1. Nomination statement for priest, by Heather Inwood

I am delighted to be nominating the author priest, also known to fans as Big P (P 大), “Little Sweetie” (小甜甜), or simply “Goddess” (女神), for the 2027 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. priest deserves this award for her contributions to the field of internet literature in Chinese and in translation, her versatility as a writer of popular fiction, and her blend of addictive storytelling and humanistic concern. priest began serializing her novels on the online literature platform Jinjiang Literature City in 2007. Over her nearly twenty-year writing career, she has published more than 30 works of fiction of varying lengths, many of which have been translated into other languages and adapted into hit TV shows, audio dramas, comics, and other media, giving priest an outsized influence over contemporary popular culture.

priest is a female giant or a “big god” (大神) in the world of Chinese internet fiction, or netfic for short. In 2019, she came 17th in the list of China’s top-earning authors across all media and literary genres. Her commercial success has been accompanied by other forms of public recognition, too. They include the Bronze Award in the Biennial Internet Literature Awards of 2017, the prize for the Best Original Fiction in the 2019 China Science Fiction Nebula Awards for her novel *The Defectives* (残次品), the award for the best genre fiction in the 2019 Yuewen Searchlight Top Ten Literary Books, and being featured among the top five female authors of Chinese internet fiction in 2020.

priest is best known as an author of danmei or Boys’ Love, a sub-genre of romance that has attracted controversy within China as well as much global academic interest in its queer (or “rotten” 腐) inclinations and what it might tell us about the female imagination. priest’s danmei novels have produced some of the most iconic pairings of male characters in Chinese pop culture: Zhao Yunlan and Shen Wei in *Guardian* (镇魂), whose love has survived tens of thousands of years and unimaginable terrors; Gu Yun and Chang Geng in *Stars of Chaos* (杀破狼), who move from master and disciple to equal lovers, saving the state and establishing a constitutional democracy along the way; and criminal investigator Luo Wenzhou and playboy CEO Fei Du in *Silent Reading* (默读), to name just a few. Danmei, however, is far from the only string to priest’s bow. In addition to being hugely prolific and maintaining an intense schedule of daily updates that would be the undoing of most authors, priest stands out for the wide range of genres in which she writes and the breadth of settings and mythologies she employs. In addition to Boys’ Love, Girls’ Love, and Boy-Girl romance, priest also writes crime and detective fiction, science fiction, steampunk, historical martial arts fiction, contemporary urban fiction, Western-style fantasy, time travel, and Daoist self-cultivation fiction.

In an industry in which many writers stick to one tried and trusted genre, priest is a literary polymath, fully inhabiting each genre in which she writes and expanding her worldview across possible worlds from the ancient past to the distant future. Not only does each novel unfold a particular perspective upon the world in which it is set and the struggles and ambitions of its main characters, priest’s personal worldview shines through in everything she writes. Steering well clear of literary didacticism, she interweaves her storylines with her own observations about humanity and the broader cosmos. As a result, not only is her storytelling highly addictive, it offers a philosophical expansiveness and moral reflexivity that make it resonate well beyond the specific genre to which any given novel belongs.

Although many of priest’s novels make extensive use of fantasy settings and lore, whether science fiction (*The Defectives*), cultivation fiction (*Liu Yao* 六爻), martial arts (*Bandits* 有匪 and *The Faraway*

Wanderers 天涯客), the supernatural (*Guardian*), or historical steampunk (*Stars of Chaos*), the novel I'd like to highlight here is one set in a recognisable version of contemporary mainland China. *Silent Reading*, serialized on Jinjiang Literature City between June 2016 and January 2017, centers on a criminal investigation team in the fictional city of Yancheng, headed by the handsome Sergeant Luo Wenzhou, who plays bad cop to his good cop partner Tao Ran. Luo and Tao have a complicated history with another younger man, Fei Du, whom they first met as a teenager after his mother apparently died by suicide. Fei has inherited his family's fortune and become a highly successful CEO and renowned playboy. He spends much of his time hanging out around crime scenes, getting sucked into the investigation and becoming key to the resolution of a series of interconnected crimes.

Like many of priest's novels, *Silent Reading* can be hard hitting; content warnings are required. Each of its five narrative arcs is inspired by a classic work of Western literature, from Stendhal to Dumas via Nabokov, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky. The first features an intricate plot involving migrant workers, China's left-behind rural poor, forced prostitution, drug addiction, suicide, murder, and rape, all tinged with the lingering effects of trauma and the ambiguities of justice and morality in China today. Despite this, *Silent Reading* remains easy to read and often laugh-out-loud funny, its characters equal parts endearing and infuriating.

In the first arc, "Julien" (based on Stendhal's 1830 psychological novel *Le Rouge et le Noir*), we are introduced to the character of Zhang Donglai, a friend of Fei Du:

> Yancheng Municipal Bureau's criminal investigation team had collectively identified young Master Zhang's area of expertise: complete bullshit. Nine times out of ten, that was what came out of his mouth. Being held in the bureau for forty-eight hours had burned away what few brain cells he had; now, he was using whatever was left in that hollow shell to speak at a level of intelligence that profoundly rocked any listener.

The omniscient narrator's sarcasm is only matched by that of the main protagonist, Luo Wenzhou, who is tough, brash, and prone to risky acts of heroism. He is also openly gay, human dad to a supercilious, pampered cat named Luo Yiguo, and far from immune to the aesthetic and increasingly emotional appeal of the younger man, Fei Du. Their love develops slowly and ineluctably as their interactions shift from playful and tetchy to increasingly heartfelt and laced with brooding sexual tension—although the sex itself is always implied rather than described, helping priest avoid censorship.

On Goodreads, where *Silent Reading* has attracted an average of 4.53 across 1910 ratings and 316 reviews, readers gush about the novel's "huge, brain hurty conspiracy" and the central relationship between Luo and Fei. As one reviewer puts it, "THEY'RE SO GOOD..they go from bickering, bantering and shit-talking each other to bickering, bantering, shit-talking each other AND kissing. very sexy of them." Herein lies priest's genius. She is just as skilled at weaving worlds and unravelling mysteries as she is at reeling in readers with the lure of romance: readers get equally hooked by the desire to uncover the plot and to see the characters get together and stay together, no matter what the story throws at them.

In priest's novels, however, happy endings—whether heterosexual or homosexual—are not the endgame. Instead, romance is a lens through which to explore the core tensions and moral ambiguities of our world, with each person embodying opposite sides of seemingly irrevocable human conflicts: justice and criminality, for example, or . Each time a couple finds love or a new relationship is formed, a solution to these conflicts swims into view. Can romance save the world? Not necessarily, but faith in romance can illuminate a way forward, a middle ground where characters can live out their lives, whether busting crime on the mean streets of Yancheng, busting martial arts moves in the imperial palace, or uncovering conspiracies in the AI-governed, genetically-engineered world of the Defectives.

As priest puts it in her tagline to the latter novel, “Humanity is born from faith, destroyed by faith, and reborn amidst the ashes of faith (人们生于信仰,毁于信仰。人们在信仰的灰烬里重生).

Recommended reading: 默读 / *Silent Reading* (Seven Seas Entertainment; three volumes out of five published so far in English); 镇魂 / *Guardian* (Seven Seas Entertainment; three volumes)

章程

纽曼华语文学奖由美国俄克拉荷马大学美 中关系研究所设立，每两年颁发一次，旨 在表彰对华语写作做出杰出贡献的文学作 品（含小说、散文、诗歌和戏剧）及其作者。纽曼奖以文学价值为唯一的衡量标准， 不论是成就卓越的名家或是后起之秀，任 何在世的坚持用华语写作的作者都有被推 荐的资格。

由知名专家组成的国际评委会通过透明的投票程序提名候选人并遴选出获奖者。获奖者将被授予 10,000 美元和奖匾一幅，并应邀到俄克拉荷马大学参与发奖仪式和学术活动。纽曼奖得益于纽曼夫妇的慷慨赞助，特此鸣谢。

Charter

The Newman Prize for Chinese Literature is awarded biennially in recognition of outstanding achievement in prose or poetry that best captures the human condition, and is conferred solely on the basis of literary merit. Any living author writing in Chinese is eligible, and the Prize may serve to crown a lifetime’s achievement or to direct attention to a developing body of work.

An international jury of distinguished experts will both nominate the candidates and select the winner, based on a transparent voting process. The winner will receive USD10,000 and a commemorative plaque, and will be invited to the University of Oklahoma to attend the award ceremony. The Prize honors Harold J. and Ruth Newman, whose generous endowment for a chair at the University of Oklahoma enabled the creation of the OU Institute for US-China Issues.