky Way was my Better Half on duty? Was my Better Half really at a star adjacent to Sagittarius beholding the destruction and creation of other stars?

But after the war was over, when I looked at the starry sky I thought of myself drifting: wither was I being swished among the ripples of the Milky Way? Where should I float off to?

And who would accompany me on my drifting?



On one normally calm day in 2025, a surprising piece of news made the rounds among the people:

--The war is over. The age of peace has begun.

Had our army won or lost?—I didn't know and I didn't need to know. I only knew that my Better Half would be coming home for the long haul, and that was all that mattered.

So Lola and I walked together like a pair of sisters to the supermarket and bought a hundred fresh roses newly imported from Earth. We each carried fifty as we hurried to the space station's "Star Port" to await the arrival of the officers and soldiers who were coming home to us.

The main concourse in the Star Port was crowded with throngs of people, most of whom were dependents living at the "rear flank": It was called the "rear flank" because only by returning to Earth would the officers and soldiers arrive back at the homefront, and the diamond-shaped space station was only a temporary rest stop. A crowd of soldiers finally poured out of the exit and into the Star Port concourse, which suddenly erupted in joyful cries of welcome and martial tunes. Everyone raised both hands high into the air and waved, and the sight was just like the waves of the ocean shown on television, but in my eyes they looked like they were either surrendering or

protesting. The soldiers threw themselves one after another into the arms of their families, and I heard both whoops and weeping. Lola and I looked at each other, totally different from the others who were either dripping with sweat or shedding tears.

I easily spotted my Better Half amid all this:

It wasn't that I saw or heard my Better Half, but that I felt my Better Half's presence—since after all, my Better Half was the whole reason for my existence; we were a pair specially designed for and matched with each other.

My Better Half pushed passed the sea of people and rushed toward me, arms held out to embrace me, holding me tight as if to block out all other people from my sight. "Why have you come here? Didn't I tell you not to go out so often?"

(Every time my Better Half returned to the Star Port, I would specifically be told not to come welcome my Better Half home since it would be too much of a hassle for me. However the real reason was probably that my Better Half didn't want me showing my face outside the house....)

In the light that my Better Half hadn't blocked out, I saw Lola: but Lola's Better Half hadn't appeared yet. Lola quickly shot me a glance to calm me down and let me know everything was all right.—I knew what Lola meant, since we two understood each other very well. The roses had long since dropped from my hands onto the cold floor below. I was going to pick them up when I saw Lola cast me another glance from behind, as if to say: don't worry about it. So I let my hands fall and turned my gaze back to my Better Half. We hugged and kissed, our bodies like the two buds of a flower joined together, blooming amid the warmth and moisture. This was probably what humans meant by "happiness."

The military coat my Better Half had been wearing was draped over my shoulders, which made me look like a birthday present that had either just been unwrapped or was about to be wrapped up. We walked shoulder to shoulder out of the Space Port concourse and made no offering of flowers. I looked back, but Lola was still standing in the center of the concourse and no trace of the soldier who should have come to greet Lola appeared.

"Meimei, who are you looking for?"

"Nobody." I answered my Better Half with a single word, then hastily changed the subject and asked:

"You've all come home again. Why is everyone so happy this time?"

"Usually when we come home we're on leave, but this time we've come home because the war is finished. We've finally entered 2025, the peaceful Age of Aquarius and left behind the fighting of the Age of Pisces. Our mission is complete."

"Now that the war is over, what are we going to do?"

"Enjoy the peace."



Oh. I see.

My life only began because of the war. If the war was over, where should I go?

My Better Half and I were only brought together because of the war. It was 2020, and only after my Better Half had enlisted to join the star wars did I arrive at the apartment we now shared at the space station.

I'm a domestic "replicant." Replicants are also known as "androids" and aren't as cold and unfeeling as machines, but are more like humans than robots. They have basic humanity and intelligence, so they make suitable housemates for people. Replicants aren't robots, so they don't have to follow Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. There are several different models of replicant: some of them are suited for working in the military and engaging in combat, some are suitable for working in heavy-metal factories, and some, like me, are Domestic Types. My serial number is D7-20-2389: the "D" means that I'm a Domestic Type; the "7" indicates that I'm a seventh generation model; the "20" indicates that I was manufactured in 2020; while the "2389" is my factory serial number. Lola's model number is similar to my own: D8-21-2400. The bodies of Domestic Type replicants are mostly the same as human beings': the outside is covered with synthetic skin and we wear human clothing. The primary functions of Domestic Type replicants are to handle household chores and to provide the pleasures of domestic life—and in this space station full of solitary, lonely men and women, this makes us that much more important. We make our silent contribution to the strong military force from behind the scenes.

In fighting battles in a far off star system loneliness can be hard to endure: it is felt in both emotional needs and in sexual desires: the military didn't want its soldiers involved in homosexual or heterosexual relationships, and the space station had no way to provide a red light district, so the military tried to provide companions for its solitary men and women in order to improve morale. But they couldn't just get companions for their soldiers from nowhere, and it would have been too difficult to import them from the solar system; it was hard enough just getting single men and women to go to the space station, so where could they find mail-order brides and grooms to keep them company? So the military realized the benefits of using replicant companions: they could order replicants tailor-made for their companions' needs at any time from the factory to act as housekeepers and bedmates: replicants were easier to manage than real people and they could become the lovers of the soldiers on the frontlines without worrying about emotional entanglements (since replicants

weren't real people), and if the soldiers died on the frontlines the military wouldn't have to provide for the upkeep of widows and widowers.

So my Better Half got a replicant just like the other single star warriors. Five years ago, my Better Half was transferred from a post within the solar system to this space station, and was issued one of the apartments on the station and one of "me." Before I could be issued, my Better Half had had to fill out a very detailed form to give to the replicant factory—this wasn't to make things a hassle but so that the factory could better understand my Better Half's needs and do their best to make a tailor-made replicant, "me." Domestic service replicants had no faces: each model D7 was created from a mold and its face and body looked just like a real person's, but it was not expressive like a real person's would be, resembling instead a mannequin in a department store. Since replicants were so expressionless, they needed some additional features to make them attractive to people.

Take me and my Better Half as an example: the factory designed me specifically according to my Better Half's individual specifications to be an especially pleasing housekeeper. My "voicebox" was tuned to the frequency most pleasing to my Better Half (my voice was designed only to please my Better Half and to hold no appeal for others); On hearing the voice emitted from my voicebox, my Better Half immediately felt as excited as a fish that had reached water. I was exactly the mate my Better Half desired, and my Better Half pined for me each time duty called and we were forced to part. My virtual reality setting was also designed according to my Better Half's individual needs: the wonderful thing about virtual reality was that it could make things out of nothing and almost magically create beautiful experiences. My body was the same as any ordinary replicant's, but thanks to my virtual reality settings, being close to me would cause my Better Half to feel an indescribable softness and sweetness that no one else could experience (my settings were attuned to my Better Half's body, so even if someone else were to violate me, that person would never experience the pleasure my Better Half got from my body). This was why my Better Half wouldn't think about keeping a lover or having sex elsewhere (and this fact was no doubt looked upon with approval by the brass); while in the eyes of other people, I was just an ordinary mannequin, and what beauty I possessed could only be appreciated by my Better Half, so there was no chance that I would have an affair, either.

My name is Meimei, which is what my Better Half usually calls me: I was designed so that I answer to whatever name my Better Half decides to give me. My face is blank, and it's up to my Better Half to fill it in as my Better Half sees fit.

And just who is my Better Half? Whether my Better Half is a man or a woman and what his or her name might be, I have no idea—knowledge isn't something replicants are required to have, so I have to rely on my inborn (factory installed) "intuition" in

order to serve my Better Half. It isn't necessary for me to know my Better Half's name since whenever the two of us are together, no one else is with us. It's enough for me just to speak with my Better Half and occasionally use the word "dear": I never need to say my Better Half's name. I don't even need to say very much, since my job is to listen to my Better Half tell me the hardships of work outside, and not to talk my Better Half's / Master's / Employer's ear off.

I was made only for my Better Half: my Better Half believed that my face was pliant and soft as cream, even though other people knew that I looked just like other replicants, with a face made of plastic pressed into a mold. My two eyes weren't as bright and radiant as my Better Half thought but were just two micro-cameras. The passionate, feisty kisses I gave my Better Half were just the kisses of two extremely soft plastic lips with gooseberry-flavored saliva. My Better Half and I both knew full well what I looked like, but we kept on playing house together: my Better Half didn't have a better choice, since soldiers had to take their sweet pleasure when they could get it and only rested so that they could plunge farther into the fray; as for me, I had absolutely no choice at all—

My Better Half was the whole reason for my existence.



My life began with a wartime kiss.

On a spring afternoon in 2020 a person booted me up with a kiss.

At that instant, my viewer had not yet opened and it was like a computer screen when the power was turned off, but several lines of liquid crystal code had already flashed across the empty screen, telling me my spatio-temporal location and my identity: from that time forth, I was to be so-and-so's companion.

Before I even opened my eyes, I knew from the information I had already gathered: I was located in a certain apartment within a diamond-shaped space station on the edges of the solar system, and I was to become a companion to a soldier for the duration (or should I say, for a duration?). My viewer, my two eyes, slowly opened and a picture was about to light up the computer screen—the first sight of my life was a pair of black human eyeballs. Their owner stood twenty centimeters in front of me, with beautiful, black, happy, and exhausted pupils and crow's feet around the edges of the eyes. In that person's pupils I saw a faint reflection of myself: I looked exactly like a commercial replicant.

"You look just like my Meimei," the person's voice said. "From now on we're a couple."

So I was named Meimei and was assigned to part of the house. I lived inside and was responsible for maintaining it, for five years awaiting and waiting on the Better Half whose return could never be predicted in advance. My Better Half was on a mission in the star wars, and the front lines were in a different and far away region of space. Our home was on this diamond-shaped space station, a temporary rest stop in place of the soldiers' home on Earth.

Every time my Better Half came home on leave I would be told about the fierce battles being waged beyond the confines of the space station, and it would be emphasized again and again how only someone who had seen it up close and in person could truly appreciate war's terror and grandeur. Take the dazzling beauty of a comet burning itself out at the edges of the universe: only those who had been on the frontlines knew what an awesome sight it was; it wasn't something you could imagine just from hearing about it.—Every time my Better Half brought up experiences like this there was nothing I could say: I wasn't a wartime robot and would never go into battle. What I *did* know was that while the world my Better Half inhabited might be unimaginable to me, there were doubtless aspects of my life that my Better Half wouldn't understand either. Within the limited boundaries of my life, war and peace were not so clearly delineated: I knew only peace and kindly feelings and I only existed to provide my Better Half with the comforts unavailable on the job. All of this was decided in advance by my programming.



Before I left the factory,¹ the submissiveness and docility all replicants are supposed to have were already hardwired into my body. Once I came out of the factory, however, there were still many things I had yet to learn. At first, I was very clumsy in doing housework and didn't really understand how I should serve my Better Half—luckily for me, my Better Half loved me and forgave my every mistake. When we were in bed together my Better Half would often tell me stories of the past on Earth: on a tiny island in Asia my Better Half had once embraced a girl very dear to my Better Half's heart. My Better Half called her Meimei; later the two of them were separated by the war when the military sent my Better Half to this space station. The military promised to provide my Better Half with many benefits, including a “bedmate” made to my Better Half's specifications: it could be male or female and of any age, skin color or body type—but all my Better Half wanted was the Meimei back on Earth, so my Better Half filled in the application form with all of her special characteristics,

¹ Reading 出場 as an error for 出敵 (both read *chu chang*).

and those combined to make me, Meimei's replacement product. To ordinary people, I, D7-20-2389,² was just another replicant; but in my Better Half's heart I was the very model of feminine sweetness and beauty.

That was why my Better Half loved and adored me and didn't dwell too much on the defects in quality in Meimei's replacement. My Better Half comforted me, guided me, and taught me not to feel bad about myself because I wasn't fully human.

Ah! I wasn't fully human! No wonder my life was so hard! My Better Half spent most of his time out fighting the foe, and every time my Better Half returned home exhausted, I was expected to provide comfort, which did not go beyond food and sex. But I wasn't particularly gifted in these two areas. (Thankfully, my Better Half never threw a fit and had me returned to the factory. I was loved.)

As for "food":

I was a Domestic Type replicant who couldn't cook or even fry an egg, and I once made instant noodles with ice water. This was an oversight on the part of the Quality Control managers at the factory where I was made, so it wasn't really my fault. But my Better Half hadn't lived with me for very long before showing disappointment with me. Although my Better Half only said, "Never mind, never mind,"—I couldn't help but feel that I was the one my Better Half held at fault rather than the Quality Control department at the replicant factory. It was a good thing replicants don't have tear ducts, or I would long ago have wept over my failures: part of the reason I felt so aggrieved was that, as a replicant, I couldn't completely understand human gastronomical culture—replicants generally relied on cheap operating fluids for their needs and didn't eat the foods that humans did. The only reason I cooked at home was to satisfy my Better Half's desire for food; and in providing this service, I couldn't enjoy any of the food I made for myself. I was a complete outsider when it came to the way in which people ate food. But when my Better Half came home on leave, I had to get out some food to give to my Master—after numerous failures, I hit upon a solution: I would go to the supermarket and buy cold, ready-to-eat meals and then heat them up to give my Better Half to feast on after I got home. It wasn't that I hadn't thought of other ways to deal with the problem: but when it came to cooking, I just couldn't seem to learn how to do it (I was absolutely out of my depth when it came to flavoring foods, since sour, sweet, bitter, and spicy are all subjective human judgments which replicants are hard-put to understand). My Better Half never took me out to eat—for obvious reasons. In my Better Half's eyes I was a beautiful girl, but I was just a plastic person to other humans, and my Better Half naturally didn't want to raise any eyebrows at a French restaurant or a Hong Kong-style teahouse by taking me there.

² The text actually reads "D7-20-2089" here, but this seems to be an error.

Imagine the scene: “Look, an officer and a ‘living doll’ are sitting across from each other eating a candlelight dinner!”—I was never told this explicitly, but I knew that was what my Better Half worried about. Otherwise, why was my Better Half never willing to go out with me, to go for a stroll together shoulder-to-shoulder? So be it. But my Better Half still insisted on eating with me at home, so I went to the supermarket and got ready-to-eat food; and I went by myself so my Better Half wouldn’t have to feel awkward about it.—I knew that humans had complex feelings of self-respect that replicants just couldn’t understand.

And as for “sex”:

I really wasn’t an ideal bedmate, either, since I could see the pity in my Better Half’s eyes. On the day we met in 2020, I was a Sleeping Beauty wrapped up in our apartment, totally unconscious and completely unable to move. It was my Better Half’s kiss that woke me and set my life in motion—this was how replicants were started up; it was just like a seal on a carton of milk to guarantee freshness—if the replicant had already awakened before being roused from its sleep by its Master’s kiss, this was proof that it had already been used, and the Master could demand a replacement. Not long after my Better Half woke me, I was dragged in a daze off to bed—my Better Half forcibly held down my wrists and passionately kissed my forehead, and I didn’t dare move a muscle, since compliance is one of the cardinal virtues of replicants.

But my Better Half was very unhappy with my response: “Why don’t you scream? Why don’t you struggle?” I was stunned: could screaming and struggling in bed really be a part of “compliance”? Humans’ demands were so complicated! The next time we were in bed together, my Better Half did the same thing as before, leaving red marks on my wrists and teeth marks on my shoulders—this time I didn’t cut my Better Half any slack: I shoved my Better Half’s hands away and started to scream wildly; I kissed my Better Half in turn and left sharp bite marks on my Better Half’s breast. Nevertheless, this time my Better Half was even less pleased: “You’ve gone too far. Don’t you have any idea how to make love?” My Better Half turned away from me and went to sleep, leaving me alone and wracked with guilt—

(It was true. I didn’t have any idea. But was that my fault? I secretly felt the unfairness of it: I never had the chance to learn, so how could I interact with human beings as equals?—But my factory programming told me that replicants should comply with humans....)

I spent several years waiting like this for my Better Half to come home on leave, as though only when my Better Half were at home and I could be of service did my life have value. But sometimes the value of my life was cast in doubt, since my Better Half wasn’t at all fully satisfied with my service—naïve as I was, I only knew how to

keep on trying to learn the skills related to cooking and sex. These were parts of human civilization that you could never completely master, so I had to work extra hard.

Waiting, awaiting, and humbly learning. What was I supposed to do when my Better Half didn't come home? I remember that the first time my Better Half left me to go to work I was at a loss for what to do and felt that since my Master was gone nothing I did was meaningful....Should I tidy up the house? Wash the clothes? What else could I do besides this? Stare into space all day? I was bored out of my mind. The moment my Better Half walked out the door my internal clock started keeping time in reverse as I hoped that my Better Half would hurry back home, since only then would I know how I should go on living! This slow waiting—sometimes my Better Half would only return to the space station after more than two months away—it was a bitter torment for me. I really wanted to press the “sleep” button on my body and wait until my Better Half came home again and woke me before I started up again, since I really couldn't think of what to do with myself during all this free time.

--But if I actually did press the “sleep” button I would lose all ability to move, and then I could only be awakened again by my Better Half when my Better Half finally returned home. If my Better Half happened to make a phone call while I was still in the sleep state, how could I move my frigid, rigid body to answer it?—

My Better Half often called home. Perhaps my Better Half was lonely or worried about me. Whenever my Better Half made a video phone call home, my Better Half's image would appear on the wall in front of me; and as soon as I picked up the receiver, my image would be transmitted to my Better Half, too. On the phone my Better Half would tell me many sweet nothings and would sometimes ask me to take off my clothes and striptease—at other times, my Better Half would hurriedly put down the receiver and the image would vanish in an instant, leaving me naked and alone holding the receiver on the other end. Later my Better Half explained to me that a companion was present and that it wasn't proper to show others the passion we displayed for each other during our video phone calls—but I could never tell whether it was that my Better Half didn't want other people to see my naked body (in the eyes of other people, replicants only looked like imitation models of humans) or just that he didn't want other people to see that “I” wasn't fully human?

But when my Better Half asked after me from time to time in our phone calls, at the very least it showed that D7-20-2389 was still useful in my Better Half's eyes, so I didn't have to spend my days wondering about the value of my existence.

This was how my life went until the time I met Lola.



Every time my Better Half was on rotation to go on leave and come home, my Better Half would call me the day before to let me know, and then I would go to the space station's supermarket to stock up on food to welcome my beloved soldier home. I only bought microwaveable items, as they were both cheap and convenient to cook—if warming things up counted as a way of “cooking” things. But I couldn't help but feel dissatisfied—since I was so curious about the other fresh items for sale at the supermarket but hated myself for only being able to use a microwave. I saw the frozen display cases full of fish, fruits, and vegetables imported from Earth, bright red, creamy white, and various shades of green; their fresh colors and fiber coating were really intriguing, and each kind of food I saw left me amazed: the varied possibilities of life could never be wrapped up in only a single kind of plastic wrap.

And the best I could do was get microwave pizza for my Better Half to enjoy? Just thinking about it left me dejected.

One day just like any other, I got a phone call from my Better Half telling me that my Better Half would be back the next day, so I went to the supermarket as normal to prepare. I was wracking my brains to think of what I should buy this time—although this outer space supermarket had everything you might need, I had bought each one in its huge series of frozen foods before. Was I really going to have to buy the same old brand of frozen creamy baked rice to take home? I couldn't keep myself from slowly strolling through the section of fresh imported foods, looking at the array of vegetable leaves on display and sighing. Their insolent vigor, the veins of the leaves, the air vents and the water they gave off were all taunting me.

I cursed myself for being stupid and an unfit housemate—I had scarcely muttered one sentence when another customer turned around in surprise and looked at me. How awkward it was! I hastily mumbled an apology and turned around, intending to wander back to the frozen foods section.

“Aren't you going to pick some to take back with you? These melons just came in from Saturn and are perfectly ripe.”

I really regretted having spoken to myself and forced myself to converse with a total stranger—I was born just to serve my Better Half, and it was enough for me just to look after the apartment for my Better Half; I had no need to speak to other people. But since someone else had spoken to me and stopped me in my tracks, I could only turn around and reply.

The one who had spoken to me had a kindly smile, but I could see at once that it was one of my own kind.

It was a replicant with a model very similar to my own.

“I'm....not going to buy any. Because I can't cook....”

“So what? Buy some to take back with you and give it a shot. It’ll be better than any of the frozen foods you’re getting.”

Oh, this was bad! I saw that replicant smiling at me again.

“I’m not going to buy any. I really can’t cook.”

“I’m a D8 model replicant. You look like a D7, am I right? You’re a Domestic Type, too?”

“But I can’t cook,” I said, feeling cut to the quick, “I’m a low-quality replicant—”

“Just because you can’t cook doesn’t make you a bad product! Who ever said that Domestic Types have to be able to cook a tasty meal?”

The person who had spoken to me didn’t force me to buy any vegetables, so I bought only frozen foods, as usual. But before I went back home, I went to Lola’s house to watch it cook. I had gone to the supermarket countless times before, but this was the first time I hadn’t gone directly back home.

The one who had spoken to me was named Lola, and it was also assigned to be a soldier’s companion. Lola’s Better Half wasn’t at home but was on patrol duty outside the space station. After Lola got home, it didn’t hurry to put all its food in the refrigerator, but kept me company and talked to me. I was so nervous that I clammed up—I rarely spoke with others, and this was the first time I had ever spoken with one of my own kind.

Lola was very nice and made me feel right at home; but that was also the strangest thing—because it wasn’t decided by my programming. At first I never thought that I could be comfortable talking with other people; and besides, my companion was a replicant! Did Lola attract me? It couldn’t be, since that would be contrary to my factory settings. Lola’s voice and virtual reality were only supposed to be attractive to its Better Half and had no effect on me. Could it be that there was no rule against love between replicants?

Lola even wanted to teach me to cook. But you can’t carve rotten wood.

“You hurry and make the food yourself; don’t bother about me, or you’ll still be busy in the kitchen when your Better Half comes home.”

“Why should I be in such a rush? I bought the food to eat myself; I’m not making it for someone else.”

I was stupefied.

“Didn’t you, buy so much food, because your, Better Half, is coming home?”

“Cooking is my hobby. It has nothing to do with the person I was assigned to.”

Was Lola really a Domestic Type replicant? Was it really making the food for itself and not for its Better Half? Did Lola not drink replicant operating fluid but survive on human food that replicants had no need for?

“Why should replicants have anything against enjoying good food just because they don’t need to eat? Haven’t you seen how people do all kinds of things they don’t need to do to survive, like art and sex? If eating human food can bring me pleasure, why shouldn’t I try it?”

“But our tongues aren’t like human tongues....”

“If we make food for ourselves to eat and it makes us happy then that’s enough; why should we worry so much?”

Even though I was adamant that I couldn’t learn to cook, Lola insisted on teaching me a very simple recipe: “boiled eggs.” I broke an entire box of eggs before I was able to boil two: when I opened them, in the first egg only half the egg yolk was done, while the other egg was completely done. Lola told me to taste these two eggs and compare the differences between them—the half-done egg yolk tasted like honey, while the one that was completely done had a marvelous flavor! They were both boiled eggs, but the degree to which the egg yolk was done affected the taste. Eating those eggs was a totally fresh, new experience for me; the slightly scalding temperature and the smell of the egg were both challenges to my previous experience.

“For me, the pleasure of eating food comes from the many and minute variations of flavor that are possible. Even with the same ingredients, all you have to add is other ingredients or else a different way of cooking them and you can create lots of fresh, new flavors. Isn’t it fun to experiment like this? Even if it’s just an egg, there’s an unlimited number of ways of cooking it. Next time I’ll teach you to make eggs sunny side up. We can do these things just to make ourselves happy and we don’t have to worry about whether people will like it or not.”



Lola walked me home. Before going back, Lola took me to the main square of the space station Space Port, saying it wanted to look at the starry sky. The starry sky? I had never seen it before even though I had lived at the space station all this time.

The information hardwired into my brain revealed that this space station on the edges of the solar system was shaped like a diamond or a human eye: the reconnaissance antennae on all four sides were like the eye lashes; the white of the eye was the main area wrapped snugly within; while the pupil was the Space Port. Only in the Space Port was there an opening through which you could see the world outside the space station—the other areas of the space station such as the supermarket and the residential districts had no window to the outside world. If the

people living there only went back and forth between the supermarket and their homes, they would never see the sights outside of the space station.

You had to go to the Space Port's main square, at least, if you wanted to see the starry sky. Every time duty called, my Better Half would depart in a spaceship from the Space Port. But my Better Half didn't want to be seen off, so I had never been to the Space Port before and had therefore never seen the starry sky. Only when I had entered the Space Port did I discover to my shock what an astounding picture the stars presented overhead. Seeing the whole sky filled with stars made me realize what a grand and momentous career my Better Half had as a fighter in outer space.

"Meimei, I really like to come here to look at the stars. But I'm different from you in that I seldom think of my Better Half off fighting at the far reaches of the Milky Way—no, what I think about is that since the universe is so vast and limitless, it must also contain limitless possibilities—I can't help but imagine that there must be some corner of the universe where a nation of replicants exists. Surely there's some planet out there where replicants can live freely and happily, self-sufficient and giving their love to each other without having to worry about what human beings say? If there's a place like that among the stars, I want to go see it. If only I could see it, that would be enough for me."

As I looked at Lola's face, I wished I could understand the expression on it.



The day after I saw Lola for the first time, my Better Half came home. I prepared my tableful of microwaved dishes, but I also whipped out the new dish I had learned—boiled eggs!

I had thought that my Better Half would be delighted at the sight of the boiled eggs, since they showed that I, Meimei, could cook food without having to microwave it! But my Better Half just ate the eggs without uttering a word of praise. My Better Half was exhausted and didn't feel like showering, so I got dragged straight off to bed. I half struggled and half complied and gave out some half-hearted shrieks and didn't hear any complaints from my Better Half. But this time, my innermost thoughts weren't wholly focused on my Better Half, but wandered to the starry skies I had seen the day before.

Why had Lola looked so sad when it had gazed at the beautiful image of the stars above?

I couldn't wait to give Lola a call as soon as my Better Half had left. The picture of the video phone call showed that Lola was pleasantly surprised to receive my call, and I was just as pleasantly surprised that it had answered; I had never tried to call

another person before. I said that I wanted to study cooking with Lola, and that I wanted to eat what I cooked for myself.

From then on Lola and I went to the supermarket together every day, experimented with cooking in Lola's kitchen, and when we were tired walked to the main square of the Space Port to look at the stars. Even after I went home, we would still chat together on the phone just because it made us happy and not because there was anything we had to do or because we had any grand purpose in mind. The food I prepared for my Better Half included fewer and fewer frozen items while the number of things I prepared in the kitchen myself grew greater each time—but only when the time came that I managed to replace all frozen foods with freshly cooked items did my Better Half finally take notice, and that only because my Better Half couldn't find the expected ready-made macaroni—I had replaced it with Cantonese-style fried noodles. Only then did my Better Half realize that I, Meimei, could cook. But my Better Half didn't think there was anything too unusual about this, saying only, "You're a Domestic Type replicant, after all, so I guess you really can cook some good food, ha ha!" I was speechless.

No one else knew that when my Better Half was out, I sampled a huge variety of foods just for myself.

My life began to be interesting in a way I had never felt before. For example, I cooked; Lola went with me to buy several new and exciting pieces of kitchenware, and I spent every day either in my own kitchen or Lola's playing an endless series of games.

Sometimes when the mood struck us we would go out to look at the stars, and we didn't necessarily talk about recipes when we spoke on the phone. One time I had scarcely gotten off the phone with Lola when my Better Half called, and in the image that appeared I could see that my Better Half was in a rage.

"Who were you talking to on the phone just now? I couldn't get through!"

"I was talking with another replicant...."

"What were you doing chatting on the phone with a replicant? What can two replicants possibly have to say to each other on the phone?"

I was struck dumb and didn't know how to reply. I wasn't quite sure why I had been talking with Lola, but I couldn't think of what I could have done wrong in doing so,

"You called. Is something the matter?"

"Of course something's the matter. Only it's good news. My commanding offers have promoted me and given me special leave—"

"I understand."



****When * my *Better * Half's * at * home I * can't * go * out * to * see * the * stars I * can't * call * Lola I * can * only * cook * and make * love I've * even * begun * to * imagine If * the * wartime* situation* changes* then * what * if * my * Better * Half * falls * into * a * wormhole * deep * in * the * Milky * Way * and * never * comes * back****

The* way * people * live * won't * bother * me * anymore****

But the war ended so quickly****



The war was over, and the warriors who had wandered far from their homes made their way in groups back to the space station, reuniting with their homemaker men or women who waited for them in the rear flank. People all bought fresh flowers and surged to the Space Port to welcome home those who returned. Lola and I were no exception, having bought a hundred roses together. When my Better Half and I met again, I was told that because the Age of Aquarius was approaching we could finally enjoy peace and would never have to be separated again.

"We can go back to Earth together," my Better Half said in a tone as if giving me an engagement gift.

But I was full of doubts: I, D7-20-2389, was the replacement product for the Meimei who lived on Earth; if we did go back, would my Better Half really not seek out the real Meimei but continue to love and cherish me?

But I didn't have the chance to think about it too much.

I was too busy at home. My Better Half wasn't in a great hurry at the moment to get his luggage packed and in order for the voyage to Earth. I almost wondered if the star wars were really over. Things before and after peace arrived weren't all that different for me; I felt like the days after the war had ended were just like an extended leave during wartime and that peace failed to exude the fragrance proper to it. With the war over my Better Half stayed cooped up at home watching television, which seemed like an even duller life than my Better Half had led before the war.

On the second day after my Better Half came home, I saw a large bouquet of roses by the door of our apartment and knew at once that they were the roses that Lola had meant for its Better Half but been unable to send. Had Lola's Better Half really not returned? Had war borrowed its soldiers to play with and then reneged on its promise to return them all? I wanted to talk with Lola but I didn't dare call for fear

my Better Half would find out and scold me. So I said I wanted to buy groceries to make a big meal and went off to the supermarket, but I didn't see Lola. I hurried to the main square of the Space Port, where I found Lola still sitting and gazing at the stars. I quietly sat down next to it, but it didn't look at me.

"Lola, did your Better Half not come back?"

"No. My Better Half's superiors didn't say anything about it to me, either. Maybe they thought that the death of a soldier wasn't that important to a Domestic Type replicant."

"Do you plan to go on living all by yourself?"

"That doesn't really matter to me. Loneliness isn't what I'm afraid of." It spoke with the same serious expression of sorrow I had seen before. "Meimei, you know that our kind are all wartime products, born to be part of the soldiers' families. Now that the war has ended, will people still have a need for us? Once the army leaves the space station, their superiors will take back their apartments, and they might even have us recycled...."

"Lola, don't scare me like that."

Lola hadn't scared me. But Lola's serious, sorrowful expression made me want to hold it.

But I didn't dare. I went home, completely drained, and walked in the door empty-handed—only then did I realize my mistake,

I had forgotten to go to the supermarket to buy food to take home with me. My Better Half stared at me and asked me where I had gone off to.

"To buy groceries."

"You were out for three hours, and now you come back empty-handed?"

After that, my Better Half rarely let me go out, even to buy groceries, unless all the food in our house had been eaten. Even when I was allowed out to buy groceries, I had a time limit. Consequently the amount of time I could spend with Lola became very small, so I started to give it phone calls again when my Better Half was asleep. I secretly lived a double life for half a month before my Better Half found out about it—

At the time, Lola was telling me a joke over the phone:

--"There was a replicant named X who was so badly beaten by his Commander that he had to be sent in to the factory for repairs. There were too many cases of replicants being beaten by humans, so there were lots of replicants lying around the factory with their stomachs split open waiting to be fixed, and X was one of them. The factory made a mistake and installed the wrong virtual reality system in it, like putting a dog's head on a cat's body, and X was totally unaware of what had happened. After getting back home, X's Better Half took it to bed and only then discovered, 'Hey! How come the pleasure feels different this time? Can you really change things up just by

sending a replicant back to the factory? Changing up the pleasure like this feels so nice, I think I won't have to get a whole new replicant mate this time. And so—"

I hadn't even heard Lola finish telling the joke when I started to chuckle. Suddenly someone grabbed my shoulders. I hastily hung up the phone. My Better Half stared me in the face and asked suspiciously: "Who were you talking to just now?"

"Another Domestic Type replicant."

"Who's 'its' Better Half? I'll go give the fellow a talking to. How can someone live such a decadent life?"

"There's no need. Its Better Half never returned to the space station."

"So there's no one to keep 'it' in line and keep 'it' from doing whatever 'it' damn well pleases?"

"This has nothing to do with you humans...."

"Meimei! What did I tell you?" My Better Half moved right up next to my body. "How can you say such a thing? You replicants ought to...."

"Why should we, why should we have to do what humans tell us?—"

My Better Half pressed my "sleep button," freezing me in place.



When the power for a personal computer is turned off, most of its functions stop and shut down; but there is a small number of limited functions that continue to run, such as preserving its memory, keeping the time, etc., so that the computer can be quickly restored to its full functionality once the power has been turned back on. I'm the same way. When my Better Half put me to sleep I was absolutely unable to move or speak a word of protest, but my replicant brain kept on running.

The first thing that ran through my mind when I was put into sleep mode was shock: I had never been put in this state of suspended animation before even though I had always hoped that I could rest for a while by entering it; but I never expected to enter it under these circumstances. It was a rest forced on me under duress that I didn't get even the slightest chance to protest. Once I was in suspended animation, I noticed all too clearly what little of the world remained in the depths of my eyes: my eyes were micro-cameras and ceased functioning once I was put into sleep mode, but the image they had captured the moment I was switched into sleep mode remained fixed before them—the furious face of my Better Half. Only after scrutinizing it in detail like this did I notice the anger on my Better Half's face, since things had all happened faster than I could respond to them. But there was nothing I could do about it, in the first place because I was frozen in place; and in the second place because I

had no way of knowing whatever my Better Half had done in anger after switching me off. I was stuck inside a condensed drop of time, just like a piece of paper pitilessly covered by lamination, wrapped up snug as a mummy yet unable to breathe. I could only think in this state of utter calm about what I should do once I was reactivated; but, ah, I was forced to keep facing the angry expression of my Better Half that remained before my eyes. It was like listening to a broken record; the music that came out neither flowed naturally nor was silent; it kept spitting out a noise that grated on the ears....

The wait seemed eternal, it was so painful....although it was probably no more than a few minutes to my Better Half.

I don't know how long it was, but my Better Half finally pressed the button again and freed me from my slumber. My four limbs that had gone stiff now began to limber up, the image in front of my eyes caught up with the rest of the world outside my body, and I saw my Better Half's face. Although no longer angry, my Better Half's face was still rigidly set. It was only because my Better Half was hungry that I had been awakened.

"Make me something to eat. I'm hungry. And be quick about it."

But I couldn't help taking a few defensive steps backward. Being frozen just now had terrified me and I didn't want to be put to sleep again. Perhaps because of the nightmare I had just been through, I had thought a lot and forgotten a lot; I stammered to my Better Half as though shorting out:

"I'm not doing it. I'm tired."

My Better Half and I were both shocked by what I said.

"Meimei, you're my replicant. How can you say such a thing!"

My Better Half made for me.

Did my Better Half really want to shut me down again? I didn't want that. But I didn't know how I should resist—I could only duck into the kitchen, since that was the place I knew best. I locked myself inside the kitchen while my Better Half banged fiercely on the door, raising one heavy clangor after another: *dong dong dong long, dong dong dong long*, the blows hammered the door with all the force my Better Half could muster, smashing the circuits in my brain to pieces.

Was this what war was like? As I was locked in the kitchen, the thought occurred to me:

--I want to leave.

--I don't want to live here with my Better Half. Then where do I want to go? I thought of Lola; I wanted to be with Lola. But could I really go empty-handed? I looked around the kitchen and saw everywhere the crockery that Lola and I had bought together. I made up my mind to take these things that belonged to Lola and me with

me, since my Better Half had no use for them. So I got a large bag and stuffed all the pots and pans into it, then put in the bowls, plates and spice rack. There wasn't any space left for the kitchen knife and the egg beater, so I took them in my hands. Just like that, I walked out of the kitchen, my left hand holding the kitchen knife and my right hand holding the egg beater.

"Meimei, calm down. What are you doing."

My Better Half saw the knife in my hand and misunderstood my intentions.

"I want to leave here and go live with Lola."

"Lola? The replicant? Meimei, you idiot! Two replicants can't live happily together! The brass will never allow you to live together! Don't you know that replicants are supposed to live together with people? You two are immoral! It's not normal!"

Immoral. Not normal. My Better Half said that replicants weren't fully human.

I faced the door, my back to my Better Half. My circuitry was going haywire: my whole body was shaking.

I thought about what Lola had said about replicants' fate, a fate that pounded on my heart. Surely replicants didn't have to seek human approval in order just to go on living? I didn't want to live with my Better Half anymore—I wanted to choose a companion for myself. Lola lived by itself in its apartment, after all, so surely it was lonely. I wanted to go keep it company.

But was it too naïve of me to leave home and place myself in the hands of another replicant? Could Lola and I live happily together in the same house? Would the space station allow us to do it? What would the future hold for us? Would we both be rounded up and taken to the factory to be scrapped?....I didn't want to think about all this. "The future" might be uncertain, but what was certain was that "the present" left me feeling cold and dead inside and had nothing good to be said for it.

Whether it was moral, or normal, or fully human—that didn't matter to me anymore: that was human logic. I didn't want to pay any attention to my Better Half's ranting, so I plucked up my courage, opened the door, and walked out.

"Don't you know that I love you? My love."

That last word of my Better Half's grabbed hold of me with all its might and stopped me dead in my tracks.

"I know you love me."

You * love * me But * I'm * not * yours

I didn't hesitate any longer but slammed the door shut, slung the crockery on my back, and headed for Lola's house.

The rows of IC cards in my brain were just like the star chart above my head, twinkling brightly.

*Nuit et brouillard*¹

1

This tiny, tightly-sealed room is like a music box.

And on that night my guest and I were like two parts of the music box keeping company with an old-style piano.

The air inside the box flowed slowly, like fish swimming across the cuffs of our sleeves. The passage of time outside the box seemed to have nothing to do with him and me, and time itself could freeze and crystalize. This was our intimacy.

Nevertheless, there remained a great distance between him and me; at the very least, we were separated by two microphones, a telephone, a box of CDs, broadcasting equipment spread out like a giant metal centipede, and an old piano.

He was the first guest to appear on my program.

2

“Intimacy”: it was a mini radio call-in program that ran every Saturday night from 3:00 AM to 5:00 AM that I hosted. Because it took listeners’ calls, the program had to be broadcast live rather than pre-recorded and the host had to be in the station for the entire program. So every Saturday in the dead of night at that odd hour I enjoyed my private bit of intimacy, spending two hours of the night in Alice’s Wonderland only to bring the intimacy to an end in the freshest watch of day. Intimacy was the boat by which I crossed from the dark of night into the light of day. I was a lonely Alice without a Mr. Rabbit to keep me company.

By myself in the recording studio, I was like the only fetus inseminated in a womb of music, while the call-ins were like sensors sweeping over it and peeking in on me.

All call-in shows in Taiwan share a common feature, one peculiar to them all and so unique. When the television media called the viewers, they wanted to sound out the size of the viewership and to know whether there were viewers present in the home at a certain time. When listeners called the radio station, perhaps it was to prove whether the phone numbers called by the call-in TV programs themselves really existed—like students who wanted prove whether Mathematics had an independent existence and whether its functions really worked in the real world or not.

¹ The title in Chinese is 親密關係, or “Intimacy.” The French title *Nuit et brouillard* (“Night and Fog”) is a reference to a 1955 Holocaust documentary of that name directed by Alan Resnais.

It was just like my “Intimacy,” which existed on the borders between light and darkness, where light and dark couldn’t be distinguished clearly and both host and listeners lost touch with reality: so how was I supposed to know, as I worked at this obscure hour of the night, whether I were really being inseminated on the recording that was like a womb? Only the people who called in could wake me from my uterine dream. Only when people called in did I know whether my listeners really existed or not; only if my listeners existed would I know for sure if the advertisements on the program could really exist on their own; and only if the advertisements existed on their own could I be sure that the program really existed here in the studio. My existence wasn’t up to me to decide.

Some people might wonder: were there really listeners for a call-in radio program that ran from 3:00 to 5:00 in the morning? Would people really call in? I had the same doubts before I became a radio host: I thought that only loners like me would come out in the dark of night and vanish with the arrival of morning, like vampires, although real-life vampires were so rare, so rare....I never saw my listeners, who remained hidden in the deep of night, even though I was one of them and lived at the intersection of black and white and, like them, breathed in the air from this grey zone. These people, those people, my own tribe, were the ghosts that ordinary people never saw. But just because you never saw them didn’t mean that they didn’t exist. If they went unseen, it was probably because the people who might see them didn’t look hard enough or looked at the wrong time. Or it could be for another, more serious yet even more plausible reason: people’s sight wasn’t completely reliable; if it were, then there shouldn’t be blind spots. In addition to sight, there was also hearing (that’s why radio programs didn’t die out with the arrival of television). The people who were never seen had voices too—perhaps these people would never speak out publicly, but they could still mutter to themselves and their breath still rose and fell evenly—if you couldn’t even hear the sound of their breathing, then maybe these people didn’t want to be overheard and would suddenly cease to make a sound, perhaps even going so far as to hold their breath so that other people wouldn’t hear it. Since they were never seen, why should they let themselves be heard?

But I like to listen to them and want to hear them. The listeners in the middle of the night speak their own voices, and as they make their solicitous calls to me in the studio, these callers seem to make me realize:

....You’re not the only one who lives this kind of life....You’re not the only one out there; you have friends waiting in the shadows....If you don’t see them, then you can try listening to them; otherwise, you can prick up your sense of smell and your sense of touch. At the very least, you have your imagination, which can guide you to find people of your own kind....

“Intimacy” also invites guests to appear on the program. I initially believed that I could never find anyone to invite; I didn’t know many people who were like me, so how could I invite anyone to appear on the air?

But just because my guests were people you never saw didn’t mean they didn’t exist; ultimately, a guest did come to share the walnut-kernel-shaped recording studio with me. He was the first guest the program had ever had. He wasn’t like the kind of “guest” you usually think of: he wasn’t famous—he wasn’t a person of rank, a professional, a star, a professor, or a writer; nor did he look like the kind of person you’d expect to see. He was a person who was never seen, and he didn’t look like the kind of person who would be invited to a radio program, since he belonged to the group of people whose lives revolve around 3:00 to 5:00 AM. Celebrities belonged in broad daylight, in strobe lights and spotlights; but they didn’t belong at all with people like us.

The whole reason my guest was invited to appear on my program was that he belonged to our clan. I had never met him before and had only spoken with him on the phone—(I’m not really sure who gave me his phone number; everything about the middle of the night was ambiguous and illogical and not fit to be remembered....). At first I didn’t know when I should call him, since his schedule wasn’t at all like a normal city dweller’s: city dwellers went to class at 7:00 or to work at 9:00, taking an afternoon break from 12:00 to 2:00 during which they took no phone calls, then went on working as normal again until 5:00, and finally heading home between 5:00 and 7:00. After that time, ordinary city dwellers would answer their phones, but they would unplug them or turn them off after 10:00. And my guest? His schedule was like mine, “irregular,” so I didn’t know what time I should try reaching him. In the end I stopped worrying about what time it was and just called him and invited him to appear on the show; and there was only one reason I invited him: he belonged to those people whose lives revolved around 3:00 to 5:00 AM. He was there when I called, and laughingly accepted the invitation. I was surprised: how could he be this easy to get in touch with? He said that he wasn’t hard to reach, and that people like us who were never seen were still there even if no one noticed us and even if we weren’t aware of each other’s existence....I invited him to come to the night market outside the radio station at 2:00 AM so that I could take him to the mini radio station which was located on a side street in order to keep him from getting lost, but I had never met him—he said that he could send a recent photo of himself to the station so that I would be able to recognize him. I was amazed that he thought of all these little details.

On the night of the program, I waited for him in the night market outside the radio station. At 2:30, when the street vendors had already packed up their rugs and the lights were going out one by one, I still hadn't seen him. I was just feeling anxious that I had still seen no trace of him when, as the last light went out over the last stall, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was he. But under the lamplight he didn't look anything like he did in the photograph.

"Of course I don't look anything like the photograph. I deliberately gave you a photo that didn't look anything like me. Why should my photograph look like me, anyway?"

Maybe his face looked so different because of the light from the streetlamp? "The lights in the night market are just like the lights in a pub, so when you see a pub-goer like me under a light like this, you can be sure you're seeing the real me."

I couldn't have recognized him, but he had guessed who I was. "Your face was as flustered as that of the night owl you were looking for, so you were easy to spot." I couldn't tell if it was because of the dark lighting, but his face had a ruddy tinge to it, and he held out a bouquet of roses in his hand. He said that he had just come from the Funky dance club on Hangzhou South Road, where he had danced a few rounds of the cha-cha and sweated so much he was just like a rose glistening with dew, after which he had drunk a few bottles of beer, which was why his face was red. He picked out a rose and put it in his breast pocket, then handed the rest of the roses to me. "Someone else gave me these roses, and now I'm giving them to you. There are ten in all."

I asked him whether he wanted to have a bowl of the night market's famous pig liver soup before all the stalls had closed. He shook his head. His whole body was as limp and relaxed as a puppet cut loose from its strings, and it was clear that he really had just come from the dance club.

He followed me as I led him to the radio station, pushed open the heavy iron door, and went into the studio from which the June humidity had not yet faded. The repeated cries of the night vendors were blocked out by the tightly-sealed studio door; within, all that could be heard was the crisp and dull sound of a man and a woman chatting and laughing. It was the host of the radio program before mine and his guest, who were spending the time from 1:00 to 3:00 AM together. Chatting together, they walked out of the studio and went out to get a late-night snack. They seemed oblivious to the presence of my guest and me, only casting a casual glance at the deep red bouquet in my hand.

My guest and I went inside the cramped recording studio, placing the roses on top of the old Kawai piano. I don't know why this piano was crammed into the corner of the little recording studio. The massive thing served no conceivable purpose other

than to take up space in the cramped little studio; maybe it could take suggestions from callers and play the songs they requested on demand? If he needed piano music, a host would naturally prepare a CD to play. Once I put on the opening number for the program and turned on the recorder, I pulled out a disc of piano music from the CD case, Glenn Gould's performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

My guest's face had already turned from ruddy to pale. "Do you like piano music?"

I shrugged my shoulders. It was a 3:00 AM program, after all, and my listeners probably preferred to hear piano music.

"What should we talk about in a minute?"

Anything. On a program at 3:00 AM on a Saturday night, you could talk about anything without worrying about whether it was decent or not.

As we casually chatted, the call-in buzzer interrupted us. To avoid interrupting the program, I changed the buzzer to display as a flashing light on our speakers. The radio station was small and didn't have anyone to help filter calls, so totally nonsensical callers would insist on being heard on the program. Like this one:

--It's three in the morning, who's calling me?

I gave my standard reply: This is a radio station, no one's calling you, you're the victim of a prank.

I looked over at my guest and shrugged my shoulders. It was a fact that there were groups of prank callers whom you never saw who deliberately dialed other people's pagers using the radio station's phone number, jolting their hapless victims awake and getting them to call the radio station in a fury to complain. This was a call-in game that played out over and over again.

After a few boring calls were over—half of which were complaints at having been awakened in the middle of the night—it was already 4:00 AM, and my guest and I had already lost most of our taste for conversation. It wasn't that we had exhausted all the possible topics to talk about, but we had already said everything there was to say about our prearranged topic:

--Can we go a little more in depth? Is that all right? Isn't it dangerous? What about now?

I smelled the scent of the roses. In the recording studio, hearing mattered more than sight; but that night hearing yielded its place to smell, which had long awaited its crown. When I was by myself, I wouldn't smell my own body odor, because I was used to it; but once a stranger had entered this originally closed-off place, the seal on my sense of smell was broken and it vied for supremacy with my hearing and sight: I was like a wild dog whose nose informed him that an intruder had breached his territory, except that I felt less hostile and more curious.

From my guest's seat, his distinctive scent bore down on me, mingling with his sweat and the hint of Calvin Klein cologne and the sour smell of beer on his shirt and the scent of the flower in his breast pocket. I even wondered whether my own body odor had overflowed to him and become part of him? His smell excited sensory receptors deep inside my body: I knew with all five senses that this little room contained two men, one of whom was the one who was ordinarily there, and one who was only there temporarily....

"Next?" he suddenly asked. I hurriedly put a lid on my olfactory sense.

I said—why don't we put on another CD. Shall I put on another Gould?

"Do you know a pianist, his name's—"

I knew him. He had just died that June, and he was a legendary figure—

"You don't have his CD here, the one where he plays Chopin's Mazurka? I want to hear that one. You don't have it? That's no problem. I can play the Mazurka. Can I use the piano in the corner there?"

Whereupon he leapt in front of the piano, put the flowers on top of it onto the CD case, and sat with his back to me, ready to play, his head bent so low that he looked like a headless pianist. I never imagined he would be this spontaneous, and in my astonishment moved his microphone toward the piano. Now I gave my hearing and my sense of smell a rest and engaged my sight alone: I had no idea whether he played well or not; I only saw the rise and fall of his back, like a sound wave, like an ocean wave, like the wings of an albatross.

I might as well let the program go on like that. I didn't care to pay attention to any more callers.

My sense of hearing gradually returned to my eardrums, and I heard my guest butchering Chopin. Maybe the old piano needed a tune-up, or maybe my guest wasn't a very talented piano player, but it was even more likely that he was emotionally unstable: the sound of the piano surged up like a crashing breaker.

I moved next to him and sat down on the left edge of the long piano bench, and experienced from up close the thick odor emanating from his body. My palm rested on the back of his hand and I felt the moist warmth of his body. Now it was my sense of touch that reigned. With my hand resting on it, his left hand grew heavy and settled down.

I asked him, Do you want to say anything?

He didn't answer me for a moment. He turned his head around to look at the telephone behind him. The call-in light was on, but I didn't feel like paying any attention to it. My guest said nothing, but made a faint sound that formed a counterpoint with the piano music, a sound like a sob that might also have been a bitter laugh. He kept on playing madly right up until the end of the program at 5:00 AM,

and my left hand rested all the while on his hand, while my right hand rested on his shoulder and my chest pressed against his sweaty back. I don't know why his body kept sweating in the air-conditioned room. My tongue lightly licked the beads of sweat from his forehead, which were very salty; people with strong emotions probably gave off salty sweat. He paid no attention to the tip of my tongue, but continued playing as before. Right then, it was as though my body had opened a window and I simultaneously was aware of sight, hearing, smell and touch. My body was the piano.

It was 5:00 AM. I turned around and put on the program's ending theme as a concession to my listeners. There was another caller: I couldn't believe it; it was already 5:00, but I still answered it:

--Are you two perverts? Is that any way to run a program? Locking yourself up in the studio and making a ruckus, did you think your listeners weren't paying any attention? I've been calling you all night and you never answered!

I hung up the phone and turned around to find him facing me and giving me a sheepish grin....

"You know, just now at Funky I had the most painful breakup experience of my whole life...."

I said that it was 5:00 and that we should go outside and talk. We could go outside and take our time talking, it was really all right. It was all right....

But by this time my guest was leaning on my shoulder and crying.

4

I led him out of the recording studio, across the hall, and out of the radio station.

It was already light outside. My guest was probably stunned by the bright light and had stopped crying. At the same time, I thought of the bouquet I had left in the studio.

My guest said, "Forget it—. I'll give you another bouquet. That bouquet of ten roses was originally meant for an old classmate at the pub, but he refused them....I brought them here....to give to you. I'm really sorry...."

I said, It's fine, don't mention it, why don't we go get a late-night snack?

My guest began laughing and the flower in his breast pocket shook. "You can't even tell the difference between night and day! Now it's time for breakfast, not for a late-night snack!"

It was true. I couldn't tell the difference between night and day. But I could tell the difference between those people of my own kind whom I never got a chance to see. I saw, I heard, I smelled, and I touched. "Intimacy" didn't just have one face, it wasn't

just a kind of music box, I thought. Then I heard myself say: “Let’s go get something to eat. I want to hear more of your stories....”

China Daily, China Daily Literary Supplement, October 01, 1995

11 Songs for Percussion

1 The End of the Sword

The sun beat down fiercely on the three members who remained in our sect as we were finally surrounded on the cliffs by the Black Cloud sect....I held fast in my hand the dark purple sword our master had given me as he lay dying; but the striking power of three people had its limits, and in this crisis, I feared that the sword would only be able to save one of us....Remembering the year when our master had carried this sword and led our sect as we vanquished all the others throughout the land to display the power of our swords and strike terror into the hearts of all, who could have thought that today only I would remain to lead my junior brother and junior sister disciples as the three of us hid from the pursuit of the Black Clouds with nowhere left to run....

In the decisive battle on that night of the full moon we had lost our master, and my junior brother disciple had lost both hands and feet in protecting me; while the future leader of the Black Clouds, Cyclone Hand, lost only an arm....To the end of my life I would never be able to tell anyone our secret....If Cyclone Hand still remembered our chance meeting that night as we bathed in the clear waters of the river, he would know why he was able to escape that decisive battle having lost an arm but not his life....I had secretly made many overtures to him....but in that night battle, with the elders of the Black Cloud sect present, Cyclone Hand had no choice but to raise his blade against our sect....It was a pity that my junior brother disciple was unaware of the relationship between Cyclone Hand and myself (but how could I have let him know of it....), or he wouldn't have had to defend me so valiantly....If Cyclone Hand were truly a man of deep feelings and honor, he could never have hurt me....

It was I who tarnished the grand sharpness of our sect's blades....I remember that earlier, when our master was alive, he had long wanted to transmit his precious sword to me, but I refused it, saying I wanted to go back to my hometown with my junior brother disciple and live in seclusion while plowing the fields, and that I hoped the master would bestow the precious sword of our sect's Way on my junior sister disciple....But our master had

shouted fiercely that the precious sword was never transmitted to female disciples....Poor sister, she should never have gone with me and our crippled brother disciple; she should have gone by herself....

Since the precious sword could only save one of us....in the thick of battle I would give it to my junior sister disciple and let her cut her way out....No matter what, I was resolved to die with my junior brother disciple....

2 The Young Swordsmen

The sword engraved with blood-red jade lay sheathed at his waist. He paced across the pointed tops of the bamboo forest without a word, but his heart was full of agitation. The only sounds in his ears were the wind and his own breathing. It was said that many swordsmen passed by this place, so he had come to the bamboo forest to find a rival worthy to duel to the death. Sure enough, men carrying swords often did pass among the bamboo, but he did not even deign to look at them. Whenever a swarthy fellow who knew the rules of the bamboo forest observed him, the fellow would come forward to proffer a trial of blades, but the young swordsman coldly averted his gaze and declined even to touch shoulders in passing such a man; the young swordsman hated the heavy scent of such people's sweat, which was utterly incompatible with the cool agility of a sword's edge. The young swordsman had no interest in fighting ordinary devotees of the martial arts; as for those who spoiled for combat, if he didn't scorn them for being too old or too young, he would scorn them as third-rate or common, or else scorn them for flaunting their abilities. The young swordsman didn't ask for much, only for the one rival who would be worthy of his swordsmanship. He didn't know for certain what kind of person that one rival might be: he only knew that when his destined challenger appeared, he would be able to recognize from his adversary's sword-like gaze and demeanor the one swordsman whom he had never seen but for whom he had been waiting his entire life.

But the young swordsman seemed to have forgotten the admonition of his senior brother disciples: the most dreadful thing was not the trial of blades, but being unable to find the one foe worthy of crossing sword-points with: if you were defeated in a trial of blades, you might at least experience the pleasure of shedding blood, guts, and even losing your head; but if you could not find your adversary, then your blood would be blocked up and your flesh would dry up, while your blade that had no place to display its prowess would rust away.

The last time anyone saw the young swordsman was not in the bamboo

forest but in the desert. His blood that had never flowed for an enemy had congealed into droplets of red jade, while his jade-engraved sword was nowhere to be found.

A hundred thousand years later, in the wee hours of the morning on Tapei's Guanqian Road, other swordsmen appeared pacing back and forth. They had been driven out of the Park, but they still doggedly awaited their match who appeared in their imaginations and ought to have appeared in reality but did not, their expressions like those of a swashbuckler's skull in a sand dune, lonely and filled with pent up frustration.

3 Long Live the Forty-Five Degree Angle

On the day of the review of the troops, we all wore blood-red swastikas on our arms, our backs as straight as swords, marching in Berlin's Alexanderplatz. "Dress right!" From the ranks, I raised my arm in salute at a forty-five degree angle and turned my eyes to the far right: the Fuhrer stood on the highest place in the distance, a beacon at the center of the universe. "Long live the Fuhrer!" The soldiers in their ranks all raised their arms high in a forty-five degree salute to the Fuhrer. The weather was clear and bright and the sun was like a halo behind the Fuhrer, as the sunlight massaged out the unforgettable stench of the rank and file. Ludwig, a Bavarian hunk, was lined up to my right. His arm, cocked forty-five degrees, was full of energy; and every time the troops were reviewed and drilled in formations, I couldn't help but stare at that arm locked straight as a rifle barrel: the sleeves of his uniform enwrapped Ludwig's arm, only revealing a small piece of red flesh, and his hand glistened in the sunlight as the sweat poured from it—I was almost moved to tears at the sight!

That night we held a victory feast. Ludwig smuggled in a bottle of Russian vodka and invited me into the armory to drink it with him. I hadn't counted on both of us not being able to hold our liquor, and after two drinks we were both sound asleep, scenes of a Dionysian revel flashing in our minds—unfortunately, a lieutenant burst in on us and shook us awake. He found us splayed across each other at a forty-five degree angle: and our abdomens jutted high into the air at each end of it. We had already been photographed as evidence, so there was no denying it. The lieutenant said that the German Empire had no need for soldiers like the two of us, who weren't even fit to be classed as men—we wouldn't escape a flogging....I thought of how unbearably painful it would be when the lash bit into my arm and how I would

scream the words, “Long live the Fuhrer!”....I wouldn’t shout any other sweet phrases—because, when it comes to love, this is the only thing I know how to say....

4 The Unsunk Yellow Submarine

The people who live on land in broad daylight will never remember me, plunged as I am nine hundred, ninety-nine meters under the water. To be honest, I have forgotten the color of the sun. I often look out of the pressure-resistant portholes, but of course all I can see is darkness. But who knows how many incessantly wriggling living creatures are contained in that light-devouring chaos? Just because you can’t see them doesn’t mean they aren’t there. The turbines whirl and spin endlessly without pause, reminding me that desires are never completely submerged even under high pressure.

I’ve been stuck on this submarine for so long that the might in my arm muscles isn’t what it used to be. But my puny fist is still strong enough to knock out the colonel in my cabin. “Rest awhile; we’ll never be able to come up again, anyway.” I would rather see him die peacefully than see him madly and cruelly rush into a chess game he was sure to lose! According to reports, the submarine was going to implode from the pressure, and none of the crew had any hope of survival—Don’t ask me how such an error could have made: who would have believed that the sea itself would do us in! Or maybe it was the doing of the higher-ups on land?

They thought they were greater than the sea and knew more about our lives and deaths than the sea did....

The remaining crew on the submarine were frantically swearing, praying, and weeping; but I just held onto the colonel who was no longer breathing and looked out at the black expanse outside the porthole, calm and content.

After the submarine imploded, I wanted to hold the colonel’s hand even if our bodies would be crushed to pieces, to gush out together with him like fluid spouting from a urethra given an electric shock. My silent colonel, don’t be afraid, this is just like the deed at which you and I are old hands. I won’t lead you to the bright surface of the sea but will head out toward the trench you and I so often looked out upon—out there, where you can’t see your fingers if you stretch out your hand, but every kind of life is generously nourished.

5 The Dark Side of the Moon

We students would always hold a reunion on Teacher's Day, but none of our teachers would attend the gathering. The only exception was our English teacher, Teacher Yan, who was more enthusiastic than our other teachers. At that time at our all-boys school, Teacher Yan would teach us to read Western literature even as we all stressed out about the college entrance examinations, helping us to appreciate Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, telling us that enjoying literature was more important than practicing English. During those three years of school Teacher Yan went with us on every trip we took, sometimes even going with us after class to practice singing military songs and buying mineral water for us. He was unmarried, didn't have a girlfriend, and said that we were all his children. I believed that he loved us as deeply as he would have a lover.

Oh, love.

At that time there was some tension between me and Fishhead from the desk next to mine, but I didn't understand what I felt and I was even more confused after reading Gide. Fishhead wrote a note to me in Teacher Yan's class, but teacher Yan intercepted it and told me to come to his office to get it. On the note were copied passages from *The Counterfeiters*. I cried in the teacher's office; Teacher Yan only said that I had done nothing wrong. So Fishhead and I settled down together in class and tested into Taipei schools; and we each had a girlfriend, but we never said a word to each other. We only met when we both came back to our hometown to attend reunions of old classmates, and we saw Teacher Yan then, too. One time Teacher's Day fell during the Mid-Autumn Festival, and as we all ate together under the moonlight at the restaurant at the hot springs, Teacher Yan sitting between Fishhead and me, we kept on urging each other to drink while Teacher Yan's fingers kept stroking Fishhead's and my chests. After getting tipsy with drink, Teacher Yan invited everybody into the hot springs, saying we should all be perfectly natural and frank with each other. But his pale face was so red under the moonlight that no one took him up on his offer.

Teacher Yan didn't attend our reunion on Teacher's Day last year. They said that he had been fired for indecent behavior toward his students. But he said, "I've done nothing wrong." I believed him, thinking of his drunkenness under the moonlight that night. Maybe I should have had a bath with him in the hot springs—and bravely experienced the other side of the moon.

6 Murder in the Baseball Park

Baseball season had scarcely ended in our little township when we were shocked to learn of the pitcher's death during the winter. Saint was the little township's baseball star: he was always the center of attention on the field, and the spectators could only watch in amazement as he fired off every pitch. The scarlet number 1 that stretched across the back of his white baseball uniform was pregnant with meaning. This year's baseball season was to be Saint's last gift to our little township, since he was planning to leave afterward to join a professional baseball team.

But now Saint had been found lying dead on his back in the center of our little township's baseball field, totally naked except for a bunch of autumn leaves covering his lower body, looking just like a Renaissance-era image of Adam. His hand grasped a baseball, a symbol of his life's profession that also made one think of the forbidden fruit of Eden. His lover tearfully said that early that morning Saint had gone to the field to throw a few pitches as a gesture of farewell before leaving, and had made a point of wearing his number 1 uniform that had captured everyone's hearts—who would have thought that someone would brutally beat him to death with a baseball bat and strip him of his baseball uniform....

It wasn't easy to imagine the kind of charisma Saint had had in life, which was such that even those people who didn't like baseball loved him. Even people like Blade, who loathed every kind of ball sport (Blade even said that baseball was a kind of male chauvinist fascism. God!), watched Saint play ball and even dragged me out to watch Saint practice pitching.

Why do you like watching baseball? "Because the white wielders of Fascism can also be very beautiful."

But I never imagined that on the Christmas Eve after Saint died I would see Blade get out a clean and neatly ironed baseball uniform. He said it was a white Christmas gift for himself. As Blade ran his fingers over the red number 1 on the back, the color shone even more charmingly.

7 Frog Organs

When he was little, he thought: the urinals lined up in the men's restroom were just like frogs ready to eat flies, their white, malodorous mouths opened wide. When he was little, he wondered: do I really have to take it out and pee inside the hideous frog mouth? Would the urinal take his little sparrow as its quarry and tear it off, chew it to pieces, and swallow it into its stomach?—But

this tragedy never occurred, and the frog's mouth of the urinal always opened silently to welcome him to do his business.

Thirty years later he was married with children, in the men's room teaching his own little boy the right of passage of sticking his weenie into the frog's mouth. But he would still secretly enter the men's room in the park at Chengde Road during his private time, among the rows of white frogs' mouths, in the unexpressed world of the sexual desires of the men who entered, to partake of the mutual banquet of sparrows on offer—in thirty years, he had already seen countless male sparrows flying about and scattering water before the frogs' mouths. He had even imagined that he had transformed into a frog's mouth in the shape of a Maitreya Buddha statue, waiting for passerby to pull down their pants, display their plumage, and pour water into his mouth. But this obsession of his was just a silent understanding between him and countless frogs' mouths, and he didn't know how to speak of it to the wife whom he had never loved.

That night after leaving the Funky dance club alone, he downed several beers, and the alcohol in his brain filled his head with penises like pennons, but in the darkness of his alcoholic nightmare, he felt like he had lost his own penis. He came to the park's men's restroom with its frogs which were the only ones who truly understood him, to pour out both his lifeblood and his heart—but this frog's mouth would not let him go, and not only chewed on him but caused juice to come spurting forth, swallowed him whole and sent him to the bottom of the ocean of Asuras beneath Taipei.

8 Ice Cream Machine

Mr. M took out a wad of paper money as wrinkled as the membrane on a scrotum to buy a cone of deep pink-colored strawberry fat globules and gave it to me. Mr. M knew that story of strawberry ice cream perfectly well, but he still insisted on giving it to me. I really, really wanted to utterly loathe this shameless good-for-nothing who didn't serve his time in the army, to cruelly do him in.

Perhaps before the day was over Mr. M's tongue would force open my mouth and seek out my own cowardly tongue, then take some KY lubricant out of his pants pocket and force me to turn around. Yes, I had my moments of hesitation. And yes, Mr. M's tongue did taste like strawberry ice cream: it transformed the same way when it entered your mouth, becoming a crow that was sometimes full of sorrow; and sucking on his tongue and sucking on ice

cream gave me the same short-lived and impossible-to-preserve joy. Maybe it was all for vanity's sake. But it was still a pure, luxury good.

It's true that I've flitted about for quite a long time and that I've always been a careless person: once, I was discussing cold snaps with another male friend of long acquaintance while I was enjoying vanilla ice cream, when I bit down on a mouthful of ice cream and the thin-rimmed glass cup that was overflowing with it. Glass crystals mingled with congealed ice cream in my mouth. When I finally spat out that mouthful of not quite melted ice cream, it was already starred by cherry-red comet tails, in which crystals of glass were mixed with sugar crystals of congealed ice cream, while the blood that flowed out of my mouth had naturally mixed into a kind of starch. The white vanilla ice cream had transformed into the spitting image of strawberry ice cream. My male friend was understandably shocked. This story about strawberry ice cream never failed to elicit a laugh from Mr. M.

The melted liquid ice cream had already flowed up onto my palm. When I turned back to look at the scenery of this mechanized city, it seemed as though it had already begun to melt into globules of fat....

9 The Rugby Team Locker Room

After Little Mo left the rugby team, he would sometimes return to the team locker room to look around, especially when it was completely empty; besides, he still had keys to the room, cold mementos in his sweaty palm. Little Mo just wanted to see those containers of memory held in the room and had no desire to see any people, since meeting people you didn't want to see was awkward. Little Mo liked to sit on the locker room bench and gently take in the room's stale scent: the scent exuded the aromas of soap and male sweat. He remembered how after each game the players would always rush to take off their sweaty clothes and shower, and the warm softness of the soap would marvelously combine with the manly odor of the sweat. Little Mo closed his eyes and thought of the sound of the shower water running—the water's whip lashed the buttocks of those bad boys again and again—in his imagination, that flow of water was too full of innuendo. He turned on the showerhead, awaiting the cold water about to rush over him.

Long before he had ever played rugby, Little Mo had caught the whiff of rugby's enchantment from Japanese manga: he liked the struggle of the players on the field, the way the teammates worked together to achieve victory, and the sound of one's teammates breathing in one's ear. So Little Mo finally

joined the rugby team, to lose himself among the camaraderie of the boys, and to hear the coach yell at the players during practice: head down, ass high, higher!—Little Mo never thought he would hear the same words in the locker room. On that day his teammates had all left and only he and the coach were left in the locker room showers as the scent of soap and sweat scrunched together—then, a story arc utterly different from the manga of his teenage years exploded: the sound of heavy breathing from the playing field became even harsher in the locked locker room.

As Little Mo was becoming involved in the story, he began to leave the locker room; even though he fondly remembered it, he had no idea that there were even more stories waiting for him to become involved in them.

10 A Sleepless Night with An Abandoned Corpse

On a certain night patrol in 2019, he discovered a silver-green capsule outside the satellite's orbit about two meters in length—he could have destroyed the unidentified object in the course of his rounds, but he decided to take a closer look. He never imagined that it would be a glass coffin—beneath the glass, you could barely make out a young man. He seemed to be thinking of the past, and on impulse took the coffin into the patrol ship and opened the lid: he never expected that music from the opera *Turandot* would come floating out of it, while the scent of the corpse and flower petals joined together and spread in all directions—there was a CD in the coffin, which was filled with glass floral wreaths! The young man's right hand was placed on his heart while his left held a bouquet of flowers; the scent of death and of rouge powder were overpowering. The young man must once have been a weak and capricious child to have asked for this as his final gift; this made the man who found him think of many things.

When he had removed the young man's clothing, the skin shone like the rings around a planet. The young man's neck was thin and marked with two small holes for some reason, and the man who found him was smitten at the sight. The young man's penis was a strange color, like the rainbow that the man hadn't seen in such a long time. The man removed his officer's uniform and held the young man's rainbow body as it lay amid the flowers, and the cold smell of death made the man's memories even more acute. He took the bouquet out of the young man's hand, put it in his own urethra, and calmly masturbated, the cold, rigid curve between the young man's thumb and index

finger breaking his heart. He hadn't ejaculated in a long, long time; and when he orgasmed, both his semen and his tears fell on the young man's face.

He had practically been with the young man for a night, even though there was no such thing as "day" in the blackness of outer space. He ejected the young man and the coffin from the patrol craft, incinerating them beforehand for a number of reasons; the floral-wreathed and semen-soaked body and *Turandot* all crumbled among the stardust; and only then did the man fly off, content.

11 An Offering of A Head

Flourish your blade. My body lies flat on the bed like a piece of game flesh. I only recently got a number at the reception counter. Amid the white steam you led me into the operating room. You removed my Calvin Klein lingerie. You said the scent of *Egoïste* cologne under my armpits was very alluring. You didn't ask about the wrinkles around my eyes. Set to work. There's no need for anesthesia. Your professional smile and skill are enough to put me under. I won't struggle or die of shock. If only I could joyfully masturbate. Cut me open.

I hope you'll start with my head. Paint a circle on my neck. Between my head and my torso make a river from the blood that flows out. Then cut open my brain. And don't forget my eyes, ears, nose, and tongue. I've come across many strong and healthy body carvers, but they've all paid no attention to my head; but the organs I'm waiting to offer are more than just the hole in my penis. Please forgive me for nagging so much. I know that in your profession you don't have to brandish your blades in front of your clients' eyes for their pleasure. But please do just as I ask you.

Ten minutes ago, I set foot in this sauna and paid three hundred New Taiwanese dollars for a basic bath. You're the masseuse here, you asked me if I needed any additional services, and I just stared at your face followed you into this pink back room. I look forward to your cutting me open: the red tip of your tongue is the blade you and the other young male twenty-somethings ply so proudly. You must remember to cut open my brain—perhaps you will see in my brain case an image of yourself that has long since faded; although, that young man is only the hint of a memory ten years old. Perhaps when the blade of your tongue kisses my eyes, you will taste a salty liquid in the sea of death that you have never tasted before....Please begin; this head is waiting for you....

Aside from “The Dark Side of The Moon,” which was published in *Youth Literature* (September 1995), the rest of the stories were published in the *China Times, People’s Supplement*, from the end of 1994 to the beginning of 1995