

THE COLUMBIA ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN KOREAN POETRY



Edited by David R. McCann

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Selected Poems of Kim Namjo, translated by David R. McCann and Hyunjae Yee Sallee. Ithaca, New York.

The Sound of My Waves, translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Young-Moo Kim. Ithaca, New York.

"Memory of the Graves," by Ko Un, translated by David R. McCann, was published in *jubilat* 6. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass., 2003.

Poems by Sŏ Chŏngju were published in *Quarterly Review of Literature* New Poetry Series 3; 1981, and *Unforgettable Things*, Sisayongosa, Seoul, 1986.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This book grew from a vision shared between Kwŏn Yŏngmin, professor of Korean literature at Seoul National University, and the late Professor Marshall R. Pihl, of the University of Hawaii. They sought to bring together an international team of scholars and translators of Korean literature, modern and premodern, to select a body of representative works and translate and publish them in a consistently reliable form. The result was, first, a meeting held at Seoul National University in the fall of 1994, in the course of which the overall plan for the project was developed, working groups for the various components were assembled, and the preliminary outline of genres, writers, and works was settled.

In the interval, Marshall Pihl passed away in May of 1995; his death was a blow to all who knew him and to those who admired his work as both a scholar and a remarkably gifted translator, and, most of all, a painful loss to those who knew him as a friend and colleague. This book is dedicated to his memory and to his inspiring example.

From the time when I first began to read and ask questions about Kim Sowŏl's poems during the two years that I spent teaching at the Andong Agriculture and Forestry High School, and on for the many years since then, I have been helped in my exploration of and work in Korean poetry by far too many people ever to hope to name them here in thanks. But I do want to extend special thanks to the many poets who have watched my antics with forbearance and to Young-Jun Lee, former senior editor at Minumsa Publishers in Seoul, now a graduate student in Korean literature at Harvard, for his many suggestions, interrogations, and help with this project.

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Translators' initials follow the poems.

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INTRODUCTION

David R. McCann

When I first began reading and translating the poems of Kim Sowöl, during my second year of teaching English at the Andong Agriculture and Forestry High School, whenever I was stumped I would ask for help from teachers at the school or members of the family where I lived or even strangers on the trains and buses I rode to Taegu and Seoul. Everyone I asked seemed to know his poems by heart and was glad to help me try to understand a word or appreciate a turn of phrase. To give a better sense of the poem, they would often recite it, and in fact, I only met one person who could not recite the poem “Azaleas.” How many American readers, though, have some of Frost’s poems by heart? Or Dickinson’s or Bishop’s or even some local favorite’s?

Korea’s modern poetry is filled with many different voices and styles, subjects and views, moves and countermoves, yet it still remains relatively unknown outside of Korea itself. One reason for this is linguistic. The Korean language, a rich medium for poetry, is, according to the American Foreign Service Institute’s ranking of foreign languages, among the most difficult for English speakers to learn. Another reason, though, is historic. Korea—Japanese colony, the setting of the Korean War and episodes of *M*A*S*H** on the television, location of stupendous economic growth in the southern half but continuing obscurity and occasional political alarms north of the thirty-eighth parallel: Who would look for poetry in such a land, and where would they begin? Yet there it has been, in Korea, from *sijo* songs and *kasa* poems of long ago, through the multiplying, rich array of twentieth-century works that have provided the occasion for this anthology.

Translators, Korean literary historians and critics, and, not least of all, the editor of this volume, have exerted themselves to select and present Korean poems in English that will appeal to and, at the same time, challenge readers. We fondly hope that this book, as an introduction to mod-

ern Korean poetry, may inspire readers to look for other books of poetry—best of all, other books by the poets included in this one.

MODERN KOREAN HISTORY: A NOTE

The history of modern Korean literature has been powerfully influenced by three related configurations of forces and events. The first was the complex sequence of efforts and counterefforts during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth to institute reforms in Korea that would enable it to survive and prosper in the world. Korean efforts during what is known as the Enlightenment Period—both successes and setbacks, but overall the impression of activity—drew the raptor attention of Japan, which had started the same process one generation earlier, prompted by the 1854 visit of Commodore Matthew Perry's squadron of Black Ships. Japanese notice led to the second event and condition, the annexation of Korea as a Japanese colony in 1910 and the installation of the colonial regime, which lasted until Korea's liberation in 1945 with Japan's defeat at the end of World War II. Immediately following liberation, however, Korea was partitioned between the United States and Russia, the beginning of a state of division, the third configuration, which has lasted until the present.

The division of Korea was originally intended to establish temporary zones north and south of the cartographically convenient thirty-eighth parallel for the United States and Russia, then allies, to accept the regional surrender of Japanese. The temporary convenience turned into the long-term Cold War standoff, however, as two separate states, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) were established south and north of the thirty-eighth parallel, respectively, in 1948. On 25 June 1950, the war broke out between them that quickly drew the two major powers, Russia and the United States, as well as a host of other participants—notably including the Peoples Republic of China—into its maelstrom.

Since the end of the Korean War, the DPRK has been increasingly isolated as it adhered to the ideological system of *Juche*, "or Self-ism," and struggled with American economic and political embargoes imposed at the end of the war and sustained since then. For the world of literature, this means that whatever has been produced in the DPRK is not adequately known, and for that reason, regrettably, poems by writers in the DPRK have not been included in this gathering.

MODERN KOREAN POETRY BEFORE 1950

Modern Korean poetry is generally said to have begun with the poem “Hae egesŏ sonyŏn ege” (From the sea to youth) published in 1908 in the journal *Sonyŏn* (Youth). The poem’s author was also the journal’s editor and publisher, Ch’oe Namsŏn (1890–1957), himself a youth just eighteen years old at the time. Ch’oe’s poem was a sort of verse-form editorial, one of an array of materials that the editor-publisher presented in the pages of the journal in his campaign to inspire modernizing change and reform among Korea’s youth. While the poem is granted a certain degree of significance in histories of Korean literature, it is justly criticized for its bombastic tone and awkward structure, and also for its thematic resemblance to the closing stanzas of Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” Two stanzas may be enough to give a sense of its style and tone. Each begins and ends with an onomatopoeic line that represents the voice of the sea.

From the Sea to Youth

Ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏk, sswa-a.

Who will not bow before me?

There is no one. If you know of any, then tell me.

Shihuang, Emperor of Qin; Napoleon, all you others:

Whoever, whoever at all, you shall bow down before me.

Come forward if you would test me.

Ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏk, t’yurŭrŭng, KKWAK!

Ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏk, sswa-a.

There on the land, all the people:

I despise them. The only ones I love,

Full of courage, are the pure-hearted youth.

Come, then sweetly to my arms and be embraced.

Come, and let me kiss you.

Ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏlsŏk, ch’ŏk, t’yurŭrŭng, KKWAK!

“From the Sea to Youth” does have the appearance of a poem, being arranged in stanzas, with the refrain in the first and last lines of each and lines of equal syllable count at corresponding locations throughout all

eight stanzas. The refrain, the voice of the sea, also manages to confer upon the young but self-confident speaker a sort of vatic weightiness of statement. Despite awkward limitations, the work stands as an important literary record of Korea's Enlightenment Period, close in subject matter to the didactic enthusiasms expressed in the many songs and patriotic verses published alongside editorials in Korean newspapers during the later 1890s and the first few years of the twentieth century. During the 1920s, similar features of tone and didactic intent are discernible in works by Im Hwa and other members of the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation.

From the annexation in 1910 until the Japanese defeat at the end of World War II, Korean literature was produced under increasingly conflicted circumstances. While the colonial government censored publications and imposed its policies on the education system, many of Korea's youth who had gone off to Japan to study encountered new ideas and news of the world, read Japanese translations of foreign literary works, and even engaged in activities that led to the 1919 Declaration of Korean Independence. Japan was both a place where the new could be encountered and explored, a model, in some respects, of a successful Asian response to European and American political and economic power, while at the same time the agent of Korea's national demise, the source of an array of disturbing controls, prohibitions, and affronts to the Korean people.

Japanese repression in Korea faltered briefly at the Independence Movement of 1 March 1919, when Koreans by the thousands took to the streets in peaceful demonstrations. Caught by surprise, the Japanese authorities regrouped and crushed the demonstrations. Because of Japanese censorship, news of the brutal suppression campaign was slow to reach the outside world, but eventually it did. The colonial administration eased its repressive policies in the 1920s. Koreans were allowed to organize literary and other groups, to publish, and, for a decade or so, there ensued a vigorous renaissance in Korean literary and intellectual activity.

The first commercially published book of poems was a collection of translations of nineteenth-century French poetry and some of the early W. B. Yeats. *Onoe ūi mudo* (The dance of anguish), published in 1921, was followed in 1923 by the translator Kim Ōk's own poems in *Haep'ari ūi norae* (Song of the medusa). Three other books of poems were published the next year, by Pak Chonghwa, Chu Yohan, and Pyŏn Yŏngno. In all of these collections there is much of setting suns, autumn colors, and a generally sad and wistful air, all seeming to resonate with atmospheric effects similar to Verlaine's "Chanson d'automne" ("Song of Autumn"), one of the poems

included in Kim Ōk's 1921 collection. In his introduction, Kim Ōk described French poetry as the zenith of the literary arts, a claim by extrapolation for the aesthetic validity of Korean poetry written with some sense of it. Two years later, in the preface written for *Haep'ari ūi norae* (Song of the medusa), the prominent novelist and man of letters Yi Kwangsu staked out a Korean frame of reference for those poems by his repeated allusions to the sadness and disappointment afflicting the "land of a people who wear white clothes," the traditional color of the peasant farmer's clothes as well as the customary color of clothes of mourning in Korea.

Among the many poets striving in the decade of the 1920s to fashion a new Korean poetic practice, two in particular stand out in the literary histories. Han Yongun (1879–1944), one of the signers of the 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence and drafter of the Declaration's codicils calling for nonviolent demonstrations, was sentenced to prison for his activities. He published his one collection of poems in 1926, *Nim ūi ch'immuk* (The silence of love), and then returned to his calling as a leader of the Korean Buddhist community. The poet Kim Sowŏl (1902–1934) likewise produced only one book, *Chindallaekkot* (Azaleas), published in 1925. Where Han deployed a long, cadenced verse line, and wrote about a vanished loved one in poems that were easily read as being about the Korean nation, Sowŏl took traditional folk-song rhythmic forms, diction, and themes and redeployed them in his best known lyrics.

After the establishment in 1925 of the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation, or KAPF, a number of writers pursued a socialist program in their works, as they sought to awaken the proletariat to the internal as well as external contradictions and complications in Korea's social and political institutions. A number of these writers "went North" in the period between liberation in 1945 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Their works were banned in the ROK until 1988, when the growing forces of democratization, combined with concern about international opinion during the approach of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, led to the lifting of the ban, along with an easing of other restrictive policies.

Much of the creative energy of the 1920s went into the journals that began publishing in considerable numbers in that decade. The most successful of these, *Kaehyŏk* (Creation), during its six-year, seventy-two-issue run from 1920 to 1926, brought out a wide variety of poems by dozens of young poets, as well as works of fiction and essays on the political and cultural scene. The broad range of political tastes and commitments accommodated in that journal is suggested by the publication in 1925 of a critique

written by Kim Kijin, an active member of KAPF, of the folk-song lyricism of Kim Sowŏl's poems, which had been appearing in the journal since 1922.

Literary journals continued to provide a significant medium for publishing in the 1930s. Two notable poets appeared: Yi Sang, whose striking modernist prose and poetic works continue to seem more modern than the oeuvre of anyone else in Korea before or since, and Chŏng Chiyong, both of whom worked into their writing their familiarity with the Japanese language and literature and the international cultural literary scene. These two poets, other translators of a variety of foreign works, and the many able practitioners of the short story, which seems to have reached a zenith during this politically repressive but aesthetically enlivened decade, stand in some contrast to a general poetry recession that followed the renaissance of the 1920s.

A new voice, in its way just as striking voice as Yi Sang's, was heard in the book *Hwasajip* (Flower snake collection), by Sŏ Chŏngju, published in 1941. With its echoes of Baudelaire, its earthy, sensual images, and, in the poem "Chahwasang" (Self-portrait), a strikingly direct, personal declaration of identity, Sŏ Chŏngju's first book of poems still occasioned admiring comment in poetry circles thirty or more years later. *Puengnokdam* (White deer lake), by Chŏng Chiyong, a much-admired modernist work that nevertheless remained unavailable in the ROK until 1988, was published that same year. And finally, the year 1945 saw No Ch'onmyŏng's *Ch'angbyŏn* (By the window), the first book by a woman poet to receive contemporary and continuing critical notice and popular attention.

KOREAN POETRY AFTER 1950

Kim Suyŏng (1921–1968) might be taken as the Janus standing between previous and later generations of modern poets. The publication date of his first book of poems, 1959, well after the end of the Korean War but also just prior to the Student Revolution of 1960 that toppled the Syngman Rhee regime, and the 1961 military coup d'état which brought Park Chung Hee to power, occupies a liminal space between the Japanese colonial occupation, the division of the country in which the United States for a time replaced Japan, and the repressive political regimes that set the limits around the political culture in the ROK for nearly three decades. But there is something else to Kim Suyŏng and his poetry that distinguishes it from all that had come before and most of what followed—an

ironic tone coupled with recurrent flickerings of self-doubt. No other Korean poet articulated that distinguishing feature of the modern more apprehensively than Kim Suyŏng. In his case, the sense of irony is not to be linked to detachment from the social and political issues of the day. His poems from the early 1960s are imbued with a sense of the physical and psychic dislocations of the Korean War, which Kim spent in a prisoner of war camp, and then the social and cultural dislocations brought on by the Student Revolution of 1960, the 1960–1961 democratic interlude, and the increasingly repressive atmosphere of the Park Chung Hee years. While a number of Kim Suyŏng's poems deploy phrases or images that reflect quite directly the uncertainties of the time, even a poem that seems as politically and socially disconnected as his very last, "P'ul" (Grass), is read allegorically as an account of the Korean people's resistance to oppressive political authority. Might not the foreign reader, though, not brought up to read literary works as allegorical representations of Korean history, find the repetitive word play of the poem a more arresting feature? Or perhaps read it in a different allegorical direction, as Kim Sowŏl's "Chindallaekkot" (Azaleas) or Han Yongun's "Narutpae wa haengin" (Ferryboat and traveler) might also be, as an account of the poem's own mode of existence?

Other poets took up contemporary political and social themes with other voices and perspectives. Kim Chiha, born in 1941, wrote poems pointedly criticizing the policies of the Park Chung Hee regime, poems like "In Burning Thirst" that became anthems in the student movement. He also wrote and performed in narrative poems like "Sori ūi naeryŏk" (Story of a sound) that took the Korean *p'ansori* and mask-dance genres as sources. His 1970 satire "*Ojŏk*" (The five thieves), which mocked the cupidity of the military, business, and political leaders of Korea, got Kim in trouble with the authorities at least as much for the title itself as for the content of the poem, as the term "*Ojŏk*" refers in Korea's history books to the five government ministers implicated in the signing over of Korean national autonomy to the Japanese in 1910. Shin Kyŏngnim's 1973 collection *Nongmu* (Farmer's dance), awarded the first Manhae Prize for Literature established by the publishing company and literary journal *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* (Creation and criticism), told in a series of sketches and vignettes the stories of the marginalized urban and rural working class, the farmers and factory workers whose lives had been made not quite desperate, but hard, by the antilabor economic and political policies of the Park regime. Where Kim Chiha found in traditional performance genres a powerful medium for the expression of political ideas, Shin explored the

resources of the contemporary Korean language, eschewing the Chinese characters and Sino-Korean vocabulary still in general use at the time, giving vernacular expression to the individual townsfolk and city people who appeared, here and there as if at a local market, in his poems.

The poet Ko Ŭn, born in 1933, became an internationally known public figure, the most prolific of any Korean poet, extraordinarily energetic in his writing, traveling, lecturing and performance schedules. Active in the antigovernment protest movements of the 1970s and 1980s, he was imprisoned several times, but with the changes in political culture of the ROK in the last decade, he emerged as a poet, writer, and public figure of unusually broad and varied capacities. Close to the government of President Kim Dae Jung, he accompanied the ROK delegation to the DPRK in June of 2000 and is pictured in the famous photograph of the two delegations singing the “Reunification Song” that seemed, at the time, such a harbinger of political change on the peninsula.

Poets and other writers who took the political, social, and economic contradictions of the 1960s and 1970s as their primary focus were known by the loose term *ch’amyŏp’a* (or commitment group). As in Korean writing circles in the 1920s, there was also another group of writers defined in contrast as the *sunsup’a* (pure [literature] group). The poet Sŏ Chŏngju (1915–2000) was a prominent member of the latter group. Sŏ described trying in his poetry to convey the *maeryŏk* (charm) of life, which might lead one to infer that he stayed quite aloof from political disputes, but at key moments during the Japanese occupation, the Syngman Rhee regime, the Park regime, and—vividly in many people’s minds—during the Chun Doo Hwan era in the 1980s, Sŏ delivered himself of proestablishment scribbles and remarks that turned others against him. Yet, as he had begun with his 1941 *Hwasajip* (Flower snake collection), he remained throughout his long and productive career a protean figure.

Although a number of women poets appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, given the close links between Korean university literature departments and the critical establishment, it is perhaps symptomatic of the situation for women writers in Korea that Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yŏnsei University, three of the top five Korean universities, have never had a tenured woman faculty member in their departments of Korean literature. The one exception among leading universities in that regard, Sŏgang University, does have one tenured woman professor, the poet Kim Sŭnghŭi.

Kim Namjo was almost alone as a woman poet during the 1960s in being not only popular with a general reading public, but also in having her work published in many of the leading literary journals of the day. While it may seem facile to suggest that the new generation of Korean women writers—whose sisters in the realm of fiction have come to dominate the literary market place, to the active chagrin of the still largely male critical establishment—were seeking language, subject, and voice independent of the literary, political, and cultural realms dominated by men throughout the preceding decades of the twentieth century, one of the more recently prominent women poets, Kim Hyesun, has observed to her translator, Jiwon Shin, that when she was beginning to explore ways to develop a narrative style in her poetry, there were literally no contemporary models for her to work with or against, and that she had to turn to the oral narrative tradition.

The National Literature Movement, organized in the 1980s, sought to refocus effort and attention on the one issue that, it was felt, defined Korea's national political life, the continued division of the country. There were bizarre moments in the group's history, such as the expulsion of Kim Chi Ha for his essays imploring university students not to kill themselves in their antigovernment protests, followed by the poet's protest that he had not even known he was a member of the organization in the first place. Nevertheless, the movement had considerable influence in Korea's literary history, as it marked a point around which writers took action as a polity rather than as isolated individuals or groups of individuals.

As the 1980s drew away from the Kwangju Uprising, in which government troops sent to suppress protesting citizens killed hundreds of them, the decade became increasingly defined as a period when writers took unambiguous stands on politics and human-rights issues, many against the government of Chun Doo Hwan, and a few in support. New voices and subjects began to appear in the latter years of the 1980s, first in writing about the world of the laboring class, then in works by members of the laboring class—such as the poems of Pak Nohae—and in works that dealt with Kwangju and other similarly violent moments in Korea's modern history.

With substantial changes in the domestic political climate in South Korea giving freer reign to the forces of a voracious reading market, poetry, stories, essays, confessional literature, and novels are published in astonishing numbers. Several collections of poetry, for example, have sold over one million copies. The most popular twentieth-century poets, such

as Kim Sowŏl or Yun Tongju, whose works have been included in the Korean literature textbooks for years, have sold many millions more, but in oftentimes unauthorized editions, so that the total sales numbers cannot be accurately determined.

In all its myriad facets, a wide range in subject, tone, poetic shape, and political or other perspective had been a constant feature of Korean literature throughout the twentieth century, confined though it was by the tectonics of the Japanese occupation, national division, or domestic political suppression, or reduced in subsequent constructions of these events and conditions as chapters in the modern Korean historical narrative. The tremendous sense of release that has taken place in South Korea, starting in the late 1980s, and that may find different forms through which to emerge eventually in the North as well, bursts out in one of Ko Ŭn's most gloriously celebratory poems:

Great Springtime (1986)

Warm east winds blow,
the earth is melting.
It's a sight to open
the eyes of the blind
Kids are clustering
close like chicks, underground insects
are wriggling restless too.
Just look! The fish rising
from deeper water
are using their backs
to break the ice!
How on earth
Can heaven keep silent?
The wild goose fathers
are leading their broods
away towards the Sungari River.
Now in this land
wonders are happening.
One great springtime is coming!

PART ONE

CHU YOHAN (1900–1980)

Chu Yohan was born in P'yŏngyang and attended school in Tokyo and college in Shanghai. His 1924 collection, *Arŭmdaun saebyŏk* (The beautiful dawn), was one of the first ten books of poetry published in Korea in the twentieth century. A variously prolific poet, Chu published "*Pullori*" ("Fireworks") in the literary journal *Cb'angjo* (Creation) in 1919, notable for its prose poem form and redolent of the aestheticism then intriguing Korean writers. His later poems are known for their return to Korean folk-song rhythmic patterns, diction, and subject matter, while at the same time in a folk song-style poem such as "The Sound of Rain," the reader can also sense the presence of such continental traces as Verlaine's "*Il pleur de mon coeur*" ("It Is Raining in My Heart"). Chu was an important figure in the modern Korean literary world, though not often translated, perhaps because his works came to focus so deliberately on the interior realms of the Korean language, verse forms, and motifs.

Translations by Kyung-Ja Chun and by Chong Bum Kim

Fireworks

Ah, the day is waning, in the western sky, over the lonely river, the even pinkish glow is fading . . . ah, when the sun sets, when the sun sets, night will return without fail. I weep alone beneath an apricot tree, but today is the eighth of April,* and the sound of a crowd flooding the boulevard betokens festivities to come, so why am I the only one unable to stifle the tears welling up in my heart?

* By the Lunar Calendar, April 8 is Buddha's Birthday.

Ah, it's dancing, it's dancing, the blood red flame, it's dancing. Peering down from the hushed castle gate, the odor of water, the odor of sand, when the torch, biting the night, biting the sky, as if still hungering, bites and tears at its own flesh, a solitary youth weighted with a darkened heart hurls his blue dream of yesterday into the river, yet will the heartless waves suspend its shadow in the flow? Ah, there never was a flower that does not wilt once cut, yet the thought of my love departed kills the life in my heart. Ah, well, what's to be done, shall I burn this heart, shall I slay this sorrow with that flame? Yesterday, again, dragging my aching feet, I went to her grave to find the flowers wasted by winter had given way to unforeseen blooms. Will love's spring ever return, I wonder? Ah, with my heart freely bared, this night, into this water . . . might someone take pity on me . . . just then: "T'ung!" "T'ang!" Roman candles burst, spewing fiery blossoms, startled me back to my senses, the hubbub of the spectators seems to mock me, to scold me. Ah, with ever deeper passion I want to live, even submerged in smoke like yon flames, even in the agony of suffocating flames, I want to lead a fiery life, and the sudden throb of the heart is none but my own. . . .

When the warm April wind rushes across the river, high on the hill of Ch'ongnyu Tower by Moran Peak, a dusky crowd of people sways, with each burst of wind the flame-dyed waves burn with mad laughter, spooked fish take cover in the sand, waves slap the ships broadside, figures pace to and fro with a drowsy rhythm—flickering shadows, rising peals of laughter beneath lanterns hanging overhead, a child *kisaeng** warbles at the top of her voice, the fireworks igniting sudden lust now are tiresome, one glass, another glass, yet another, the endless wine no longer welcome, lying listless in the filthy bottom of a boat, idle tears redden my eyes, weary of the incessant drumming, men with leering eyes leap from the

* *A female performer and entertainer; not unlike the Japanese geisha.*

boat, unable to endure their rekindled desire, as the dying candles left behind doze on the hems of rumpled skirts, the squeaking of the oars, as if the sound signified something, presses still harder on my heart. . . .

Ah, the river waters are laughing, laughing, a grotesque laugh it is, the laugh an icy river laughs looking up at a pitch dark sky. Ah, the boat is gaining, the boat is gaining, sadly, sadly squeaking at every gush of wind, the boat is gaining. . . .

Row the boat, all the way to Nŭngna Island asleep there in the distance, slice through the Taedong's swift currents. Turn your boat straight toward the hill where your beloved stands barefoot waiting. What of the cold wind rising in the waves' wake? What of the noise of that grotesque laughter? What—for you—of the darkened heart of a youth bereft of love, though without shadows there can be no light. Oh, only do not forgo this your day of certainty. Oh, oh, burn, burn! This very night! Your red torch, your red lips, your eyes, and your red tears. . . .

Life, Death

Life is a sinking sun, a sea of blood,
A strong clamoring sky.
Death is a dawn, a pale mist,
A pure breath, clad in mourning white.

Life is a flickering candle.
Death is a shining diamond.
Life is a comedy of sorrow.
Death is a beautiful tragedy.

When seething waves swallow the mountain
The wind's lament wailing on the mast,
Onto night snows heaping in soundless drifts
Feathery moonbeams cast their full laughter.

Life is a path sloping toward Death.
 Death is the dawn of a new life.
 Ah, the intricately woven thread of Death
 A sacred shine bestows on the deluge of heavy life.
 (KJC)

The Sound of Rain

Rain is falling.
 The night quietly spreads its feathers,
 And the rain whispers in the yard
 Like little chicks chirping secretly.

The waning moon was thread-thin,
 And a warm breeze blew
 As if spring was about to flow down from the stars.
 But today the rain falls on this dark night.

Rain is falling.
 Like a kind guest, the rain falls.
 I open the window to greet him,
 But hidden in the whispering, the rain falls.

Rain is falling
 In the yard, outside the window, on the roof.
 Planting in my heart
 Joyful news no one knows, rain is falling.

To Catch the Moon

One spring day, to catch the moon
 Treading on blue-green shadows, I set out.
 But there was only the wind blowing across the grass on
 the hillside,
 And the moon had crossed the water.
 One spring day, to catch the moon

Scattering on the golden waves, I rowed.
But there was only the lonely sound of water washing
 the stones,
And the waning moon had already crossed the fields and
 ridges.

One spring day, to catch the moon
Climbing the night, I ascended the sky.
But the moon revealed only half its face:
“How would you have come if not for the dream?”

One spring day, to catch the moon
Wandering through dreams, I went seeking,
but even before I arrived, the stars blocked my path:
“How would you have come if not for the dream?”
(CBK)

KIM SOWŎL (1902–1934)

Kim Sowŏl was born in Kusŏng, North P'yŏngan Province, near P'yŏngyang and attended the progressive Osan Middle School, where he met the teacher and literary mentor Kim Ŏk. He went to Paejae Academy in Seoul, and then, briefly or perhaps not at all—the records have been lost—to Tokyo Commercial College before returning to Seoul for a brief try at the literary life. Despite the publication of his book *Chindallaekkot* (Azaleas) in 1925, he abandoned the literary scene, returned to Namsi to run the branch office of the Tonga Daily newspaper, fell into increasingly destructive drinking, and died of an opium overdose.

Sowŏl's one book-length collection, *Chindallaekkot* (Azaleas), just the fourteenth book of poems published in Korea in the twentieth century, worked in the small-scale, minor-key realms of folk song-style lyricism with a remarkable sense of line, phrase, diction, and tone. The title poem is an exquisitely balanced yet oddly unsettling lyric with a prophetic rather than reminiscent point of view. Formerly presented in Korean school textbooks as expressive of the resigned sadness of the Korean people in the 1920s following the unsuccessful demonstrations of 1 March 1919 for Korean independence, it is now appreciated for its aesthetic, literary qualities rather than its nationalistic sentiments.

Kim Kijin, a leftist writer in the 1920s, criticized Sowŏl's poetry for its neglect of social issues, saying that, apart from a certain prettiness of expression in the folk-song style, there was not much to it. However, Sowŏl's teacher and literary mentor Kim Ŏk, writing a remembrance after Sowŏl's possibly intentional death by opium overdose, recalled his former student's stubborn pursuit of deliberately Korean forms of expression during a period when other writers were pursuing all the latest foreign literary fashions. Kim Ŏk also noted Sowŏl's innovation in the poem "Kanŭn kil" ("The Road Away"), in which the verse line is broken up into separate phrases, printed in sequence down the page. Whether read as expressions

of nationalist sentiment, as a young man's attempts to express his own feelings, or simply as the effort to write poems, Sowöl's works have exerted a powerful spell on generations of Korean readers.

Translated by David R. McCann

Azaleas

When you go away
Sick of seeing me,
I shall let you go gently, no words.

From Mount Yak in Yöngbyön
An armful of azaleas
I shall gather and scatter on your path.

Step by step away
On the flowers lying before you,
Tread softly, deeply, and go.

When you go away,
Sick of seeing me,
though I die; No, I shall not shed a tear.

A Day Long After

If you seek me on some day long after,
Then I might say "I have forgotten."

If you blame me in your heart,
"Missing you so, I have forgotten."

In your heart if you blame me still,
"I could not believe, so I have forgotten."

Not forgetting today or yesterday;
Some day long after, "I have forgotten," I'd say.

The Golden Meadow

Meadow,
 Meadow,
 Golden meadow:
 Deep, deep in the mountains a burning fire,
 The golden meadow round my love's tomb.
 Spring has come, the light of spring has come
 Even to the tips of the willow's thread-like branches.
 Spring light has come, the day of spring has come
 Deep, deep in the mountains
 To the golden meadow.

Mountain Flowers

Flowers on the mountain bloom,
 The flowers bloom.
 Fall, spring, summer through
 The flowers bloom.

High on the mountain,
 Up on the mountain
 The flowers are blooming
 So far away, so far.

One small bird
 Sings high on the mountain.
 Friend of the flowers,
 It lives on the mountain.

Flowers on the mountain
 Fall, flowers fall.
 Spring, summer, autumn through
 The flowers fall.

The Road Away

Miss you.
Should I say it,
I would only miss you more.

Yet shall I
just go,
once again . . .

Ravens on the far mountain,
And in the fields, ravens caw
While the sun sinks lower
On the western hills.

River waters flowing, tumbling
Down say "Come on, let's go
Quickly now," and still,
And still they flow away.

Cigarette

My thoughts turn faithfully to my cigarette,
conspirator-friend for one deep, long breath.
There is a tale told somewhere, I have heard,
it was tobacco leaves that grew on the tomb
of a girl born and straightway seized by death
in a time that has long been forgotten.
Listless dull smoke drifts before me, traces
of a flame that, just kindled,
begins to fade.
O how my heart torments me! If only
these many long, desolate, empty days
might be consumed as surely as you!

The Cuckoo

Cuckoo,

Cuckoo:

My little brothers,

Cuckoo.

Our sister who lived by the Chindu River
Returns to the village
By the river and cries.

Long ago and far away
In our land,
Our sister who lived by the Chindu River
Was killed by step-mother's jealousy.

Call out, *Oh sister,*
Oh, in sadness call!
Our sister who was killed by jealous hate,
Died and became the cuckoo.

Even in death remembering,
Always remembering the nine brothers left behind,
When others are sleeping, deep in the night
Moving from hill to hill she sadly calls.

The Road

Again last night
at a country inn
crows cried at the dawn.

Today
how many miles
again lead where?

Away to the mountains,
to the plains?
With no place that calls me
I go nowhere.

Don't talk of my home,
Chŏngju, Kwaksan,
while the train and the boat go there.

Hear me, wild geese in the sky:
Is there a road in the air
that you travel so sure?

Hear me, wild geese in the sky:
I stand at the center of the crossroads.
Again and again the paths branch,
but no way is mine.

Forsaken

In a dream I cried out
awakened
and came out to the field.

In the field
a gentle misting rain,
frogs croaking in deepening shadows.

I hesitate, hands clasped behind me,
nervously scanning the ground

when someone calls
from within the firefly-teeming forest
"I'm going. Stay well!"
and sings.

YI SANGHWA (1901–1943)

Yi Sanghwa was born in the city of Taegu, North Kyöngsang Province, and attended Kyöngsöng Central School. He later became a member of the *Paekcho* (White tide) literary group. A relatively obscure poet in his time, Yi's poems were gathered and published after his death, in 1951. Still, he left several poems for which he is generally admired, poems that show something of the influence of French symbolism in Korean literary circles in the 1920s. Yi was also a founding member of KAPF, the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation, and a member of the Socialist Writers Association. His poem "Will Spring Return to Stolen Fields," published, though censored, in the magazine *Kaebryök* (The creation) in 1926, is the work for which he is remembered and anthologized as a Korean nationalist poet. Bold as the poem is in its evocation of the Korean countryside and its even somewhat shamanistic overtones, as if it were a spell to drive out the demon that has taken possession of Korea, it is also a striking tour de force of language, image, and poetic rhythm. The poem can be read as an account of the poet's, or the people's, rebirth. The image of the child and mother together at the conclusion of the poem stand in quite striking contrast to later representations, in the 1960s and 1970s during President Park Chung Hee's era in particular, of Korea as a sternly protective *fatherland* (*choguk*) in place of the motherland (*moguk*) of Yi Sanghwa's poem.

Translated by David R. McCann

Will Spring Return to Stolen Fields?

Now another's land—Will spring return again to stolen
fields?

My body bathed in sunlight,
I walk and walk in a dream
A path parting the fields like a comb to where blue sky
and green earth merge.

Sky, and Earth, mouths tight shut:
I know in my heart I have not come on my own.
Have you drawn me out? Is there someone who calls
me? Answer and ease me!

The winds whisper in my ear
Don't pause even one step. They tug at my clothes,
While over the clouds a lark sings like the girl beyond
the hedge.

Barley fields, full and rich with grain:
In the gentle rains that fell past midnight
You have washed and coiled your luxuriant hair. Even
my cares feel lifted.

Alone, as I press on in my flight,
The gentle streams holding the thirsty fields
Sing a nursing song as they dance along, light-
shouldered.

Swallow and butterfly, alight!
You must greet the cockscomb and honeysuckle.
I seek the fields the young girl gleaned, her black oiled
hair shining.

Put the hoe in my hand.
I want to tread this earth, soft and full as a breast,
Until my ankles ache and the good sweat runs down.

My soul, like a child coming out by the river,
Running free and unbounded: What are you
seeking?

Where are you going? Give me an answer! How can you
feel such joy?

My body wears a green scent, as on the verge
Between green laughter and green sorrow I have walked
all day
Until my legs have gone lame, and still the spring seems
spirited away.

Because now, these fields have been stolen, and the
spring itself may be stolen too.

HAN YONG'UN (1879-1944)

Han Yong'un was born in Hongsŏng, South Ch'ungch'ŏng Province, and attended a local *sŏdang*, or Confucian academy. Also known by his Buddhist name, Manhae, Han was active in the anti-Japanese, guerrilla movement known as the Righteous Armies near the turn of the century. He went to Paektam Temple, joined the Buddhist orders in 1905, and became an active leader of Korean Buddhists. Han was editor and contributor to the Buddhist newsletter *Yusim*, wrote the nonviolent pledges, the codicils to the 1919 Declaration of Korean Independence, and was imprisoned for three years (1919-1922) for his participation in the March First Independence Movement. While in prison he wrote a series of poems in Chinese, and upon his release and journey back to Paektam Temple, he wrote (in Korean) the poems published as *Nim ūi ch'immuk* (The silence of love) in 1926. Han is viewed as someone who refused to make any accommodations to the Japanese occupation and its oftentimes humiliating demands, such as the 1939 order that Korean people take Japanese names.

The subject of spiritual and profane love, which in Han's poems also serves as an evocation of Korea, and his long verse lines and extended phrases reflect Han's reading of the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1913, whose poems were translated into Korean by Kim Ŏk and others. Han's homage to Tagore is directly registered in the poem "Upon Reading Tagore's 'The Gardener.'" The subject, tone, and images of Han's poems are also strikingly reminiscent of a book of poems by an obscure British poet, Edmond Holmes (1850-1936), for many years the Inspector of Schools for the Oxford district, and later for all of Great Britain, whose collection of sonnets, published in 1898, also bore the title *The Silence of Love*.

Translated by Sammy Solberg

(Preface)

The loved one is not only the beloved; it is also everything yearned for. If all humankind is the beloved for Sakyamuni, philosophy is the beloved for Kant. If the gentle spring rain is the beloved for the rose, then Italy is the beloved for Mazzini. The loved one is not only that which is loved but also that which loves.

If love be freedom, then the beloved also is freedom. But aren't you all bound helplessly by the high-sounding name of freedom? You have a love, even you? If so, it is no love, it is your shadow.

As I write these poems I am thinking of the lambs wandering the darkening plain searching for their lost way home.

The Author

Your Silence

You have gone. Ah, you have gone.
 Shattering the verdant brilliance of the mountain, hard
 as it might be, cutting off all
 ties, gone along the narrow path that opens out to the
 maple grove.
 The old vows, firm and splendid as flowers of golden
 metal, have turned to icy dust
 and flown off in the breath of a sigh.
 The memory of a sharp first *kiss* reversed the compass
 needle of my fate, stepped backward and faded.
 I am deafened by your perfumed sounds and blinded by
 your flower-like face.
 Love too is man's lot; even if we have not neglected to
 prepare with fear of parting at
 meeting, parting comes upon us unawares and the
 startled heart bursts with a fresh sorrow.
 However, since I know that to make parting the font of
 needless tears is to shatter one's own love, I transferred
 the uncontrollable power of sadness and poured it over
 my forelock to quench the old ill with a fresh hope.

Just as we fear parting when we meet, we believe we will
meet again when we part.
Ah, even though you are gone I have never said
goodbye.
The sad melody of my song of love curls around your
silence.

I Cannot Know

The paulownia leaf that gently falls, rippling the
windless air—whose footprint is it?
The glimpse of blue sky seen through rents in the
ominous black clouds driven away
by the west wind after the tedium of the long rains—
whose face is it?
The mysterious perfume that caresses the quiet sky over
the old stupa on its way from the green moss on the
tree in the remote dell which has not even a
flower—whose breath is it?
The small feshet, its source no one knows where, that
winding splashes against the stones—whose song is it?
The afterglow which beautifies the setting sun with
hands like white jade caressing
the endless heavens and heel like lotus flowers stepping
across the boundless seas—whose poem is it?
The ash left after burning becomes oil again; my breast
that burns and never stops—whose night does this
weak lamp watch?

Artist

I am a clumsy painter.
Lying on my bed, sleep not coming, finger tracing across
my chest, I limned your nose, your lips, even the
dimples that spring in your cheeks.

Then, trying to limn the slight smile that ever hovers
 round your eyes I rub it out a hundred times over.

I am not a sure singer.
 After the neighbors had all come home and the crying of
 the insects was stilled, I
 was about to sing the song you taught me when I
 became shy of the dozing cat, and I dared not;
 And so, as the passing wind fluttered the paper of the
 door, I joined quietly in.

I don't seem to have the makings of a lyric poet.
 "Joy," "sorrow," "love": I don't want to write about such
 things.
 Your face, your voice, your carriage, I want to write
 about those as they are;
 I also will write about your house, your bed, even the
 little pebbles in your flower garden.

Ferryboat and the Traveler

I am the ferryboat
 You the traveler.

You tread on me with muddy feet,
 I embrace you and cross over the water.
 When I embrace you, deeps or shallows or fast shooting
 rapids I can cross over.

When you don't come I wait dark to dawn, disdaining
 the chill wind, the wet of snow and rain;
 Once over the water you go on without even a glance
 back to me.

No matter, I know that sooner or later you will come
 while I wait for you, day after day I go on growing older.

I am the ferryboat
You the traveler.

Your Touch

While your love is hotter than a fire that will melt steel,
your touch is cold.
While I've met with cold things in this world, I've yet to
meet with anything so cold as your touch.

The fall wind itself is not colder than your touch as it
comes rustling the leaves fallen on a
frosty morning when chrysanthemum are in bloom.
Even the snow piled high on the ice of a winter night is
not colder than your touch, when the moon is small
and the stars are shafts of light.
Nor is the Master's sermon, cool and refreshing as dew,
colder than your touch.

Only your touch can put out the flame which burns in
my poor heart.
My heart is the only thermometer there is that can
measure the temperature of your touch.
While your love is hotter than fire, so hot it can burn
down a mountain of cares, dry up a sea of yearning,
your touch is cold beyond measure.

The Master's Sermon

I heard the Master preach.
"Don't be chained to love and suffering. Instead, cut the
ties of love and you will rejoice in your heart." So he
said in a loud voice.

The Master is quite a fool.
 He does not know: true it hurts to be tied with love, but
 it will hurt more to cut the ties of love, it will hurt
 more than even death.
 In the tight binding of love's bonds lies their unbinding.

Thus great liberation is to be had in the bonds
 themselves.
 My love, I was afraid the rope of your love might be
 weak so I doubled the strands of my love for you.

Love's Reasons

It's not for nothing that I love you:
 It's that others love my ruddy cheeks only—you love
 even my white hair.

It's not for nothing that I long for you:
 It's that others love my smile only—you love even my
 tears.

It's not for nothing that I wait for you:
 It's that others love only my health—you love even my
 death.

Inverse Proportion

Is your voice "silence"?
 When you are not singing a song then I hear your song's
 melody clearly!
 Your voice is silence.

Is your face "darkness"?
 When I shut my eyes then I see your face clearly!
 Your face is darkness.

Is your shadow “light”?
Your shadow is cast on the dark window after the moon
 has gone down!
Your shadow is light.

Upon Reading Tagore’s “The Gardener”

Friend! My friend! You make me cry like a flower
 blooming at my love’s grave.
Friend, who makes me glad as one I encountered in the
 birdless desert’s night.
You are the fragrance of white bones that breaks out of
 an old grave and pierces up to heaven.
You are a song of hope, yet without hope, which one
 sings through the fallen flowers picked up to make a
 wreath in the other branches.

Friend! My friend, who cries over a broken love.
No tears can possibly make fallen blossoms bloom again
 on their old branch.
Do not shed your tears on the fallen flowers, but on dust
 below the flowering bush.

Friend! My friend!
No matter how good the fragrance of death, you cannot
 kiss the lips of the white bones.
Don’t enmesh the grave with golden song; place a
 blood-stained banner on the grave.
Yet a spring wind tells you how dead earth is moving
 through the song of a poet.

My friend, I am ashamed. When I hear your songs how
 shamed I am, how I tremble.
This is because I am listening to your song all alone,
 keeping myself away from my love.

The Embroidery's Secret

I have finished making your clothes.
 I made your skirted coat, your cloak and your pajamas,
 All but the embroidery on a little wallet.

That wallet is finger-stained
 Because I worked on it, set it aside, worked on it and set
 it aside.
 Others may think I have little skill in needlework, but
 there is no one, other than myself, that knows this
 secret.
 Whenever my heart aches I try to work on my
 embroidery, my mind follows down
 the golden thread into the eye of my needle, and out of
 the purse a song flows crystal clear and becomes my
 heart;
 And as yet there is no treasure in this world that
 deserves to be kept in the purse.
 I haven't finished embroidering the little purse, not
 because I don't want to—I have left it unfinished
 because I like embroidering it.

Come to Me

Come to me. It's time you were here. Quickly.
 Do you know when it is time for you to come? The time
 for you to come is the time when I am waiting.

Come to my flower garden. The flowers are in bloom in
 my flower garden.
 Should anyone run after you, then hide in a flower.
 I will turn into a butterfly and light on the flower where
 you are hiding.
 Then anyone running after you won't be able to find
 you.
 Come to me. It's time you were here. Quickly.

Come into my arms; there's a soft breast waiting in my
arms.
Should anyone run after you, then lower your head into
my breast.
Though my breast be soft as water, when needed to
protect you against danger it can become a golden
sword, a steel shield.
Though my breast become like flowers trampled by
horses' hooves, your head will not slip off.
Then anyone running after you won't be able to lay a
hand on you.
Come to me. It's time you were here. Quickly.

Come blend into my death. Death is always ready to
accommodate you.
Should anyone run after you, then stand behind my
death.
In death emptiness and omnipotence are one.

Death's love is at once infinite and everlasting.
Before death battleship and battery turn to dust;
Before death strong and weak become friends.
Then, anyone running after you will not be able to catch
you.
Come to me. It is time you were here. Quickly.

To the Readers

Readers. I am ashamed to set myself up as a poet before
you. I know as you read my poems you will be
disappointed in me and for yourselves.

I have no mind for your children to read my poems.

To read my poems then might well be like rubbing a bit of
dry chrysanthemum in your fingers and holding them
up to your nose in a flowering glade in late spring.

I don't know how far the night has advanced.
As the darkness thins in Mt. Sŏrak
I wait for the bell of a dawning day as I put my brush
aside.

(The night of the 29th day, 8th month, the year of
Ŭlch'uk.* The End)

* 1925.

YI YUKSA (1904–1944)

Born in Andong, North Kyöngsang Province, Yi Yuksa, or Yi Hwal, a descendant of the renowned Neo-Confucian scholar Yi Hwang (1501–1570), actively engaged in the Korean national resistance movement during the Japanese colonial occupation and was arrested several times, both in Korea and in Beijing, which was then under Japanese colonial occupation. It is said that he took as his sobriquet his prisoner number “two-sixty-four”—“*yi-yuk-sa*,” in Chinese characters. In the context of the increasingly severe restrictions placed on Korean cultural forms and expressions by the Japanese colonial authorities, and in light of his persistent anticolonialist activities and repeated arrests, even the most tranquil and composed of his poems, a work like “Blue Grapes,” for example, takes on a decidedly nationalist aura. Yi died in a Japanese prison in Beijing. His one book, *Yuksa sijip* (Poems by Yuksa), was published in 1946.

Translations by Kyung-ja Chun and by David R. McCann

Twilight

I part the curtain of my back room
 To greet the twilight with a devoted heart.
 Like the ocean's white seagulls
 What is man but a lonely creature?

Open full, twilight, your tender arms,
 To let my burning lips freely reach you.
 And to all in your embrace
 Let me send my kisses.

To the glimmering stars of the twelve constellations,
 To serene nuns deep in the forest, bells stilled;
 To prisoners, so many there on the cement floor,
 Their hearts shivering so, with none to share.
 To caravans crossing the Gobi by camel, or
 To natives shooting arrows in Africa's jungle,
 Twilight, in your tender embrace,
 Entrust just half the Earth to my burning lips.

My back room in May is cozy indeed.
 Again tomorrow, twilight, you'll have me part this blue
 curtain.
 Vanishing in veils like the gurgle of a brook,
 Once cooled, never again knowing how to return.

Thatched House

Like a worn book of lore the crumpled sky opens,
 Foothills like a castle's stone battlement,
 As dusk arrives buried under a flight of bats,
 Oil lanterns light every thatched house.
 The village's India-ink image is moth-eaten,

And the painting's unveiled in patches.
 Going forth from the field, a field of barley,
 Maiden gone out to harvest Malmai herbs,
 A maiden with a maiden enthralled by the lark's song,
 Too bashful to return with basket empty,
 Momai flowers blossoming on her cheeks.

Rain on swing ropes means a rich harvest, they say,
 Yet when a tree collapses in pieces next to the nearby river,
 A youth with a youth sets out on that raft,
 Drifting down to the harbor for a few months' work.
 The wind will swell if they're not back
 Ere frost drops the leaves.

Even sparrows flee the unthreshed rice nurtured by blood;
The young, like bears, dream of the North pole;
The breath of the old, quarreling with the old;
Frosts over the walls, this midwinter night
Even the river, the village's own spy, is frozen.

A Small Park

Midday, the sun's rays
Spreading full over a white peacock's tail.

There beyond, the worried cooing of a pigeon
Missing the love left behind in the barley field.

A white heron, its youth drifted down to the water's edge
Stooping and summoning the rain.

The splash of diving faintly heard, just a flock of ducks
Busily searching for their prey.

And on the grassy hillside, two foreign girls whirling
parasols,
Singing a song of nostalgia, sweetbrier cheeks raised.

The Summit

Lashed by the brute season's whip,
Driven at last to the North.

On the heights where the spent sky ends,
Frost blades beneath, I stand.

Where should my knees bend down?
No place to take even a single step.

Now then, eyes shut, there's but one thought—
Winter must be a rainbow, forged in iron.

(KJC)

Blue Grapes

July in my hometown
Is the season of the ripening, deep blue grapes.

Legends cluster thick about the village,
And each day the sky descends in a dream, pressing deep
into each fruit.

Beneath the blue sky the green sea unlocks its heart,
And a boat comes gliding, its white sail spread.

As I hear that my weary guest has come,
Tired body draped in a robe of deep blue,

In welcoming him, if I pluck these blue grapes,
What does it matter if my two hands are drenched?

There, child, on our low table's silver platter,
Set out the white linen cloths.

(DRM)

IM HWA (1908–1953)

Born in Seoul, an active leftist poet and essayist, Im Hwa was an early leader of KAPE, the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation. His poems first appeared in 1926, when he was eighteen; his first collection, *Hyōnhaet'an* (The Hyōnhaet'an Strait), was published in 1938. Im Hwa “went North” in 1947 but was arrested in 1953, charged, convicted, and sentenced to death on the improbable charge of being an American spy. “My Brother and the Brazier,” a poem in the form of a letter, was particularly praised by Kim Kijin (see also the introductory note on Kim Sowōl) for the colloquial form of its support for the proletariat, a theme which supplanted the early-twentieth-century exhortations to Korea’s youth, as for example in Ch’oe Namsōn’s “From the Sea to Youth” (1908). Such active engagement in the social and political issues of the day seems to have been possible even in the late 1920s, when, after the interval of relative freedom in the early 1920s, the Japanese colonial administration once again began to clamp down on Korean organizations of all kinds. “Again at the Crossroads” presents, in place of a message of class struggle, a picture of the more generalized depression that settled over the Korean urban landscape of the 1930’s.

Translated by Jiwon Shin

My Brother and the Brazier

Dearest brother, the charcoal brazier with the turtle-
shell pattern, the one you so cherished, cracked
yesterday.

That one that Yōngnam—our *pioneer*, the little flag-
bearer, as you used to call him—had bought and

brought home, his young body having steeped in the
venom of tobacco through all his hours of sunshine
on earth; that turtle-shell patterned brazier broke.

So now the fire tongs hang lonely on the wall, lonely as
poor Yǒngnam and I, siblings who lost our beloved
brother.

Brother . . .

Me, I know so well—

on that evening when you were taken to be locked up,
leaving two of us
younger siblings, why you were smoking the three rolled
cigarettes one after another.

I know very well, brother.

When thoughtlessly I used to say to you, weary at
dinner after returning from the factory, that you
smelled of newsprint,
you'd reply, an exhausted smile on your pale face, . . .
Don't *you* smell like silkworm droppings? Greatest and
bravest brother, our brother, I know
why, that evening, you silently filled the room with
tobacco smoke;
the mind of our brave brother, I understood very well.

In the single plume of smoke rising to the ceiling, I saw
clearly,
stamped in your iron-tough heart, the great
determination and sacred resolution.
Even before I finished mending one of Yǒngnam's
socks,
you had gone, along with the clanging, beating on the
door sill,
the violent sounds of boots trampling down the wooden
floor.

Even then, our greatest brother, didn't you leave with
our worries
wreathed in clouds of smoke?

Brother—so, Yŏngnam and I;
 as the stories of you and your bravest and greatest
 friends turned the world upside-down,
 I had to leave the reel machine. Now I break my
 fingernails making the envelopes,
 one hundred for a penny.
 Yŏngnam, too, was fired from the tobacco-stinking pit
 and licks the flaps of the envelopes.
 Now he is snoring under patched rags that look like the
 shape of a world map.

But, brother . . . don't you worry.
 I am a girl who shares the same blood with you, this
 country's gallant young man;
 And Yŏngnam is your younger brother who brought
 home the iron-hard
 turtle-patterned brazier, the one you used to praise all
 along.
 Oh, and brother, a little while ago, the rest of your
 young friends came by.
 They brought tearful tidings of you, their comrade, our
 brother.
 They were lovable brave young men.
 They were the greatest young men in the world.

Though the brazier is broken, don't the fire tongs
 remain like flag poles?
 Brother, you left, but sweet *pioneer*, Yŏngnam
 is here
 and my breasts, a warm-hearted sister's bosom for all
 young *pioneers* are still warm.

And, brother . . .
 Would it be I alone who lost her brother or Yŏngnam
 who sent away his iron-willed brother?
 We are neither sad nor lonely.
 There are your countless noble friends, and our precious
 friends,
 numerous boys and girls who lost their older brothers.

So the next battle will be fought by the hands of our
 friends, who now must harbor their grudges and
 resentment.

Brother, if I work all night and make twenty-thousand
 envelopes,
 in three days, new padded clothes will be put on your
 shivering body.

Your sister and brother in the outside world spend day
 after day like this,
 in good health, in the battle field.
 Yŏngnam sleeps on. It has grown late.
 —Your sister.

(February 1929)

The Pier of Yokohama Under the Umbrella

Girl at the harbor! Girl from that foreign land!
 Don't run out to the dock. The dock is wet with rain;
 my heart is blazing with the sorrow of departing and
 resentment for being deported.
 Oh, my beloved girl at the harbor of Yokohama,
 don't run out to the dock. The rail is wet with rain.

"The weather could've been better at least . . ."
 No, dear. Not your helpless, wretched words.
 Even if the dock is washed away in the rains,
 or poor thing, your throat choked tight with weeping
 and sobbing;
 your country would not allow me, this rebel-youth from
 the foreign land, to stay.
 You, wretched girl at the harbor, must not even cry.

Your fellow, leaving this grand pier with the deportation
 tag on his back,

is not unaware.

When you return now to the small house
where you used to spend day after day in company with
unknowable passion and the laughter of the gallant
 young men, there'll be
nothing left to greet you but the muddy footsteps of
 those who rushed in and out.
I know this better than anyone else.

But you, girl at the harbor! No doubt you'd know.
All those who now sleep in a bird cage, did not live by
 the charity of your country,
nor did they dwell in your sweet heart.
Nevertheless
I for your sake, you for my sake,
and they for your sake, you for their sake:
why did we pledge upon our lives, why did we
keep vigil in the streets on snow-falling nights?

Nothing explains why;
we are not related by any natural tie.
You are a foreign girl, and I am a colonized man.
The single explanation is that you and I,
we were but brother-and-sister laborers.
So for a single purpose,
the lives of two different countries shared the same pot
 of rice.
You and I have lived in love.

Oh my sweet love, girl of Yokohama.
Rain falls on the sea and the waves rise with the wind.
Leaving behind everything that remains
to return to the country of my mother and father,
I am afloat on the Pacific Ocean.
On the ocean, even the gulls with far-reaching wings
are not in sight today while you, my love in Yokohama,
 who used to take wings in my heart, disappear as of
 today.

But you, the bird of Yokohama.
You mustn't feel lonely. Isn't the wind blowing?
What if your one-and-only wax-paper umbrella were to
break?
Go in at once.
Now the sound of your wooden clogs has disappeared,
muffled by the
cries of falling rain and striking waves.
Please go, go on.
Though I am chased away, those gallant young lads
must be sitting under the iron bars in sweat-soaked
clothes;
the child-workers from the northern land at your factory
must be weeping,
longing for their mothers and sisters.
Shouldn't you return to wash their clothes and
hold those young ones to your bosom?
Kayo! Kayo! You must go back inside.
The siren has rung three times already and
the black uniform has pulled down my hands several times.
Now we must go: you must return and I must go.

Girl of the foreign land!
Don't shed any tears over those lads, or over me, no
longer to be there in the demonstration that sweeps
down the street.
Do not miss me because I will no longer be waiting
behind the light pole when you leave the factory.
There will be another wave of young laborers to
strengthen your heart,
and the hands of the love-deprived child-workers will be
awaiting you.

And once again, the young men's speeches
will pour down on the heads of the workers like flames.

Get inside! Get inside at once.
The rain falls on the dock and the winds strike the deck.
Don't let your umbrella break.

With the same umbrella that sent away the young
foreign man today, shouldn't you
go marching on the Tokyo-Yokohama highway
accompanied by the sound of wooden clogs
to greet those lads who will be freed tomorrow?

Well then, my beloved, girl at the harbor,
you are not the kind who would settle for the sorrow of
departing,
the small pain of sending away your beloved fellow.
Don't you see that I, your beloved, am being driven
away from this land?
Those lads are locked up without even knowing this fact.
At this thought,
with this indignant reality,
let your pigeon-like bosom flare up in red.
When your pale skin can no longer bear its heat,
cast that heat at their faces and heads till your heart is
content.

By then, though now departing, I will have returned by
way of Pusan and Tokyo
to Yokohama with friends.
In long-held sorrow and resentment,
you might bury your pretty head, tired from waiting, in
my chest, and you might
cry and you might laugh.
My girl at the harbor!
Don't run out to the dock.
Rain falls on your frail back and wind strikes your umbrella.
(September, 1929)

Again at the Crossroads

Even today, the streets
that greet and send away numerous people
are crowded with

streetcars and automobiles;
 where do they go and where do they come from?

At the heart of the crossroads, civilization's new
 machine
 turns its head this way and that way,
 replacing the red and green flags of the past.
Stop, Caution, Go.
 People, cars, and animals, as if practicing drill.
 Is this all that has changed?

Unfamiliar buildings overlook Posin'gak belfry from far
 above.
 Where have they gone, the dignified signboards of the
 past?
 Has the wind so fiercely swept the streets?
 Red and blue neon crawls like worms
 on the brick wall above the roof.

Oh, how much I missed you, streets of home! This is the
 Chongno intersection.
 Leaving a distant hut below Mount Nak, I have returned
 yearning for you, only you.
 Wide streets and neat houses!
 Countless passers-by who come and go under the distant
 sky!
 How have you all been?
 How am I to bear this joy that fills my heart?
 I raised my hand repeatedly to greet you and smiled
 upon everything.
 Bustling streets! Chongno streets of my home!
 What has become of you; are you dead? Have you been
 sold out to a stranger?
 Or, have you forgotten it all?
 I who had praised you in songs with a throbbing
 heart,
 and a raging wave of young men who had gushed
 through the streets, satiating your heart.
 My poor Suni had fallen over to cry here.

Beloved street! Since then, hasn't anyone shed tears on
 you, grudging the loss of a young man?
 Haven't any familiar ones passed by?

Tonight as in the past, life's tragedy would sleep on your
 stone steps.

Tomorrow, they would collect dust from your
 ground.

And without knowing where to go and what to do for a
 living,
 the heavy steps of those would tread on you with their
 heads down.

But you wouldn't, perhaps, forget all this,
 send them away with no more than fatigue, sorrow, and
 despair.

Though quiet and faint, they will hear in silence the
 great song of tomorrow,
 And walk by outside the gate at a distance.

Oh, dear streets, the long-missed place of home!
 Like those of my precious sister Suni
 and her beloved gallant young men of this country:
 how many traces of those mighty and beautiful
 youngsters who knew
 resentment and joy, how to care for others, fight, and
 _____ the dark _____ that covers you like _____,* have
 you greeted and sent away?
 You, the streets of home . . . I no longer see
 a single familiar face on you.

Your old friends, who used to rattle like market crowds
 and scatter quickly as fire
 in the open yard before the familiar two-story building
 where signboards used to hang in a row,
 and where, now, the white flag of the newspaper
 company droops down like folded wings, may all
 have gone far away.

* The underscores represent words censored in the original.

They may have perished as Suni's young daughter
withered away.
But have the flaming footsteps of the truly gallant heroes
ever ceased,
like those of several noble youths we know?
I don't know the faces of all these new generations.
But "Be alive and well! Let there be glory on the bitter
paths ahead."
May I ask you, streets, to please pass my words on to all
of them!
Good bye! Streets of home!
And be generous to those youngsters.
Though I may die upon, and never rise up again,
Wretched city! Chongno intersection! My beloved Suni!
I will write neither repentance nor request, not a word
upon my will.

(July, 1935)

CHŎNG CHIYONG (1902–?)

With Yi Sang, Chŏng Chiyong is known as a leading avant-garde, modernist poet from the 1930s. Born in Okch'ŏn, North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province, Chŏng received his undergraduate degree in English literature at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. Another strand in the fabric of his work, though yet to be given much attention by literary historians in Korea, is Japanese poetry and its influence. Chŏng was kidnapped at the beginning of the Korean War by North Korean forces, according to South Korean sources, which accounts for the absence of any information about the time, place, or circumstances of his (presumed) death. Remarkably, the biographical details of up to one third of his generation who “disappeared” during the war are similarly “unknown.” Because Chŏng Chiyong eventually ended up in North Korea, his works, published as early as the mid-1920s, were banned in South Korea until the easing of the government suppression in the late 1980s. Chŏng's work has suffered the unusual distinction of being banned in both the North as well as the South.

Translations by Brother Anthony of Taizé and by Kevin O'Rourke

Homesickness

That place at the eastern end of wide stretching plains
 where a stream meanders away, murmuring old tales,
 while a dappled ox
 bellows in the idle golden tones of sunset:

—How could I ever forget that place, even in my
 dreams?

That place where, as embers fade in a clay stove,
the sound of the evening breeze goes riding across
 empty fields,
while my aging father, lightly drowsing,
lays his head on a freshly plumped straw pillow:

—How could I ever forget that place, even in my
 dreams?

That place where my heart, grown from the soil,
got drenched in dew from high grass
searching for arrows shot at random
as it longed for the blue sky above:

—How could I ever forget that place, even in my
 dreams?

That place where my sister with her black locks flying
like evening waves dancing on legendary seas,
together with my wife who went barefoot in every
 season,
nothing the least bit pretty about her,
used to glean ears of corn,
the scorching sunlight on her back:

—How could I ever forget that place, even in my
 dreams?

That place where stars sparsely scattered in the sky
moved toward sand castles we could never know,
while frosty rooks flew cawing over shabby roofs,
full of the murmurs of people sitting around in dim
 lamplight:

—How could I ever forget that place, even in my
 dreams?

Windowpane I

In the glass something glimmers, cold and sad.
I feebly stand there, my breath clouding it,
and it flutters its frozen wings as if tame.
Rub at it, rub at it though I may,
black night surges away, then back, collides,
sodden stars sparkle, set like gems.
Rubbing glass alone by night
is a lonely, rapturous contemplation,
with the tender veins ruptured in your lungs.
Ah, you have flown away like some wild bird!

Spring Snow

As soon as I open the door,
in a flash the distant hills are close at hand.

The morning of the very first day of the month,
and the calendar heralds Early Rain.

Newly snow-covered mountain roots, chill and bright,
seem much closer to me now.

The ice cracks, the breeze follows fresh;
my white sashes grow fragrant of their own accord.

Ah, huddled up then reviving like some dream,
I am sorrowful indeed.

Green buds of dropwort come pushing up,
the long motionless lips of fish munch anew,

in the unseasonable snow before flowers blossom,
I long to strip off thick clothes and freeze again.

Paengnokdam: White Deer Lake

I

The closer we draw to the summit, the more the height of the cuckoo-flowers dwindles. Beyond the first ridge, their bodies disappear; above the next, their necks are gone; finally their faces alone peep out. They lie spread like an intricate floral pattern. The chill of the wind rivals that far up in the north, at the tip of Hamgyŏng Province; the cuckoo-flowers' stems vanish completely; yet for a time in August they bloom in glorious profusion, like scattered stars. And when mountain shadows grow darker, at last stars shine out in the cuckoo-flower patches. Then those stars drop from their appointed places. Here I grew exhausted.

2

By its dainty pill-like fruit the amro orchid quenched my thirst and I revived.

3

White birch lives beside white birch until each becomes bare bones. When I die, I will be white like a birch tree, but they are not so ugly, after all.

4

On this spur, so desolate that even ghosts refuse to live here, hobgoblin flowers stand alone in broad daylight, pale with dread.

5

Up here, more than six thousand feet above sea level, live cattle and horses that have little concern for human beings. Horses cluster together, cows cluster together; while foals may follow cows, calves only follow mares for a moment, and soon turn away.

6

One cow had trouble giving birth to her first calf. On the spur of the moment she set out down twenty-five miles of mountain paths to Soguip'o. Her calf, having lost its mother as soon as it was born, lowed after her: Ma-a, Ma-a. It clung blindly to horses, and climbers too. I wept at the thought of our children being handed over to mothers with hair of another color.

7

The perfume of the sweet orchid, the sound of orioles warbling to one another, the whistling of Cheju's whistling bird, the sound of water rebounding off rocks, the swishing of pines when the sea crumples far away; I lost my way among ash trees, camellias, oaks, but emerged down a twisting path of pale stones all tangled with arrowroot vines. The dappled horse I abruptly encounter does not run away.

8

Royal fern, bracken, *tōdōk*,* bellflower, wild aster, umbrella plants, bamboo grass, rock-dragon mushrooms, high mountain plants with bells hanging like stars: I ponder them, then fall asleep intoxicated. The procession climbing up the mountain ridges, yearning for Paengnokdam's homely waters, is more majestic than clouds. Braving the noisily spattering showers, drying in a rainbow, the seat of my pants clotted with flower juices, my flesh swells.

9

In Paengnokdam's blue waters, where not even a catfish crawls, the heavens revolve. A cow walks round me and passes on, my legs are almost lame with exhaustion, as we draw closer to the crater. With only a trace of

* *A wild plant.*

driven clouds, Paengnokdam grows hazy. After lying
 ahead of me for half a day, Paengnokdam looks desolate.
 Caught between waking and sleeping, why, I had forgot-
 ten even to pray.

Star

How far far away
 one star looks, when I'm lying on my back.

At the same time how near, as if linked
 by a golden thread to the corner of my squinting eye,

and in the night, when I gently wake,
 how tightly I press against the window-pane, peeping out.

Abruptly, as if sprouting,
 as if waiting to be called, as if welcoming,

suddenly, a lonely flame flares up within my soul
 in regrets that gust like the wind.

I rise in my white night-clothes
 and clasp my hands to my heart.

(BA)

Sea 6

The channel flaps like a tent
 now that the whale has crossed.

White water bundling up; *paduk* stones
 tumbling, tumbling down.

The sea skylark soars, silver drops its flight,
vigilant half the day
to claw, to scavenge red flesh.

A shell, azalea hued, takes the sun
in a rock crevice thick with seaweed reek,

while a sea swallow on wing slide glides
in a plate-glass sky.
Sea—see right, right down.
Sea
green as bamboo leaves.
Spring.

What does it look like?
Little hills, lines of flower bud lanterns lit?

What does it look like?
Thick thickets of pine and bamboo?

What does it look like?
A crouching tiger
draped in a blanket
spotted yellow and black?

And you, my friend, take some such scene,
a white
smoke like
sea,
and voyage far, far away.

Home

Home, home, though I come home,
it's not the home I knew and loved.

Mountain pheasants brood,
cuckoos call in season,

but my heart has no home; a cloud
floating toward a distant port.

Today too I climb to the summit.
White spotty flowers smile in sympathy.

They do not hear the sound of the grass flute
I played as a child;
bitter, bitter absence to parched lips.

Home, home, though I come home,
only the sky I loved is high and blue.

Rain

Shadows
fill the stones;

gentle breezes
come and go.

Lusterless mountain birds,
tails high in the air,

chicken step
in leader rotation.

Mountain water
runs off

in slender, white, spread-finger
rivulets.

Raindrops, momentarily suspended,
begin again,

clambering noisily across
every red leaf.

(KO)

KIM YŎNGNANG (1903–1950)

Kim Yŏngnang was born in Kangjin, South Chŏlla Province, and attended the Aoyama Academy in Japan. Like so many others in Korea, Kim Yŏngnang's life was abruptly cut short, in his case by a stray bullet, early in the Korean War. His brief literary career began with lyric poems, then moved, during the repressive period of the 1930s and 1940s when the Japanese colonial administration implemented an assimilationist policy designed to eradicate Korean culture, to poems that deliberately evoked images of traditional Korea. Kim Yŏngnang's work resembles Kim Sowŏl's in its deployment of the Korean language and pursuit of its expressive capabilities. In this respect he is a difficult poet to translate, though the clarity of images in the poems remains striking even in another language.

Translations by Brother Anthony of Taizé and by Walter K. Lew

Someone Who Knows My Heart

If someone somewhere exists
 who knows my heart,
 who knows my solitary heart as I do,

the dust that sometimes clouds my heart,
 and the pleading drops of guileless tears,
 the rewards that gently form like dew in azure nights:
 all these I would lay like hidden treasures before him.

Ah, such yearning.
 Can I see far off in my dreams
 one who knows my solitary heart as I do?

In pure-scented jade, flames glow red;
I wish that love would kindle too,
but my heart, clouded like a smoking lamp,
knows no love, my solitary heart.

Until Peonies Bloom

Until peonies bloom
I shall still wait for my spring to come.
On the day that peonies drop their petals one by one,
I merely languish in sorrow at the loss of spring.
Then one day in May, one sultry day
when the fallen petals have all withered away
and there is no trace of peonies in all the world
my buoyant expectation crumbles in irrepressible sorrow.
Once the peonies have finished blooming, my year is done;
for three hundred and sixty gloomy days I sadly lament.
Until peonies bloom
I shall still wait for the spring of glorious sorrow to come.

Intoxicating Moonlight

In the intoxicating moonlight
the sea is a sheet of silver,
heaven and earth are like a dream,
they lie so still.

The familiar moon
seems ready to come down if called,
it seems ready to give voice
to a pure resonant song.

Suppose it came falling down
onto that sheet of silver,

surely the moon
could not shatter there?

Fall then,
O moon, fall soon.
That confusion, that beautiful noise,
though it shakes heaven and earth,

could not waken
the lonely dreaming sea
in deep forlorn night
on the mountain top.

At the Sight of Water

At the sight of water, my heart flows,
at the sight of stars, my heart is clear.
How then shall my heart grow old?

How pitiful and far away,
the days when I ceaselessly roamed,
uttering sighs on a bright clear day.

Embraced in a regretful tear,
as a raindrop falls where scattered leaves are piled,
feelings limply simply flow.

If I sit up all alone that night
and even caress lightly a haggard cheek,
withering, unblooming flowers hasten down to earth.

An Endless River Flows

Somewhere in my heart, it seems, an endless
river flows.

The dawn's rising glow brightens
 its smooth silvery path.
 In my breast, it seems, in my eyes, my veins,
 where my heart hides whispering,
 somewhere in my heart, it seems, an endless
 river flows.

(BA)

Selections from "Quatrains"

Heart broken from leaving you and the road of departure!
 Tenuous dream-path that if I sigh might flicker out.
 And this night: Whose dark countryside could this be?
 With my fingertip I scatter a welling tear like dew

* * *

When shadows gather in the flowering branches
 Like the heart-strings of a maiden tying her sash
 Summer haze rises through my heart's white day
 Summer haze rises through my heart's white day

* * *

If I think back, it's humbling
 "Like Sakyamuni or Jesus I will do great things!"
 Time when sparks flew up in my chest
 "Student" time steeped in blood and shame

(WKL)

YI SANG (1910–1937)

Yi Sang was born in Seoul, and attended the Kyōngsōng Technical Institute. “Yi Sang” is the sobriquet adopted by one of the most brilliantly gifted, challenging, and exasperating of Korea’s modern poets, Kim Haegyōng. The sobriquet first: Yi Sang’s friend Pak T’aewōn recalled that a Japanese supervisor called to Kim Haegyōng, “Mr. Lee!” the second-most common surname—after Kim—in Korea, which in Japanese would have been “*Ri-san*.” According to the story, Kim Haegyōng took that wrong name deliberately as his pen name, thereby joining Yi Yuxsa as a Korean writer marking his notice of, resistance against, and existence within, the Japanese occupation. Most ironically in his case, given a studiously Bohemian style of life and indifference to all but literary pursuits, Yi Sang was arrested and imprisoned during a trip to Japan, and died in Fukuoka Prison, thereby joining Yun Tongju and other martyrs who met their deaths in Japanese jails. Korean literary history does not generally accord Yi Sang that status, however, as his death is read more as an accident than as an end that he chose. But Yi Sang resists the categories of Korean national literary history. He was not an activist like Han Yong’un, but rather more like Sowōl, a denizen of the literary world. His short story “Nalgae” (Wings), read as something of a self-portrait, has provoked complex interpretations of its main character, an over-intellectualized sort who lives on what his wife earns as a prostitute. Yi Sang also subverted—or simply does not fit, chronologically—the post-Korean War celebration of him as Korea’s most notable modernist. Many of his writings, for one thing, were in the Japanese language, a point registered inversely by the gradual disappearance of the Japanese-language works from succeeding editions of his collected works, as noted by Edward Mack, the translator of Yi Sang’s Japanese-language poems in this volume. Mack has also noted that a significant portion of Yi Sang’s “Korean” poems may well be translations, by others, of the “original” Japanese

works. Finally, the works themselves resist reading if “reading” is taken to mean comprehension, reduction, or the construction of linguistic equivalencies. What do his poems mean, surreal, elusive as they are? Vigorously, complicatedly, exasperatingly, they *are*.

Translated from the Korean by Walter K. Lew and from the Japanese by Edward Mack

From Crow's-Eye View

POEM NO. I

13ChildrenRushdownaStreet.
(AdeadendalleyisSuitable.)

The1stChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The2ndChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The3rdChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The4thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The5thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The6thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The7thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The8thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The9thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The10thChildsaysit'sfrightening.

The11thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The12thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
The13thChildsaysit'sfrightening.
13Childrenwerejustgatheredtogetherlikethataseither
frighteningorfrightenedChildren.
(TheabsenceofanyotherConditionwashighlypreferable.)

IfAmongstthem1Childisa frighteningChildit'sfine.
IfAmongstthem2ChildrenarefrighteningChildrenit'sfine.
IfAmongstthem2ChildrenarefrightenedChildrenit'sfine.
IfAmongstthem1Childisa frightenedChildit'sfine.

(AthroughstreetisSuitable.)
Evenif13ChildrendonotRushdowntheStreetit'sfine.

POEM NO. II

when my father dozes off beside me i become my father
 and also i become my father's father and even so while my
 father like my father is just my father why do i repeatedly
 my father's father's father's . . . when i become a father
 why must i lopingly leap over my father and why am i
 that which while finally playing all at once my and my
 father's and my father's father's and my father's father's
 father's roles must live?

POEM NO. III

a quarreling person is none other than a person who had
 not been quarreling and also a quarreling person was even a
 person who does not quarrel and so if a quarreling person
 wants to view some quarreling should that person view the
 quarreling of a person who had not been quarreling or view
 the quarreling of a person who does not quarrel or view the
 not quarreling of a person who had not been quarreling or
 of a person who does not quarrel it will suffice

POEM NO. VII

One bough in the land of eternal banishment • Flower bud-
 ding on the one bough • Flora of a unique April • 30 cycles
 • Bright mirror that appears on both sides shortly
 before/after each of the 30 cycles • Full moon that faces a
 horizon giggling like little sprouts and just now just now is
 crestfallen • In mountain stream air the full moon scarred
 all over is sentenced to having its nose chopped off and the
 riotous • Land of banishment is flowed through by a single
 message from home • I barely covered myself! • Drizzly
 sprout of a moon • Tremendous distance of an atmosphere
 that caps a serene quietude • Hollow cavern next April
 amidst great exhaustion • Terrible snow gales that scrape
 through and escape the tottering inverting constellation
 and its decimated back alleys of death • Sandstorms •

Particles of rock salt stained blood-red • Skeleton drenched
with the luster that shot down through my brain serving as
a lightning rod • And I like a venomous snake in his tower
of exile was planted underground and could not stir! • Until
a shiny providence comes

POEM NO. IX

Each day it seems fiery winds blew but now at last the
great hand has come to my waist. As soon as the smell of
my sweat can permeate the rapturous valleys of its finger-
tips Fire! It shall fire. In my bowels I feel the weighty bar-
rel of the gun and its slippery mouth against my tightly
shut lips. Then it seems the gun will fire and my eyes
close but rather than a round of ammunition I toward my
own real mouth pushed what and spat it out?

POEM NO. X: BUTTERFLY

In the tattered wallpaper I see a butterfly dying. Secret
mouthpiece bearing endless traffic to and from the other
world. One day in the mirror I see on my beard a butterfly
dying. Wings collapsed in exhaustion the butterfly eats
the meager dew that collects glistening from my exhaled
breath. If I die while blocking the mouthpiece off with my
palm the butterfly too as if starting up after resting shall
fly away. Never do I let any word of this leak out.

POEM NO. XIII

Holding the razorblade my arms became severed and fell
off. Looking closer I see how cold and pale they are as if
seriously threatened by something. Confronted with this
I stood my pair of lost arms up as candleholders to deco-
rate my room with. The arms are dead but seem to show
all the more nothing but fear of me. Such frail etiquette I
consider more lovely than any flower basin.

POEM NO. XV

1

I'm in a mirrorless room. Naturally the I in the mirror has gone out. I'm trembling now in fear of the I in the mirror. Has the I in the mirror gone somewhere to plot what next to do to me?

2

Slept in a dank crime-cuddling bed. In my precision dream I was absent and an artificial leg crammed into an infantry boot soiled my dream's white page.

3

I secretly enter a room with a mirror. To free myself from the mirror. But with its gloomy face the I in the mirror definitely enters at the same time. The I in the mirror conveys to me that it's sorry. Because of him it's as if I've become a prison and because of me he too is a prison and trembles.

4

Dream I am absent from. Mirror of mine in which my impostor makes no entrance. Impossible though it may be it is that which aspires to solitude for the good I. I decided at last to proffer suicide to the I in the mirror. I show him a raisable window that doesn't even have a view. A window meant only for suicide. But he points out to me the fact that as long as I do not kill myself he too cannot kill himself. The I in the mirror is practically a phoenix.

5

I shield with bulletproof metal where my heart is on the left side of my chest and aiming at the left side of my chest in the mirror I fired a pistol. The round penetrated the left side of his chest but his heart is on the right side.

6

From the replica heart red ink spills. In my dream I arrived late and received capital punishment. The controller of my dreams is not I. To have blocked off from each other these two persons unable even to shake hands is a great crime.

Flowering Tree

Dead center of an open field there is a flowering tree In the neighborhood not even one That flowering tree with as much ardor as it thought about its thought-about tree opened ardently its blossoms and stood. It cannot go to the tree it thinks about Wildly I fled For the sake of one flowering tree I really went that far to make such uncommon mimicry.

Paper Memorial Stone

because i'm tall my legs are long my left leg's lame and my wife is small so her legs are short and her right leg's lame and so my right leg with my wife's left leg if that pair of sound legs goes walking like one person ahhh this Husband and Wife end up a cripple that no one can help the whole Problem Free World is a Hospital and its Cure awaiting Absence of Illness will definitely persist right up to the end

Precipice

The flower is not visible. The flower is fragrant. The fragrance is in full bloom. I dig a grave inside it. The grave is not visible. Into this invisible grave I go and sit down. I

lie out. Again the flower is fragrant. The flower is not visible. The fragrance is in full bloom. I forget and am at it again digging a grave there. The grave is not visible. Toward the invisible grave I go forgetting for a moment about the flower. I really do lie down. Ahh. The flower is again fragrant. Flower that can't even be seen Flower that can't even be seen.

I Wed a Toy Bride

1 EVENING

From the soft skin of the toy bride there arises now and then a milky fragrance. It looks like she plans to have a baby before long. Snuffing out the candle, I draw close to her ear and as if scolding her whisper,

“You smell, dear, just like a newborn babe . . .”

In the dark the toy bride gets angry and answers,
“Took a walk to the dairy farm and back.”

Could it be the toy bride is back from memorizing all the many colors of the daytime scenery? Burns in my chest like my little address book. Because in this way I can only sniff nutrients in through the nose, I'm getting more and more emaciated.

2 EVENING

Whenever I give the toy bride a sewing needle the toy bride stabs wildly at anything around. The calendar. A book of poems. The clock. Also the place that is so worthwhile for my body my accumulated experience to enter and sit around in.

This constitutes evidence of thorns growing in the toy bride's heart. That is, like a rose . . .

Blood oozes from my thin armor. To treat the wound I eat a fresh mandarin orange in the dark. Sporting nothing on her body but a ring, opening the darkness like a

curtain, the toy bride comes searching for me. I am quickly found out. When the ring touches my skin I mistake it for a sewing needle and recoil in pain.

The toy bride lights a candle and searches for the mandarin orange.

I pretend to not hurt and not know what's going on.
(WLK)

Mirror

In the mirror there is no sound
There is probably no world so quiet

In the mirror also are my ears
Two pathetic ears are there unable to hear my words

In the mirror I'm left-handed
Lefty that can't take my handshake—who doesn't know
how to shake hands

Because of the mirror I can't touch the mirror's I but if it
were not a mirror
How could I've ever done something like meet myself in
a mirror

I don't have a mirror on me now but there's always an I
in the depths of one
I'm not sure but he's probably sunk in some sinister
project.

The I in the mirror is my real self's opposite but
Also takes after me considerably
Unable to care for and examine the mirror's I I get very
depressed
(WLK)

*Two People . . . 1 . . .**(from the Japanese)*

Christ began his sermon in shabby clothing.
 Al Capone plucked the Mount of Olives, as a mountain,
 then left.

x

Things since 1930 . . .

At the entrance to a certain church decorated by a neon
 sign, a rotund Capone was buying a ticket while
 expanding and contracting the scar on his cheek.

Two People . . . 2 . . .

Al Capone's coins had a very good luster, good enough to
 use as a medal; Christ's coins were so few in number as to
 be nearly invisible, barely worthy of the name *money*.

As for the story that says Christ refused until the very end
 to accept the frock coat Al Capone had sent him, though
 famous, isn't it believable?

Face

I look at a gaunt face.

Why is there a gaunt face under such lustrous hair?

Where did that man come from?

Where did that man come from?

It is thought that the reason that man's mother's face is
 unquestionably ugly even though that man's father's face is
 unquestionably handsome is unquestionably because though

that man's father had been rich he suddenly went bust after he married that man's mother; you might say it is true that children take after their mothers more than their fathers not in their face but in their character and conduct but when you look at that man's face it seems such a creepy face that you wonder whether that man has ever laughed, even once; moreover, what is even creepier about his face is that you wonder not only whether he has laughed even once, but whether he has cried either; even though you might think that is as it should be, considering that that man was raised looking only on that man's mother's face, even though that man's father has unquestionably laughed before, despite the fact that children by their nature tend to mimic just about anything, when you consider that that man's face looks like it has never known even the littlest bit of laughter, it might seem unquestionably because that man's father was off roaming overseas, that man having become a grown-up man before his father had even returned, and the problem of how in the world that man's mother got by each and every day goes without saying, in any case it is unquestionably the case that that man's mother's face was gaunt because she herself was unquestionably gaunt, but she at least unquestionably raised him, her beloved only son, doing whatever it took such that he would not be gaunt, at any rate, because children depend most on their mothers, he probably looked only at her face, coming to be convinced that that was a truly natural face, unquestionably trying with all of his might to imitate only his mother's face, but nonetheless, even if he now had the status and time to have gotten gold teeth, it was not unreasonable to think that maybe his face had hardened so much that there was no longer anything else that could be done, but even still, why is there that creepy gaunt face beneath such lustrous hair?

Motion

I went up to the roof garden which was above the third floor which was above the second floor which was above

the first floor and because there was nothing to see when I looked south and nothing to see when I looked north, I went down to the first floor which was below the second floor which was below the third floor which was below the roof garden, and since the sun which had risen from the east had set in the west and risen from the east and set in the west and risen in the east and set in the west and risen from the east and come directly above me, I looked at my watch only to see that, though it had stopped, the time was correct, and rather than say that the watch might be younger than I, I could only think that I was not older than my watch, and since that was unquestionably the case, I threw the watch away.

Performance Angel

—As a sequel—

The plastic surgery lacerated the woman's eye, making it into an absurdly aged trick-elephant's eye. Even when the woman has smiled enough, still she smiles, even when not smiling.

I happened to encounter the woman's eye at the North Pole. It is early winter in the North Pole. The white night was revealed in the woman's eye. The woman's eye slipped and fell on the ice as on the back of a giant seal.

The wind that births the cold currents blew into the woman's eye. The woman's eye raged but the woman's eye was encased in a terrifying glacier, making it impossible to raise a great wave.

The woman stripped completely nude. Her pores themselves became thorns. Intending to sing, the woman instead cried out in a shrill voice. The North Pole quaked with fear at the sound of the bell.

The street musician is an angel like a beggar who scatters the warm spring. The angel walks with an angel as thin as a sparrow.

He lashes the angel with the angel's snakelike whip.
The angel smiles, the angel swells like a balloon.

The angel's performance draws people's attention.

People buy heliotype photograph picture postcards,
which are said to capture the vestiges of the angel's chastity.

The angel drops its footwear and flees.
The angel throws out more than ten snares at one time.

The solar calendar increases chocolate.
The woman wears chocolate as make-up.

The woman throws herself down crying with the
mud-covered drawers in the trunk. The woman carries
the trunk.

The woman's trunk is a gramophone.
The gramophone summons red and blue demons like a
trumpet.

The red and blue demons are penguins. The penguins,
which are wearing nothing but shorts, suffer from edema.

The woman looked up and down and side-to-side
with the elephant eye and the large, skull crystal eye,
recklessly issuing amorous glances.

Bit by bit the woman chops up the full moon and
holds a banquet. People eat it and give off the aroma of
chocolate fat as a pig.

Publications Law

I.

The category of crime known as false accusation sentenced me to death. Amid the steam that concealed my

appearance, I braced myself and stared at the asphalt cauldron.

I One classical allusion concerning uprightness!
If their father has stolen a sheeep, they will bear witness.

Because I was coming to know how to know, I had to know a new thing again even as it was being carried out against me, who could not have known.

I started to gather up the bone fragments, which had been bleached to the white of snow.

“Perhaps the skin and flesh will arrive afterwards”

I had to give up on the sweat and blood that had been peeled off.

II. IN A CERTAIN POLICE DETECTIVE’S SECRET INTERROGATION ROOM

The police detective does not know anything about the fact that the young man who had been picked up as a suspect discharged the excreta, which had been printed with a map, and subsequently swallowed same. It was an undisclosed multi-stage digestive process. I suppose this is the very thing that people call witchcraft.

“You are unquestionably a miner”

By the way, they say the cross section of the young man’s muscles glistened like obsidian.

III. SPECIAL EDITION

The magnet begins to contract

Despite the fact that the cause is exceedingly unclear, many points connecting it to the great number of prison escapes caused by domestic economic bankruptcy are visible. A secret research survey by a collection of leaders in the field is in progress.

The liberated test tube key is excavating an identity-shaped canal in the skin of my palm. Soon after, a great expanse of river water like filtered sweat and blood came flowing down in.

IV.

Fallen leaves infiltrate through windows and doors,
sheltering my uniform's shell button.

Assassination

Mysterious deliveries are already underway in this
remote area that has not yet been fully topographically sur-
veyed. I despaired of anxiety.

Treacherously as a daily record, I lost my direction.
The pupil of my eye sliced the refrigerated liquid many
times, and had to be earnestly assisting the business of
the fallen leaves.

(My progression toward apishness)

Noon—A Certain

O

ELEVATOR FOR AMERICA.

O

The three-winged chicken is a serpentine staircase.

Lumpenproletariat and blankets.

O

The crowd of newspaper deliverymen spat out by the
building. The suggestion of urban planning.

O

The second noon siren.

O

The chicken washed by soap bubbles. Gathering in the
anthill and eating concrete.

O

The man hates the rock(head) as he hates the butcher.

O

Poets who walk in the cracks of the suns looking like
tortoise-shell cats.

Cockle-doodle-doo!

Just then yet another magnetlike sun rose.

(EM)

NO CH'ŎNMYŎNG (1912-1957)

Born in Hwanghae Province, now in North Korea, a graduate of Ewha Womans University, No Ch'ŏnmyŏng worked as a newspaper reporter for several different papers, including the pro-Japanese *Maeil Shinbo*. She published poems supporting the Japanese war effort and traveled in northeastern China in aid of that cause, which placed her eventually in the problematic category of "collaborationist writer." Immediately after the Korean War, she was arrested and tried as a wartime collaborator and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. The arrest, trial, and imprisonment, shortened to six months of the twenty-year term thanks to interventions by other writers on her behalf, proved shattering. Her late poetry seeks to present a rationale for her choices. Her earlier poetry explores a realm of everyday language and rural themes that remains compelling. "Performer, Male" presents a member of a touring drama crew, a precursor to the musicians in Shin Kyŏngnim's "Farmers Dance" some three decades later. No's "Deer," included in every textbook of Korean literature, presses on into the pastoral nostalgia that lurks at the edges of the drama crew's world, perhaps too far for some; but the poem is a lovely one, a reincarnation, in its attention to gesture, of the Chinese poet Li Po's (701-762) iconic "Night Thoughts": "Before the bed, the bright moon shines. / It seems it must be frost on the ground. / Raising my head, I look off at the moon. / Lowering my head, I think of home" (trans. McCann).

Translations by Mickey Hong and by David R. McCann

Road

When I entered through the pine grove, the pine grove
An old house glowing with light would appear.

There
 Was the autumn of chirping insects
 Also the moonlit night of snow-covered field.

In the evenings when the white lilies spewed fragrance,
 People with white hands
 Talked about the deer
 Biting on a pistil in the folding screen.

When I enter through the pine grove, the pine grove
 Even now
 Like a legend,
 The light would appear from the old house but—

I shiver,
 Lest I recall many stories
 With my heart as gentle as a dove . . .

Spring of the Steel Bar Window

The female prisoner in blue clothes
 Recently
 Has gotten worse in her habit of looking out the window.

The place where the woman laid her eyes,
 In the spot where the snow melts, a blue mugwort has
 sprouted.
 A few days later
 The woman who always would be looking out the window
 Abruptly fell ill.

A Lemon for Me

One day swallows another day
 Toward tomorrow, toward tomorrow
 I am not walking but thrust forth.

Drinking and throwing up the filth
I struggle because I would hate to drown unjustly.

When no one can transplant outside
The heart in which evil blooms like poppies

You cannot blame the child.
You could not raise him in a fence.

There are days when not even words come out
And I want to close my eyes.

When a fearful judgment wavers instead of a dream
I cannot see any friend who might put in a good word!

Grandmother, won't you please give me a lemon?
If there's none, then anything with fragrance.
I am about to suffocate!

Nostalgia

When the day train in May
Passes by a village where the cabbage flowers are yellow
Suddenly
I am sick for home where I once dug knotweeds.

While I look at the foreign mountains
My heart
Follows the clouds of the southern sky.

(MH)

Deer

Sad creature, neck stretched out;
Dignified always, you say nothing at all.
With your crown so fragrant,
Yours was too noble a clan.

As you stare into the depths
 And think of lost legends,
 In overwhelming sadness, you turn your neck
 And look toward mountains far away.

Performer, Male

Me, a fellow who powders his face
 and lets his long, thick hair hang down in a braid.
 Evenings when they're playing the reed horns, those guys
 with their straw hats, hemp cords dangling in back,
 I turn into Hyangdan, Hyangdan the Maid, wrapping
 myself in a dark red skirt.
 We get hold of some just-wide-enough space
 in the town market, and with the lights turned up
 out on the asphalt, for ten minutes my voice, my man's
 voice gets subdued.
 Over in a village up across the mountain
 was a pretty girl I'd have loved to give
 a silver ring to,
 but the very next morning
 she'd have taken it off, I know it!
 I must have gypsy blood, the way I wander,
 wondering each day what little town we'll enter next.
 Following the mule
 loaded with all our props,
 shaking dew off the wild strawberries we find
 the dawn light, as it spreads across our road,
 like the reed horn that calls out the ones who want to see:
 mixing sadness and happiness, it all opens out before us.

Nameless Woman

Up in some cleft in the hills
 I'd go to be a nameless woman.

I'd put up gourds on the thatched roof,
Plant squash and pumpkins in the clearing,
Train up a hedge of wild roses,
Let the skies down into the yard, as much as I wanted,
Hug all the stars, all of them,
And not feel sad or alone
Even nights when the owls were crying.
Little village the trains left behind.
Snacking on soft candy from a brass bowl,
Telling village stories about the fox
Until late at night with the one I love,
I would be happy as a queen,
And the old shaggy dog would bark at the moon.

(DRM)

PAEK SŎK (1912–?)

Born in Chŏngju, North P'yŏngan Province, near P'yŏngyang and Kim Sowŏl's birthplace, Paek Sŏk was something of a rural counterpart to Im Hwa. Like Kim Sowŏl, Paek Sŏk used the flavorful dialect of his region, though his early poems, especially, dealt with the local countryside and its human inhabitants rather than the more subjective realms that Kim Sowŏl explored. Like Im Hwa, though, Paek's work shows a shift from a sense of locatedness and of almost tactile connection to those who people the poems, to the depression and anomie that seem characteristic of much of the literary work of the 1930s. Like other writers of his generation, Paek Sŏk "disappeared" into North Korea, and although his works have become known and are admired now in South Korea, following the lifting of the publication ban in 1988, the particulars of his life in the DPRK remain obscure.

Translated by Kyunghwan Choi

Samch'ŏnp'o

The piglets go by, smart as you please,
each one's ears tingling on a road so warm,
so full of sunshine.

On the heap of ashes, magpies climb, and children too,
and the shimmering air rises.

In the threshing yard, so good for feeling the warm sun,
people are standing about, the color of the rice stalks,
the sounds of their quarrels the same color as snow
after sweeping.

The ox is dozing with its packsaddle on its back.
They are all warm. They are all poor.

Mountain Rain

Raindrops are striking a mountain mulberry leaf.
A mountain dove is flying away.
An inchworm on a stump raises its head,
looks where the mountain dove is flying.

Sound of the Mountain Bird

Drying pollack at the end of the eaves.
The pollack is completely frozen.
Pollack is a long and bluish fish,
long icicles hang from the tails.
The sun sets, the day is gone, the sunshine sadly cold.
I, too, am a long and bluish pollack.
Frozen on the threshold,
long icicles hang from my heart.

Natasha, the White Donkey, and I

Because I, this poor one,
love beautiful Natasha,
snow falls thickly tonight.

As for loving Natasha, I do,
and as for the snow, it falls thickly as
I sit sadly alone drinking *soju*.
As I drink, I think—
Natasha and I,

in the evening as snow piles up deeply, we will ride on a
 white donkey
 into the mountain. Let's live in a grass hut deep in the
 mountain village where
 the echoes murmur.

Snow falls thickly, and
 I think of Natasha—
 no way she won't be coming.
 She has already come quietly and talks to me inside.
 Going to the mountain is not surrendering to the world,
 but
 leaving it and all its filth.

Snow falls thickly,
 the beautiful Natasha loves me,
 and somewhere a white donkey may cry for joy of this
 night.

On the White Wall

This evening only the lonely ones come and go upon
 the white wall in a narrow room.
 On this white wall are
 a fifteen-watt bulb casting a weary light,
 a dark shadow resting upon the worn-out cotton shirt
 soaked with dirt and sweat,
 and many strings of my lonely thoughts wandering
 about, thinking
 a cup of warm and sweet *kamju* would be perfect.
 But then, what is it?
 On this white wall
 there is my mother, old and poor—
 my old and poor mother rinsing the radishes and cabbages,
 her hands in the icy water on a day frozen, pallid, blue.
 And there is my beloved—

my dear beloved at a dinner table with a bowl of codfish
soup
sitting face to face with her husband
in a small house with a low roof in some quiet southern
harbor-town.

She already has a child, the little one beside her.

Then, also, just about now
coming and going quickly on this white wall,
the words

watching my lonely face—

I was born in this world to live a poor and lonely, lofty
and solitary life.

And as I go on living in this world,
my heart fills up with many things
blazing or desolate, with love and with sorrow.

And once again, this time, as if comforting me or urging
me to join them,

these words come and go, signaling me with their eyes
and shaking their fists—

When Heaven let this world begin, to all those he
cherished and loved the most,

he granted a life of poverty and loneliness, loftiness and
solitude, full of love and sorrow—

like a crescent moon, a wild flower, a mountain bird, and
a donkey, and like Francis Jammes,

T'ao Yuan Míng, Rainer Maria Rilke.

YUN TONGJU (1918–1945)

Yun Tongju was born in North Kando, in northeastern China, went to Yŏnhŭi College (now Yonsei University) in Seoul, and then to Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. His one collection, *Hanŭl kwa param kwa pyŏl kwa si* (Sky, wind, stars, and poetry), was published posthumously, in 1948. He was arrested in 1943 and imprisoned in Fukuoka Prison, where he died, possibly a victim of medical experimentation, on 16 February 1945. The Christian imagery and the idealism in his poetry are relatively easy to perceive, even in translation; less so is the intense focus in his poems upon issues of his identity as a Korean. For example, during the wretched final years of the colonial period, Japanese policies banned the use of the Korean language and required all Koreans to assume Japanese names. In that era, using such phrases as “alien country,” in reference to Japan, from the poem “A Poem that Came Easily,” would constitute a subversive act. That somewhat subdued but valiant presentation of a Korean outlook in his poems, the fact of his early death under such appalling circumstances, and the straightforward, youthful heroism of his life and work, have made Yun Tongju an iconic figure in the South Korean literature textbooks over the decades, all of which in turn helps to account for the extraordinary popularity, year after year, of his one book of poems. Of all his works, “Self-portrait” is perhaps the most admired. In capturing an agonizing sense of self-regard and simultaneous self-loathing, it does present a portrait of the “colonized mentality” that readers also find embedded in Yi Sang’s works, but the poem stands as a remarkable enactment of a poem’s own mode of existence. Yun’s poem might be read alongside such works as Kim Sowŏl’s “Azaleas” or Han Yongun’s “Ferryboat and Traveler,” first as an articulation of a Korean sense of identity at the time it was written and subsequently represented in the national literature textbooks, but then also as a lesson in how to make a poem dance, by beginning with a gesture, countering with another

gesture or sequence, then concluding with an inward folding of all the gestures into the carefully composed conclusion.

Translations by David R. McCann and by Kay Richards and Steffen Richards

Self-portrait

Below the mountain
beside a field
alone I look into a lone well.

In the well, moons glow
where clouds flow down opened skies
before pale blue winds,
and there is autumn.

And a young man.

Somehow despising
that young man
I turn away.

Turn away, reflect,
perhaps begin to pity that young man.

Returned, looking in as before
is a young man.

Again somehow despising
that young man
I turn away.

Turn away, reflect,
perhaps begin to remember . . .

In a well, moons glow
where clouds flow down opened skies

before pale blue winds.
 Autumn is there,
 and like a pale memory,
 a young man.

(DRM)

Foreword

Wishing not to have
 so much as a speck of shame
 toward heaven until the day I die,
 I suffered, even when the wind stirred the leaves.
 With my heart singing to the stars,
 I shall love all things that are dying.
 And I must walk the road
 that has been given to me.

Tonight, again, the stars are
 brushed by the wind.

His Last Words

In the room awash with light,
 his last words were mere movements of his lips:

—My son, they say, went to sea to hunt for pearls;
 my first son, they say, fell in love with a woman diver:
 Look out to see if they are coming . . .

The last breath of a father lonely during his lifetime:
 Sorrow clouds his eyes as they close.

A dog barks from a remote house;
 cool blue moonlight flows over the ribs of the door.

Hospital

Her face concealed in the shade of the apricot tree as she lies in the garden behind the hospital, a young woman is sunning herself, her legs white below her white dress. Even after the best part of the day, no one, not even a butterfly, comes to visit this woman, who is said to be suffering from tuberculosis. Not even the wind stirs the branches of the apricot tree, which knows nothing of sadness.

I am here for the first time, no longer able to endure my mysterious affliction. But my elderly doctor does not understand his young man's illness. He says I don't have a disease. These excessive trials, this excessive fatigue: I must hold my temper.

The woman gets up, tidies her clothes, picks a marigold from the flower bed and pins it to her breast, and disappears into the ward. Hoping she will quickly regain her health—and I mine—I try lying down where she has just been lying.

The Cross

The sun was following me
but it is now caught on the cross
on top of the church.

How can I get up
that high on the steeple?

No sound comes from the bell:
I might as well whistle and hang around.

If I were permitted my own cross,
like the man who suffered,
the blessed Jesus Christ,

I would hang my head
and quietly bleed
blood that would blossom like a flower
under a darkening sky.

Yet Another Home

The night I returned home
my white bones followed
and lay down in the same room.

The dark room gave out
on the universe
and the wind blew
like a voice from heaven.

Peering down at my white bones,
so finely worn away and
pulverized by the wind amid the darkness,
I wonder who it is whose tears are being shed.
Am I crying?
Or is it my white bones?
Perhaps my beautiful soul?

A steadfast dog howls
in the darkness through the night.

The dog howling in the darkness
must be the one that is driving me away.

Let me go! Let me go!
Let me go, I who am being driven away!

Let me go to yet another beautiful home,
stealing away from my white bones!

One Night I Count the Stars

The sky that the seasons pass through
is filled with autumn.
I feel as though I can count, without trouble,
all the stars in the depths of autumn.
The reason I cannot now count
all the stars being etched in my heart
one and two at a time,
is that morning comes too soon;
night still remains until tomorrow,
and my youth is not yet spent.
For one star, a memory;
for one star, love;
for one star, loneliness;
for one star, longing;
for one star, a poem;
for one star, Mother. Mother.

Mother, I try calling each star something beautiful: the
names of the children I shared a desk with in primary
school; the names of the foreign girls, like Pae, Kyung,
and Ok; the names of the young women who are already
mothers; the names of our poor neighbors, and of the
dove, puppy, rabbit, mule, and deer; and the names of
poets, like Francis Jammes and Rainer Maria Rilke.

They are all so far away,
like the stars that are infinitely distant.

And Mother,
you are in far northern Manchuria.
Longing for something, I wrote my name

on the hill, where so much starlight has fallen,
and then buried it.

Perhaps the insects drone during the night,
mourning over my shameful name.

But when winter has passed and spring comes even to my
star,
to the hill where my name is buried,
the grass, like that growing green over graves
will grow lush and proud.

A Poem That Came Easily

The night rain whispers outside the window
of my six-mat room, in an alien country.

The poet has a sad vocation, I know;
should I write another line of poetry?

Having received my tuition from home in an envelope
soaked with the smell of sweat and love,

I tuck my college notebook under my arm
and go off to listen to the lecture of an old professor.

Looking back, I see that I have lost my childhood friends:
one and two at a time—all of them.

What was it that I was hoping for,
and why am I simply sinking to the bottom alone?

Life is meant to be difficult:
it is too bad
that a poem comes so easily to me.

My six-mat room in an alien country:
the night rain whispers outside the window.

I light the lamp to drive out the darkness a little,
and I, in my last moments, wait for the morning,
which will come like a new era.

Extending a small hand to myself,
I offer myself the very first handshake,
tears, and condolences.

(KR AND SR)

SŎ CHŎNGJU (1915–2000)

Sŏ Chŏngju was born in Koch'ang, North Chŏlla Province; he studied at Chungang Buddhist Academy and taught for many years at Tongguk University. Sŏ's first collection of poems, *Hwasajip* (Flower snake collection), published in 1941, presented images, language, and narrative elements that were startlingly new in their vivid sensuality. Poems like "Flower Snake" or "Midday" had never been seen before in Korea, though the poet acknowledged his own indebtedness to Baudelaire. Nor had a poet written about his or her own family's undistinguished pedigree; Sŏ's "Self-portrait" is a work that other poets remember for its pathbreaking, if now evidently fictive portrayal of a family's humble, rural origins. Although they would object to the directions that Sŏ's later poems took, especially their avoidance of the contemporary Korean political and cultural scene, poets like Shin Kyŏngnim, who wrote in the 1970s about the difficult lives of Korea's rural and urban poor, were pursuing possibilities and obligations that were implicit in Sŏ's first collection.

Silla ch'o (Shilla notes; 1961) turned to Korea's distant, quasi-legendary past. The Shilla era, from the sixth to tenth centuries, was a period of high artistic accomplishment in Buddhist sculpture and architecture, in the gold crowns and other tomb remains, and it was a period known in quite fascinating detail and quantity through the songs, poems, legends and other narrative materials collected in the thirteenth century *Samguk yusa* (Remnants of the three kingdoms), by the monk Iryŏn. Sŏ returned to the more personal mode in his famous 1968 collection *Tongch'ŏn* (Winter sky). He wrote an autobiography in the poems of *Anich'inŭn ildŭl* (Unforgettable things), a record of a journey around the world in *Sŏjŏgŭro kanŭn tal ch'ŏrŏm* (Like the moon going westward; 1980), a set of rather rueful poems on older age in *Nŭlkŭn ttŏdoriŭi si* (Old wanderer's poems), published in 1994.

The shaped character of his poetry is elegantly represented by Sō's "Winter Sky," with the poem unearthing itself, clarifying itself in the opening lines, the fierce bird then recapitulating that process in the final lines. The arc of flight is the shape of the poem, a glorious, extravagant, poetical gesture, in some ways like the turn in Kim Sowōl's "Azaleas"—to go off to Mount Yak and gather the azaleas and then scatter them on the path. The poem begins in a subjective mode and transposes itself into the objective mode, marking the liminal moment by the word "mimicry," which makes the poem doubly knowing, able to see the gesture and line of the brow, then bend its own path in the bird's flight to match it.

All together, Sō Chōngju created an oeuvre that stands as among the most impressive of Korea's twentieth century in its range of imagery, subject, location, period, and, above all, as many will attest, its strikingly beautiful effects in the Korean language. Alas, the latter are just those qualities most obviously missing in translation.

Translated by David R. McCann

Self-portrait

Father was a serf;
 he never came home, even late at night.
 The only things standing there were grandmother,
 withered
 and pale as the roots of a leek,
 and one flowering date tree.
 For a month, mother longed for green apricots, even one.
 By the oil lamp set in the dirt wall's niche,
 I was mother's boy, with black fingernails.
 With my large eyes and thick hair
 I am said to take after grandfather on my mother's side,
 who went off to sea, the story goes, sometime
 during the year of reforms, and never returned.
 For twenty-three years it is the wind that has raised
 four-fifths of me.

Life has become more and more an embarrassment.
 Some read a convict in my eyes,

some an idiot in my mouth,
but I will repent nothing.

On such mornings, at the magnificent dawn,
drops of blood mingle with the dew
of poetry settled on my forehead.
For I have come, tongue hanging out,
panting through sun and shade like a sick dog.

Leper

Saddened by the sun
and blue of the sky

the leper ate a child
at moonrise by the barley fields

and through the night cried out
his sorrow red as a flower.

Midday

A path through a field of red flowers
that plucked and tasted bring dreaming death;

along the path winding like the yellow back
of an opium-stunned snake,
my love runs, calling me after,

and I follow, receiving
in my two hands
the blood flowing sharp-scented from my nose.

In the broiling midday, hushed as night,
our two bodies burn.

Blue Days

Dazzling blue days—
Know the longing for those we love.

The green in autumn's garden
withers to autumn hues;

snow fall
lets spring return.

And if I should die and you live?
Or you die? And I live?

On dazzling blue days we know
the longing for those we love.

Beside a Chrysanthemum

To bring one chrysanthemum
to flower, the cuckoo has cried
since spring.

To bring one chrysanthemum to bloom,
thunder has rolled
through black clouds.

Flower, like my sister returning
from distant, youthful byways
of throat-tight longing
to stand by the mirror:

for your yellow petals to open,
last night such a frost fell,
and I did not sleep.

Winter Sky

With a thousand nights' dream
I have rinsed clear the gentle brow
of my heart's love,
to transplant it
into the heavens.
A fierce bird
knows, and in mimicry
arcs through the midwinter sky.

Like a Wind from Lotus Blossoms

Sadly, though not
terribly
 just
a bit
sadly

parting, though not
forever
 parting
as if to meet again
in another life

like a wind away
 not toward
lotus blossoms

not the wind you met
a few days ago, but the wind
of a season of more
past.

In the Old Capital

A boy of fifteen or sixteen carrying a bundle of peonies behind on his bicycle passes the alleyway of the old, Yi Dynasty tiled-roofed houses, and he calls out in his rooster voice, "Buy some flowers." The pulsing of that sound fills air dyed the most beautiful jade in the world. Behind him, a woman wanting flowers opens the white paper window and calls out "Boy, you boy! Come here!" But he doesn't hear at all and goes on eagerly shouting "Buy some flowers! Buy flowers!" Starting up the hill where the dark tiled-roof houses end, riding briskly ahead of the peonies he goes darting away, ringing his bell.

Autumn, 1949

AT THE "FLOWER" TEA ROOM

For poems the pay was a dollar
and a half. Prose
was cheaper.
We were waiting, all of us
literary people
for payment at autumn's edge,
1949,
sitting there idly waiting
in the "Flower" tea room.

I had no way to avoid
sitting there in the crowd of specimens
solid as Ansŏng brass,
strangely suspended.
President of the Poetry Division
of the newly established
Korean Writers Association,
I knew that I must
conduct myself with dignity,
but still I sat there, hoping

someone else would pay the bill
for my tea.

Liberation had come to us
through another's strength,
and in our land gone mad,
split into two pieces unable
for a minute to work together,
Freedom was about as much use
as horseshoes on a dog!
Talking of Self-determination was just
mumbling in our sleep.

With our poor stomachs
always hungrier, near sundown,
for having made lunch and dinner both
out of breakfast,
dazed,
sitting in our little band
of the bewildered,
vacantly, vacantly,
always vacantly we sat there
for that sorrowful eternity,
there in the "Flower" tea room.
Just *there*, in the "Flower"!

Wanderer's Bouquet

Once one year, and I don't know when,
so lonely I could not stand it,
I became a wanderer and spent the year
roaming the mountain district,
and as I did I broke and gathered
a handful of flowers I
gave to some child by the roadside.

That child by the roadside
by now must have grown,
and perhaps being lonely he too
has plucked a handful of flowers
to give to some other child.

And after some tens of years have passed,
crossing over yet one more bridge,
might that present of the bouquet
pass on to a child I haven't seen?

And so on a certain day
one thousand, or one thousand five hundred
years from now, below a mountain
where the sky is clearing after rain,
on a vast plain as the sun begins to fall,
where the hand of a new wanderer extends the bouquet,
is the child coming to receive it?

Such A Land

Do you know a land
whose people live more still, more forlorn
than a temple deep in the mountains,
the fourth hour past midnight,
a quiet dream?

Do you know of a land whose people live
with their words folded away, hung
on a rack beneath the clothes
worn for occasions?

Whose flesh is cheapest in the world.
A land where a dollar is more than enough
to buy two or three pretty young poppies,

and the heart
is never old. Perhaps
pawned, but never sold, despite
two thousand years'
betrothal.

And with that pledge redeemed
and starting home, a land
that could live on *kimch'i*
rice
and water,
ten thousand years
for another such pledge
to wait.

The Great Wave

There was a day when the sea overflowed, climbing back up the stream, sliding through the gaps in the hemp-stalk hedge, crossing over the corn patch to gather brimming in the yard of my grandmother's house. On that day I would have been visiting for minnows or shrimp fry, and hopping around chirping, happy as a lark. Grandmother, who always seemed able to spin stories out long as the silkworm's thread, this time for some reason was utterly still. She stood, her old face tinged reddish, like twilight, staring mutely out to sea.

I did not understand, that day, but now that she has passed away I have at last begun to. Grandfather was a fisherman, sailing far out to sea, and one autumn, before the time I was born, they say that in a sudden storm he was swept away overboard and forever lost. There was simply nothing grandmother could say, though her face flushed red, when she saw the waters of her husband's sea returning to the yard of his own home.

Grandmother's Verandah

Behind grandmother's house is the verandah, dark as mulberry-wood and big as two sheets of floor paper. Verandah polished, it was said, by grandmother's hands and the hands of her daughters, so there must remain many signs of the youthful touch of my own mother's hands. By now though that floor has been polished so often, the marks of so many hands have been worn away to a gleaming mirror, a mirror reflecting my young face.

It happens on a day when mother is so mad, scolding me till I have no place to go, I find this verandah, mirror of time and touch. I catch my breath, and eat the healthful fruit grandmother picks and gives me from the mulberry out by the sauce-crock terrace. Even mother cannot bring her scolding back here, to this verandah where my face and grandmother's are reflected side by side.

New Year's Prayer: 1976

The sound of the boy walking
down the snowy street
selling fried silkworms

echoes the rustling of bamboo groves
near Tamyang, in the southwest.

Sharing a grin with him I know
a difficult calm.

The boy selling papers,
as he pulls a copy loose from the pile,

the sound of pine groves
near Ch'öngdo, east of Taegu.

Placing the copper coins
jingling in his hand
I know a difficult calm.

The children on their way to school
turning so effortlessly
down the sloping ridge path,
curving like the slender line
of a winter day's orchid:
thinking "Go safely, fare well,"
I know a sense of peace.

Their hearts, what
are the hearts of these children like?
Small, cold, and mute?
Are they warm as cousin's silk trousers?

Or like a fireplace
where someone, risen so early in the morning
kindles the fire for someone else?
—Musing brings back
the line from an old, old song:
A heart full of healing.

Whatever else they may be,
let your hearts, children, be full
of healing, and all of you
well. May this prayer for you
find you
well.

At a Wine House near Taegu

Some days after
the celebration of my sixtieth*

* *The sixtieth birthday marks the full cycle of a lifetime.*

year, one night I found
a small wine house
near Taegu, where the girl
who came and sat by me
seemed just the age
I had been in grade school.
No more those days to play with
than to eat, but still
the fun we had
tickling the girls!
Lost again in longing
I heard that girl say "Well,
is there anything else you want?"
and suddenly we were tickling under the arms,
soles of our feet, laughing
as I haven't laughed for years.
I left her a new
ten-dollar bill, one
I'd received on my birthday,
and hoped we might
"Meet again soon?"
I found my way back
only a few days later,
but the girl by then
was gone,
bundled up and started
again on some wandering trail.
The old poet can't repeat
with another
what happened.
That visit was my last;
no way
back to the repetition.

Kilimanjaro Sunrise

At sunrise
on Kilimanjaro
what is it the three peaks
 —grandfather,
 father,
 and son—
 in silent communication
agree to do?

By a tree of dawn
just the height of a giraffe
they reveal a giraffe couple
as they tear off and eat the leaves.
They reveal a kiss as the couple recalls
love, a kiss just as still
as still can be.

The Floor in Goethe's House

For how many hundreds of years,
how many thousands of times
have generations of women worn
their hands down
 polishing
and polishing the wide boards of this floor?

Mark of the hands of so many generations
of good-hearted people;
clear mirror that deepens with each generation;
and the sky joined in kindly understanding:
where they seem joined in wearing away together,
I rest in their warm embrace.
That floor gleaming in Goethe's house
promises comfort, and recovery from any illness,
whatever its cause.

Fruit of the mulberry tree
and ball of the cotton plant
show their faces in this floor,
reflecting as if new born.

How utterly colorless it would all appear
if one Goethe at least had not been born
in a corner so well tended as this.

Cuckoo and Skylark

I asked the cuckoo of Zen Cloud Mountain
why she cried so sadly in the night.
“No matter how sad you might be, you don’t know
how to cry, so I cry instead.”
I asked the lark of Zen Cloud Mountain
why she cried out so joyously on such a morning.
“You have forgotten the laughter of childhood,”
came her reply, “so I laugh instead.”

PAK MOGWŎL (1916–1978)

Pak Mogwŏl was born in Kyŏngju, North Kyŏngsang Province and attended Kyesŏng Middle School in Taegu. From the poems he contributed to *Ch'ŏngnok chip* (Blue deer anthology; 1946) with fellow poets Cho Chihun and Pak Tujin in 1946, a reader would surmise that Pak Mogwŏl was a pastoral, nostalgic poet. His “Wayfarer,” for example, one of his most widely known and consistently taught poems, evokes a lovely Korean countryside, but at a certain distance, as the wanderer of the title moves through it without any apparent goal. That sense of detachment, of generalized images in the distance, may remind the reader of Paek Sŏk or other writers of poetry or prose from the later 1930s and 1940s, the last decade of the Japanese occupation, but there is also a sense of imminent rediscovery, as for example in the spring season lurking just past the lines of his “Blue Deer.”

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke and by Edward W. Poitras

Blue Deer

Far away stands Ch'ong ŭn Temple
an old tile-roofed building.

There at Cha Ha Mountain
when spring snows melt

The elms
sprout twelve-fold leaves.

In the clear eye of
a blue deer

Float
clouds.

Family

A whole world
nine pairs of shoes.
No, in the hallway, no, in the garden,
no, in a certain poet's family
when the bare bulb is lit
nine pairs of shoes, different sizes.

My shoes
are size nineteen and a half.
After walking on snow and ice
when I put them next to the others
I see the six point threes of you, my button-nose
little cutie, my sweet little one
our youngest.

Look at the
smile on my face.
This place is
the whole world
where they build walls of snow and ice.
Pitiful road of life!
My shoe size is nineteen and a half.
Nine little puppies
gathered at the warm end of the room!
You're just like puppies.
I came here by treading a way of
humiliation and hunger and cold.
Your father is here.

No, shoes size nineteen and a half have come here.
No, in this world
roughshod people

called fathers
exist.
Look at the
smile on my face.

The Nature Of Gravel

10. TODAY

The wind is blowing;
scudding rags of cloud
hide the sky;
our child has gone to the army.
Today
this
trembling—what is it?
We come and go
and miss in passing, at the edge of simmering water.
While from the depths
a vortex rises,
those who must leave, depart
and even in the spaces in the streaming mass of soldiers
no one is left out.

* * *

After all, the earth, too,
is but a hunk of stone,
speck in absolute space.
mote enveloped in a cloud
of light as from a chandelier.
A jewel wrapped in the skirts of final destruction.
Yet
today
is wearing the shoes of the wind,
cracking the whip
of the whistling wind's cyclone:

on this earth
I become
one drop of thick blood.

14. ETERNITY OF PURE COLOR

My shoelaces come untied.
In harvest October when our ears ring sharply.
in the spaces between the daily round of chores
my shoelaces come untied.
The current of life
is not these motley writings, but
rushes like an overflowing spring.
Beneath the heavens
some things become
clouds,
other things become
stones.
In this eternity of pure color in harvest October
however much I live completion never comes.
My shoelaces come untied.
Some
from the stones
become monuments.
Some
from the monuments
become stones.

(EWP)

April

When the cuckoo cries
protesting April's too long day

the blind daughter of the forester
in a solitary house

on a solitary peak
where pine pollen blows in the air

puts her ear to the lattice door
and listens.

The Wayfarer

Across the ferry
by the path through the corn

like the moon through the clouds
the wayfarer goes.

The road stretches south
three hundred *li*

every wine-mellowing village
afire in the evening light

as the wayfarer goes
like the moon through the clouds.

A Bare Wind

Hermann Hesse,
poet of the clouds, is gone;
summer is gone.

Empty
sand flats, draped
in a fine ash tint,
bite into the sealine.

Eternity
cut on the prow of the
old

battered boat abrades.
Today
the wind is bare.
Nature's harmony has its way:
the old wreck hunkers,
the rotted keel sinks,
the poem carved on the
old
battered prow wears thin.
The foolish fisherman grows old
while a shortening sun flashes
on his waving shock of white hair.
The sea is dark:
a bare wind blows today;
nature's harmony has its way.
The sea is dark
on the rotted keel.

Hanbok

I like hanbok because it's roomy:*
pants, blouse, and coat
are warm, homey apparel.
Those feelings of reassurance
that wrap me when I wear hanbok,
where do they come from?
My hair, turned foam, freezes
as it stretches to the distant shoreline.
I'm at an age when
my ears
hear the sound of a different sea,
an age on which snow is piling.
Winds lash the frozen land
but my hanbok is amply padded.
Hanbok isn't just apparel.

* *Korean-style clothing.*

It is the weave—with breaths strong and liberal—
of a stolid life homeward bound.

Cotton pants, blouse, coat—
dyed jade:

hanbok wraps the body and in doing so
lets me strip the body away.

(KO)

CHO CHIHUN (1920–1968)

Born in Yöngyang, North Kyöngsang Province, and later a professor at Korea University, Cho Chihun in his brief life demonstrated an engagement with the real world and in his art that struggled to shape it. He published several volumes of poetry, beginning with poems in the 1946 *Ch'öngnok chip* (Blue deer anthology), which also included works by Pak Mogwöl and Pak Tujin; *P'ulip' tachang* (Blades of grass; 1952); *Yöksa ap'esö* (Before history; 1959); *Yöun* (After words; 1964). His poems on the Korean War, especially “At Tabuwön” and “At Toriwön,” are well known; his later works addressed the social and political ambiguities of the 1950s and 1960s. Cho Chihun’s use of the sounds, rhythms, and structural features of the Korean language in his lyric poems, hidden by translation, is worth noting. In the poem “Ancient Temple,” for example, the sequence of *d* and *tt* sounds in the phrase “*mogörül ttudurida*” (“striking the wooden fish”)—a way to keep the rhythm in reciting the sutras—suggests the sound of the wooden tapper striking the carved wooden fish, while the verb ending conveys the sense of an action done up to the point of interruption by something else, namely, the next verb phrase, “*chörüme kyöwö*” (overcome by drowsiness), which then gives way in the second stanza to the image of the young monk, who, in the final line of the second stanza, has at last “*chami türöttda*” (drifted into sleep), a phrase that in Korean obliquely echoes the “drowsiness” that came before it.

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke, Kyung-Ja Chun, and David R. McCann

Spring Day

The white teeth
of the blue sea
smile

between the crimson petals of the
camellias.

The roar of the waves
shatters against my window.

A yellow butterfly
hovers
over a glass vase

and like the petals of a flower
withdraws.

The Nun's Dance

Fine, white cowl—
folded butterfly wings;

blue shaved head—
gossamer screened.

Sad-beautiful
the light on her cheeks.

Mute candles melt on the empty terrace;
the moon sets with every falling paulownia leaf.

Sleeves reach across the width of sky;
*posŏn** toes pivot-point in flight.

Black eyes lift gently,
focus on a star in the distant sky.

Two tears glisten on lovely peach cheeks;
the anguish of the daily grind turns to starlight.

* *Korean socks.*

Hands angle, furl, stretch to the limit:
imaging a sacred joining deep in the heart.

Third Watch*: crickets sleepless through the night;
fine, white cowl, folded butterfly wings.

(KO)

Falling Petals

If petals are falling
is the wind to be blamed?

Beyond the bead curtain,
sparse stars fade one by one;

trailing the nightingale's song
a distant mountain draws near.

Shall I blow the candle out
now that petals are falling?

The shadows of falling petals
are aquiver in the garden, and

The white door
is dyed a faint red.

The fair heart
of one living entombed apart

is fathomed by any soul?
I fear.

On a morning with petals falling
my heart longs to weep.

* *After midnight.*

Apparition

Hovering quietly by my window on this dark night,
the person peering into the room, who is it?

saying not a word, with only a heart-piercing gaze,
the person watching over me, who is it?

In this night of blackness with all things awake,
secrets I cannot hide flicker a luminous blue.

On the countless nights I sweat sick with anguish,
ever glued to the window that watcher stands.

Ah, someone thus eyes me nightly, yet
at dawn when I slay my sinful urges

when I open the window as I bare my heart,
only then I wonder who that person could be,
vanishing forlorn into the dim light of waning darkness?

As I Play the Flute

Up in the attic
as I play the flute

on the road of endless clouds
cranes whoop.

Dewdrops grace
the blades of grass.

Bluish moonlight
traverses mountains
like wind on the water
rushing.

My heart brims with
cold white clouds.

Leaning in the attic
as I play the flute

flower-rain, flower-wind,
blurring before tears,

Mt. Chaha in view
with its dozen peaks,

grazing sprouts of clover
the deer likewise weep.

Waiting

With my fair love far away
grieved is my heart, yet

a beloved I have, though far away;
bright is my heart.

Tears abound in this veil of sorrow,
How boast of it?

Until that far off day
that sees my love return
I'll go on, quietly smiling.

This vain body, cast in the mire,
shall bloom and wither
on the road she travels.

Granted but a glimpse of the one I adore,
not even the swift withering should I grieve . . .

Fair star!
There in the dark night sky.

(KJC)

Ancient Temple

Tapping, tapping the carved wooden fish,
overcome by drowsiness,

the lovely young monk
has drifted into sleep.

As the Buddha wordlessly
smiles, just smiles,

along the thousand league western border

under a dazzling evening sky,
peonies fall and fall.

At Toriwpn

Once over, the fierce battle
was less than a rainstorm.

Burnt-out thatch-roof houses,
huts lonely, collapsed—

Today I pass by dejectedly
this village fallen into ashes.

Only one thing, with heaven's favor, still intact:
an old earthenware pot.

And my life too, I realize today,
is with me still.

One by one the people who fled this village come back,
stand on the vacant ground and look at the distant
mountains

where the skies are blue as ever.
Toriwŏn, where in autumn's light

the sad cosmos flowers
bloom and at once fall.

(DRM)

PAK TUJIN (1916–1998)

Pak Tujin was born in Ansŏng, Kyŏnggi Province, and taught at Yŏnsei, Ewha, and Korea Universities. Included with poems by Pak Mogwŏl and Cho Chihun in *Ch'ŏngnok chip* (Blue deer anthology; 1946), Pak Tujin's poems, early and late, are noted for their positive, evocative energy. "Sun," published in 1946, is a representative work, read as an invocation to the Korean nation newly liberated from the Japanese. More direct than Pak Mogwŏl's "Wayfarer" or Yi Sanghwa's 1926 poem "Will Spring Return to Stolen Fields?", "Sun" is read as an expression of the Korean people's longing for national liberation, boldly expressed in Shim Hun's (1901–1936) famous poem of 1930, "When That Day Comes," the first few lines of which are: "When that day comes, when that day finally comes, / When Samgak Mountain will stand up and dance, / and the waters of the Han River boil up like a dragon rising, / If only that day comes before I breathe my last!"

Translated by Edward W. Poitras

Song in a Graveyard

The rich grass slumbers even in this place of death and
the mounded graves seem not at all lonely.

The white bones must be shining brightly in the darkness
within the graves. The fragrance of death must seem
pleasant there.

Death which seemed so sorrowful in death at once loses
its sting; in the tomb remains only the longing for the sun
that will one day shine brightly into these graves.

Granny flowers are blooming in the golden grass; a bunting sings, “bee, bee, bae, batjong, batjong!” The bones lie in the graves, warmed by the spring sun.

Sun

Sun, come forth! Sun, come forth! Sun with your fair face washed clear, handsome sun, come forth! Over the hills, over the hills, eating up the darkness, over the hills all night through, consuming the darkness, with blazing young face, handsome sun, come forth!

No more moonlight nights, no more. I hate moonlight nights in vales of tears. I loathe moonlight nights alone in the empty garden.

Sun, handsome sun! If you only come, if only you come, I will exult in the green hills. I rejoice in the green mountains with their green wings flapping. In the presence of the green hills I am content to be alone.

After the deer, after the deer toward a sunny spot, toward sunny places, following the deer, meeting the deer and playing with the deer,

After the fierce tiger, after the tiger, meeting the tiger and playing with the tiger,

Sun, handsome sun, sun come forth! When I meet you face to face, not in my dreams, we will rejoice together in that fresh day of innocent beauty when flowers and birds and beasts all sit together in one place, are all called to come and sit down together.

Book of Poems

A book of poems lay open
white on the sand before the blue sea.
Wind turned the pages,
ruffling them one by one.
The warm words in the book had etched within them
a sad and beautiful heart.
Those printed words became birds, began to fly.
One, then another;
a hundred, a thousand,
higher, higher, glimmering, drawn into the sky,
white poems of birds, birds of poems.
Flower petals fell trembling from the sky.
Those birds that had recited poems in the sky
forgetting, unable to speak the verse they knew
became flowers falling above the sea.
Then they became stars in the far distant sky.
Those birds that had recited poems in the sky
the world's
sad and beautiful poems,
recited the poems in the book so brightly
they twinkled now, stars in the world of stars.

Tobong Mountain

A mountain bird comes
and does not call,

the clouds have left
and do not return.

All human traces far behind,
I sit alone as
autumn dusk covers the mountain.

As I bellow and call
though there is none to hear,
the echo returns useless
up the empty valleys.

The shadow of the mountain lengthens;
the sun sets red.

In the twilight
stars appear and begin the night,

life grows sadder as I live on
and love brings only pain.

It is for you that I pass this
long night with its sadness,

while you spend the night resting
in some village I know not where.

Inscription Etched by Water

One stroke at a time, now and then in spare moments
retracing the strokes with water
during ten times a hundred thousand years
I wrote
one word.

After a time, later again
quietly searching out the place, then
my hand's touch exploring gently,
retracing each of the strokes,
after passing yet again ten times a hundred thousand
years,

I wrote one word.
In the etched form of each stroke gleamed
a gorgeous rainbow,

in the sun's rays lighting the water
a rainbow of the currents.
There were the times once when I listened,
inclined my ear to the messages, but
having heard
then afterward, and afterward
recorded the inner sense of those words,
now I find that
after carving a few ancient characters
year upon year, for too long,
I have completely forgotten
what words I wrote.

PART TWO

KIM SUYŎNG (1921–1968)

Kim Suyŏng was born in Seoul; he attended Yonhui College (now Yonsei University) but did not graduate. Kim Suyŏng was Korea's most essentially modernist poet. His works are known for their difficulty, their stubborn attention to the plain or even banal or, in the later works, the rhythm induced by repetition of phrases rather than metrical or rhythmical structures. Kim is also cited as an activist poet. While the work that followed the April 1960 Student Revolution (and military coup that brought Park Chung Hee to power in the following year) deploys images of the contemporary political scene, even a poem having no trace of the political in its lines, such as "The Grass," his very last poem, is read as a metaphorical representation of the Korean people under dictatorship. Such a reading is itself deeply implicated in Korean constructions of social and political culture, which is to suggest that its relevance to the non-Korean reader is quite problematic. Another aspect of his work, one that is less obvious than whether to read him as a political poet or perhaps a language poet, is the matter of Kim Suyŏng's efforts to extract his poetic practice from the overwhelming weight of the Japanese occupation and resituate it on Korean cultural foundations. Kim wrote that he was influenced, in this process, by his work in translating *Korea and Her Neighbors* by the doughty, late-nineteenth-century lady traveler Isabella Bird Bishop. There is a certain irony to this part of the story of his development as a writer, given Bishop's cautious admiration for all that Japan seemed to be doing during the 1890s in Korea and her obvious disdain for the Korean ruling class. In the event, the reader of Kim Suyŏng's poems encounters a distinctive voice indeed, puzzled and puzzling, one that succeeding generations of Korean readers as well as the foreigner may be inclined to follow, if, for the latter, in some uncertainty as to ultimate destinations.

Translations by Ellie Choi, Young-Jun Lee, Brother Anthony of Taizé, and Kevin O'Rourke

Emerging from the Old Palace One Day

Why . . . do I get riled at the small things,
 instead of that imperial palace, at the dissipation in the
 imperial palace,
 riled that for a fifty-*wŏn* short rib I got a piece of fat
 riled so narrow-mindedly, cursing the sow-like wench
 who owns the *sŏllŏngt'ang** shop,
 so narrow-mindedly cursing,

unable once to firmly resolutely
 demand freedom of speech for an arrested novelist,
 protest the sending of troops to Vietnam,
 . . . do I instead loathe the night watchmen who
 visit three-four times a night for twenty *wŏn*?

My narrow-minded tradition, so eternal, is now
 Strewn before me as emotion.
 . . . in which case such things are seen:
 Once in Pusan at the Fourteenth Field Hospital POW
 station
 An intelligence officer watching me folding gauze
 bandages making bandages with nurses
 Taunted me, wouldn't I rather be a POW officer, was
 this any work for a man?
 There, right in front of the nurses.

What I defy even now is no different
 Than this making of sponges, this folding of gauze.
 Given over to a dog's howls after hearing its cries,
 Given over to a newborn's fretting, the blood on its head
 still not dry,
 The falling ginkgo leaves, too, are thorn fields on which
 I tread . . .

I am anyway moved to the side, not the summit,
 In any case moved slightly to the side,

* *A plain beef stew.*

Aware that my being slightly to the side is
Also slightly a cowardly thing!

I can not therefore help but rail in this narrow-minded
manner
At the barber,
Not able to rail against the landowner so at the barber,
Not able to rail against the ward office worker, nor
council member,
So at the night watchmen for twenty *wŏn*, for ten . . . for
one *wŏn*,
Is it not ludicrous? For one *wŏn*?

Oh sand, how insignificant am I
Oh wind, dust, grass, how insignificant am I,
Just how insignificant am I?

(EC)

A Beauty

Though they say it's great to see a beauty
She might not like her own face
If not, how could she be a beauty?

The more beautiful she is, the more she must be so
When we are with her
The reason we happen to open the door or the window
is not to let cigarette smoke out only
is it?

Sex

After I did it with her, the day I first did it with my wife,
it was the very second night after the day I did it,
O, no, it was the very first night, though I did it over
half an hour,

my wife was not satisfied
 I tried it hard, though not as far as with the girl
 almost cutting off the tongue, I tried it hard to serve her,
 but my wife was not satisfied

She seems to know that I grasped the point of her sex
 She seems to sense it, if not clearly enough

Surprised, I become insensitive
 what I was in the past
 it's the moment of compassion, not the moment of
 ecstasy,
 but the moment of compassion in deception

I discharged long after she did,
 after holding back much longer than usual
 though I could pass out a peak once more
 If I deceived her so thoroughly
 I should end up in the deception of myself.

The Journal Encounter

I can't lend it to you. I am not the same as last year.
 I can see it. Under the signboard of a shop of cold
 noodle—
 We went in for hot beef soup and came out—to a shop
 of buckwheat noodles only—
 young prostitutes were sitting with crossed dirty legs.
 No, it's not what I came to think when I was looking at
 them eating noodles with fried tofu.
 At the time, I thought to lend it to you. With the virtue
 of generosity—
 I could do that. I could see it too. I could sacrifice even
 Ionesco
 in the *Encounter*. That is
 nothing. I was standing before it. My body. Shining
 body.

I have believed it so everyday. I moved to another room.

My
son moved into my room, I moved into the room the
kitchen maid
used. But, the private teacher who shared the room with
my first son hated
my coughing. Recognizing even dropping my pen, even
waking up, even opening the door, he took
defensive measures. So, I returned to the inner room,
and the kitchen maid
occupied the room where the coughing sound gets to
the private teacher. I had no doubt until that time.
I was ready to lend the book to you, to entrust all of my
pride,
properties and tools to you.

I have believed so everyday, then suddenly it became
different.

Why different. This is my question. This is my concern.
Even now, I can lend it to you. But, the opposite is
possible too.

Do not force me too much. Be patient
and wait for the solution. Now is the time not to lend it
to you.

Only by not doing so, I can see time. I say, I am fighting
against time. There was time.

I came not to lend it to you. It's time. It's because I felt
time. Because
I liked time.

Time is my life. I am not the same as before. I know
I became different. I came to know I should be
different. I need to let you know that. You might not
know
that point is more important than this book. I would live
from now on
letting you know that—Will it be
possible? If so? If not? You! You are shining.
We are not shining. Yesterday is not shining,

nor is today. Only the juncture of these shines.
 It is only time that is shining. It is only the recognition
 of time
 that is shining.
 I won't lend it to you. Although I promised to, I
 will not. I was weak and avoided making a blunt
 declaration,
 hanging around until tomorrow and the next day.
 I don't have to make a blunt declaration. I may tell
 a lie.

It's enough that I would not lend it to you. I am enough,
 you too. This is how the world is.

Vinegar of Cruelty

Now, be cruel
 when this door is opened, do not say a word.
 Without welcoming, just show a slight nod
 wherever he studies, on the floor or in the field
 whatever he does, goes away or not
 Don't speak to him—that boy must be expecting me to
 say a word
 and to be as warm as we were at lunch
 and to be soft like a leaf of spinach
 Yes, I am warm as before, but a little different
 some vinegar has been added, the vinegar of cruelty
 You, bastard—this little rascal—unreliable—sixth grader
 this motherless boy—a life
 I am such a person—cruel—sorry—but cruel
 You, you stopped humming—you are quite
 headstrong—bastard—drop dead

(YJL)

A Lonely Journey

Winter had arrived
in the cemented yard.
Certainly I had done well
to return without sending a telegram
from the journey
I had set out on without saying a word.

From there in the yard
I could detect my wife's secrets
while I had not been around
and even
detect my own secrets
from that day with me not around.

Yet I was not in the least
bit amazed.
(Besides, I was probably
far too weary.)
Just as the journey had been
unable to amaze me,
it would not do to be amazed
at that period of absence
once I was back home.

Repeating: "Fool drunk on common sense
drunk on common sense
common sense
common . . ."
I just keep busy
at something or other.
And I reflect that it's because
the drunkenness I left behind,
threw away
hurled
into the white seas of Sorok-do,
has not yet
all worn off . . .

Ha . . . No Shadows

Our enemies are nothing to look at.
 Our enemies do not look fierce like Kirk Douglas or
 Richard Widmark.
 They are not in the least fierce villains,
 they are even virtuous.
 They disguise themselves as democrats,
 they term themselves good citizens,
 they term themselves the people's choice,
 they term themselves company employees,
 they ride in trams, they ride in cars,
 they go into restaurants,
 they drink, they laugh, they gossip,
 their faces express sympathy, sincerity,
 they do their work quickly, say they're busy,
 write texts, keep accounts,
 they're in the countryside, by the seaside,
 in Seoul, they take walks,
 go to movies,
 have charm.
 Which means to say that they're right beside us.

Our battle line is invisible to the eye.
 Which makes our combat all that more difficult.
 Our battle line is not at Dunkerque, or Normandy, or
 Yŏnhŭi Hill.
 Our battle line cannot be found in any atlas.
 Sometimes it lies in our homes.
 Sometimes it lies in our work-places.
 Sometimes it lies in our neighborhoods but
 it is invisible.

In appearance our combat is not as active as burnt-earth
 strategy,
 or "Battle at Gun Hill," neither is it nice to see.
 Yet we are all the time fighting.
 Morning, noon, and night, as we eat,

as we walk down the street, as we enjoy a chat,
 as we do business, as we engage in engineering works,
 as we go on journeys, as we weep and as we laugh,
 as we eat spring greens,
 as we go to the market and sniff the smell of fish,
 fully fed, and thirsty,
 making love, dozing off, in dreams,
 waking up, and waking up, and waking up , . . .
 as we sit in class, as we go home
 as we set our watches to the siren, as we are shining our
 shoes . . .
 our combat knows no rest.

Our combat fills all the space between heaven and earth.
 Since it's democracy's battle, it has to be fought
 democratically.
 As there are no shadows in the heavens, democracy's
 battles likewise know no shadows.
 Ha . . . no shadows.

Ha . . . just so . . .
 Ha . . . and yet . . .
 why, just so indeed . . . that's how it is

Uhuh . . . uh . . . what?
 Ah, I see . . . I see, I see.

(BA)

Snow

Snow falls after it fell

Snow falls after thinking

Will it fall after crying loud

Snow falls after thinking as a whole

Will it fall more, over a line, over two lines

Will it fall in ruins, in ruins

Grass

The grass lies down. It fluttered
in the driving rain of the east wind,
and now it lies,
cries,
cries all the more
for cloudy skies,
lies.

The grass lies:
lies more quickly than the wind,
cries more quickly than the wind,
rises before the wind.

On cloudy days the grass lies;
lies
to its ankles,
to the soles of its feet;
lies later than the wind,
rises before it;
cries later than the wind,
laughs before it.
On cloudy days, the roots lie.

(KO)

PAK INHWAN (1926–1956)

Born in Inje, Kangwŏn Province, Pak Inhwan was extremely popular, during his brief life, among readers who responded to his modernist, Western-oriented language, imagery, and subject matter of urban alienation. A close associate of the famously canonical poet Kim Suyŏng and other modernists, he was involved in two important publications, *Sinsiron* (New theory of poetry; 1948) and, in collaboration with Kim, the significant *Saeroŭ tosi wa simintŭlŭi hapch'ang* (The new city and the chorus of the citizens; 1949). The poet died at the age of thirty, only three years after the Korean War's armistice. His best-known poem, "The Rocking Horse and the Lady," expresses a regret and nostalgia that are characteristic of lyric poetry in general terms, and it wraps these subjects in images of foreign materials such as the whiskey and its bottle, the name of Virginia Woolf, her novel *To the Lighthouse*, and the extinguishing of its light. Yet in poems like "Towards a New Resolve" and "A Sleepless Night," one can observe the writer struggling to engage the still raw subject of national division and the Cold War. It seems a doubly cruel fate for a poet in the midst of that engagement to reach the end of his life and career.

Translated by Scott Swaner

The Rocking Horse and the Lady

We drink whiskey,
 chat about Virginia Woolf's life and
 the skirt-tails of the lady who left on the rocking horse.
 The rocking horse threw its rider, making no one but
 the bells cry out,
 then it departed into autumn. Stars are shooting in the
 whiskey bottle.

Heartbroken stars shatter softly in my heart.
The girl I so briefly knew
grows up near the garden's grass and trees,
and when she casts off the shadow of love and hate, the
very truth of love,
literature dies and life dies
and the beloved rider of the rocking horse
disappears.
With the coming and going of time
we avoid isolation for a while, then wither away,
now we must say farewell.
The whiskey bottle carries the sound of toppling in the
wind,
we must gaze into the eyes of the old-woman
writer.
. to the lighthouse
Even when its light doesn't shine
we must remember the plaintive sound of the rocking
horse
for the sake of our easily amassed pessimism of the
future.
Whether everything passes away, whether it dies,
we must cling to the dim awareness that lingers in our
hearts,
we must listen to Virginia Woolf's doleful story.
Like a snake finding its youth in a crack between two
stones,
we must open our eyes, we must drink another
shot.
Life isn't lonely at all,
it's just vulgar like a magazine cover.
Are we departing because we fear that hapless
something?
The rocking horse is in heaven,
but the jingling of bells surrounds my ears,
and the strangled autumn wind
cries from within my toppled whiskey bottle.

A Sleepless Night

In a broad and many-peopled land
I was all the more alone.
When I returned home, spent, my family of three
looked up at me. But
clinging to the bitter cold wall, I'm lost in reverie.

Because of the war, my fortune and best friends have
disappeared.
The works of the human intellect reduced to a heap of
ash,
the glory of the past, too, has taken flight.
My best friends, we were so close, have scattered,
sometimes there isn't even an echo when we call our
names.
The buzzing of planes fills my ears again today,
and sleep won't come.

When I read poetry on a sleepless night,
her soft perfect face wells up as if a dream
above the blank white page.
My best friends scattered, the next meeting unplanned,
kidnapped by communists.
She will have escaped the world of affliction
with the speed that only a corpse has.

The righteous war awakens me.
At the other side of oblivion I drank for a long time.
It's been a festival of misery
since so many days have been mine.
But when we fathom the fight fought in the name of
endless freedom,
the fight that broke out in our own front yard,
I announce that my departure has been delayed.

My fortune the shattering of this.
My life the shattering of this too.
Oh, isn't it a great thing when one's life goes to shit?

My mind is different than it was. Still
 I'm a real coward when it comes to my beholden family.
 Why do I hide my face from them? Why do I make a fuss?
 I am staring my last days in the face.
 On top of that, I am crying alone.

In this broad and many-peopled land
 I alone am tardy.
 I may not know when I'll die but
 I have an illimitable attachment to life.

Towards a New Resolve

The people of my country, of my village
 left their brides and their homes behind,
 fighting on the battlements they had made,
 to stop the enemies' aimless pillaging,
 so utterly remorseless and unrepentant. So
 they howled raging at their fate.
 For them it was an ever-blessed time but
 the first blood flowed roselike from their breasts.
 Spun out silence and meditation
 trying to discover a new history but
 the dead and a victory without wings—
 I don't want to believe in such things!

Let's say more time has passed,
 who will remember them then?
 In a village of warriors
 and streets where only so-called freedom remains
 the brides grow old and the fatherless young
 are raised, like grass,
 in the midst of the winds.

It wasn't long ago, just a poignant tale of yesterday.
 Those who invaded are still alive,
 those who went to fight don't come back,

a ponderous reign of terror rules over us.
Ah, submission and a present without change,
the spoils of a battle that's lost its meaning,
my own rage and humanity's persisting grief
pierce the heavens.

Rain pours on the ruins and the hungry streets
as if mocking the battle we fought,
and we are weeping.
What can we do?
None of what we'd hoped for survives.
And even now, aren't our enemies still alive?

When Seasons Pass

That person's name escapes me now
but her eyes and her lips
remain in my heart.

Even when the winds blow,
even when the rains fall,
outside the window, I can't forget
that night of streetlight shadows.

When love passes
what remains of the past—
a lakeside on a summer's day,
a park in autumn,
on that park bench,
the leaves falling,
the leaves turning to dust,
covered with leaves,
though we say love disappears—
that person's name escapes me now
but her eyes and her lips
remain in my heart,
remain in my bitter heart.

Fortnight

It's no use
even writing on this clean seat.
The sounds of horror waft through the air,
butterflies transported in a tiny room.
It is something you have to hear,
it is something you have to see,
a ceremony.

Today's no different from yesterday—
the person I'm worrying about gets farther by the day—
like a prisoner waiting for death
I have to yawn a fatigued yawn.

Particles flying at the window,
a dictionary filled with lies,
I have no other choice but to look at it.
Beneath the changeless sea and sky
there is no one for me to curse.
I have to circle my own world of dreams
like a seagull migrated from Alaska.

One bottle of whiskey. Ten packs of smokes.
But wait—the consumption of my mind continues. A
 fortnight
spent on the wide sea is meaningless.
But
my face and fractured body are soaked
in the scent of isolation and complexity.

The sea gets angry and I'm trying to sleep.
I dream of the ego through nature's eons and eons.
It could be
a deep-seated delusion embellishing
a fragment of reminiscence
and a peculiar ambition.

Night passes and the day of affliction arrives.
Drinking coffee becomes my measure.
The sea and sky all around
immersed in immense misery and steel.
That is why I wasn't lonely yesterday.

KIM CH'UNSU (1922–)

Kim Ch'unsu was born in Ch'ungmu, South Kyöngsang Province and attended Nihon University in Japan. Kim Ch'unsu had considerable influence on post-Korean War poetic practice through his critical essays as well as his numerous collections of poems. The explorations of meaning and nonmeaning, of the relationship between perception and object, or the simple juxtaposition of images in his collection *Ch'öyong*, which invokes the elusive, eponymous figure from the same Shilla period that also drew the attention of the poet Sö Chöngju, have attracted many readers to this Korean “language poet.”

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke and by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Flower

You were
nothing,
a mere sign,
till I named you.

But when I called you by name,
you came to me:
you became a flower.

I want someone,
my match in tone and scent,
would call my name
as I called yours.
I will go to that person,
I will be that person's flower.

To be is the supreme human need:
you for me, me for you;
to be something meaningful,
unforgettable.

Prelude to a Poem

I am a dangerous animal now.
If my hand touches, you'll
be the pitch-dark unknown.

You bloom and fall
on the branch-end of existence,
nameless:

a vessel of retrospection, a light
in this opaque darkness
where eyes rim with tears.

All night I cry.
Unexpectedly, my weeping grows tornado force;
shakes the tower. If it permeates the stone,
it will be gold.

. . . my veiled bride.

(KO)

Snow Over Chagall's Village

Snow falls over Chagall's village in March.
On the temples of a man who was standing eager for
spring
a newly emerged vein
is fiercely throbbing.
Stroking the newly emerged vein
on the man's fiercely throbbing temples,

the snow comes riding on a myriad of wings,
dropping from the skies and covering
the roofs and chimneys in Chagall's village.
When snow falls in March
the diminutive winter berries of Chagall's village
take on olive-green hues again
and in the evening the womenfolk
kindle the year's most beautiful fires
in the kitchen hearth.

Lilac Petals

A child is pursuing a butterfly.
The hand of the child pursuing a butterfly
but never catching it
is rending the limpid depths of the sky.
The morning sunlight is moistly
drenching the lilac petals.

Masks

As I suddenly enter a side path
full of spring and magnolias,
abolished abolished
darkness,
the back of your head comes in sight.
The abolished abolished
darkness
of the magnolias in Chiri Mountain
I saw last night in a dream,
the back of your head is silent.
One antique bronze earring
is advancing alone in the wind
murmuring softly still today
instead of you: Love, love.

Riding A Mule

Cry no more, wild geese,
cry no more your croaking cries as you fly.
The wind has died down, so do not go,
passing one village, then two, do not go far away;
why did folk say such things in times long gone?
Cry no more, snipe,
and evening primrose, no longer bloom
only in summer nights,
short-lived sparks from the bellows,
crimson sparks from the bellows.

(BA)

KU SANG (1919–)

Born in Seoul, and a graduate of Nihon University in Japan, Ku Sang has published seven major collections of poems and a volume of collected poems, which trace his compassionate witness to the human condition. His poetry does not seem to be the product of a desire for verbal effect, for the kind of textural and textual ingenuity that characterizes the Korean- and Japanese-language works of an Yi Sang, for example, nor the aestheticized longing around which Sŏ Chŏngju's poems seem to arrange themselves. Ku Sang's poems have a meditative, alert, and watchful air; they may begin with spare notations of place, object, people, or animal inhabitants of the scene, and then move to the simple, present-tense declarative mode, often in the present imperfect *ing*-form that captures but leaves without further comment what these living creatures are *do-ing*.

Translated by Kevin O'Rourke

Shame

Between the bars and netting wire of
Changgyŏng Gardens' Zoo
I peer, in search of an animal
that knows shame.

Keeper, I cry!
Is there no presage of shame
in the monkey's
red hole?

What of the bear's paw,
incessantly licked,

the whiskers of the seal,
the female parrot's beak,
do they betray no harbinger of shame?

I've come to the zoo in search of a
shame
long atrophied
in the people of this city.

Wings

The first thing I felt
when I began to toddle
was that arms and legs
would not move as I wished.

Now on the threshold of seventy
once again I feel
that arms and legs
will not move as I wish.

Tottering toward
mother's arms,
or clinging tenuously to life
propped by invisible arms,

I'm not after
jet planes
or spaceships:

I want the ecstasy of flight.
I want to don wings in the company of the angels,
to be a caterpillar become a butterfly,
to have the whole planetary system as my garden.

Spring Chrysanthemums

Spring chrysanthemums,
—progeny of 50 *wŏn* worth of clay
and 10 *wŏn* worth of seed—
yellow,
 red,
 pink,
 green,
 white,
dangled pistil and stamen
in a blocked-up orange box in the window
of one of the Mammoth Apartments.

Nature breathing within artifice.

Spring sunshine came for a look:
dazzled, it slipped away again.

The dancing girl—third floor, facing block—
hung out her pink tongue-blade blanket:
she narrowed her eyes and looked across.

Above, on the sixth floor, a university student
listening to jazz
shook dandruff from his scruffy head:
he looked down.

On the floor below, the wife of the bank security guard,
hair done up in a towel,
flicked the cushions with a feather duster:
she looked up.

The old retired widower next door
changed the water in his fish bowl:
he craned his head to the left.

In the apartment on the left baby brothers
laid out the pieces for a game of house:
they looked right.

The bean curd man
rang his bell as he passed in the street:
he lifted his head and looked up.

The ice peddler
pushing his cart
wiped away the sweat: he looked up, too.

The young mistress of the house
watered the flowers:
she wore just the hint of a smile,
fruit of languorous thoughts of her youthful husband's
insistent love bites
as she pushed him off to work just now.

HONG YUNSUK (1925-)

Hong Yunsuk is a remarkably accessible poet, writing from a position in South Korea that, until relatively recently, seemed permanently cut off from her birth place, Yŏnbaek, Hwanghae Province, in the north. The theme of separation that runs through so much of Korea's so-called division literature prompts in her poems an expansive, inclusive mode of speech and gesture, rather than exclusionary, isolating tones. One of the great strengths of her poetry is its capacity to universalize her experience as a Korean living in a divided land, as in her works the themes of political and cultural separation seem to modulate into the rueful reflections that any reader will or already does recognize as a human, not exclusively Korean, experience. In turn, this universalizing pulse in her poems presents for the Korean reader a clearer message of national reconciliation than the non-Korean reader might necessarily notice.

Translated by Genell Y. Poitras

Discourse on an Ornament

Year after year
 As youth slips away
 Piece by piece
 A woman
 Puts on her jewelry.

Not unlike the washing of a turnip
 Or the leaping of a fish
 (Though this be but a platitude)
 Those days of youth—
 Were they but a shiny ornament
 Coming only once?

At times when out for a stroll
I am taken aback
To see my shabby self
Reflected in a store window.

Those sparkling jewels,
Where were they lost?
Masked in this ridiculous clothing,
What does it mean?

In a foglike weariness
I open the door
Hiding myself from view
Like an invisible flower shop.

The young, too,
In the full bloom of youth,
Flowers like jewels
To delight the eye.

Reaching for a flower,
My trembling hand
Becomes cheerless
A dried-up leaf devoid of dew.

Returning
In secret
Slipping on my deep purple amethyst ring
A languid feeling soothes my soul.

That I Can Do This Autumn

This autumn
Sitting in my chair
This is what I can do.
My ears bend to the sound of the wind.
Peeking into the mailbox once again

As if walking up and down an empty hospital corridor,
To quietly return inward is my work.

As day follows day
Who makes the earth's buds dry up?
Here and there who sets fires, large and small?
This year's bleached bones
Left to pile up on vacant land everywhere.
I am unable to lift even one finger
Nor to keep one leaf from withering.

Myself,
My work this autumn,
To sit in my chair,
Bidding farewell to the sun at noon,
Quietly awaiting the evening,
Reverently welcoming the onset of winter.

My Sea Has One Island

On my sea
A moving island floats,
A light burns on that fairy-tale island
Where wind and waves float like music.
From a distance on a clear day
Not even a glimmer of that light is visible.
On a foggy day with wind and rain
Like the coming of the full moon
With soft hands it beckons.
Embarrassed though I am to say, on my island
At any old time the surging typhoon and the tidal wave
In the darkness of the solar eclipse,
The hunger of many days becomes as undulating tears,
A boat without a sail.
Gone are the compass and the chart.
Yet adrift on the heavy seas
The island appears near as a full moon rising,

The broken hull of a ship abandoned on a bank.
Open that tender heart, let it rest.
Then again in the darkened light
Butterflies and doves fly off in flocks,
Roses and dandelions burst into bloom.
Coming to life dawn breaks
Only escaping to become an illusory sea.
The way to the land is not lost
From that hidden island on my sea.

KIM NAMJO (1927-)

Kim Namjo was born in the city of Taegu, North Kyöngsang Province, graduated from the Seoul National University College of Education, and taught at Soongmyöng Womans University. She has published some thirty volumes of poetry and essays, and with Hong Yunsuk is regarded as one of the major, indeed pioneering, woman poets of the twentieth century. During the 1960s and 1970s her books of poems sold very well, while her poems also appeared in many of the leading literary journals of the day. This was an unusual combination for a woman writer at that time, popular *and* critical success, given the male domination of the literary critical establishment, then and even now. Her poems characteristically engage the theme of love, in both its spiritual and human dimensions.

Translated by David McCann and Hyunjae Yee Sallee

Moonlit Night

When I open the door a bit,
 you peek in with such hesitation;
 when I open the door a little wider,
 you gaze inside for a good while
 with your gray, counter-beam light.

When I leave both doors flung open,
 you do not enter;
 instead, you sit high in the middle of the sky,
 veiling the world with your silk gown.

A certain person long ago
 did just as you have . . .

He never paid me a visit,
but unrolled for me a roll of silk instead.

For Baby

I

Sunlight alights and plays by my baby's sleeping head.
Sunlight is the baby's guest.

Each day since the baby was born
has been smooth as silk.
My child
who cannot see yet.

My baby sleeps sound all day long;
sleep is baby's cradle.
Held in sleep, my baby is growing.

Baby is a small garden of peace,
a bubbling stream of joy.

Baby is a lamp for mother.
When I am with baby
my heart is clear and bright.

2

My baby has no name yet.
Like the charming new-born chick or puppy
that has no name,
my baby has no name yet.

Dawn or night,
or hazy evening
I have been searching and searching
among the numberless letters,
but there is no word so sweet
to call my baby.

The field of stars in the sky,
the pearls that lie piled beneath the sea:
Where can I find
a name for my baby?

My baby has no name yet.
As no one knows the name for the white flower
and the blue bird sent for the first time
from some far distant land,
I do not know the name yet
for my child.

Evening Primrose

Neither for stars nor moon
did this flowering tree yearn.

Even this moonless night
the tree filled with blossoms
is waiting
just for darkness.

While sea gull cleans its feathers
in the cold waves
of the night sea,
the flower
glows in the darkness
with a light like the lamps
in a distant mountain village.

Darkness,
generous oil:
This flower knows
the sweet rest that follows
in peace and tranquility.

The passing wind
kisses the flower,
and as the night deepens
the flower becomes
even more graceful.

Weary at morning light,
like a butterfly, it folds its wings.

Love's Cursive (Selections)

I

When a woman is without love,
she doesn't know how to
become good and hopeful.

When a woman is in love,
she dies of thirst
by the well.

2

Even to the end of the earth
even to the edge of the heavens
even to a house as far as
the world beyond,
love carries sun in the morning;
wind in the evening.

3

Even love dies of starvation;
heart stays cold after a drink
of warm water—
The sickness grows worse, my love;
O my love, you have closed your eyes!

5

As the spring
wells up soundlessly,
as the dew forms
without sound,
just so am I
drenched, and though
the electric currents touch me
I am held by silence.

6

Person who feeds me,
atom by atom:
one single spark causes
the sunrise and sunset
burning the entire sky.

8

Words are sand,
the foam carried
to the rock by the tide.

At the horizon
words will not reach
is a person whose name
cannot be spoken.

9

Today,
love compromised my character.
No, each day
love has compromised my character.

10

Love is
customary sight,
repeated encounter,
the unification of soul and body
in the past, present, future.

I I

Heart that answers heart
soul that echoes soul:
I weep just to think of these,
like a hungry
and foolish child.

I 3

This day so lonely
one could shout for it,
in the cold spring
that gathers
at the bottom of existence,
like complete forgiveness
a love glimmers.

I 5

If your soul is called,
mine too answers,
shuddering to grasp
for the first time
this alliance of two souls.

2 I

An uninvited woman;
I live with her.
Many days, I am that woman.
So it is,
while love is a special invitation,
the reception of conscience.

3 I

Do not let your blood
flow, do not
love me.
Love fills me;
the two of us must consume it.

32

The more painful, love is;
the more lonely, love is.
Piled up, the more
remain, the building stones
of divine punishment.

38

How
the two people soaked
in a fall of wet snow,
in the shared chill
kiss of such
politeness!

39

You already know
my words, and I
know already their sad resemblance
to what you would say.
Words unspoken for a lifetime,
the two of us know.

43

Loving is precious
ability, but I lack
the strength for it.
I write a note of surrender to the air.
Today
there is no other truth.

47

Rather than deserting someone,
let me be left by someone.
When two people love,
let me be first
to love.

48

Love's half moon
in the winter sky,
half shadow, half light
frozen to a crystal.

83

Love is honest farming.
It is planting in the deepest place,
and only on the very last day
reaping.

88

Though I am an ugly clay pot
I yearn to be the brazier
that carries your coals.
I wish to bear
the precious son.

PAK CHAESAM (1933–1997)

Pak Chaesam was born in Tokyo, Japan, and attended Korea University. Pak Chaesam's poetry pursued the cycles of nature that, as much as the elements of the natural world themselves, suggest a simplicity and perfection of form. The reader will find the worlds of nature and humans nearly touching in Pak's poems, in the elegantly suspended contemplation that a poem such as "Night at Tonghak Temple" achieves. The poem "Untitled" begins with what seem to be merely idle, if warm, observations from the window of a train passing through the city of Taegu, a place famous in Korea for its apples; but in its last two stanzas the poem turns to lines that are the despair of the translator for their intense physical and emotional intimacy. Small and delicate as they are in scope and their carefully colloquial, slightly traditional, but extraordinarily poignant phrasing, Pak Chaesam's poems achieve an unusually deep resonance that is quite strikingly his own trace as a poet in the world.

Translated by David R. McCann and Jiwon Shin

Looking at Winter Trees

Just around twenty
and the distant grove of trees
wore its hair loose,
dizzily shaking,
unable to grasp the sense of it,
oh breathless tree, oh love
that lived in such longing!

Now nearing forty,
the backs of my hands thin and bony,
and all the trees as well
have become winter trees, like that:
shedding their leaves,
without shame they have taken off
all that feels good to be rid of.

Only now as I settle
into the bath, they wave
their hands at me,
confirming, slightly,
a landscape in the misty evening glow,
all of it drawing joyfully nearer.

The Road Back

Starting on the frosty path at dawn,
mother now soaked from the heavy night's dew;
mother has come back after a day of selling
to the place where we lie asleep.

There is no jar of honey on the shelf,
only the gray dust piling,
while the children, too small to work
off the debts, lie stretching here, there.

No one to see, no one
to comprehend when she unties
the starlight she carries back on her forehead,
and shakes loose the moonlight
that clings to her sleeves.

Sound of the Taffy-Seller's Shears

There is illness left in my body still,
like the debt that must be repaid,
but I can deal with that.
The sudden sound of the taffy-seller's shears
as they begin their new composition
scatters brilliant gems
on the grassy meadow of my mind.
If I go out into the sound of
the taffy-seller's shears,
close companion to the sunlight,
and get a little piece snipped off
just to try the taste,
will the law of nature be revealed, or
will I arrive at the mistaken notion
that I have rounded the corner
toward eternity?

Immortals' Paduk Game

For a single move a thousand
years have gone flowing past

while for the next move a thousand
years have passed and still

no sound of a stone
striking the board.

Spring's Path

Along the river where the ice has melted and gone out,
accompanying my sister just recovering . . .

Does joining these two
bring the next world any closer?

In the village away across the river
have the peach blossoms started to bloom?

Just now as the bees are birring
and the air is filled with a shimmering,

pearly mists are rising,
a sign of the snows melting on the mountain tops,

and I cannot point it out:
that long and winding pathway spring comes down.

Night at Tonghak Temple

Bury in order the snow-melt
and the spring night,

and somewhere in the next world
water drops fall from the eaves

while at the very edge of your far away
lips, now the whole universe collapses.

Nothing

Sometimes the wind
blows over the plantain leaf

where the drops of water
take their bright form, and fall.

Beyond this moment of perfect calm
life wants nothing.

Autumn River in Burning Tears

When my mind can find no way to rest
in any place, if I follow the trail
of a friend's sad story of love,
taking autumn sunlight along as my companion,
before I know it I am at the ridge,
and the tears come.

The lamps and other lights that gather
at elder brother's house for the ceremonies
may be lights, but I have seen the autumn river
burning in tears as the sun sets.

Look at that, just look!

No, more than you, more than me . . .

When the fresh and happy words of first love
like the sound of the mountain stream fade,
when even the tears that rise
at the end of love have melted away,
in all the things that might well undo me,
I have come to the sea and I find
the voice of the autumn river has died.

Untitled

In sunlight suffused
with the glow of apples

on thin, distant branches
in orchards near Taegu,

morning shakes, as the train,
like an illness,
reaches now the height of its fever.

Love, my love
so far away:

in moments like this
even silk
round my waist
is painful.

SHIN KYŎNGNIM (1936-)

Shin Kyŏngnim was born in Ch'ungju, North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province and graduated from Tongguk University. Shin Kyŏngnim's first book, *Nongmu* (Farmer's dance), created a sensation when it was published in 1973. In place of the many-times romanticized or idealized vision of rural Korean life and culture as had appeared in any number of poems and short stories previously, Shin seemed to enter directly into the lives of the village people, or those caught between the rural and urban settings of late-twentieth-century Korea. His representations of village life came from street level, or the floor of a back room where farmers gathered at the end of a market day. Most strikingly, the poems in the collection slipped frequently into colloquial speech, capturing the rueful voices and sometimes exasperated, sometimes delighted exchanges that take place among ordinary people. The book was awarded the first Manhae Prize for Literature, established by the journal *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* (Creation and criticism), in honor of the poet Manhae, the Buddhist name of Han Yongun. In his later poems, Shin moved to folk-song forms and thematic elements, based on his field studies of such music, and to historic themes in his long narrative poem, *Namban'gang* (South Han River), about the end of the Chosŏn period and beginning of the Japanese colonial occupation.

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke, David R. McCann, and by Brother Anthony of Taizé

The Baby

I.

Baby looks at the snow piling up outside the window;
 signs it's all lovely, all strange; waves a hand.
 Like baby trees shaking baby leaves.

Baby knows all the hidden things:
why snow falls, and the lovely things the snowflakes
 whisper;
knows all—a perfectly contented still life.

2.

After a while, baby learns the word “Mum.”
This means he is forgetting the hidden things of the
 word “Mum.”
But he doesn’t realize.
Flowers, trees, stars.
With elation baby learns the words,
forgetting the hidden things of each.
And when he has forgotten all the hidden things,
baby is a full-fledged person.

3.

Thus when snow piles up like today,
he’ll fret from thoughts of a girl.
Walking the bank of the stream,
he will cry from nostalgia self-directed.

Legend

The poor bugger drank all the time,
a lunatic on the loose;
eventually he died.

He hung his patches
of red and yellow
on the old tree shrine

over the pass
on the way to my village;
then squatted there, revenant.

Chagrined, chagrined,
 the poor bugger cried.
 On mist thick summer nights,

chagrined, chagrined,
 the old tree cried; resuscitated
 he squatted by its side.

They

Barefoot
 they went through
 the bucketing rain,
 so tight their grip
 skinny hands
 welted blue.
 An angry voice
 called me,
 spat
 in my craven face.
 Blood congealed
 on white shirted shoulders.
 They raced through
 the driving wind.

(KO)

Farmer's Dance

Gong sounds, curtain lowers.
 Makeshift stage, lights
 strung from a paulownia.
 The viewers have left
 an empty playing field.

Faces stained with powder, we drink,
 jammed into the wine shop

by the school.
Suffocating, exhausted,
lamentable life.

The cymbal in the lead
we start for the market place,
boys shouting, clinging to us
while young girls cling, giggling,
by the wall of an oil dealer's shop.

The full moon shines as one fellow
bellows like a bandit, another
sneers like Sŏrim the outlaw.
But what use is this commotion,
kicking the heels, crushed
into a hole in the mountains?

Better left to women, this farming
that won't pay
even for the fertilizer.

Past the cow dealer's, turning
by the slaughterhouse
comes the spell, and I
lift one foot and blow the brass horn,
shaking my head, twisting my shoulders.

Country Bus Station

Once past the sixth block
of Ŭlchiro, downtown,
come the smells of my country home.

Crossing the muddy yard
of the bus station, into the chill
of the stoveless waiting room,

an old man, ice
 dangling from his moustache—
 a neighbor, from Sinni Village.
 Worried about the rice stacks
 still ungathered in his fields,
 he curses this cold
 and the windy snow.
 “Oh, is that all you have
 for complaints?” some woman
 sighs.

“Is that all
 you have for troubles?” adds the mistress
 of the wine shop at the crossing.
 The waiting room turns colder
 as it grows more disordered.
 These people from home
 are somehow too much for me.
 Shall I just leave my seat,
 quietly, and take the bus
 back to Ŭlchiro, downtown?
 Returned to the sixth block, I grow
 all the more cowardly.

Market's Closing

We fools are pleased enough
 just seeing each other's faces.
 Carving a melon by the barber shop,
 gulping *makkölli* at a wine stall,
 we all have old friends' faces.

Talk of drought in the southwest,
 of debts to the co-op.

Tapping time with our feet
 to the remedy vendor's guitar,

why do we always feel
such longing for Seoul?

Shall we find some place to play cards?
tip out our wallets
and head for the wine house?

Gathering on the school grounds
we eat pieces of dried squid
and we drink.

Gradually,
the long summer day ends
as with a pair of rubber shoes
and one salted fish,
down the moon-bright road
market limps to a close.

That Day

Alone, a young woman wept,
following the bier,
a procession without bells
or funeral banner.
Along the fog-shrouded, evening road,
phantom shadows.
The wind lifted tree leaves
on a street without doors or windows,
while others watched, hidden
behind phone poles or trees.
No one knew the name
of the one who had died,
that dark day,
with no moon rising.

(DRM)

On a Winter's Night

We're gathered in the backroom of the co-op mill
 playing cards for a dish of *muk*;^{*}
 it's market-day tomorrow. Chattering merchants
 shake off the snow in the yard of the inn.
 Fields and hills shine newly white, snow comes
 swirling thickly down.
 They talk about the price of rice and fertilizers,
 about the local magistrate's daughter, a teacher.
 It seems Puni, up in Seoul working as a maid,
 is going to have a baby. Well, what shall we do?
 Let's get drunk. The bar-girl
 smells of cheap powder, still, let's have a sniff, eh?
 We're the only ones who know our sorrows.
 Shall we try raising fowls this year?
 Winter nights are long, we eat *muk*,
 down drinks, argue over the water rates,
 sing pop songs to the bar-girl's chop-stick beat,
 and as we cross the barley field to make fun
 of the newlywed man at the barber's shop,
 look, the world's all white. Come on snow, drift high,
 high as the roof, bury us deep.
 Suppose we send a love letter, say,
 to those girls behind the siren tower hiding
 wrapped in their skirts? We're
 the only ones who know our troubles.
 Suppose we try fattening the pigs this year?

The Road

Walking along a road,
 walking along a snow-swept mountain road,
 I see bright crimson berries growing in the snow.

^{*} *Acorn jelly.*

I hear the old tales long forgotten.
I hear songs
that flew far away in childhood times.

Walking along a road,
walking along a riverside road crunchy with reeds,
I see white birds perching to sing on the bare branches.
I see long-lost old friends.
I rediscover dreams
forgotten together with those friends.

Walking along a road,
walking along a mountain road,
walking along mountain, river, meadow roads,
I see crimson berries filling my hands full.
I hear the beating wings
of the white bird fluttering in my breast.
I hear the sound of the song
I sing, united with all those things,
walking along the road.

Graveside Memorial

Having lived a wretched life, he died.
He was buried on a quiet slope with
a stream flowing in front, a hill behind.
One balmy spring day with a mild wind blowing
a white wooden marker was standing over his grave.
It stood looking as wretched as his life had been,
exposed to every wind.
Yet that marker suggests there was nothing
worth remembering in the past. Its fragile face
that was growing darker as time went by
looked sad.
It was quietly calling attention to something
that might be heard and might be seen.

(BA)

KO ŬN (1933–)

Born in Kunsan, North Chŏlla Province, Ko Ŭn is without question the most prolific writer of twentieth-century Korea. He has published numerous collections of poems, gatherings of poems on various subjects, as well as fifteen—or more—volumes in the series *Maninbo* (Ten thousand lives), dedicated to making a record of every person he has ever met. His novels, notably including *Hwaŏm kyŏng* (The Garland Sutra; 1991), have been best sellers. He has been publishing a long narrative poem on the Korean War and has recently published two books of poems about his journeys to North Korea. His translated collection of Zen poems, *Muŏnya* (Whaaat?), was published with an appreciative forward by Allen Ginsberg. Ko Ŭn has also published essays, newspaper columns, and articles at a rate quite impossible to keep up with. Formerly a Buddhist monk, then an activist leader of Korea's democratization movement, and then imprisoned for his efforts, Ko Ŭn has worked ceaselessly in bearing witness to the lives of individuals, to Korea's political and cultural life, and in bringing the realm of literature to its necessary, direct engagement with all that life demands and imposes.

Translations by Brother Anthony of Taizé and by David R. McCann and Kevin O'Rourke

Crossing Rice Fields at Nightfall

One star already out, the world's the cosmos now.
 In the village it's the season of the smell of dried grass,
 here and there the light of sparingly used lamps shines
 out.
 As I make my way home across the rice fields at
 nightfall,
 sometimes brushing away the invasive insects,

I remember old Namdong who was laid to rest
yesterday.
It's as if death makes our hearts grow deeper;
I must change a bit from what I was when the old man
was alive.
I keep looking back at the rice fields, more lovely than ever
in the darkness.
More blasted by mildew than last year:
how much work and affection it must have
consumed.
Demanding eighty-eight times the hand's intervention,
isn't that one-year farming?
In autumn, no matter how poor the rice harvest,
how big the debts,
in autumn the poker too must be busy at work as
autumn demands.
No thought at all of leaving here, no thought of rest.
As life goes on, time is not such a big thing to people,
it's the smallest thing for all of us.
On the way home, the evening field-path is today
sublimely still.
After growing tall in drought, in late monsoons,
despite mildews and blight,
what is the rice to us if not adult,
after it has so silently put out ears?
Quick, let's be off, and with our bodies stinking of loam
once lift up our kids, holding them high in the dark,
then put them down as one nation, at least.

Beside the Evening River

Since I am here at the river's side
the river flows down, and flows away.
Without me here,
I wonder how the river would flow.
On its own there is no river, and no flowing.
When evening comes

I am ready to wash my feet in the river but hold back.
There are a few full-grown calves here too.

Someone said that such days are holy; I have no idea.

For an Island

For people, islands give birth
to dreams or love.
Then
they bury the dreams and love.

The sea is more than earth.
Death gives birth to the earth
love gives birth to islands.

The sea enclosing islands in a sound of waves,
the sea gives birth to the world.
Then makes the world sink.

Love makes the world dream.
Yet when one is in love
there is nothing we can do.

Impermanence

All our life long
each autumn, keeping us company,
becomes last autumn and passes.
Even suppose we could change our bodies
into that body,
what would become of us in the blue sky's warp and
weft?

Why, the deciduous trees are busy together
amidst the evergreen trees,
here and there dyeing each other's leaves.
Yet all our life long
we can never become children that run when called;
there are no lonely fathers either.
Though you say "last autumn,"
autumn is no stranger.
But as you call aloud once more,
autumn becomes last autumn.

Great Springtime

Warm east winds blow,
the earth is melting.
It's a sight to open
the eyes of the blind.
Kids are clustering
close like chicks, underground insects
are wriggling restless too.
Just look! The fish rising
from deeper water
are using their backs
to break the ice!
How on earth
Can heaven keep silent?
The wild goose fathers
are leading their broods
away towards the Sungari River.
Now in this land
wonders are happening.
One great springtime is coming!

(BA)

A Slice of Moon

As king I grow thin
the people grow fat.
As I grow fat
the world grows thin.
Always
I watch the moon.

Into the Woods

The woods were dark.
The child with me
held my hand tight.
Two of us as one,
silent, for a time
we moved on.
It was there in the woods
my childhood lingered still.
A fawn was on the run.

Memory of the Graves

As a youth I was obsessed with graves.
There are six-hundred-and-eighty-nine
mounds in Hwandung Cemetery.
At Sarabong graveyard on Cheju Island
I would stop on the way every night
to sleep by the graveside.
Word spread that I was a ghost
residing in that cemetery.

A lucky day it was
when someone died and his grave was dug.
I would say with joy,

So, you have come here at last?
 What can be a better place
 to come to than this one?

At day's end once
 drunk as could be I fell asleep
 somewhere among the graves
 and was stung by a scorpion.
 For a week I wore a piece of pumpkin
 bandaged to my cheek,
 all swollen, in deadly pain.
 And again, as a novice monk
 on my way to Marae Temple
 in T'ongyong, I once spent half a day
 in a graveyard, forgetting
 the errand for my master,
 a lapse that cost me dear.

A few decades drifted past
 until I came to realize
 wild animals have no graves!
 Animals are better than man;
 they are superior to God!
 They do not leave their graves behind.
 They are far better than myself.
 Have I been infatuated, crying and weeping
 over graves, in order to awaken
 to this simple truth?

(DRM)

No-More-Daughters's

There were three girls in the Kalmoe house
 we called "No-more-daughters's":
 Toksun,
 Poksun,
 and Kilsun;
 and this time around another charcoal daughter

—which explains the family's god-awful name.
 The father came home full of booze anger,
 announced he'd throw out this good-for-nothing
 woman who had nothing but daughters,
 grabbed her by the hair of the head
 —she was still in postpartum care—
 knocked down the rotten fence on the way out
 and burst into floods of tears. A capital sight!

The other side was that No-more-daughters's
 red pepper paste was so unbelievably sweet
 people came from Namwŏn and Such'ang
 to find out how it was made.
 Two or three of the red-pepper dragonflies
 that filled the late autumn sky
 were wont to sit on the lid of the
 red-pepper paste pot on the neat crock stand.
 The red-pepper paste was made by the dragonflies
 and the girls' mother together!
 Leastwise that's what the local women
 said with a smack of the lips
 when they came to draw water.

One day Sunch'öl's mum stole
 through the bamboo grove to the women's quarters
 to help herself to a bowl of the red-pepper paste.
 So flabbergasted was she by the sight of
 Toksun washing her luscious body, she cried:
 "Sunch'öl-a, take Toksun to wife,
 I never saw such a divinely-fleshed tit in my life!"

Chrysanthemums

Poets of the south,
 how can you sing your ineffectual songs
 of chrysanthemums and the like?
 You are death

to countless flowers,
death
to history.
Poets of the north,
how can you sing your obdurate songs
of one father icon?
You are death
to countless brothers and sisters.

Poets of the south, poets of the north,
run
from death and deceit.

(KO)

HWANG TONGGYU (1938–)

Born in Seoul, and a graduate of Seoul National University, Hwang Tonggyu has pursued the practice of Korean poetry through periods of residence and study in Edinburgh, at the University of Iowa and New York University, then back at his alma mater, where he now teaches. Something of this path may be found in his poetry. Between the introspective landscape of a poem like “Port of Call,” or the sequence of linked poems imagining the postmortem landscapes of “Wind Burial,” there seems to be a dialectic at work between two ways of stating or defining the poetic self. The sustained elegiac tone and shifting circumstances of the linked poems work to problematize their reading as political or cultural-historical documents, yet surely there is some resonance to be felt between the subject of the poems and the period in the early 1980s when they were published, not long after the Kwangju Uprising and Massacre of 1980, and yet relatively early in the process of unearthing, in South Korea, the true dimensions of that tragedy.

Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and by Kevin O'Rourke

Wind Burial 1

When my life is done, let my body be left exposed to the
wind.

Dressed as I am with my electric watch still working,
strapped to my wrist
to prevent my feeling sad,
put me into a rented taxi inside a leather suitcase,
so that I don't feel too cold,
then off to Kunsan,

or if the searches are too severe
Komso will do,
and there transfer me to a barge.

After some time lying quietly inside the suitcase,
snug despite my legs' being bent,
beyond Sonyu Island, a deserted island, and the engine's
throb
passing out for a moment
at the crunch of the keel on the shore,
freed of the suitcase, freed of clothes,
in that deserted island's chill late autumn sunshine,
freed of shoes and socks,
secretly letting go of time
as my wristwatch is being broken,
let my flesh dry out
while I carelessly gaze as if not really looking
at the seeds that pop from crimson berries ripening in
the wind.
Let the rusting gold fillings that cap my molars
likewise glisten in the wind.

Covered with the wind like a quilt
without makeup or deliverance
adjusting the wind as one adjusts a quilt,
until the body's last drop of blood has dried
let me play with the wind.

Wind Burial 3

One vague track,
like a broad highway opening ahead
after going astray for a while in a maze of alleys,
like an aching tooth
that flares up and explodes in the brain
when the wind blows, after vanishing a while in the jaw.

The world is in the midst of being established,
 in the midst of being demolished,
 in the midst of loneliness, the world
 flares up somewhere between
 the bar in Kwang-gyo where we met and made merry
 and the room where I took refuge and slept
 when sleep would not come.

Inwang-san? Or Nam-san? Or perhaps beyond Nak-
 san?

That bar below Nak-san selling hooch?
 Or the wine-jars
 that used to stand torrid wrapped in blankets
 in the inner room?
 Or perhaps our alley, hotter even than us?
 In some such alley, we threw off our coats,
 stripped off our jackets, draped them over our heads,
 bent our backs,
 fled from the scorching porch, fled from the yard,
 tripped on the sill of the gate, fell sprawling,
 the world dry, the world burning up, we heard sounds
 of water being sprinkled over the world.

A Happy Letter

I .

My thoughts of you always involve something trivial:
 something like the sun setting somewhere behind where
 you sit and the wind blowing; but by that triviality, long
 transmitted, some day when you wander in infinite mis-
 ery, I will summon you.

2 .

The reason why I really truly love you is because I
 transformed my love into waiting, infinitely prolonged.
 As night fell, it began to snow heavily in our valley. I am

convinced that my love too is certain to end at some point. But that is merely a matter of thinking about the posture of my waiting. I am convinced that in the meantime the snow will stop, flowers will bloom, autumn leaves will fall, snow will again fall heavily.

When I See a Wheel

When I see a wheel I long to make it turn.
Cycle wheels, pram wheels, rickshaw wheels,
carriage wheels,
I long to make even turning wheels turn.
When I'm climbing a steep hill
I long to make even car wheels turn.

On the road everything is unseen
and seen, the childhood days I long to demolish are
unseen
and seen, the woods front and back where
different flocks of birds used to chirp
are seen and unseen, the republic of short breath is
unseen
and seen; the tangerines piled on streetside stalls,
the pots upturned in the pottery store, people lying
curled up:
before everything collapses, just once,
I want to make them turn, on the flying road.

One Flower and Another Flower

One flower lying behind the bars,
one flower lying before the bars,
one flower lying beside the bars,
one flower lying beside that one.

All around the sky is cloudy.
 Flowers here, flowers there.
 One flower lying behind the bars;
 open the bars, an even higher wall will appear.
 We will appear, simply dying and living.
 Flowers will be seen walking,
 not walking in time, but singing in time.
 Even in winter they will be seen.

One flag is there, not slipping down the pole
 but poised in the middle of the flagstaff.
 One flower lying behind the bars.

(BA)

Wind Burial

Twice I bow before my friend's picture:
 the picture smiles at me.
 Nothing's changed, it says,
 just a realignment of body atoms.
 All's as it was, it says:
 the rain dripping outside the mortuary,
 the mourners drinking and playing cards next door,
 the flip-flop of slippers bound for the loo.

The Cricket

The cricket that sang these last few evenings
 near the potted benjamin on the verandah
 sang yesterday—rather listlessly—
 from the lumber room at the back.
 What made it move there?
 Was it the gradual deepening of autumn gloom?
 Did it crawl through the living-room,
 or did it fly?
 I imagine it in the daytime, no one here,

crossing the open verandah and walking slowly
through the living room.
First it would have hesitated in front of the TV,
the machine that for a while every evening
throws an eerie glow across all living things
and furniture within the house.
Perhaps it flew up and rubbed its sensitive feelers
against the shiny face of the Braun tube.
Ah, the eye has dimmed!
Maybe it missed its hold and fell headlong
to the floor
where it took a cricket sleep.
Afterwards, it must have crawled sluggishly into the
kitchen,
licked the spot on the floor where the spilled tea had
dried,
looked back, shook its head a few times,
crossed the threshold and disappeared into the lumber
room,
the most remote space in the house.
Today it does not sing.

Port Of Call

I reached the harbor on foot.
The wind blew relentlessly
from the cold country,
rocking the houses on the sea front:
a lengthy snowfall seemed in store;
lights were shining lower and lower.
In my pocket I crumpled
the neat picture on the bank note,
and I stubbed out a half-burned cigarette
as I'd stub out a shadow.
I went down to the boats
with an easy mind.
The dark hulls in their moorings

lifted their heads
and looked into the harbor.
Skybirds were following
a few snowflakes
in the dark sky.

(KO)

SHIN TONGYŎP (1930–1969)

Shin Tongyŏp wrote with a strong sense of Korea's history, of the common people's resistance to or endurance of foreign as well as domestic oppression, and of the moments in Korean history, such as the March 1, 1919, Independence Movement, the April 19, 1960, Student Revolution, and other events when the people stood up to resist. His *Kŭmgang* (Kŭm River), published in 1967, the most admired and widely known of his works, is an account of the nineteenth-century Tonghak, or "Eastern Learning," rebellions, which started in the southwestern part of Korea where the poet was born—in Puyŏ, South Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. The volume was notable for its subject matter at the time it was published, representing, as it did, a story of local rebellion against an oppressive state that was falling under the sway of foreign, Japanese, control. These were themes of considerable significance in the late 1960s in Korea, as the Park Chung Hee regime established ever more oppressive domestic policies, especially directed against the southwest. The geographical theme, and the genre of the long narrative poem, undoubtedly inspired other writers like Kim Chiha, who took the narrative into satirical domains in works such as his "Piŏ" (Groundless rumors) in the early 1970s.

Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Kŭm River (Extracts)

I

Back when we were children
in a hill village of yellow clay laid bare—
borne along on grandmother's back,

my sister and I
often heard the Blue Bird Song.

When creepers blazed red on each fence and wall and
sorghum heads stood high along the sides of fields,
shouts to scare the birds away could be heard on every
side.

Oiyoh! Hwuoi!

Once the Japanese cop's cycle with its tinkling bell
had vanished into the distance,
we would wait beside our clay hovel
with racing hearts
for the old peddler woman who taught us her songs.

Seya, seya, p'arangseya . . .
Bird, bird, blue bird . . .
do not land in the green pea patch.
If the pea blossom falls
the pea-jelly merchant will go weeping away.

I'm not so sure but in those days
they used to say: if you sing that song
the acupuncture man will whisk you away.

The name has changed now, but
when midday came, a cannon boomed out beneath the
sky:

“Let those who worked a lot take a lot to eat,
Let those who did not work eat nothing at all,
Ohoo . . .” it said.

On the hill at Kilatt'i,
as we gleaned for grains of bean or rice,
a formation of planes would go flying across the sky
and every time, my mother, with a troubled face
would seize my hand
and hurry me along the field path.

In those days some of the people who had experienced
those great events, were still living in this world;
their tales used to send my heart racing
and I intend to tell you some of them now.

Sometimes they wanted to sow seeds of their stories,
in memories that went scurrying from early
 morning
to the village hills and fields like carefree pups.

The seeds of those tales
would sprout leaves, and branches,
then at last, one autumn, blossom profusely.

Could they ever have imagined that?
That was why, in snow-swept midwinter
huddled at the warmest spot of the room
where bean-cakes were kept warm under blankets
and in midsummer's suffocating dog days, sitting
 beneath
the parched village tree, on one branch of which
Sunni's mother hanged herself, they cautiously used to
 talk,
whisking away cicada songs with their fans,

to us snot-nose kids
as we sat scratching our bellies,
our belly buttons bare.

2

We have seen heaven.
In April 1960,
rending the clouds that were crushing history,
we saw the face of Eternity.

Your face,
that shone for one brief moment,
was our innermost
heart.

Scooping up an armful of heaven's waters
 in 1919 we all
 washed our faces clean.

In 1894 or so
 even in stones and tree stumps,
 your faces were all heaven.

Heaven,
 you shone bright for a moment then were veiled,
 yet every year the flowers
 filled the whole landscape.
 Sun and harvest and love and labor.

On holidays, limping along in a mountaineer's cap,
 I would visit the East Sea,
 with its brilliant sandy shores,
 or Indian back alleys where pottery was fired.

But they couldn't be found
 in the outside world. Bowls, meat,
 were nowhere to be found
 in the outside world.

Your faces
 that had shone for a moment
 were Eternity's sky,
 our infinitely
 deep hearts.

.....

SCENE 8

Ha-nui
 limped
 a little with one foot.

When he was three
 he was thrown down
 in Kim the Clerk's yard.

The sound of the gate opening and shutting,
the rough rasping sound of a rolling gourd,
dry grass flying here and there,

when the cockerel
in the big house crows far away,
on and on, no regard for the time,

at such moments, without doubt,
starving hordes in search of tree roots,
the bark of pines, early sprouting shepherd's-purse,
mugwort roots,
will spread white
like dried radish leaves
over hills and fields,

a farmhand
spreading the ashes from some house
over the barley fields in the broad plains
smothered in white ash
will be shaking his head and sneezing.

Surely,
and more.
On the hill along the river
 with flowering reeds flying,
a woman bearing a bundle of clothes,
skirts flying,
must still be waiting for the ferryboat.
Two rocks stand face to face.

Ha-nui
was reared by Tol-soi, the farmhand
of Kim the Clerk's house, who had taken him in.

The three-year-old
went hungry
every day.
There were no soy-bean cakes
laid to keep warm on the heated floor.

That was the day
 the great Master Chǒng who lived in Seoul
 was due at the house of Kim the Clerk.

All the villagers, young and old, had been mobilized
 to level the road during the past month,
 and were busily preparing to receive him.
 For all the villagers
 were the serfs of the ones with money.

Hungry Ha-nui
 lay weeping.
 His nose against the floor,
 he was sorrowfully weeping,
 sorrowful to exhaustion.

“The rascals never do as they’re told,”
 in raging fury, shouting orders to the old head-servant
 Yu,
 Kim the Clerk stormed into the servant’s room in his
 shoes
 and tossed the weeping child out into the yard
 where he fell into the pigsty.

Perhaps the old Sam-shin woman, guardian of
 childbirth, caught him?
 his ankle bone simply stuck out more
 while his crying stopped,
 he sat up
 scratching his head with one hand.

Ha-nui
 was wrapped in the apron of old woman Cho,
 and from that day
 brought up by her;
 she lived in the valley at the back of Puso Mountain.

Old woman Cho’s husband had been exiled for some
 vague sedition

in the days of King Kwanhae and died there,
a supreme gentleman-scholar, whose eyes
were so pure he could commit no crime:
does such a man have to be forced out like a pearl in
pig's swill?

In the year Ha-nui turned twelve
he lost old woman Cho.
For nine years she filled the mind of the little scholar,
reading him dozens of volumes of Chinese classics and
Buddhist scriptures.

No one knew anything about
Ha-nui's father.
One rainy day, a woman had appeared
in front of Tol-soi the farmhand, soaked to the skin,
had entrusted him with something wrapped in cotton
and vanished again.

“Ask nothing about this child's
ancestors. Take care of it
until I come again.

I will not forget your kindness,
even if I should never return.

His name is Ha-nui.

His family name is Shin.”

Turning her head aside,
the woman had laid the cotton bundle
and a few coins on the floor of the room,
then vanished into the rain.

The baby's hand
was clasping a tiny ornamental silver bell,
scarcely bigger than a bean.

As he grew up,
Ha-nui cared for Tol-soi
like a father.
And that mysterious ornamental silver bell

scarcely bigger than a bean
never left him either.

SCENE 9 (Extracts)

Who says that they have seen the sky?
Who says that they have ever seen the sky
clear without one single cloud?

What you have seen is dark clouds
that you have taken for the sky
—you have kept on living.

Sweep away, human kind,
the clouds within your hearts.

By morning and night,
sweep away the clouds within your hearts,
and you will see
Eternity's sky spotless and clear,

and you will bring knowledge
of awe.

Take the utmost care,
be careful even in walking,
keep your heart serene;

sorrowfully,
ah, in this solemn world,
you will live
sorrowfully.

Who says that they have seen the sky?
Who says that they have ever seen the sky
clear without one single shred of cloud?

CHŎNG HYŎNJONG (1939–)

Born in Seoul, a graduate of Yŏnsei University, where he now teaches, Chŏng Hyŏnjong is known for a determinedly abstract, philosophical bent in his earlier works, in the collection *Samulŭi kkum* (An object's dream). His later work explores the intimate relationship between animate and inanimate, humans and things, often with a wryly humorous touch, as in the deliberately overdramatic little poem "Like leaving an Umbrella Somewhere."

Translated by Kevin O'Rourke and by John M. Frankl

Greenly the Earth

Greenly, blades of spring grass
push up the earth,
pillars to prop
the sky against collapse,
blades of spring grass.

Pulsing
in the spring breeze:
 a woman in a painting, frogs.
The grass sounds of my song
must flow close to those blades of grass.

Country Bus at Night

Country bus at night,
see it a mile off.

Interior bright.

Passengers in silhouette,
country bus at night
passing distant bright.

Lock, stock, and barrel,
I want to lift it into the sky,
brighter than the brightest sun.

(KO)

Like Leaving an Umbrella Somewhere

Because I cannot
Somewhere leave my self
Like leaving an umbrella somewhere,
I suffer so.

If I could just leave my self behind
It would be all sky
And love
And freedom.

Are You a Star?

— FOR A POET

Like the stars of the sky many stars,
Like the sand of the sea much sand,
That which shines is that which shines
That which is lonely is that which is lonely
But until I can stride into your star-shining flesh
And sing "I shine"
I must wait.
Until your flesh becomes an enormous night floating
above the desert

Becomes sand
Becomes wind blowing over the sand's flesh
I must rehearse methods for loving my own falsity.
Until my own falsity is no longer visible.

The Blood of Daybreak

Oh, daybreak streets. Have you seen them? I passed inside them. Inside them? Inside the cold, clear blood of daybreak. That's right, I mixed my warm blood. Inside my body a line of blue sensations . . . bored into the blue flesh of daybreak (drawn as my own flesh passes) a line of warm holes. Daybreak remained so composed. To the point of cruelty. No, daybreak was so steadfast. To the point where all that does not hurry, all that remains composed appeared trustworthy. Mix your warm blood with its cold, clear blood. Oh, daybreak streets.

(JMF)

KIM CHIHA (1941–)

Born in Mokp'o, a port town in South Chōlla Province, and a graduate in fine arts of Seoul National University, Kim Chiha was perhaps the first Korean poet of the twentieth century to become well known outside of Korea. His reputation internationally was due more to his identity as an activist, dissident poet than for his literary works as such. Especially during the early 1970s, as the Park Chung Hee regime imposed increasingly severe restrictions on Korean political and social life, Kim's acerbically witty satires caused the South Korean government increasing discomfort even as they delighted Korean readers. Kim was arrested, tried, and sentenced numerous times for his poems, for his activism, for his attitude. The Korean state's campaign to find Kim guilty of a capital offense prompted an international outcry and countercampaign to rescue the poet, much like the similar effort in 1975 when the Korean CIA had kidnapped the political opposition leader Kim Dae Jung from a Tokyo hotel and were preparing to murder him. "The Story of a Sound" is a representative example of Kim Chiha's satirical narrative poems from the early 1970s, a lively adaptation of the *p'ansori* oral-narrative style displaying a satirical attitude toward state authority.

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke and by David R. McCann

Core

Forthrightness is good,
though not unequivocally so:

like poetry
writing the dark in all its darkness,
amending the dark,

and in the writing,
somehow, inducing sunlight.

Truth

The wind is cold, forbidding.
Ride that cold
and the wind's core
becomes your house.

Difficult, isn't it?
Something so simple,
so hardly realized;
something still cold
even when realized.

(KO)

No One

From here
all the way there
no one at all.

Above a black
stream, on a stone
bridge where moonlight collapses,
in this strangely beautiful house,
cloudy with breath,
no one at all.

Dark,
the midst of an old dream
of my twisted limbs crushed
by the coin rolling
round in the moon

is dark,
 and on the road running
 away from me
 dying
 in blue-dyed brain,
 no one at all.

The Road to Seoul

I am going.
 Do not cry;
 I am going.
 Over the white hills, the black, and the parched hills,
 down the long and dusty road to Seoul
 I am going to sell my body.

Without a sad promise to return,
 to return some time blooming with a lovely smile
 to unbind my hair,
 I am going.

Do not cry;
 I am going.
 Who can forget the four-o'clocks, or the scent
 of wheat? Even in this wretched,
 wretched life, the deeply unforgettable things . . .
 and in the countless dreams I return,
 drenched with tears,
 following the moonlight . . .
 I am going.
 Do not cry;
 I am going.
 Over these parched hills that anguish
 even the skies, down the long and dusty road to Seoul
 I am going to sell my body.*

* This poem uses the form of refrain of a folk-song style popular during the early part of this century, when Korea confronted both the West and Japan.

Well

Drawing the moon from a well
fell in and died
in a bucket.

In long twisted clouds
buried and killed, mountain top's dream
cut off in winds.
The highlands, ah
the days passed in the highlands!
One night at the border
a white horse in deep snow
screamed, stalks of Musŏng millet screamed, throats
torn, slashed
down—azalea
blossoms in sudden frost.

When the mouths of the bells of all kinds
of lovely voices, of all
the magnificent chimes
were shut, tight
shut,
and the night was deep,
the lightning-filled night
was deep
 those who were young
died in the sin of waking
alone to bring a candle light.

Left nodding, left
shaking a head,
left the groove worn round a dry well
and died in bucket.
Drawing the moon from a well
fell in and died.

The Story of a Sound

For some time now, in the heart of Seoul
 they have heard the strangest sound.
 Some people quake like aspen leaves
 and sweat freezing streams at this sound . . .
 A strange business; and stranger still,
 these are guys with money, the real
 big-load operators.

K'ung.

—There, that sound.

K'ung.

A canister of tear gas bursting?

No.

K'ung.

The war starting? An A-bomb
 exploding? A Hirohito fart? Nixon's cough?
 No.

K'ung.

The Red Army salute guns greeting big-noses
 in T'ien-An-Men Square?
 No? Then what?

K'ung.

There, do you hear it?

K'ung.

Does anyone know the story, where
 the sound of that *K'ung* came from?

K'ugung, K'ung.

Listen to the people, and you shall hear
 the story of a sound.

It wasn't in Russia, China, Japan,
 or America either, but here in Korea,
 the eastern part of Seoul,
 where the dust swarms up in Ch'ongyangni,
 and beyond it lie the coal-black fluids

of Chŏngnang Brook.
 Jammed together down its banks,
 the squatter shacks perch in bunches wherever they fit,
 rattling this way, trembling that
 in the slightest breeze blowing by.
 Way in the back of the darkest corner
 of the most ramshackle shack
 lived Ando, up from the country
 to find his fortune.

Ando worked like an ox,
 but was timid as a mouse, simple
 as a sheep—the harmless sort
 who doesn't need laws to live right.
 But some strange twist of fate,
 some lousy inheritance from a previous life
 made whatever he tried

go bad.

It might start well, but it wouldn't come out;
 what looked good for a while just wouldn't turn out.

Get married?

How could he? He couldn't find a girl friend.

Buy a house?

Not a chance. He couldn't get the rent for a
 whole room.

He couldn't find money for food, and if he looked
 like he might get a job, well,
 from this day to that day to the very next day
 they kept putting him off till it went up in smoke.

"No backer? No go here."

"No school tie? Nothing doing."

"No deposit? No return."

"No soup? No dessert."

Without any money, and no one to help,
 there wasn't a deal he could start.
 The shake-down artists shook him,

without a break, first this guy, then that one:
 guys with good connections, well-developed
 greed and guile, the ones with gangs of cronies:
 this one with "Official" stamped on his forehead,
 that one with "Junior-Grade" on the bridge of his nose,
 three times three makes nine, the plate goes
 round and round;
 the guy with "swindler" in his smiling eyes and nimble
 tongue;
 the one with "Fraud! Fraud!" flashing from his golden
 teeth . . .

Tortured, chewed, battered and bit, kicked, bloodied,
 trampled into the ground;
 even the tiny bit of money he had hidden away under his
 clothes
 for the journey back home was stripped away. He was
 squeezed flat,
 beaten shapeless as a bowl of mush,
 half dead, a walking corpse, and then what? All over
 again:

"Enemy agent! Commie Flag!
 But buy me some noodles and I'll let you go."
 "No! Give me the training instead."
 "You can't!"
 "Control yourself! Where is your haircut?
 Pay for the ticket and beat it!"
 "But I can't get a haircut; I don't have the money."
 "You have to!"
 "Unsightly shack! Settle up for the flies and get out!"
 "But I rent by the month."
 "You can't!"
 "Three un's and five no's! Three fives is fifteen, so you
 owe fifteen hundred!"
 "But I haven't had a meal in five days!"
 "No excuses!"
 "Pay up in advance! Settle your taxes! Your fines! Your
 whatever is left!

 Your security!"

"I'd rather jump in a cesspool and drown!"
 "You're not allowed to die!"
 Rice money, clothes money, shoes money, medicine
 money;
 money for pickles, money for soy sauce, money for
 coal, de dum di di.

Add to this, add to this money
 money for congratulations,
 and add to this money
 money for condolences,
 and on top of this,
 for contributions;
 on top of this,
 for the local officers,
 on top of which,
 the price of going back and forth,
 on top of which,
 the money lender,
 on top of whom,
 way, way on top, this and that,
 add it up, and add it up,
 until every which way, from bottom to top
 Ando was wrapped up tight.

What was he to do? What else could he do
 but race around frantically trying to earn a rat tail's
 worth?
 Like a rabid dog in snow, or a tiger pup with its tail on
 fire he raced round and round:
 one foot up, the other down;
 this one up, and that one down.
 If he raised this foot, he put the other one down,
 lower the foot and raise the other.
 Veering this way, lurching that,
 hop, hop; jump, jump,
 at his frantic pace he sets out.
 Chongno, Myŏngdong, Mugyodong, and Tadong:

real estate, insurance, finance office, trader's;
 he was an errand boy, office boy, janitor, watchman.
 He went through each one once,
 then on to Tongdŭngp'o, Sihŭng, Mallidong, and
 Ŭlchiro:
 textile factory, iron caster, sugar mill, clothes maker;
 he was a factory hand, a furnace man, a dispatcher,
 whatever,
 racing around trying this and trying that.

Then Kupabal, Ch'andong, Changanp'yŏng, and
 Kwach'ŏn;
 peddling stew in It'aewŏn, radish leaves in Tamsimni.
 At South Gate he sold pigs' bellies, and puffer eggs at
 East Gate,
 hoop-sticks at Kwanghwamun, silkworm larvae in
 Mugyodong.
 At construction sites he was a dirt carrier; on movie lots
 he was an extra;
 a delivery service go-fer.
 Back and forth, right and left, helter-skelter, in his
 frenzied race,
 puffing and panting, north south east west,
 harried, exhausted, starving and sick, until crazed
 one evening as the sun was going down
 he planted his two feet down on the ground,
 rolled his eyes back in his head and yelled
 "Agh! What a dog's life this is!"

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than
Clankety-clank, heavy handcuffs were snapped on his
 wrists and Ando was dragged straight off to court.
Bang, Bang, Bang . . .

 "State the charge."

"The crime, your honor, of standing on the ground with
 his
 two feet
 and spitting out groundless rumors."

“Oho! That’s a big one!”

“The defendant, by standing on the ground and spitting
out groundless
rumors, your honor, is guilty of

the impertinent use of feet without proper
authorization;
the upstart relaxation of the corporal being;
the crime of tranquilizing the mind without permit;
plotting to usurp and expropriate the fundamental
human
qualitative
substance, in plain disregard of the defendant’s
own
wretched poverty;
the crime of wasting time in oafish cogitation;
perverse idleness;
the crime of harboring weak-willed thoughts of suicide;
being an idle bystander, as if he were some floating
cloud:
looking up at the skies without shame;
tendentious expansion of the cranium;
the impudent trespass upon the special-class privilege of
standing comfortably;
the impertinent neglect of our national policies for
INCREASED PRODUCTION
OF GOODS FOR EXPORT WITHOUT A
MOMENT’S REST;
opposition to the THREE NO’s, the FIVE UN’s,
SEVEN
DON’T’s, and the NINE
ANTINEGATIVITIES;

the crime of thinking up GROUNDLESS RUMORS
that
would BEWITCH THE PEOPLE
and CONFUSE THE WORLD;

the intent to pronounce said rumors;
 the pronouncing of the same;
 the intent to propagate said rumors;
 the propagation of same;

the crime of INSUFFICIENT VENERATION FOR
 THE FATHERLAND;
 DENIGRATION OF THE MOTHER TONGUE:
 comparing the fatherland to an animal;
 the crime of making it possible for other countries to
 conceive
 of our fatherland as an animal,
 thereby and in conjunction with DISTURBING
 THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CAPITAL
 INVESTMENT;

the crime of promoting social disorder and instigating
 unrest;
 the crime of agitating the people;
 the crimes of pessimism, being weary of life, other-
 worldliness;
 providing comfort to the enemy;
 harboring antisystem thoughts, and advocating
 same;
 the crime of supporting by empathetic means the
 establishment of an
 antistate organization or network or group;

the crime of promoting the clarification of personal self-
 esteem,
 fostering in turn the development of spiritual and
 ideological self-reliance which inevitably nurtures the
 consciousness leading to antistate riots;

in addition to which the defendant, for violating the
 provisions of the special anti-antisocial
 manipulation law, is hereby found guilty of all
 crimes as charged. Therefore, in accordance with

the law, it is the solemn judgment of this court, that
 immediately upon adjournment
 one head be removed from the defendant
 to prevent further thinking or pronouncing of such
 groundless rumors;
 two feet be cut off to forestall the
 recurrence of inflammatory standing on the ground;
 and to prevent the breeding of future
 seditious types such as the defendant, that one
 reproductive organ and two testicles be removed;
 And finally and furthermore, whereas there is a clear
 and present danger that defendant may resist, his two
 hands are to be bound behind his back; he is to be
 wrapped in one water-soaked leather straightjacket;
 and the opening of his throat is to be jammed shut
 with
 a hard, thick, and long-lasting voice-blocking tool;
 after
 which he is to be put in solitary confinement for five
 hundred years.”

Bang, Bang, Bang.

“No, you can’t!”

Snipsnap.

“My thing’s gone! Don’t!”

Snipsnap, snipsnap.

My balls are gone! Stop! You can’t! Don’t!”

Crea—k, Clank.

“My neck, my neck! Where ? . . . ”

Rattle Wham!

“Oh no! Not my legs too, gone at a stroke!”

The arms are bound in back;

the leather jacket;

the voice-blocking tool shoved in tight . . .

And so, pitiless they threw poor Ando into the moss-

grown,

dark and dreary cell.

Shaa-Bang! The sound of locks, echoing farther
and farther away down the tunnels of the prison . . .

No!

This can't be! It can't!

How can it be?

How can it?

Starving, in rags, I worked nearly to death;

Beaten and yelled at, I didn't say a word.

No chance to rest, to sleep, even to lie down.

Then why has this happened?

What awful crime

has brought this unbearable punishment?

Oh geese flying so high!

You know what is inside me.

Tell me: where the millet stalks

reach their long shadows

though the heavy sunlight

by the newly-built road,

is my mother still standing,

waiting for me?

Weeping silently,

in clothes worn far past

their season, does her gaze

reach out, time and again

toward Seoul?

Dear mother, I shall return home;

return, even though I die.

Though my dead body be torn

in a thousand, ten thousand pieces,

I shall return.

Through this wall,

over the next,

even as a spirit

I shall pierce and vault

these red brick walls.

*I shall return, mother;
even in death, I shall return.*

Ando would have cried out this song,
but what tears, what voice did he have?
Without any tears or voice, deep within
each night he sang out his crimson, blood-red
No! No! NO!

Roll, then,
roll your body,
beating with it

K'ung.

Again, and yet again

he slammed into the wall:

K'ung.

K'ung, K'ung.

There were those who couldn't sleep at all when they
heard that sound rising up,
people with money, the ones who could
really
blow the wind right by. They sent out their strict orders
to have that fellow executed,
and yet
K'ung.

It's a strange business, how that sound seems to drive
some people mad.

K'ung K'ung:

You can hear it now, night and day, never ceasing.

There are some who call it the work of a ghost;
others will tell you it is Ando, somewhere
still living,
and ceaselessly hurling himself against the walls.

They say this stealthily, whispering from ear to ear,
while a strange light flashes from their eyes.

In Burning Thirst

Before dawn in a back alley
I write your name, Democracy.
My thoughts long ago turned from you,
and long, long ago my steps turned away.
The single fragment remaining, memory
of my burning heart-thirst.
Where no one knows, Democracy,
I write your name.

In some back alley that dawn has not
reached, the sound of steps, a whistle, someone
pounding on a door,

the single, long, extended cry, the sound
of groans, wailing, sighs, and within these,
within my very core,

above your deeply engraved name,
above the desolate brilliance of your name

the pain of life reviving,
the memory of clear blue freedom,
of the blood-stained faces of friends dragged away
reviving,

with trembling hand and heart,
in trembling, teeth-chattering rage

on a wooden plank
with white chalk
in an unfamiliar hand
I write these all down.

And choking, sobbing,
I write your name where no one knows.
In burning thirst,
burning thirst

Democracy, long life!

(DRM)

KANG ŬN'GYO (1945-)

Born in Hongwŏn, South Hamgyŏng Province, in the DPRK, a graduate and Ph.D. from Yŏnsei University, and at present a professor of Korean literature at Tonga University, Kang Ŭn'gyo has grappled with the meaning of life and death, of individual and collective existence, and has moved from a focus on death and emptiness, and on the poetic self, to a concern with social or more public matters and the lives and concerns of other people. She was especially noted for eschewing in her earlier work the sentimentality that is sometimes (sometimes quite unfairly) ascribed to poets who, like her, are women.

Translations by Kevin O'Rourke and by Tae Yang Kwak

Woman

She comes each morning
with the sea on her head.

Fresh oysters for sale, fresh oysters!
She cries like the sunlight,

wrinkles rippling
though there isn't a puff of wind,

hands filled with thunderous storm clouds.

When will it rain,
when will it rain?

Her firm buttocks
are rolling breakers.

Faster than the dark,
lighter than a bird,

lovely, so lovely,
she strides beside the sun.

(KO)

Love's Way

He who wants to leave
Let him leave
He who wants to sleep
Let him sleep
And with the time saved
Be silent.

Of flowers as well
Of heaven as well
Of a grave as well

Don't rush
Be silent.

In your flesh
The callused wings
The river that doesn't flow
The idle, idle clouds,
The stars that never wake

Don't dream easily
Don't flow easily
Don't bloom easily

However
Seen with narrowed eyes:

He who wants to leave
His lonely leaving form,
He who wants to sleep
His solitary slumber,

The greatest span of heaven
Will always be behind you.

A Poem's Visit

On a day when sunlight fell through rifts of wind, he came to me limping and said, "Try and draw my face." I got a permanent pen and a clean white sheet from a secret hiding place and cautiously began drawing a circle. Sunlight, scent of wind, starlight a smeared circle. Shaking his head, he disappeared. The cold rain seeped endlessly into my bones. Endlessly, the fog implored me to stand, stand up.

On a day when lightning roared, he came to me again and hoarsely said, "Try and draw my face." I took out a pencil and eraser from a drawer and on yellow newsprint began to draw his hair. Galestorm, fury, history, era a shock of hair. Shaking my drawing of hair with his vine-like arms, he disappeared. The cold rain seeped endlessly into my bones. Endlessly, the fog implored me to stand, stand up.

On a day when darkness threw open its gaping jaws, he came to me again and said, "Try and draw my face." I took out a red pencil and on draft-sheet I began drawing his eyes. Sand, stone, tears, time his unfathomably deep blue eyes. "No! No!" He bellowed with his galestorm mouth. Then he disappeared. The cold rain, the cold wind seeped endlessly into my bones. Endlessly, the fog, the graves implored me to stand, stand up.

A day when a face neither his nor mine expired in the darkness. A day of our permanent betrayal.

Azalea

A single teardrop
out of the sea of tears I wept without you knowing,
the darkest crimson sadness
sank deep, deep into the earth and
rose again in April.

A clump of blood someone's thrown away
lying in this riverbed, that riverbed
blown clean, clean year-round
to the smell of yesterday's sky
to the smell of sunlight I awoke.

Azaleas, azaleas.
Azaleas everywhere.

Sleet

Sleet falls
Unable to fall as rain
Unable to fall as snow
Splattering and whirling
Spinning in oblivion
Falling without a trace
The streets I run around
The spirits, restless spirits
Though they rise and rise
There is no Heaven
Only suffering souls.

Fog blows about inside the fog.
 Dark blows about before the dark.
 In this dark oblivion
 Where drifting clumps of blood and drifting clumps of
 flesh
 Are thrown about
 Where one departure bemoans
 Another departure.

Sleet falls
 Unable to fall as rain
 Unable to fall as snow
 In this dark universe
 They
 One day fall and splatter as sleet
 But for one moment, one breath, they are flowers.

Sound 8

Night is falling,
 Look at these shadows that lie once again
 Fluttering at the foot of the bed,
 Dreams tearing apart dreams
 Streaming blood
 Blowing about like hail, aaahh . . .
 Lonely masses of flesh

Yes, we have crossed the streamwaters to come here.
 Drinking it mixed with the foam of gory tears, one
 minute with trembling withered leaves, one minute with
 severed currents, we have carried light of the last moon
 on our tired backs, yes, we have seeped into the ink-blank
 night. Our straw shoes seized and carried off by winds
 that once blew.

You sleep so long
 Now through a dream's winding course

Wandering the virgin woods
In sandy bog or furrowed field
Find the straw shoes strewn about

Yes, we were mist drifting peddlers, blisters clustered on
soles bursting like fireworks in the starless sky, a path
unseen by open eyes but with closed eyes desperately
pursued, a glow extinguished by a bare foot in twilight,
fickle lighting that soaks the tender flesh in cold rain

But, what can compare to those straw shoes
Racing to the Han river engulfed by the Imjin
rivermarsh
The horizon of winds wailing en masse
Can compare to that mist

Now I'll try and close my eyes,
With closed eyes, I'll try and shake
Mother's river with whipping currents,
A dark world
For the sun has already set,
The wind rubs my eyes
Swollen from crying,
A few small stars
Secretly come my way.

(TYK)

IM YŎNGJO (1943–)

Im was born in Poryŏng, South Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. He graduated from the Sŏrabŏl College of the Arts with a degree in Literary Composition, and in 1971 he made his literary debut by winning the *Chung'ang Daily News* Shinch'un Prize for Literature with "A Carpenter's Song." His poetry includes *Parami namgin ŭnŏ* (The secret language left by the wind; 1985), *Kŭrimjarŭl chiumyŏ* (Erasing the shadows; 1988), *Kaldaenŭn paebuga* (A reed has no back; 1992), among others.

Translated by Edward W. Poitras

Winter Tree

Now there is nothing more to strip away.
 The wind, crazed wind
 every day wildly shaking
 has torn everything off leaving the body bare.
 Day by day gazing ever higher into the sky,
 Sir, it's me! It's me! Though I raise my hand
 no response in the village frozen solid.
 The winter is too cold, too long,
 I keep having frightening thoughts.
 Is the April we knew at home
 really on its way?

A Carpenter's Song

I'm using the saw again.
At some point forgetting
the momentary pain of severing my finger
now I am using the saw again.
Even in its tiresome everyday motions
teeth gleaming, my saw is precise.
Cutting to the heart in a feeble age
it lives by advancing grandly.
The sunlight is still confined in the feathers of the
clouds.
On a day when the snow comes like a cold white rumor,
I stand at the dusty windowsill
covering all sorts of mistakes
as I peer into the history of this dry wood.
Do you know about it,
the slipshod carpenters' tower in broad daylight?
That was when our skin had been soaked
with the long lamentation of our mothers' burning love.
There was a skill that lay everywhere hidden
but only unripe evidences glistened through,
shaved daily by the starved blade of the plane.
Outside now
each house crumbles under its own weight into the
night,
snow falls throughout the deep night.
At last the mountain withdraws and sits on its cold
cushion.
In my dream the huge mountain
buries its head in a white grave and weeps.
Passing through the deep forest where I
hear the coughing of dead carpenters
I have cold, such cold premonitions,
lie awake at dawn aching all over
and by habit taking the saw I use again
go out to put behind me one more frostbitten day.
In this place where the painful rays of light
of the severed hours gather, I float in the air.

Yet in the queasiness of many winds blowing
my bones are solid pewter,
all the strands of my hair are white with frost.
As I bow, my eyes are pierced
by the short limbs of the people I greet
in this winter of busy coming and going;
also, somewhere,
the carpenters are cutting.
With them I too am cutting
the winter that cracks my every joint and
the skeleton of the freshest dream
held at the tips of my groping fingers.
At some point forgetting
the momentary pain of severing my finger
now I am using the saw again.

Textbook

Please open it and look again.
Ever between these pages
crawl only the ghosts of those who starved to death.
In every village darkened by the hand-grease of daily use
the habits that still live
clean the blackened chimneys of the lamps.
The children drowned in the ocean of their dreaming,
in a yellowed clapping of their hands.
Their ghosts rise and clamor
Give me tasty candies
Give me thrilling candlelight,
then they form a wave that at once collapses.
Several medals left by someone long ago rust away.
Between these pages, it is always
the universe of a past time
and within that universe ghosts
of children who died of starvation
hover with the ghosts of those who will die.
Family is but a few pallid volumes and

a pencil with a bruised lead,
its eraser no longer virgin.
Not one star's light in the sky
at the end of the bare season's branch,
only the white-naped wind sometimes blows.

Matches

No one knows.
There is no telling
what they might do
if they leave prison.
Unknowable types.

From their long imprisonment
their white frames are mere skin and bones.
Even the expressions are frozen on these blockheads
always caught in the fingertips of others,
partners in crime rushing headlong.

When confined to darkness
anyone would rather be bold.
Since all of them harbor hot feelings of enmity,
whenever you hit them, at once
these under surveillance resort to self-immolation.

(Is it the most ardent wish
of those seeking attention
to show brute courage at the end?
Or is it an unintended death?)

For now they hold their breath
lying in their dark coffin, yet
they are waiting for that instant
when they can make a grand debut,
the opportune moment to burst forth.

Soap

The unusual saint of this age,
it had an affinity for water,
suave and of lively disposition,
unreservedly friendly toward all.

Asking no payment whatever,
it dissolved its whole body and as if forgiving our sins
washed our dirty hands,
erased all sorts of impurities carried from outside
and those memories we wished to forget.
Even when its holy ministrations were forgotten
and its master went forth smelling,
it never condemned or told us to clean up a checkered
past,
only silently cleansed our most shameful places
and our hidden weaknesses,
never revealing our secrets.

As it lived in an ever more soiled world,
a life consumed for a clean conclusion
it was beautiful and too soon gone,
shedding its precious blood sacrificially in self-giving,
the unusual saint of this age.

Today
as though receiving its laying on of hands
I washed my face and hands,
washed my body and felt an expiation for my sins.

KIM SŬNGHŬI (1952–)

Born in Kwangju, South Chŏlla Province, Kim Sŭnghŭi received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Sŏgang University, where she has been teaching now for several years. Kim Sŭnghŭi's poetry collections began with idealized, striking images, then turned to the chiaroscuro effects of such poems as "Sun Mass." The poems in *Talgyal sok ŭi saeng* (Life inside the egg; 1985) explore a constructed space, an area of life and yet also *within* it, and thereby isolated or insulated. Awarded the Sowŏl Prize for Poetry in 1990, she is the only tenured woman professor of Korean literature at any of the five major Korean universities.

Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Sun Mass

The dark precedes the sun,
 the sun destroys the dark.
 Reality precedes dreams,
 and then dreams destroy reality.
 Hey, eagle taking the sun for a stroll
 now, behind the wall of clouds,
 I dare
 to dream
 that the sun's mysterious corpuscular waves
 are linking my life to the sun.
 To prevent my life from becoming an ashtray
 to prevent my life becoming
 an icy mask
 I dare imagine:
 my fire revolving as the sun

in its eternal orbit.
For ever, eternally.
Unite
my life and that enormous life.
What spinning wheel
in the void of what fog
is our thread becoming unwoven?

Horror Movie

I am all the time being pursued.
Like the star in a horror movie
I am pursued to the bitter end.
After living under a faint star of misfortune
unaware of the way things are,
one day the hackneyed plot says
that I suddenly start to be pursued
in the old projector, today again,
that never wearies but just keeps turning . . .

Now it's raining on the screen
and there I am from behind, getting drenched,
ceaselessly pursued . . .
What crime did I commit?
On the silent screen
faint foreign words flash like a code;
why did I become a criminal?
Like some imbecilic flower,
even the question forgotten,
pursuing motions of flight in all directions.

As I hoped, though a nightmare is a nightmare,
if it's a nightmare you never wake from
all your life long
it's something great,
it's O.K.
Ah, but you see, I long to watch

one really splendid love movie,
and one quite frighteningly extravagant
art film . . .

Life In The Egg 3

A few days ago I bought three
packs of eggs, thirty eggs in all
and now only one is left,
they've all been eaten up, yet
nothing has happened.
Is that really so?
Can such a thing happen?

There are those who say
that love is never more than a punishment
but this blind love
without a single window,
inside
this dumb love
unable to say a single sound, no *a b c* or *d*,
and curled inside the shell of that last remaining egg
what oviparous tales are you dreaming?
What oviparous myths
do you say you are waiting for?

As for me, curled up like this
under December's cloudy skies,
I am dreaming of chicks skittering
through fields of green dropwort some spring day,
of some primeval azure dawn
with golden cockerels crowing cock-a-doodle-doo
as if waiting for the Phoenix to rise.

Did you expect your blue plate
tomorrow morning
to contain a yellow fried egg?

Did you see that golden Phoenix
fly fluttering over our roof?
In that case, go ahead, ask me
once more then how I am.

*Song of Children in the Land of Ice Who Love
the Sun*

We must buy coal.
On account of the wind
the flowers are constantly losing their petals.

Horseman,
take me to the best firewood store.
At present the chill wind is blowing too hard,
intent on leaving nothing,
not a single word of human speech.

I go to the hearth to light the fire,
but it's full of a pool of golden spittle.
I head southwards in search of live coals but
they tell me some Greek fellow died for that long ago.

I shook my head
and told them "No."
For the sake of the future,
surely it's better to love the thin ice inside the privy?

Ah, trivial things.
You are all of you covering
far too trivial things.

I won't cover them up.
Horseman.
Gallop across this desolate shore.
So that I can finally rest in the sun.
So that I can reach it.

Roses and Thorns

I touched life
with my blind hands
It was a mass of thorns.

Feeling how life was such a mass of thorns,
I smiled.
If there are so many thorns,
roses will soon be blooming, I thought.

Yet even if roses bloom,
how shall I ever forget the pain of the thorns?
But
if only roses once bloom,
why can't I lose the pain of the thorns?

I caressed life
with my blind hands.
I expected roses
beyond the mass of thorns.

So many thorns were sticking
out from it, yet
I could not find a single rose.

So tell me now, please,
is life thorny roses or rosy thorns?
Is it thorns of roses? or is it
roses and thorns?

KIM HYESUN (1955–)

Born in Ulchin, South Kyöngsang Province, Kim Hyesun shares with Kim Sünghŭi the distinction of being known as a writer who challenges the preconceived notions of so-called women's poetry. Many of her poems, such as "Remembering the Day I Gave Birth to a Daughter," are unabashedly about life as a woman and adopt such images as the mirrored rooms of that poem from shamanic ceremony, traditionally a women's religion in Korea, shaping them to a modern idiom. Other more recent poems show a quite strikingly urban and language-oriented narrative inclination. She has received several prestigious awards, including the Sowöl Prize for Poetry in 2001.

Translated by Jiwon Shin

Ripe Apple

Shrill of one hundred katydids chirring together
 Squeak of my bicycle wheel turning click, clack
 Thrum of violet autumn breeze grinding under
 the water wheel like grains just unloaded at the mill
 A cluster of cloud colder than the baby's cheek
 —having fed on nothing but the tears of a single mother,
 aboard a carriage bound for a faraway land for
 adoption—
 descending from the sky, blanketing my hand
 The little cloud with an aroma of the one,
 forever an infant, for a thousand long years
 At each bend of an alleyway as my bicycle wheel
 carves the path round and rolling,

an apple as large as the home village to which I returned
gently peeling
Perched on the raised mat, a senile grandma at the
mom-and-pop
scooping out the big apple with a spoon,
her gums chewing and crushing each morsel

The Old Hotel

Such an old hotel. Curled up like a cat by the river at night. That kind of hotel. The hotel, in the heart of it are rooms numbered 1992, 1993, . . . , and it's been said that in the room next to mine my loved one sleeps. In my heart there is a hotel, and in that hotel, there am I again. Inside the hotel in my heart, there is a bed spread with a blue blanket, and I am lying on that bed. And in the heart of my lying body is that hotel again. Outside the hotel in my heart, a green river flows like wrinkles on a crumpled sheet of wool, and a boat full of tourists moves up and down inside my head as the water rises and falls. And with a drunken headache I'd look at the river, or I'd stand at the window that opens only by yanking at the knob. The hotel's breathing, its pulse's beating, and a silent vacuum cleaner passes by in the red carpeted hallway. And a woman with a white cap stretches her back from time to time, shaking off her cap. Keys to each room of the hotel in my heart are at the front desk and though I have a bunch of invisible keys in my pocket, I am unable to open the door to the room in the hotel in my heart and enter as I please. Oh, and did the lights in the rooms of that hotel light up at night? When they're alight, I want to throw off my blanket and fling open the doors to the rooms of the hotel in my heart. My belly button lights up with anxious desire. When the doors don't open after my frustrating pulling and yanking, I want to call someone strong. The hotel that sometimes runs like cat in the rain. The hotel that sometimes lifts me up and throws me out the window. I am told that another lunatic me who

stole my sleep hides behind the grandfather clock at the end of the hallway of the hotel. That hotel; at night with lights off, looking lost like a king's crown just excavated from a tomb, not knowing where it is, and looking unfamiliar even to me when I look at it awakening from sleep. The hotel where, my love, you stick your face out of every window under the gable roof when I open all the windows in my body, as from the rows of boxes on the writing pad* with a roof hanging above it. The hotel that runs away like a night-cat into the river when the morning comes and hangs its windows again above the water.

Saturday Night, Arriving in Seoul

Like a brightly lit after-hour bus
 shooting across the Chongno Boulevard past
 midnight with a driver and his
 two shit-faced passengers aboard, like
 the pale neon Emergency Room sign, not
 blinking even once all night, like
 a general hospital at midnight, a thousand or more
 patients lying in bed jabbed with intravenous needles,
 like
 the Café Pulp with its telephones in
 see-through design,
 crying and yelping from each table, like
 Eclipse in downtown Myŏngdong, bright behind the
 doors with
 beepers going off, phones ringing, advertising leaflets
 flying, like
 My Beautiful Launderette, lit twenty-four hours, with
 grandpa, grandma, mom, and younger brother, all
 rushing in, all

* Korean manuscript paper has rows of boxes, and each syllable is written in a box.

taking off their clothes, and
 if you look down from South Hill when
 all are sleeping,
 the South Gate Market, like
 a golden rose blazing in the heart of Seoul—
 This dazzling heaven!
 Who shakes it like
 a ten-dollar fish bowl being carried home?

In the Night

Rat
 gnawing the white rabbit deep in sleep
 Dark blood pouring out the rabbit cage
 Rat gnawing the piglet fallen into the feeding trough
 (lumps of flesh just now roasted in the womb
 newborns shuddering and fluttering at the first breath of
 air
 chunks of greasy meat
 delicious, warm, and, when bitten off, bleeding, lumps)
 A rat gnawing a newborn in the cradle
 Mommy went to the kitchen to do the dishes
 Rat coming in and out of the fresh corpse
 just now interred

Rat, never eaten anything that is not stolen

The one who gathered our shadows into a ball and
 breathed us awake
 The one who used to tag along, stealthily between the
 toes, under the foot fungus
 Gulping and devouring, yet even at an escape of deep
 breath, quickly curling up its tail with a rustle
 Hiding behind the security camera, peeping at us
 copulating every night
 The rat boasting that it has seen all the course of
 hundreds-of-centuries-long evolution,
 every day, grinding its teeth that never stop growing

On the other side of our glossy exterior, in between the
 veins,
 beneath the silken skin, within the dark and slick
 intestines,
 under the squeaky living room cabinet, in between the
 ten wiggling toes,
 inside the cranium concealing the thrumming footsteps
 of rain and wind,
 in the darkest nook of my body where not a single ray of
 light can penetrate,
 death's anatomy curled up inside me for decades, and in
 its abdomen,
 the rat
 grinding its teeth to bite off ten fingers

In the night

The Titanic, Reincarnate

The Titanic, reincarnate, now a cauldron.
 Built, 1911, in Southampton.
 Twenty-two knot, a passenger liner, over
 two thousand aboard on her voyage.
 Dismantled the year I married, and now
 turned into a toaster, a teakettle, a Chinese wok,
 and
 a Korean pressure cooker.
 A grand beast, wounded all over.
 A retired captain, still unfit for life on land.
 Though nothing but a rice pot,
 trouble persists.
 Uninspired to cook, I called the pressure cooker
 company to complain:
 Why does it leak steam?
 How many tons of rice have I rinsed? Rising at dawn,
 rinsing rice, setting the table, rinsing rice again, scrub-
 bing pots, polishing spoons, scrubbing bathroom, rinse,

rinse, rice, rice. Scraping chicken fat off its belly, rinsing
 rice, taking out fish guts, chopping scallions, rinse, rice,
 rinse, rice. A ship afloat on the infinite ocean, "The
 Titanic Reincarnate" Brand Rice Cooker: Is this really
 my voyage? *Replay, replay, replay.*

"The Titanic Reincarnate," a Korean rice cooker at
 anchor in my house.

Wretched thing never left the kitchen.

Sick of cooking.

Fed up with doing dishes.

What else would you rather do?

the pot asked.

I'd eat, wipe my mouth, and slip out like a snake,

I answered.

As flames surround the pot like light pouring from a
 movie projector the waves simmer.

When the ship collides with the iceberg, white as a
 movie screen,

my day's apparition sinks into the night ocean.

A thousand rooms, lit up under the water,

whirling like a film reel.

With a slow fadeout,

she who became the rice pot soon

vaporizes in the seething white wave with stars and
 extras.

Named "The Titanic Reincarnate,"

built by the White Star Shipbuilding Company,

wandering in the kitchen four thousand meters down

letting scarlet rust seep into the deep green ocean.

Women

I was wondering, did I write that I would get through
 this

by the sorrow of the path we will not take together? Or,
 saying,

My dearest love . . ., was I feeling sorry for us? Or, I
 wondered if
 I hadn't made more than I should of this, saying, *How*
terrible
this summer is! Had I asked you what becomes of the rest
 of your
 birthdays if you leave this world?
 Why can't I hide you under my long skirt? Why not, as
 they do in the movies?

Will they come thrashing and thumping at the gates?
 As all of war's gates fling open, women
 barricading all of war's gates. saying, *Not here, he isn't*
here,
 shaking their heads, spilling out.

Why can't I hide you under my skirt ? . . . A woman,
 hiding a man in her skirt, falls at a gun shot. The man
 gulps down the blood of the woman just losing her last
 breath. tearing out the stuff from a sofa, she makes a
 room to hide him. Gutting the piano, she hides his bed
 inside. The piano hits a mute key. Defiantly sitting atop a
 barrel, the woman shouting, *he isn't here; I don't hide him.*
 Chased to the farm shed, she lays herself over the man
 concealed under the straw heap: *Not here; didn't hide him.*
 They set the straws on fire.

In time to come, after I die,
 how will my daughter recollect me?

Mother who tore apart
 her brow and made a secret attic.
 Unable to fall asleep because the night is too heavy,
 Mother rising, putting on her glasses,
 sleeptalking:
Not here; I didn't hide him.

A fig tree, its large palm
 hiding the fruits that it bore without blossom,
 stands in the rain,
 shaking its head this way and that.

*Remembering the Day I Gave Birth to
 a Daughter*

(In the storytelling rhythm of *P'ansori**)

As I open the mirror and enter,
 my mother is seated inside the mirror, and
 as I open the mirror and enter again,
 mother's mother is seated inside that mirror, and
 as I push the mirror where mother's mother sits, and
 cross the threshold,
 mother's mother's mother grins in the mirror, and
 as I poke my head through the grinning lips of my
 mother's mother's mother,
 inside that mirror, my mother's mother's mother's
 mother is seated looking younger than I,
 with her back turned toward me, and
 as I open that mirror and enter,
 and enter again,
 yet enter once more,
 inside the mirror growing darker and darker
 all mothers of the ancestral line sit and
 all the mothers, they leap at me
 murmuring or yelping, mommy, mommy,
 crying out for milk with their lips puckered up, but
 my breasts run dry, and instead, somebody keeps
 blowing air into my intestines and
 my belly swells up larger than a balloon

* *P'ansori* is a dramatic narrative performed by a singer accompanied by a drum.

and so it floats and wafts here and there on the sea, and
inside the mirror, it's so very wide and vast that
I can't find even a straw to grab onto, and
from time to time, lightning flashes through my body,
and
every time I dive down into the sea,
at the bottom of the sea, the shoes
of all the mothers up on the land
are quietly dissolving away, and yet, again.
lightning from a clear sky.
Lights out. Darkness in heaven and earth.
At that moment, the mirrors collapse before me, all at
once, and
as they break, they spew out one mother and
many people in white, with gloved hands, who
remove the debris of mirrors and lift up
the mother of all my mothers, blood-stained and with
her eyes shut,
and say, it's a princess with all ten fingers!

HWANG JIWOO (1952–)

Born in Haenam, South Chŏlla Province, and like Kim Chi Ha a graduate in arts from Seoul National University, Hwang Jiwoo began to publish his poems in 1980, and in a short time became one of the leading poets who occupied the middle ground of the so-called, “Poetry Era” of the 1980s, a ground of poetry also frequently labeled postmodern. During that period a process of cultural resistance against the government, a veritable military dictatorship, was begun in response to the bloody repression of the 18 May Kwangju Uprising. Even the most conservative accounts report that at least 400 people were killed by government troops in this event that has recently been dubbed “Korea’s Tienanmen.”

The most prominent feature of Hwang’s poetry is its rather unconventional form, which Hwang himself refers to as the “destruction of style, [the] stylization of destruction,” a (poetic) formal reference intended to reflect Korea’s harsh political reality. He often employs a kind of tessellation technique, like a thematic enjambment, to move his poems along with both humor and cynicism. Despite his own protestations, many Korean critics label his poetry “deconstructionist.” Unlike many of his poet-colleagues at that time, he did not write his message in direct language but rather chose to express the painful social situation as introspectively ironic satire. His poems from the 1990s, with their Zen-oriented abstraction and antirational qualities, seem to echo the works of the 1930s poet Yi Sang.

Hwang has published five books of poetry; he is also a fine-arts critic and sculptor. Currently, he teaches at the Korean National Academy of the Arts.

Translated and introduced by Scott Swaner and Young-Jun Lee

Variety Show, 1984

"That sonnofa bitch! What, he's totally whacked and he wants to die? Hey! Sonnofa bitch! You drivin' around with your crossed eyes shut?" / "What? 'Son of a bitch'? You're the crosseyed sonnofa bitch, sonnofabitch sonnofa-bitch. You talkin' shit now?" In the Left Turn Only lane a commercial taxi driver and a private chauffeur (*oh my, he drives a Mercedes SLC 500*), one stabs his middle finger into heaven cursing.

A church steeple shoots up to high Heaven—no, with no idea how high Heaven is. A bright red neon cross is situated right above a bright red neon "CABARET YÖNGDONG." Like the antenna tower of some interstellar communications company, . . . probably in the middle of having intercourse with a bunch of those mutherfuckers' souls.

There's no way. They're not going to their "promised land." Bunch of invaders!

My, literary, behavior's, no answer, questioning, all of it. Center, less questions, fleeting, sus, picions, all of it. End, less suspicion, some, skepticism, are . . . coulditreallybeendlessuspicionandskepticism?

We congratulate your suspicion and skepticism (sarcastically)—at the award ceremony for the 12th Annual Evergreen Literary Prize. Weird. She didn't really get what was being said at all. Receiving bouquets, . . . taking commemorative photographs with veteran literary figures, and even giving interviews at the newspapers, the poetess felt nothing but hollowed out when she returned home. She felt like she'd just come home from being raped.

Ms. Lee jumped right out of her clothes and got right into bed.

"And then sunlight on the panes, distinct bits of dust, disillusion, disillusion, enough to want to die, to want to kill!"

Rode the bus this morning, and in the in the second seat from the back on the right were the remains of an expansive sprawl of a feastlike spread somebody puked

up. After somebody was about to sit down there, they'd jump back with a start and fly away. Contents: grains of rice 55%, little chunks of kimch'i stew meat 15%, tiny top pieces of been sprouts 10%, tofu bits 7%, fried egg—yellow parts and white parts 5%, crushed red peppers 5%, other 3%, in order of quantity.

"Oh Gods of Heaven and Earth! These are said to be the sustenance of our world. Oh please, shower all this down upon us. Oh please, stuff these things down our throats."

"Now then, will the Secretary of Agriculture and Fisheries please come forward and respond. What in the world is the reason you can't increase grain procurements this year? Now that yer come before us, there's no use to go and try 'n' save face, yer better off erasin' the 'N' of the National Party from the National Party Platform, goin' and bustin' a bloodvessel, no matter how high you raise yer voice, those farmin' villages they's a thing of the past, ya hear."

"Hey! How can you just let leave that shit there?" loudly intones a middle-aged gentleman in his 40's, rather hysterically from the second seat from the back on the left. Rather than answer, the bus girl just spreads a piece of newspaper over the that seat second from the back on the right and walks off.

FOUR SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ARRESTED IN DEMONSTRATION

Kwanak Police Station. Four Seoul National University students—Kim Yöngsu (22, Math major), Lee Hyeja (21, Biology major), Hō Hūiyōng (23, Communications major), Shin Yunho (22, Geography major), and others who had led a demonstration on campus on the 15th have been arrested for conspiracy and violation of anti-demonstration laws. Kim and the others are suspected of having masterminded the demonstration and of distributing over 1,000 anti-government handouts entitled "Manifesto of the Democratic Students Struggle" around the library and student cafeteria at 1:40 in the morning on the 11th of the month.

Pak Nosök. 23. Lathe turner. Monthly wage, \$13. Eating sweet-potato tempura with his greasy hands. Fingers stained black. That sight, when Yi Söngyöng (Ewha University, Junior in Food and Nutritional Sciences) glances over, makes her loathe him. As Pak goes on chomping, chomping his tempura until the lady who runs the tempura stand brings him some more, he piercingly ogles the student who looks like she attends a girls-only school. Yi Söngyöng's mood, at this point, has been utterly, completely defiled. Before his crude antagonistic gaze, which made it seem like he'd chew her up and spit her out any minute, she began to feel as if her body had been stripped naked, buck naked, without a single nook or cranny unexplored.

After 20—years, would his son meet her daughter in the same way?

All the supermarket walls are covered with mirrors. The mirrors on one side keep the mirrors on the other side under surveillance and the other side's mirrors keep the first side's mirrors keeping the other side's mirrors under surveillance under surveillance with all of that being kept under under under surveillance and keeping and keeping the the . . .

Master Imje, the venerable monk, came down after sitting upon the meditation mat, in one hand he held his folded mat, and with the other hand grabbed the venerable monk Magok and asked: "Where has the 12-faced Boddhisatva gone?" Magok turned himself around and was about to sit on Imje's woven mat. Master Imje grabbed his monk's cane and gave him a thrashing on the spot. Magok also grabbed the staff, and grappling with each other thus, they entered into the place of the head monk together after all.

At the entrance to the construction site at the subway, the doll-like automatons sway, their red hand-signals going to the left and to the right. They sway vacantly to the left and to the right until 11 P.M. passes by. Under Construction. Beware of Falling! 20 Meters Underground.

Take shelter, in the underground that makes whole the things of this world—all for some later day, some later time!

Well, here is one hypothesis—If—just “if” is all I’m saying—as soon as I’m finished writing this, now, this very moment an atom bomb is dropped into the Seoul skies, how is it you will act then?

I will execute anti-chemical warfare procedures just as I learned in the National Guard.

I will remain sitting quietly.

I will give prayer a chance.

I will shave while knowing in my heart “Even though the world will be destroyed tomorrow, I will plant an apple tree today.”

I will change my underwear.

I will pay my respects at my parents’ hometown greave.

I will hug my kids.

I will drink the booze I had buried away.

I—my wife and I—will have one good last fuck.

If that’s the case, is the honorable sir aware of the fact that the honorable sir’s airspace is already carrying an a-bomb?

Day in and day out day out and day in, that tidbit, knowingly unknowing, unknowingly knowing, even knowingly unspeakably, 10,000,000 beetles stuck to each other bobbing up and down sucking out each other’s bodily fluids. Everyday. Everynight. Blinded life under skies of fire. Pitiful, pitiful, pitiful, oh pitiful.

If we all die together all at once, there will be no death for us.

A young mendicant Buddhist monk was shooting contemptuous glances at a newborn, just 3 months old, being carried on the back of a girl in her twenties. Human larva bloomed splendidly like a lotus flower from lust’s filthy crotch! Without a care in the world the newborn—nervously keeps watch on the world. (Jan. 31, 1984. In line to go home at the Kangnam Terminal, waiting for a Chŏnju train).

But that lust is exactly what props up humankind.

On the billboard outside the Piccadilly Theater on the 3rd St. of Chongno there’s a picture of a famous

Korean actress, crotch spread wide open. 3 months running. In the lower right part, she's holding a naked man's torso tight to her breast and grinding. Her mouth is spread wide open, she's breathing hard panting, moaning and panting. When the entire life and culture of an age are pornography, what do we think we're doing by prostrating ourselves on the cold floor of dawn and writing poetry? What the hell are we doing?

A single kerosene heater in the Health Club turns the hotel into an inferno, all the good men and women on the 7th and 8th floors, none of whom know each other, strain to grab hold of the helicopter's life rope, lose their grip, and fall through the sky to their death, and the sightseers stand and watch, and all the people from the 9th and 10th floors are already piled in a squashed heap of death.

"Woah. Ever seen a person or two drop dead before? Whaat, it can't be more than 30 people."

However, the novelist Kim Wõnu comes out, taking another drink, and proclaims that South Korea's middle class absolutely does not want to see unification like this.

The scattered families, after meeting once, scatter once more.

The times are vexing! Vexing times! Vexing! These times! Vexed! Vexing! Enough to make you grind your teeth.

"I hate the Communist Party," said the little dead boy who turned into the bronze statue standing in the school yard of his tranquil small town elementary school.

Rush hour—on the crosswalk the staff of the district office, bank employees, workers from the local neighborhood office wear banners on their chests for the "Order in the Streets" campaign and carry pickets to the same effect.

At the far end of ORDER we eventually find the point of a blade.

The thing called ADVANCEMENT is an eternal parade.

Kids from the local elementary school carry yellow flags, halting passers-by who would jaywalk.

We've been halted. All the government and public offices, all the schools, all the soldiers, bureaucrats, civilians at their jobs. A flag ceremony has been put into effect at 17:00 hours, the whole nation, all at once, the unwitting pedestrians passing by stop in haste, face flags they cannot see, salute. Junior high students, full of enthusiasm, flags held high, snap military salutes.

The honorable "BIG BROTHER, 1984" casts down his lofty gaze and saith:

"Looks good to me!"

Memo on Composition

Last winter, there was this one time when I was just talking with some of my juniors who want to be writers and I asked: "With poetry, what if we tried starting out from discovering what the 'poetic thing' is, instead of starting out from language?" We can't exactly say what the "poetic thing" is, and we don't know if starting from the point of not exactly being able to say what the "poetic thing" is doesn't possibly bring us to some Zen-like state, is what I said one time last winter when I was just talking with a few of my juniors who want to be writers. There was this time I said I'd tried to find some examples in the diaries of Chŏn T'aeil* and *The Record of Imje*. Even though poetry is fragile like a mason jar, we get a taste for what it is when we use it.

* Chŏn T'aeil was a Seoul garment worker who immolated himself in public on 13 November 1970. His action, a protest against exploitative working conditions, served to galvanize workers' and students' activism from that time forward and has since assumed legendary significance in South Korean mass-protest movements. Shouting workers' slogans as he burned, he was taken to a hospital where he later died—reportedly saying "Please do not waste my life!"

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Do. Start. Start to move. Come. Come. Come. Come.
 Make noise. Reverberate. Prostrate. Contact. Surround.
 Close in. Shoot. Shot. Shoot. Shed. Bleed. Run through.
 Collapse. Break. Blown away. Knocked down. Struck.
 Destroyed. Cut off. Stretch. Spread out. Fall back. Shake.
 Ripped. Divided. Split. Cut. Jump. Blown to pieces. Split
 open. Spread out. Shatter. Fragment. Dispersed. Capture.
 Fall. Collapse. Crawl. Crawl away. Captured. Raise hands.
 Bound. Go. Dragged off. Now—all gone. Which dust will
 I eventually sleep in? Shut my eyes. Open them. Am alive.
 Am. Am. Am. I am alive. I will live.*

Out of the Winter-Tree Into the Spring-Tree

The tree is a tree
 by my own body.
 By my whole body the tree becomes a tree.
 By my whole shabbily clothed body 30° below zero
 above ground it's 20° below zero
 it takes root in my whole body, it raises its sprouts
 having stood up a naked a defenseless tree
 having put forth its hands in the attitude of taking
 punishment
 oh, with this punished body, it rises up with this life
 being punished, but
 that's not it, that's not it
 as my entire soul is overwrought, as it is consumed
 inside, inside my body
 as it endures, as it refuses, from below zero
 it pushes onward, it just pushes upward and onward

* In *Na nŭn nŏda* (I am you; published in Seoul by P'ulpit, 1978), the collection from which this poem is taken, all of the poems have numbers for titles. Many people assume the numbers corresponding to the poem titles represent the numbers of various buses in Seoul.

back above zero, overground to 5° above zero, to 30°
above zero.

My whole soul to the point of disintegrating
to the point of disintegrating as it is blistered,
as it's broken down, fresh buds sprout from my warm
tongue
and slowly, gradually, suddenly, turn to green leaves
as it bumps against April's azure sky,
through my whole body the tree becomes a tree.
Oh, finally, at long last,
the flowering tree through my own whole body
is a flowering tree.

Melancholy

MIRROR 1

While I dread looking into the mirror
I show up there frequently.
Looking

for an ashtray, I go to the bookshelf and back
ah, I'm going back and forth to the bookshelf, I think.
When my body grazes against the corner of the bookshelf
ah, I'm still over here, I think
a certain mass filled mostly with water, I think:
now and then I've thought about the dead, but
it's either this guy Ch'ae Kwangsök, who ended every
sentence with "Fuck,"
drunk in front of the shredded chickens at the Kubanp'o
Chicken House
or it's my mentor Kim Hyön, who sang Yu Simch'o's
"Hey, Love," so softly.
Why is life the only space where their voices float up to
me?
Their voices, their expressions, their personalities, are
they only illusions?

My face uptilted so I can shave the stubble under my
 chin:
 this hollow shell of mine lathered up all snowy white,
 this shell, this isn't anything!

MIRROR 2

The day the Soviet Union collapsed I, I
 was spreading out the sports page in the Kwangju
 Airport.

Has my chance to betray this life in totality
 just up and disappeared? At first, there was absolutely
 no way to accept the fact that I had turned 40.
 It's because this is one "fucked-up century."
 Of course, if you tell me to go live in Pyöngyang, I can't
 do it.

So why is my pain any worse than theirs?
 I wanted to travel up across the Kaema Plateau. I can't
 just head straight off for Okinawa.
 I should've been born in the 19th century, you realize
 then I wouldn't have known a future like this?
 Yeltzin's out of sorts, just like that disagreeable bastard I
 hate.

That fucked-up bastard, this fucked-up century:
 so why
 is my pain worse than theirs?
 No worries. Roh Tae Woo doesn't make appearances in
 my dreams;
 should we say it's better to be the cruel than the cunning?
 Funny, isn't it. I'm pretty well-off for being unemployed.
 Has the buoyant flotsam of corruption been floating me
 too?

The shadow of a cloud walks the ridgetops of the Kaema
 Plateau, and when it just passes the region of royal
 azaleas
 all I wanted was to see that dazzling sight—just once.
 Last spring, I went to the hospital—don't laugh—and I
 was happy the instant I learned the name of my
 disease.

A butterfly flut flut flutters up from the pages of the
book I open,
it flies up, an ink butterfly soaked in ill will:
Okinawa would be an island floating on the wind.
A dream where noodles are hanging down out of my
nose; then I woke up,
isn't the door slightly ajar and the light's been left on?
Has someone been here? (Someone has been here!)
It was 2 A.M. and I went to the kitchen, opened the
fridge, then slammed it shut.
'Cause inside there's a single left shoe with the heel-cap
smashed down.
And a travel commercial comes to mind—Palm fronds
like fine hair
waving, almost as if they'd fall over, on an island that
combs the wind;
nowadays I lose my hair in sudden handfuls,
so how, after coming all this way from the 19th century,
could I know my mental age, detour after detour?
This fire-scorched cut-back of my skull.
A fuse-blown idea; anyhow I, I
have passed the stainless steel chef's knife atop the
butcher's block, both eyes shut tight.
Sometimes I'm afraid of myself! How can I believe myself?
I can understand the thunder and lightning crashing
inside the head
of that guy who grabs onto the iron bars shouting "I Am
Jesus";
I hate the coming of morning every day, sunlight is tedious.
While I, I don't do anything all day long
all the while every every day seems very very urgent.
I'm late to the airport again: "Uh, is there a 12 o'clock
KAL flight to Seoul?"
Where's a life that's as urgent as that of the crazy bastards?
At the newsstand where there's a "No Soliciting" sign
posted
"Yeltzin's gonna get ousted," my mind is always clouded
as if it were filled with some gas. I stood there in front of
the bathroom mirror

pointing a finger up against my temple and pretended to
 pull the trigger.
 Funny, huh? After that, I muttered to myself "Fucked-
 up century."
 "BANG!" my finger pulls the trigger inside my head,
 "Hey, you fucked-up bastard!"
 I screamed, of course it only comes from the mouth in
 the mirror.
 And I thought, some lunatics are sages.
 Now even when I think I've met all the people I need to
 meet
 why do good women keep appearing? This is the kind of
 question
 I have sometimes when I fly.
 Homesickness is better than living in your hometown.
 Byelo-Russia? The Kaema Plateau? Okinawa? The
 Kansas River?
 There are names in my address book I've crossed out
 so many times I can't recognize them.
 Being made of non-existent material: that's my nothing-
 special strength.
 I don't need to be told to forgive.
 I don't need to be forgiven.

MIRROR 3

Once I was sitting on the right hand side of god in
 Paradise,
 in repartee as witty as a drone's wing is long!
 that's utterly ridiculous

 unaware that the light plays tricks on the retina
 I follow the white light until
 I pitch headlong into this sewage ditch; a mirror of clay,

 with my head buried and my beak stuck in the field of
 this heart of clay

even when I get to the point where I'm not afraid of
 filthier things
the mind-body will only change

playing with my emotions this way as if you're out of
 your mind,
when it's contagious, this melancholy
 mirror 3,
it's perilous since there's a chance I'll lose it again

I'm on the road home, then,
I wonder, did I forget my lamp?

PAK NOHAE (1957–)

Born in Hamp'yŏng, South Chŏlla Province, and a graduate of Sŏllin Commercial High School, Pak Nohae is the first poet in Korea to have achieved success as a laborer-poet rather than a poet who wrote about the laboring class, whether of the factory variety, the farm, or another. Pak worked in factories, became involved in the clandestine labor movement—taking his sobriquet from the phrase “*pakbae pannŭn nodong-ja ŭi haebang*” (liberation of the oppressed workers). He published his first collection, *Nodong ŭi saebyŏk* (The dawn of labor), in 1984, a book that became a huge popular success. Pak was arrested in 1991 for “organizing a revolutionary communist labor organization,” but after imprisonment for eight years, he was released in a general amnesty in 1998.

Translated by Scott Swaner

How Much Is This One?

My cousin at the dye factory, who stutters
 had his 10-year pension embezzled by a Middle East–job
 broker* and
 killed himself.
 If it's \$1,000
 my bed-ridden mother could be hospitalized,
 my 29-year-old maid sister could get hitched.
 If it's \$10,000
 I'd have to kiss ass for ten years.

*While many Koreans found lucrative job opportunities in construction-related projects in the Middle East during the 1970s and 1980s, others found profit by brokering these jobs to unconnected Koreans for often exorbitant sums.

\$100,000—is a rainbow beyond a mountain past a river
 of which I cannot conceive even being born twice
 kicking and screaming.
 My life's \$4 for one day—
 How much is yours?
 They say our company president drinks \$1,000 in a
 single night,
 they say it costs \$5 to feed his puppy for a day,
 they say some Amazon's got \$300,000,000 in the palm
 of her hand,
 my cousin at the dye factory killed himself for \$1,200, and
 my little 16-year-old brother goes off to the factory, and
 shit.
 Our lives, our loves, our existence—
 How much? How much?

The Road to Corruption

—To a friend going into the army—

Wearing an eighteen-year old boyish face,
 chained to the machine day and night
 for five years since you stood in the factory door,
 with never a left-over from eating poorly and playing
 little,
 you've kicked and screamed about the sad, greasy rice,
 now, since you were born as a boy, you're going into the
 army!
 The bloom of your youth, good up till now, is going to
 be corrupted!

This good-for-nothing friend has nothing to give
 to you while you're leaving
 crying burly tears.
 Besides one cup of rotgut booze, I have nothing to give you.
 But Ch'öl-su,
 you're not going off to be corrupted.

Some day during your three-year confinement in that
blue uniform,
it will have been a precious life that can't be discarded
without cost.

Live passionately, even though you're in the army.
Don't wish for nights of drinking or for comfortable
assignments,
even among your comrades, don't step out of line.
Even in the army life, wearing the soldier's uniform like
every one else,
eating greasy rice like every one else, sweating like every
one else,
get recognition fair and square
before those shameful, savvy bastards who've learned
and have so much,
but only through sincerity and hard labor.

Pick up the broom one more time.
Polish one more piece of silverware.
When it's time to work, work with a vengeance.
Peel when they say "PEEL!" Pluck when they say
"PLUCK!"
Don't ignore the point of it all, but live positively.
Even when you think you're being victimized
by the arrogance of the old hands or lackeys of the
soldiers above you,
even when you think you're suffering all alone for no
reason,
as time goes by you'll become an old hand too—
instead, sell your labor for that price and
more than this fucked-up society where you're kicking
and screaming at the overtime that keeps building as
you go,
isn't it army life, oddly enough, its going around
coming around equally, which is fair and clean?
In that life learn the submission beyond servility,
learn the true labor of every one sweating together for
the corporation.

With a practical love flowing through your body,
with a spirit of sacrifice that doesn't refuse the disgusting
work,
find and make good friends.
Among friends who've received bitter wounds, just like
you,
in a society that judges by money and academic cliques
and connections,
you'll realize with your whole body
that only sincerity and hard work have a genuine and
precious value.
To that different you who's becoming one amid the tight
collaboration,
find good friends.

Amid bursting laughter spread adventure and stoutness
of heart.
Amid raids and marches, among the lackeys, grow some
balls.
Stretch your courage to act, to distinguish the truth and
lies of commands,
the fortitude to take some underling under your wing.
If there's any time left over, read and think and thrive,
learn passionately.
Under the desolate guardpost drenched with moonlight
carve the tragedy of Korea's division into the depths of
your heart.

While you cry
you're going off to get corrupted by three years in the
army.
Get corrupted passionately
up until the day you return,
corrupted, then once again like a flower's bud.

This stupid friend too, you too, your friends too,
will bloom like blindingly-bright flower buds, but

let's all of us, passionately,
 get corrupted together
 until we violently shake the whole world for all to see.

After that, along with cooperation, practice, labor,
 good friends who've become a part of your life,
 heated and rolled smooth
 as a reliable worker,
 return to our arms
 with your shining face.

Ch'öl-su, wipe away your tears.
 With the laborer's tenacious will to live,
 passionately, passionately
 you must get corrupted well.

The Wind to the Stones

A flower planted on the sands
 doesn't bloom, even on a bright spring day.
 Bamboo rustles
 because the wind blows.
 Wailing reeds flail their hands about,
 this too because the wind rages on.
 Scree rolls and causes rockslides
 unable to sustain its own weight in the wind.

Bamboo trees, reeds, pebbles,
 howl in the blowing of the wind.

We want to live quietly.
 Knowing too well what comes around, that there will be
 nothing
 but the stigma of layoffs, hunger, beatings, and a life
 behind bars,

who will there be to stand and speak out?
Though you say to us
we cause the labor problems,
like the stones, like the grass, we want to live quietly.
Only we must go on spreading the desiccated roots
from the sands, on toward the fertile soils.
On spring days, we too want to be fragrant like the
humble flowers.
The wind drives us on ruthlessly
so we are compelled to cry out,
we are forced to start rockslides,
because we cannot endure it any longer.

