

# kyung

Eva-Maria Leuenberger

Poetry

German



*In her second collection, kyung, Eva Maria Leuenberger pays her respects to the poet Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who was murdered at the age of 31. Leuenberger explores her own pain with intimacy and passion, using poetry to indite every form of violence.*

*"the dead bodies in the parking lot / a woman disappears / in the screen's pixels / as if time were / a clear river / flowing backwards"*

*"anything can be true / when the lie is good enough"*

## Title

kyung

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## Author

Eva Maria Leuenberger was born in Bern in 1991 and lives in Biel. She studied at the University of Bern and at the Bern University of the Arts. Publications were included, amongst others, in manuskripte and Literarischer Monat. She is a two-time finalist of the open mike in Berlin (2014 and 2017). In 2016, she received the "Weiterschreiben" scholarship from the city of Bern. Her poetry debut dekartation was published in 2019, and awarded the Basel Poetry Prize in 2020. Eva Maria Leuenberger was also awarded the Literature Prize of the Canton of Bern 2020, the Orphil Debut Prize 2020 of the City of Wiesbaden and the Poetry Debut Prize Düsseldorf 2021.

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kyung  
Eva-Maria Leuenberger  
Excerpt translated by Annie Rutherford

something is sent –  
reaches the body at night

its core

the blank space  
where the name had been

awareness flickers

the bodies  
barely graze each other  
and yet: here is the time  
here is the snow  
a woman is alive

you are alive  
still  
or again

I search for words                      and stumble upon a body.

tell me the story  
of all these things.  
beginning wherever you wish, tell even us.

**theresa hak kyung cha**, author and artist, born on 4 march 1951, in busan, korea, lives for 31 years. aged 13 she emigrates with her family to the usa, first hawaii, then san francisco. she has four siblings, two older, two younger. her parents grew up in exile in manchuria. both come from korean families who had to flee korea to escape the japanese occupation. their mother tongue is forbidden. during the second world war, both flee to seoul in the face of the soviet invasion of manchuria. then later from seoul to busan before the north korean army. later still, following the military coup of 1951 and the resultant dictatorship, to america.

**theresa hak kyung cha** attends a catholic school in san francisco. she learns english and french, sings and reads. she is a good pupil. she attends berkeley university, studies ceramics, performance, film. she reads. she works and performs. she earns a degree, then another, a few more. she exhibits. she wins prizes. she works. in 1979 she travels to south korea for the first time in 15 years, in the midst of renewed protests. she returns. she moves to new york. she works. she writes. she travels to seoul with her younger brother to work on a film project; the project proves impossible due to renewed unrest and she and her brother are suspected of being north korean spies. she returns. she works. she gets married. she works. she writes. she receives the first copies of her first book, dictée, in 1982. she visits her husband and walks through the parking lot near his workshop. her fingers curl. emptiness in the palm of a hand. a man places his hands around her throat.

time swallows hairs and words and itself

**dictée**, her first and only book, is the palimpsest of a fragmented identity, in whose mouth language flickers. cultural contexts layered over one another are woven into a dense polyphonic material, formed by an awareness which probes its own identity and finds itself again in a river of polyphonic silence.

divided into chapters which are named after the greek muses, the text flows through the mouth of a speaker who doesn't trust herself to speak, through the silence of her mother, whose language is forbidden, through the biographies of **yu guan soon**, **st thérèse of lisieux** and **joan of arc**, the history of japan's occupation of korea, catholic practices of ritual, taoistic creation charts, korean shamanistic myths, through french dictation exercises, which are repeatedly mistranslated and tug meaning in new directions; words which are newly fertile, spoken anew – the mouth from which silence flows into language, the mouth which opens and closed is stifled by the instruments of power.

les cygnes dans la pluie. j'écoutais.

many elements in **dictée** are jarring. – sentences fragment, stumble over endings, stop – begin again. the voices blend into each other, characters are almost never named, so that the pronouns, more and more, begin to flicker. identity becomes collective. chronological time becomes fluid. melts away. the voice names historical dates, places, wars – but no context remains, time leaks into itself. whole passages are left untranslated or are mistranslated. quotes are made up or falsely attributed. images are left without explanations, without sources. to be able to read the whole book properly, you would have to speak at least 4 languages and be aware of the cultural contexts of korea, japan, america, france, the catholic church, taoism, korean shamanism etc. awareness flickers, here. the texts refuse the reader, block the way, and then open a new door to a place where no walls exist. the reader has no body, she is free – she chooses the path and wherever her feet land, new openings, new eyes, new mouths emerge. awareness flickers.

les signes dans la pluie. j'écoutais.

in the essay **paths** she mentions **zhuangzi**, the chinese philosopher and poet, and his dream about the butterfly. in the second chapter of the eponymous **zhuangzi**, one of the foundational texts of classical taoism, he writes that he had dreamt he was a butterfly. in this dream he forgets his name and is, with the entirety of his consciousness, a butterfly. when he wakes up, all certainty is lost: either he is a man who dreamt he was a butterfly, or he is a butterfly who is dreaming that he has woken up as a man. **zhuangzi** calls this uncertainty the interdiffusion of things. **theresa hak kyung cha** terms it the interdiffusion of subject and object – what happens when an artwork meets an observer, a reader; the author, who until then was sure she was the subject, becomes the object, and the reader becomes the subject, the co-author. their perspectives merge and their bodies disintegrate – melt, flicker together in new openings, new mouths – observing and observer at the same time.

la pluie fait rêver de sons.

la pluie rêve de sons. des pauses.

ne plus distinguer la pluie des rêves ou des souffles

interdiffusion is a kind of void. forms merge, skin opens to a new time. the hierarchy of bodies flickers out.

wings grow from the shoulder blades of a man who has been dead for years.

a butterfly which had been dead for years wakes up, black hair wrapped around its antennae.

the in-between-time: from when a sound is made  
to when it returns as an echo  
no one knows if it was heard,  
when it was heard  
when it would be heard  
if ever at all  
but it continues on and on and on  
maybe a thousand years

**theresea hak kyung cha**, born on 4 march 1951 in  
busan, korea, dies on 5 november 1982.

**theresa hak kyung cha** had black hair.

**theresa hak kyung cha** had black hair and was raped  
and strangled by a security guard and serial rapist on  
5 november 1982 in new york.

a body falls, on the floor of a parking lot