

# Recommendations





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# Kim Eun-sook

- How her work achieved legendary  
rating in Korean drama

Weihua Gao

**K**im Eun-sook (Korean: 김은숙) is a South Korean screenwriter. She wrote the popular television dramas *Lovers in Paris* (2004), *On Air* (2008), *Secret Garden* (2010), *A Gentleman's Dignity* (2012), *The Heirs* (2013), *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God* (2016–2017), *Mr. Sunshine* (2018), *The King: Eternal Monarch* (2020), and *The Glory* (2022–2023).

*The Glory* season 2 came out on March 10th, 2023. This drama has been on the hot search on Weibo several times since it started. The series mainly talks about a victim of school violence who takes revenge on her bullies after taking up a job as a homeroom teacher at the elementary school of the bully's child. *The Glory 2* is currently dubbed in 17 different languages, subtitled in 34 different languages, and is ranked among the top viewed in over 80 different places worldwide. Recently, Kim won the honor of Best Screenplay at the 59th Baeksang Arts Awards.



Figure 1: Kim Eun-sook

Kim Eun-sook is a highly talented Korean scriptwriter with an exceptional writing style. Her ability to craft complex, multi-layered stories with compelling characters is unparalleled.

One of the most impressive aspects of Kim Eun-sook's writing is her ability to create unique and memorable characters. Each character is well-defined and has a distinct personality, making them stand out in their own right. She is particularly adept at crafting strong, independent female characters who defy traditional gender roles and expectations. Especially in the hottest Korean drama *The Glory*, which passed the Bechdel test<sup>1</sup> (Admin), all the female figures in this play are “regarded as humans”.

They have desires, ambitions, and selfishness. They love each other and manage to get revenge. They can be angry and feel the pain. And all of these have nothing to do with men. They are all individuals with independent personalities.

Another strength of Kim Eun-sook's writing is her ability to knit intricate plots that keep the audience engaged from start to finish. Her stories are often filled with unexpected twists and turns, which are both exciting and thought-provoking. The pacing of

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<sup>1</sup> Bechdel created a number of directives in connection to this test in her cartoon strip artworks, most especially in her *Dykes to Watch Out For*. These comic strip materials began to be distributed in 1985. In her other masterpiece, entitled *The Rule*, a set of guidelines for a feminist film was laid down such as:

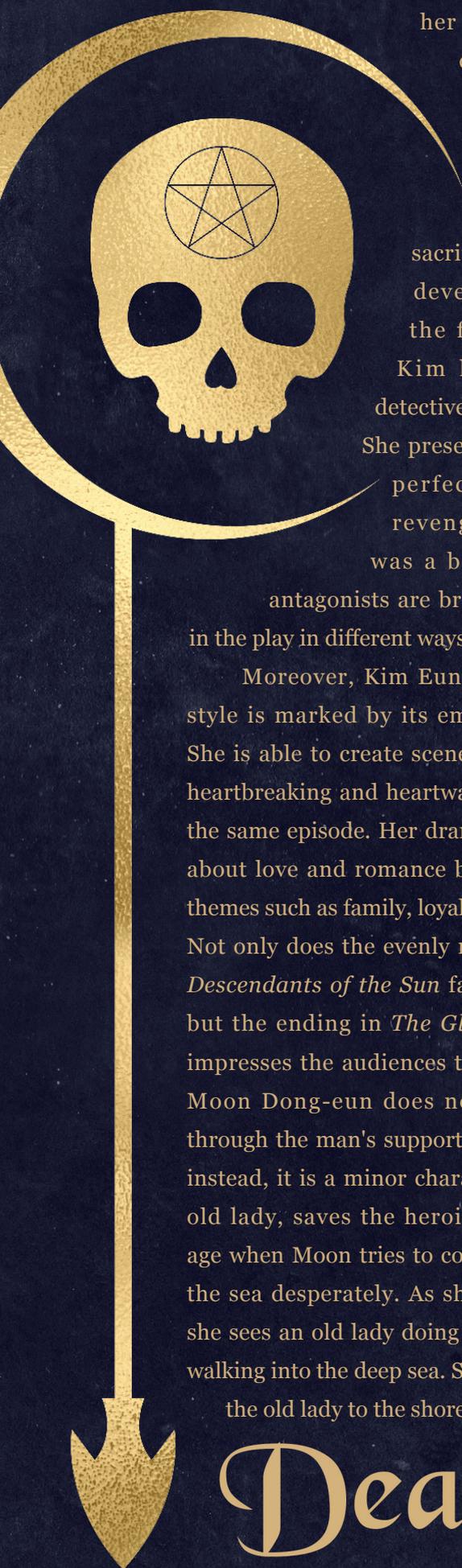
A film ought to have a couple of women

These women should talk interactively to each other

The topic of interaction should be about anything without mentioning about the opposite gender

This test classifies a film using these three standards. If a film fails to meet the just a single stipulation of this test then a film fails the test as a whole.





her dramas is also commendable, as she can keep the story moving forward without sacrificing character development. It is the first time that Kim has chosen a detective genre to write. She presented a logically perfect closed-loop revenge drama that was a big hit. All the antagonists are brought to justice in the play in different ways.

Moreover, Kim Eun-sook's writing style is marked by its emotional depth. She is able to create scenes that are both heartbreaking and heartwarming, often in the same episode. Her dramas are not just about love and romance but also explore themes such as family, loyalty, and sacrifice. Not only does the evenly matched love in *Descendants of the Sun* fascinate people, but the ending in *The Glory* also really impresses the audiences that the heroine Moon Dong-eun does not heal herself through the man's support conventionally; instead, it is a minor character, who is an old lady, saves the heroine at her early age when Moon tries to commit suicide in the sea desperately. As she is struggling, she sees an old lady doing the same thing, walking into the deep sea. She comes to pull the old lady to the shore.

# Death

**"I saw you wearing off your shoes just now."**

**"But kid, the water is too cold, right?"**

**"Let's wait until spring to die."**

But they know they won't leave this world; they catch a flash of hope from each other. This is the only hope that supported Moon to be alive until now.

Kim is skilled in creating some religious symbols. God in Korean culture is important and mysterious. In *The Lonely and Great God*, Lonely God hears a sincere prayer from the world and saves an injured woman from a car accident. One of the important lines in *The Glory* appears when the old lady tells Moon, who is tormented by her insane mother again after many years, "God makes mistakes, too." She means that God makes a mistake in bonding their mother-daughter relationship. This statement rescues Moon from

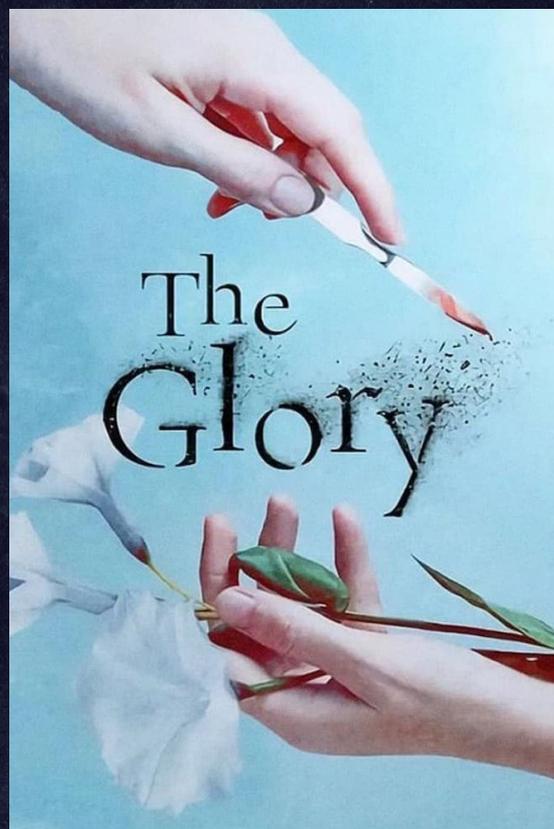


Figure 2: *The Glory*



Figure 3: Religious elements in *The Glory*

drug addict. The yellow-green tones of the ruined temple, the unreal Garden of Eden, with the iron frame as the foreground, block the upper end of the cross in the background and highlight the absence of God's presence. In contrast, the phones and flashing lights stick out from the windows on both sides instead of God's judgment. Therefore, from a religious perspective, the design of the scene about Sa-ra's Eden, where she has the forbidden fruit, is to satirize her identity as a daughter of the church more strongly. The reason why Sa-ra's acting impresses the audience so much is that she is doing the forbidden things in front of the cross, which is more explicit than poison since it is direct blasphemy against God.

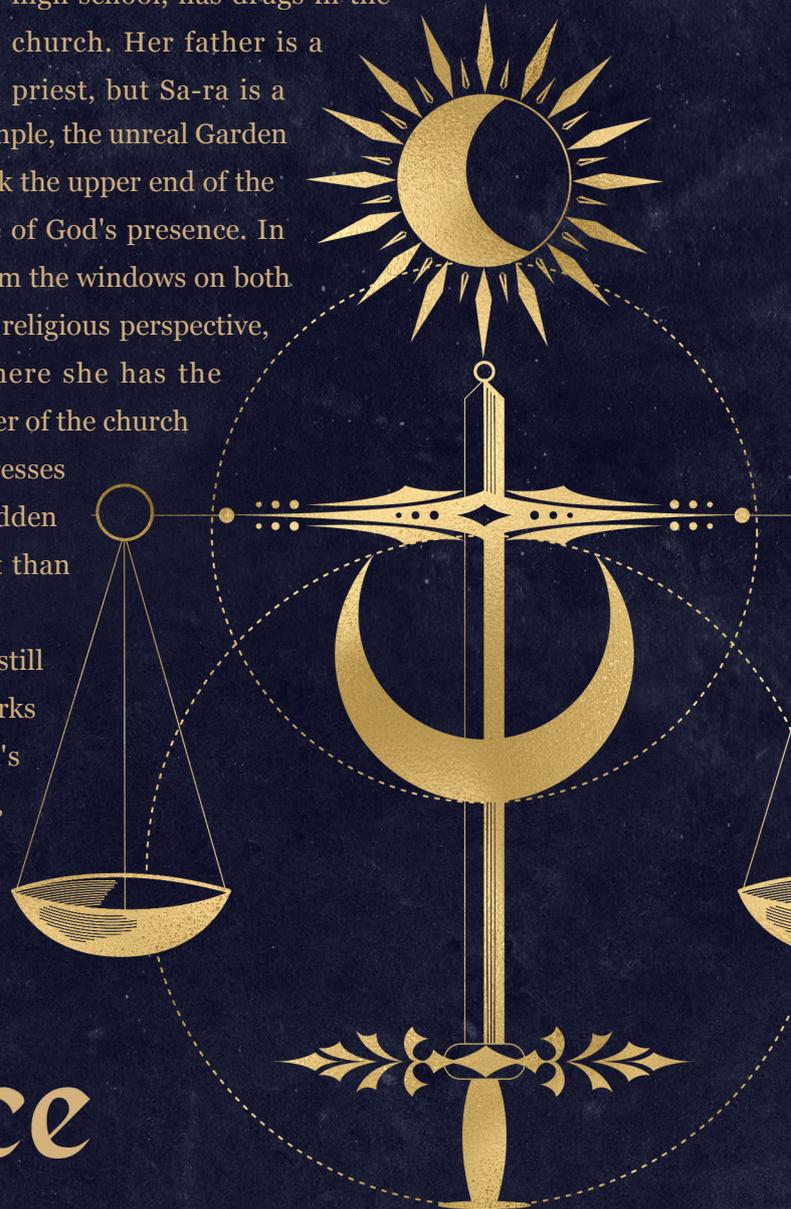
Composing many well-known scripts, Kim is still on her way to creating innovative and touching works for everyone. I highly recommend Kim Eun-sook's works to anyone who appreciates well-crafted, emotionally rich stories. Her ability to create vivid characters and fascinating plots and explore complex themes is genuinely remarkable, making her successful in the Korean drama field.

the lousy blood relationship. It's just God's mistake, and she can rewrite it. It feels like this is really a salvation for the East Asians who are often bound by blood ties.

Kim used many symbols of God and hell to create such a religious belief. In *The Glory* season one, Moon is bullied by a group of peers. She cannot defend herself and lies down on the ground. The light from the gym doorway looks like a cross, but God doesn't save her. The door is closed by those bully peers. Suddenly, the gym is full of darkness. Moon is disillusioned with the only hope of someone else to save her.

Another famous scene in *The Glory* is when Lee Sa-ra, a member of a bully group in high school, has drugs in the church. Her father is a priest, but Sa-ra is a

priest, but Sa-ra is a



# Justice

For your ear, there must  
be somewhere for  
*NEVERWHERE*<sup>1</sup>

— Recommendation of Audio Drama<sup>2</sup>  
*NEVERWHERE*

*Siyue Zhang*

Neil Gaiman's novel, *Neverwhere*, has been adapted into various formats, and the radio drama is the latest version. If you like the book *Neverwhere*, then the radio drama is a lovely addition to your library, which is a brilliant production that has made the leap from print to a sensory adventure by BBC Radio. Even though you haven't heard anything about *Neverwhere*, it can rapidly pull you into that fantastic realm.

The radio play, dramatized by Dirk Maggs, features Natalie Dormer (*Game of Thrones*), Benedict Cumberbatch (*Sherlock*), Christopher Lee, Anthony Head (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), and many others, including Neil Gaiman himself.

*Neverwhere* is an adult version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. If you have been to London, you will definitely have a sense of déjà vu while listening to this radio play. The story begins with a young businessman, Richard Mayhew, who has a good heart and does a dull job every day. One day, he finds bleeding on a London sidewalk when he stops to help a girl. His life is then forever altered, for he finds himself propelled into an alternate reality that exists in a subterranean

<sup>1</sup> A BBC Radio Full-Cast Dramatisation

<sup>2</sup> Audio dramas are entirely scripted, scored, and sound-designed performances, movies, or plays.





labyrinth of sewer canals and abandoned subway stations below the city. He has fallen through the cracks of reality and has landed somewhere different called London Below, opposite London Above, but sharing places. London Above has shades of London Below, and London Below has the darkness that London Above never has. The familiarity of London Above and London Below with each other is the best portrayal of real life, where human nature is always intertwined with good and evil, making the whole story more real.

The radio play removes some of the characters in the novel. Namely, it is a more streamlined story with a tighter and faster-paced plot. While the radio play retains the original dark feeling, this feeling does not make people feel suffocated and desperate because moments of tenderness, black humor, and deft characterizations have been created wonderfully through the lovely lines and successful interpretation of the voice actors. For instance, the protagonist, Richard, is witty. He whines internally when he first arrives in London Below and realizes he can't go back to London Above in the way of a “nonexistence diary”.

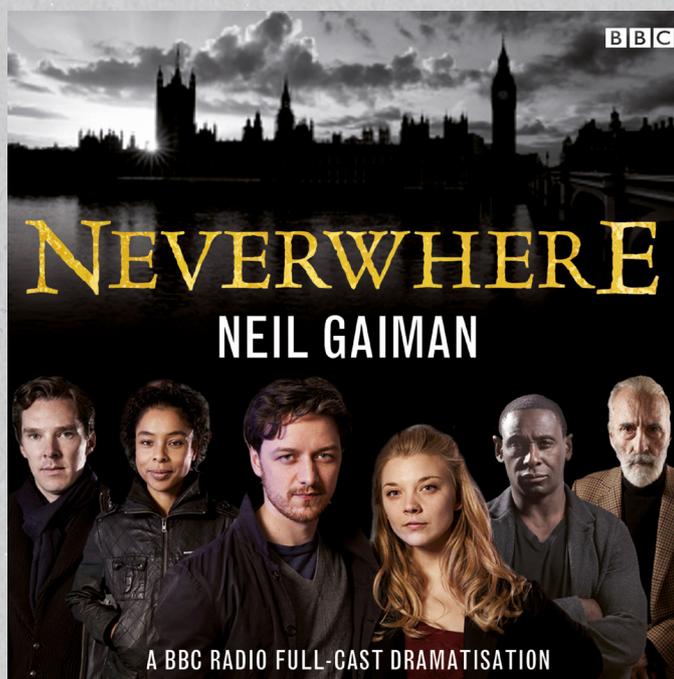


Figure 1: *Neverwhere* audio drama full cast

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Dear Nonexistence Diary,

On Friday, I had a job, a fiancée, a home, and a life that made sense. Then I found an injured girl bleeding on the pavement, and I tried to be a Good Samaritan. Now I've got no fiancée, no home, no job, and I'm walking around a couple of hundred feet under the streets of London with the life expectancy of a suicidal mayfly.

There are hundreds of people in this other London. London below. Thousands, maybe, people who come from here, or people who have fallen through the cracks in my reality. I'm wandering around with a girl belonging to the local aristocracy called Door. Hunter, her Amazon of bodyguard.

And the Marquis de Carabas, who's a frock-coated, fairly shirted know-all.

I want to go home. *Underlining the last sentence three times, please, in red ink.*

The Marquis said we might find a way to make that happen, but I just can't see how.

Maybe this mythical Angle is the answer.

”

This inner monologue not only clearly explains the characters and the background but also reflects Richard's lovely side. He wants to go home so badly that he will underline three times in red ink in this imaginary diary.

What makes *Neverwhere* more enchanting is the use of realistic sound effects incorporated into the drama. Aside from the masterful performance of the voice actors, the experience is delivered in a fashion that sparks the listener's imagination to run wild. When watching a movie or TV series, the viewer is limited to what the directors show on the screen. However, in radio drama, the slightest sound allows the imagination to come up with whatever the listener can associate the sound with. The story begins with a brief prologue. The sound of London rain in

the opening scene and the sound of footsteps are asymptotic, suggesting that London is cloudy and drizzly for days on end. Many other instances occur throughout the drama to help the listener be immersed in the setting and events taking place. This radio play does not use the conventional way of transitional sound effects to indicate the change of scenes, but more use of sound size, distance, and more realistic ambient sounds to shape the different scenarios. For example, the sound fades and echoes when the protagonist rides in the elevator, the elevator under the abyss of ten thousand feet.

Overall, this radio drama is absolutely phenomenal, compelling, and captivating. It is such an audio feast that audiences cannot tear their “ears” away. Even though the book alone would probably have been tremendous enough, the well-designed, fascinating sounds make the story a more marvelous, extraordinary, gripping experience as a perfect symbiosis that brings the story to life.



Figure 2: The cast and production team of the new *Neverwhere* spin-off

# 七 琴 Yue Ying

## 乐 璞 Mingyue Gao

A month ago, a video quietly got onto the Most Viewed list on Bilibili. Guqin master Ms. Guo Shunlong played the *Canghai Long Yin*, a legendary work that has a clear and gentle melody, conveying a sense of ephemeral movement and turmoil as if rising and descending like a dragon soaring in the heights and plunging into the depths, haunting audience's ears. When appreciating her consummate playing, you can see the sign of another maestro, Ms. Yue Ying. She is Guo's mother, who was famous for playing this song before she passed away.

Ms. Yue Ying is the earliest female Guqin player whose performances have sound recordings from the Republic of China era. But it is a pity that the details of her life are scanty because few people visited or conducted any in-depth investigation of her when she was alive. Meanwhile, among all her children, only Guo Shunlong and Guo Jingcheng systematically studied Guqin skills from Yue Ying, and they were seldom seen in public, making it trickier to know this great artist. Therefore, the meager materials about her and her family become more precious.

According to her family members, Yue Ying had been favored by her father from childhood due to her outstanding talent. Her father found a tutor to teach the prodigy literature, calligraphy, sword dance, painting, Kunqu, and Guqin, rendering an

art-filled growing atmosphere for her.

Even during the turbulent period, Yue Ying learned Guqin harder and made remarkable progress. Unfortunately, there was no showcase available for her at that time. Furthermore, after getting married, she was busy raising her seven kids, following her father's managing style with strict discipline. Finally, her children all succeeded. Although domestic trivia occupied her life, she never gave up playing the Guqin, her love.



Figure 1: Photo of Ms. Yue Ying

1 Guqin is a plucked seven-string traditional Chinese musical instrument made of a single piece of wood without any bridges. It has existed for over 3000 years and is preferred by the sages and literati. The sound of Guqin is quiet and elegant, and it is usually used to play a solo. It has been registered as one of the master pieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of the humanity by the United Nations' Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO).

2 Xia Lianju is a political figure and famed Buddhist layman of the Republic of China.



Figure 2: Photo of young Ms. Yue Ying

Unfortunately, the Red Guards came to Huazhi Hutong No. 1 on August 25, 1966 and ransacked all her belongings, including her Guqin. Her children only found some photos in the garbage and kept them until today. After this trauma, she lost her favorite thing and was devastated to be sick.

In 1972, her daughter Guo Shunlong spent 45 yuan at the Beijing Flower Market, commissioning a merchant to purchase a Luwang Qin 2. Xia Lianju's<sup>2</sup> grandson, Xia Fashen, provided the strings. Then Yue Ying recorded some Guqin music while she was ill and copied it for her seven children. It is a rare Guqin record from the Chinese mainland during the difficult and unsettled stage. The tune holds a hidden power, with every note transcending the test of time and unfolding the secret stories.

Ms. Yue Ying's music now stays in the *Old Eight - China Music Collection of Recordings*. The fall of a Guqin virtuoso of a generation has taken away the treasured skills of Guqin. The appearance of Ms. Guo Shunlong's video is undoubtedly a huge surprise to the people who love Ms. Yue Ying. The souls of these two glamorous ladies are connected and woven in rhythm. The Guqin goddess style resounds through ages, pure and graceful.

For all cultures in the world, only inheritance can make them survive for generations. When the baton is handed over to today's youth, why not move forward in the footsteps of the seniors? For Guqin, such a magnificent player should not be forgotten in the long course of history. Rejoicingly, Ms. Guo's appearance shows the light in the endless darkness.



# Exploring Friendship in the Musical Adaptation of *Flowers for Algernon*

Mingyue Gao

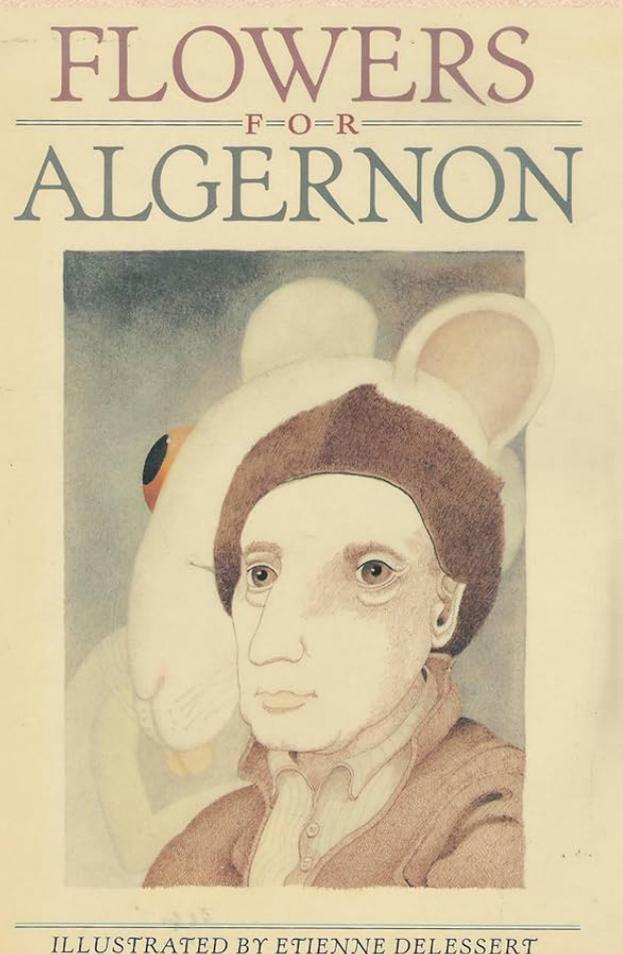
The musical *Flower for Algernon* is adapted from the Hugo Award-winning sci-fi by Daniel Keyes. It tells the story of Charlie Gordon's life. He suffered from other people's cold shoulder and unequal treatment due to his congenital low intelligence. His greatest wish was to become as "smart" as normal people. By chance, he is chosen to participate in an experiment to improve intelligence and has undergone the same brain surgery as a real little white mouse, Algernon. After the surgery, Charlie becomes much smarter than others. However, he finds that destiny makes mischief between him and everyone he cares about, and his life seems to move from brightness to gloom. Then, Charlie's IQ increases from low to high and back to low again. In the end, everything appears to change, but they just return to where they started.

Charles used to be silly and considered that these people who ridiculed him were his friends because he didn't understand the true meaning of their words, nor did he comprehend concepts like dignity, shame, equality, or mutual assistance. Previously, his so-called "friends" in the bakery made fun of Charlie, taunting him as a steppingstone to boost their delicate self-esteem, which rooted in their low social status. However, when Charlie becomes "clever", they are jealous because their plaything has reached a height they can never achieve. They cannot accept that their last, pitiful pride has been torn to shreds and that the

pain will not be relieved until Charlie is gone. But will it be reduced when Charlie dies?

When Charlie turns mentally disabled again, life at Donner's Bakery is like before. Charlie continues to work, repeating, "Charlie! Bread!" But the clerks' attitude towards him is slightly different from before. Until a new shop assistant bullies Charlie, those boys who once teased him drive the assistant out. They stand out, protecting him as his brothers. This is when Charlie might have acquired the friendship that he had always wanted but never got.

The musical drama makes full use of the actors' physical language and stage settings to enrich the connotations of this story and strongly resonate with audiences. Compared to the original book, the reordered plots and extra scenes about love and happiness express more humanistic warmth with the help of dramatic tension. Every song in the play was intriguing and provocative. In the lyrics, Charlie's life is like the final home to destiny, "So aren't we?" The scenario seems to have met before and may already be changed.



ILLUSTRATED BY ETIENNE DELESSERT  
Figure 1: The Cover of the Book *Flower for Algernon*



Figure 2: Musical drama *Flower for Algernon* stage photo