

# GRANTA

---

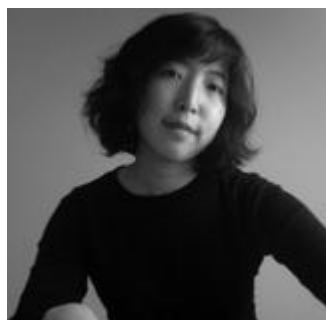
01 APRIL 2010 | **INTERVIEWS**

## New Voices: Announcing Catherine Chung

[ShareThis](#)

| **COMMENTS (0)**

**W**e are delighted to announce Catherine Chung as our latest selection for *granta.com*'s **New Voices** series, which showcases fiction from emerging writers. Her story, 'Wish', will be published exclusively on the site on Tuesday. Below, she speaks to Ollie Brock about the beauty of maths and writing.



*OB: As well as a degree in creative writing, you have one in mathematics. When did you decide to start writing, and why?*

CC: I think my interest in mathematics was that of a writer: I was always trying to translate it back into a story. The two interests come from the same source though, which is an obsession with language and its capacity to explore things larger than ourselves. I discovered mathematics as an undergraduate, and fell in love with how beautiful it was: it can be so precise and elegant – and asks all sorts of big questions.

I think I started writing, on the other hand, because it allowed me to actively engage with language in a critical way. When I was growing up, we spoke Korean at home, so I didn't learn English until I started school. It was very bewildering: all of a sudden I had a name I'd never been called before, and couldn't understand what anyone was saying. Weirdly enough, I learned to read and write at the same level as the rest of my class before I could track even the most basic conversation in real life.

*Much of your story 'Wish' is a direct address in the second person. Why did you use this device?*

I wanted the story to be very intimate, almost like a conversation overheard from the inside of someone's mind. I used a direct address because I wanted to the reader to be pulled into that intimacy, to feel part of it.

*Your prose has a lovely rhythm to it. Do you write poetry as well?*

Thank you! I'm flattered because I've always wanted to be a poet, but I've written just one poem in the last ten years. I was so excited when it came to me, and hoped others would follow. Alas, no such luck – it was the only one.

*You've taught creative writing in both America and Germany. What was different about the two experiences, and the students?*

Teaching creative writing is always rewarding and fun, and occasionally exhilarating. It's tricky to try to differentiate between two groups though, because of course there's so much variation between individual students in any given classroom.

What I learned from teaching in both places is that literature, that compulsion to share yourself through language and the imagination, really does transcend borders and nations. On some level our struggles, and what we care about and want to write about, are the same – as are our difficulties in expressing them.

If anything, being in Germany affected my writing much more than my teaching. I was working on *Forgotten Country*, a novel I'm just finishing up. So I was there, trying to write about things like dislocation and divisions within families and histories and nations, and it was incredible, because those things had just happened there. The friends I met had grown up in East Germany, and lived through the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification. It was exciting to find myself in a place where people retained a cultural memory which resonated so well with everything I was thinking about.

*Any tips for young writers?*

Oh dear. The advice I give myself is to risk more, be patient, and remember that life is pretty big. But I think my mom's advice is better: Eat and sleep right, exercise, remember to take breaks, and treat yourself gently, because you will write other things but you only get one life – so above all, take care of your health!

~ **Look out for 'Wish' on Tuesday 6 April** ~

Our New Voice for February was Billy Kahora, with his story *'The Gorilla's Apprentice'*. Read [all our New Voices stories here](#), as well as [interviews with the authors](#).

[HOMEPAGE](#) | [GRANTA 109](#)

[ShareThis](#)

Comments (0)

You need to [create an account](#) or [log in](#) to comment.