

Corvus (ฉีก) collects eight stories of rural doom by Jarupat Petcharawet written in a varied mix of Thai and Lao, a hybrid known as Isan, the regional dialect of the Thai Northeast. It was published in 2017 in the province of Maha Sarakham by Kakayia Publishing House—*kakayia* is the Isan name of a bamboo reading stand for palm leaf manuscripts written in obsolete scripts. Bridging the ancient and the contemporary, Jarupat’s stories give contemporary form to the spirit of ancient Isan prophetic literature. The book’s epigraph quotes from the transliteration of a palm leaf manuscript of *Time Increasingly Tapers* (กาลนับมือสั้น), a classic of prophetic verse:

Time increasingly tapers years become abnormal
Rabbits live underwater caught in fish traps
Mekong giant catfish ascend living on the hill
Monkeys migrate to make home in the river
Mice bite and strangle cats to death in droves
Little chickens carry a hawk in their beaks
Cockerels strike at snakes swallowing them alive

In *Corvus*, this apocalyptic time of reversal plays out in a twilight zone where humanity falls prey to nightmarish non-human and meta-human forces. More than an isolated, far-flung province that suffers the effects of encroaching systems of domination, Jarupat Country is a microcosm of national and global politics past and present. It is peopled by both victim and perpetrator, encroacher and encroached, at times within the same body.

The story excerpted in the translation sample, “Old Hunter, Short Handgun,” illustrates the two most outstanding facets of Jarupat Country: the realistic detail and the psychological horror. The former can be seen in the way the narrator describes village life, its politics, its flora and fauna.

The latter can be felt in the menace of king cobras who have returned to their former territory with a vengeance. These two facets intermingle to ground the horror as well as heighten the tension of village drama.

Jarupat Petcharawet is a rare example in contemporary Thai letters of a still-rooted rural writer recreating a rural world. Born in 1975, Jarupat lives and writes in his hometown near the Mekong river in Khemarat District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. All his characters' motivations, actions, and inactions are believably explained by their placement in this still-living world. The tongue they speak bleeds into the standard Thai narration, in which a small minority of the many words of Lao origin have a parenthetical translation next to them to help readers unfamiliar with those local terms that seldom appear in print.

Jarupat Petcharawet is also rare in being recognized by both the literary establishment and the literary anti-establishment. (On one side, *Corvus* was longlisted for the S.E.A. Write Award in 2017. On the other side, one of *Corvus*'s stories won Jarupat the Excellent Short Story Award from Chaika Rueang San in 2015). Thailand's color-coded politics bookended by two coups d'état in 2006 and 2014 left Thai writers deeply divided into anti-coup and coup-compliant camps, a division which persists well into the present. For emerging literary writers who want their work to be read and seen, it means any contest and magazine you submit your work to will probably be judged and edited by people firmly on either side of the divide. In this landscape, Jarupat has charted his own path by submitting his work to contests and magazines of all political persuasions while remaining unpatronized by any faction in particular. Even though it is clear where his political sympathies lie, and even though his stories can be read as an allegory of contemporary Thai politics, Jarupat steers clear of editorializing tendencies in his work: it tells you the political story without showing where to linger your gaze for a derivative or axiomatic insight. This has

resulted in wide critical recognition but very limited “pushing” of his work. Aside from *Corvus* and several other short stories published in contest-winning anthologies, Jarupat has quietly published two novels: *A Shadow Above the River* (เงาเหนือแม่น้ำ, 2019) and *Ancestral Waters* (สายน้ำบรรพชน, 2021).

Corvus is a remarkable accomplishment by an underserved writer of great promise. It possesses a thrilling vitality and compelling world-building that will likely grip the reader whether or not they are familiar with Lao village life on the Thai bank of the Mekong.

For years, I have been looking for detailed feedback as I keep going on my lonely path in literary translation from and into Isan. The ALTA Emerging Translator Mentorship is where I hope to get that feedback on the English-language side, where I have no one except my US-born husband to rely on for how my translation sounds. Now that I am a resident alien in the United States, it will be helpful to have a sense of where my “immigrant art” fits into this country’s literary production. Currently, I have no idea how to pitch to American publishers, or even what they might be looking for from someone like me. I will keep doing my work and sharing my gift either way, but this mentorship will enable me to do so more fruitfully and with a wider readership in mind, rather than the small circles of Thai studies scholars and people with a personal interest in Isan as it has been. By learning from someone who’s braved a similar path and turned passion into profession, I will be able to realize my future as a literary translator in this country.