

TOKYO UENO STATION

By [Yu Miri](#)

Translated by [Morgan Giles](#)

192 pp. Riverhead Books. 2020.

Tokyo Ueno Station, *the 2020 National Book Award winner in translated literature, is a novel of dislocation and despair. Written in a single, long exhalation with only a rare glyph or a few blank lines as a visual cue to rest, it is at once exhausting and riveting.* Perhaps ghosts don't experience breaks in consciousness (or breath). Yes, the narrator is a ghost. Haruko Mori tells of a pitiful life seared with regret: a [Pure Land Buddhist](#) by ancestry, the eldest of seven in Fukushima, a child fisherman and rice farmer. Haruko was luckless, according to his mother, and disappointing, according to his children. His wife, Setsuko, was stoic and capable. "We shared the same blood, but I meant no more to them than a stranger" (69). Haruko left his family to work in Tokyo as a laborer in construction, sleeping in the company dormitory. Life was rootless, monotonous, difficult, and then, tragic. Haruko ended up homeless in Ueno Imperial Gift Park across from Tokyo Ueno subway station, subject to youthful marauders who terrorized the homeless for sport, evictions during imperial drive-bys, and more. "To be homeless is to be ignored" (147). Is Haruko Mori alive but dismissed or dead and forgotten? —Lisa Thaler (author, *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*), 9 October 2022