

By HANIS MAKETAB
lifestyle@thestar.com.my

AWARD-WINNING fantasy novel *Mist-Bound: How To Glue Back Grandpa* by Malaysian author Daryl Kho is being translated into Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese, allowing readers in the respective countries to enjoy the enchanting tale.

Mist-Bound, published in 2021, is one of the rare works of fiction for young readers published in the region that features dementia as a central theme.

The story follows a brave girl named Alexis as she embarks on an epic quest to save her beloved grandfather's broken memories before they are forever lost to the mists in his mind.

The story takes inspiration from Kho's personal life – the protagonist takes her name from Kho's real-life daughter and Grandpa is based on Kho's father, who passed away in 2018 after living with dementia for almost a decade.

Kho, 44, says he can't wait to walk into a bookstore in Hanoi, Shanghai and Seoul to see the localised copies of *Mist-Bound* sitting on a shelf.

"One of the things that drove me to finish the book, even after my father had died, was the idea that each time a person reads it is a chance for him to be 'saved' anew, over and over and over again, by his granddaughter. Now he also gets to be saved in different tongues. Every new language is like a new spell, a new prayer for my father," says Kho.

Reaching new audiences

Kho prefers to call *Mist-Bound* a "family novel", as it can be enjoyed by children and adults alike.

Indeed, the book has grown-up fans from around the world, including South Korean writer and translator Bora Chung, who was an International Booker Prize 2022 finalist.

Kho reveals that it was Chung who reached out to him to ask if she could translate the book into Korean.

"After being on the International Booker Prize shortlist last year, Bora has been in sizzling-hot demand, being flown to all corners of the earth to speak at book festi-

Bound for shores abroad

Daryl Kho's debut novel will be translated into Korean by Bora Chung.



Kho, author of *Mist-Bound: How To Glue Back Grandpa*, says getting Chung to translate his book is better than 'scoring Taylor Swift ticket'. – Glance Studio



South Korean literary star Chung is working through the process of translating Kho's debut book (into Korean). – HyeYoung



Mist-Bound has been a refuge for those whose lives and loved ones have also been affected by degenerative illnesses. – SillyJellie/Penguin SEA

vals and conferences. Some of her stories have been optioned, if not already being produced, for K-dramas," says Kho.

"So for someone like her to: a) buy my book with her own money, b) actually find the time to read it, and then c) reach out to ask me if she could possibly translate my book into Korean, that still implodes my mind to this day," he adds.

Kho, who works in the regional TV industry in Singapore, says that the translations are expected to be published next year and that translations into other languages are currently under discussion.

There are also talks to adapt *Mist-Bound* to the big screen. Kho recently signed a development deal with an LA and Seoul-based production and talent management company, B&C Content, which represents global stars like actor/producer/ filmmaker Don Lee (*Train To Busan*, *The Roundup* franchise) and Oscar-nominated actor Steven Yeun (*Minari*).

"We're currently pursuing an animated adaptation of *Mist-Bound*, and are in active discussions with some top studios, screenwriters and directors for the project," shares Kho.

"As a broadcast media professional who

has made a living selling other people's stories, it will truly be a dream come true if I can eventually see my own story brought to life."

Mist-Bound won the Hedwig Anuar Book Award 2022, a biennial prize presented by the Singapore Book Council, and the "Best Young Persons Title" at the Singapore Book Awards 2022.

In China, the translation will be published under New Star Press; in Korea, it will be under Sam and Parkers; while in Vietnam, translation rights have been acquired by Kim Dong Publishing House.

ARTEMISIA Gentileschi's painting skills quickly surpass her father's, but society dictates that as a woman, she must stay home and protect her virtue.

Art – with its unsavoury types and naked models – isn't exactly fit for a good Roman Catholic girl. And when her painting tutor attacks her, it sets off a cascade of seemingly insurmountable problems and impossible choices.

Author Elizabeth Fremantle deftly paints Artemisia's painful but inspiring story in her latest biographical fiction, *Disobedient*.

Having already established herself as a writer who champions powerful female leads, Fremantle fleshes out the 17th-century artist who defied the limits placed upon her and became one of the best painters of the Baroque period.

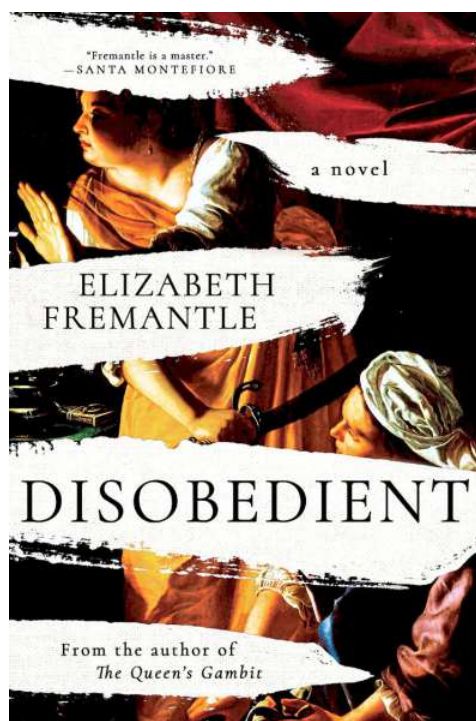
The book starts off with a magical rendition of Artemisia's childhood, the day she witnesses a beheading. It's thrilling and wonderful to see the world from the eyes of six-year-old Artemisia to open the story before pivoting to 1611 Rome.

This is the year Artemisia gains her first commissions. It's also when renowned painter Agostino Tassi rapes her.

And be warned: The scene is truly horrific. The chapter is heartpoundingly tense, sickening, nightmarish. Each word rings disturbingly true, Artemisia's thoughts tragically relatable – at first of how to escape or fight, then of how to cope.

Beyond the trauma of the assault, Artemisia faces backlash from the community. Her tarnished reputation could spell ruin for her ageing father and her

Painting an inspiring story



Fremantle deftly paints Artemisia's painful but inspiring story in her latest biographical fiction. – Photos: Handout/Penguin



young brothers. Marrying her attacker might be the only way to remedy the situation.

Disobedient plows forward with an unstoppable force. It would be easy to dry out a historical fiction like this into

arid oblivion, or to saturate it beyond fancy and into falsity, but Fremantle strikes an excellent balance that feels like you're actually there, watching the Gentileschi family's real struggles and triumphs play out.

The attention to detail – so necessary in a narrative filled with painters – is absolutely engrossing and doesn't let you forget for a moment that this is 17th-century Rome. And the clever chapter names, many with double meanings, share the dark humour of the main character.

Disobedient proves the perfect title for the book, which rings the motif repeatedly, layering meaning onto the word like oils on canvas until it takes a dynamic shape and an entirely new image emerges.

In Fremantle's version of the story, the women of the paintings are not merely things to be ogled at; their stories are told in translated interludes.

The paintings are evaluated through a feminist lens that acknowledges the artist's experiences and the effect those must have had on their works.

Erotic elements of paintings like Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* are frequently situated side-by-side with the double standards of strict piety and virtue pounded into the very women who are sheltered from looking upon such paintings or hearing the Biblical story they're based on. The author's eye roll in solidarity with the reader is palpable in these paragraphs.

Disobedient was everything I'd hoped for and so much more. Fremantle has immense talent and tells the story of an amazing and inspiring woman with wit and certainty. – AP