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Kim So-wol (1902 - 1934)

Kim Sowol was born in 1902 in Kusong, North Pyongan Province. He went to Osan High School, where under the influence of Kim Ok he started to write poems. Some of his early poems were published in the literary magazine *Changjo* (*Creation*, 1919-21). He was a student at Tokyo Commercial University before he settled back in his native district, running a branch office of *Tong-A Ilbo*, a Seoul daily newspaper. But he was unsuccessful in business and became so desperate that he took to heavy drinking. He was only thirty-two when he was found dead after a night of intemperance in 1934. In 1939, his poems were collected and published in a volume by his former teacher Kim Ok under the title of *Sowol Shicho* (*Selected Poems of Sowol*).

진달래꽃	Azaleas
나 보기가 역겨워 가실 때에는 말없이 고이 보내 드리우리다	When seeing me sickens you and you walk out I'll send you off without a word, no fuss.
영변에 약산 진달래꽃 아름 따다 가실 길에 뿌리우리다	Yongbyon's mount Yaksan's azaleas by the armful I'll scatter in your path.
가시는 걸음 걸음 놓인 그 꽃을 사뿐히 즈려밟고 가시옵소서	With parting steps on those strewn flowers treading lightly, go on, leave.
나 보기가 역겨워 가실 때에는 죽어도 아니 눈물 흘리우리다	When seeing me sickens you and you walk out why, I'd rather die than weep one tear.

On the hills are blooming flowers

On the hills are blooming flowers,
Flowers bloom;
Autumn, spring, summer through,
The flowers bloom.

On the hills,
On the hills,
Flowers bloom;
Each alone, the flowers bloom.

The little birds singing on the hills
Are living
On the hills,

For the flowers bloom.

On the hills are fading flowers,
Flowers fade,
Autumn, spring, summer through,
The flowers fade.

Spring night

Upon old boughs, the dim locks of willows,
On the indigo skirts, the large wings of swallows,
And by the window of the pub, look! isn't that spring?

Softly the breeze breathing, sobbing and sighing:
On a spring night when you sadden and yearn, but for nothing,
The tender, damp air floats, embracing the ground.

Unable to forget

You may remember, unable to forget:
yet live a lifetime, remember or forget,
For you will have a day when you will come to forget.

You may remember, unable to forget:
Let your years flow by, remember or forget,
For once in a while, you will forget.

On the other hand it may be:
'How could you forget
What you can never forget?'

Han Yong-un (1879 - 1944)

Han Yong-un was born in Hongsong, South Chungchong Province, in 1879. Having studied classical Chinese in his native village, he began at the age of twenty to study Buddhist scriptures at a Buddhist monastery in Mt. Sorak and became a Buddhist monk in 1905. In 1908, he traveled in Japan, visiting Kyoto and Tokyo. After the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, he played a leading role in resisting Japan's policies toward Korean Buddhism and the Korean people at large. He even lived for a while in exile in Manchuria. In the 1919 Korean Independence Movement, he was one of the most active among the thirty-three signers of the Declaration of Independence and had to spend three years in prison. It was presumably during this period of imprisonment that he began to write modern-style poems in Korean in response to the poems of Tagore. These "modern" poems, distinguished from both his *sijo* poems and his poems in Chinese,

were collected in a volume, *The Silence of Love*, which was first published in 1926. A great Korean Buddhist, patriot and poet, he died in Seoul in 1944.

My Lover's Silence

(님의 침묵) Trans. F. Cho

My love is gone.
Ah, the one I love is gone.
Crossing the narrow path to the maple grove
that shatters the mountain green, she tore away from me.
Promises, like bright gold blossoms,
turned into ash scattered by gentle wind.
The memory of a sharp first kiss reversed my destiny and then,
retreating, faded away to nothing.
I was deafened by her scented voice;
blinded by her flowerlike face.
Love is a human thing—when meeting I already feared parting,
and still with separation, my heart burst with fresh sorrow.

But to turn parting into useless tears destroys love,
and so I turned the strength of sadness into new hope.
Just as a meeting creates worry of parting,
parting creates hope of meeting again.

My love is gone, but I didn't send her away.
My common song of love wraps itself around my lover's silence.

I cannot tell

Whose footstep is that paulownia leaf, quietly falling, a perpendicular wave drawn in the windless air?
Whose face is that patch of blue sky that sometimes peeps through the menacing black clouds driven by the west wind after long, tedious rain?
Whose breath is that subtle scent lingering in the still air around that old pagoda, drifting from the green moss on a somber flowerless tree?
Whose song is that small stream winding from an unknown spring, ringing over the pebbles?
Whose poem is that evening glow adorning the sunset, its lotus-like heels treading the boundless sea, its jade-like hands caressing the endless sky?
The burnt-out ash turns back into oil. Over whose night does the tiny lamp of my ever-burning heart keep vigil?

Secrets

Secrets? O no. What secrets can I have?

I tried to keep my secrets from you, but in vain.

My secrets have entered your sight through my tears;
My secrets have entered your hearing through my sighs;
My secrets have entered your touch through my trembling heart;
Another secret of mine has become my devotion and entered your dreams.
Still I have one final secret. But it cannot be revealed, being like a voiceless echo.

An artist

I am a clumsy artist.
Lying sleepless on my bed,
with my fingers I drew on my breast
your nose, your mouth,
even the dimples on your cheeks;
but I failed, even after many tries,
to draw your eyes
with their constant smile.

I am a shy singer.
When my neighbour had gone
and the insects' chirping ended,
I tried in vain the song you taught me.
but shy before a sleeping cat
I failed.
So softly I sang with the wind
at the door.

I do not seem to have the mind
to be a lyric poet.
Joy, sorrow, love
do not inspire me.
I wish to write
your face, your voice,
your manner of walking,
just as they are.
I will write about your house,
your bed,
and the tiny stones
in your garden.

Your face

'Lovely' is not an adequate word with which to describe your face.
That is a word for human things, but your face is far too lovely for any such human word.

No matter how I ponder, I cannot discover why Nature has sent such a beautiful being as you to us.

And yet I know. It is because in Nature, there is nothing that can equal you.

Where is a lotus to match your lips? Where is white jade like your complexion?

Who ever saw ripples on a springtime lake comparable to your gaze?

What fragrance from the Morning Star is equal to your smiles?

The music of heaven is your song's echo. The brightest stars are your eyes incarnate.

O! I am your shadow.

You have no equal, only a shadow.

'Lovely' is not an adequate word with which to describe your face.

Submission

Others love their freedom, but I prefer submission.

It's not that I don't know freedom.

I just want to submit to you.

Willing submission is sweeter than exalted freedom.

If you tell me to submit to someone else,
that's the only thing to which I can't submit.

If I submit to someone else, I can't submit to you.

Chong Chi-yong (1902 - ?)

Chong Chi-yong was born in 1902 in Okchon, North Chungchong Province. He attended Huimun High School in Seoul and Doshisha University in Kyoto, where he studied English literature. Graduating from Doshisha University in 1902, he started to teach English at Huimun High School. After the liberation of Korea in 1945, he taught at Ewha Woman's University and also, briefly, worked at a Seoul daily newspaper as editor-in-chief. In February, 1948, he resigned his teaching post at the university and spent his time on writing and calligraphy at home until the Korean War, during which he was taken north by the Communists.

Chong Chi-yong published poems from his students days, and his poems were collected in two volumes before Liberation: *Chong Chi-yong Shijip (The Collected Poems of Chong Chi-yong, 1935)* and *Paeknokdam (The White Deer Lake, 1941)*. He also joined in the activities of a few literary groups. After the liberation, he wrote mainly prose and little poetry. By his exact and precise imagery and diction, he has been recognized as the modernizer of Korean poetry and exerted a strong influence on some of the important younger poets.

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 1

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!

Paekrokdam: White Deer Pool

1

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 very tip of Hamkyong 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, *todok*, 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 Paekrokdam'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 Paekrokdam's blue waters, where not even a crayfish 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 driven clouds, Paekrokdam grows hazy. After lying ahead of me for half a day, Paekrokdam looks desolate. Caught between waking and sleeping, why, I had forgotten even to pray.

Kim Yongrang (1902 – 1950)

Kim Yongrang (originally named Kim Yunsik) (1902 - 1950): Born in Kangjin, South Cholla Province. Graduated from Huimunuisuk. Studied in the English Department of Aoyama Academy (Japan). Deeply involved in the start of the rural movement. Initiated his literary career in 1930 with the publication of "Dongbaekipei pitnanun maum" in the review "Simunhak". His published volumes of poetry are "Yongrang Sichip" (1935) and "Yongrang Sison" (1949). Among modern Korean poets, Kim Yongrang is one of those who have most beautifully exploited the musical qualities of the Korean language. His poetic language is often said to have a feminine quality, influenced by the particular rhythms of the Cholla dialect and popular songs, which is strongly individual. He was fiercely opposed to the Japanese occupation, but after months of imprisonment for involvement in the 1919 Independence Movement, he adopted a quieter strategy of resistance. Some poems are strongly anti-Japanese.

Until Peonies Bloom

Until peonies bloom
I just go on waiting for my spring to come.
On the days when peonies drop, drop their petals,

I finally languish in sorrow at the loss of spring.
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 soaring sense of fulfillment crumbles into irrepressible sorrow.
Once the peonies have finished blooming, my year is done with;
for three hundred and sixty gloomy days I sadly lament.
Until peonies bloom
I just go on waiting
for a spring of glorious sorrow.

The Cuckoo

Little bird, weary of a lifetime in rancor and sorrow,
you cough blood after singing, then swallow it again;
you came to this world to delve deep into sorrow by blood,
your tears have endlessly clouded a myriad ages.
This southern region is secluded, you can hide in exile;
The moonlight is so dazzling, this desolate dawn,
your anguish startles fish a thousand leagues under the sea,
makes infant stars at the sky's edge shudder.
Tears pooling and pooling late at night for so many years
that I could never wash away, they simply pooled and flowed,
and I—sorrowful, lonesome, grieving—
finally grew weary of the wine-glass you kept filling,
songs from the beyond that echo near in this dawn full of fear,
death's boastful voice circling the foot of the city walls.
The moonlight, that pale lantern sobbing to win hearts, is going.
The long-since emaciated, gaunt heart likewise goes.
Since your anguish makes every red heart wither then bloom,
could Chunhyang avoid death in prison in highest spring?
In ancient times a child king set out from the palace,
wept all alone in a mountain valley, then followed you
and on the south coast opposite Gogeu Island, on a bitter homeward path
the sound of a galloping pony came to a halt, wearied
and a scholar's haggard face floated in blue waters
as your regret-filled voice conjured even death.
Without your song, this world is so sorrowful, so wracked;
early in spring as the groves become green, the grass is fragrant;
seeing the pitiful bright darkness as the crescent moon hangs
from slender bamboo leaves
you tremble, on the verge of tears, feeling pity;
if you did not sing, you would surely die,
oh, anguished spirit.
You call late at night when thick-clustered azalea flowers fall
and gently vague mountain ranges draw back,
little villages suddenly wake.

Brightness

Gulping, gulping, I drink down the autumn morning,
I walk along intoxicated, absorbing the brightness.
As I gulp down the bushes, gulp the insects,
the brightness penetrates my head, my heart,
then slips away through my feet and fingertips.

My skin's every hair is eye, mouth,
I can sense each bush's affection,
can sense each insect's wisdom.
With that I become this morning's
most unlovely serenader.

Bushes and insects are children waking from sleep;
there is still dew left, though they suckled all night.
Give me some too, since some remains.
I hunger after this brightness.
I have been in my room, door shut, breathing at the walls.

As the first ray of sunshine comes bursting
the brightness suddenly puts on a kingly crown.
Just then, *plop*, a camellia seed falls.
Oh! Such splendor, such stillness.
Just like last night's flow of starlight expelled from the sky.

Sound preceding every sound,
origin of every hue,
warmly refreshed by this brightness, my heart
is just one blade of grass growing in a cool vale of feeling,
one grub spending a lifetime drenched in dew.

A Geomungo

While the year has changed twenty times
my kirin has stayed leaning against the black wall,
never able to sing.

The hand of the old man that once plucked at its heart
now occupies a lofty place in endless banquets above,
while you, lonely kirin, here below, seem almost forgotten now.

Outside are wild lands where packs of wolves roam,
groups of apes gambol, only human in appearance,
so there is nowhere my kirin can lay its heart, rest its body.

Once more the year has changed,
still leaning against the wall, the door shut tight,
tonight again my kirin is unable to sing freely.

So Chong-ju (1915 - 2000)

So Chong-ju was born in 1915 in Kochang, North Cholla Province. After attending high schools in Seoul and Kochang, he studied Buddhism under Master Pak Han-yong and, in 1935, entered Chungang Buddhist College, which he left after about a year. In January 1936, he made his poetic debut and, in November of the same year, edited a group anthology *Shiin Purak* (The Poet's Village). He published his first collection of poems *Hwasajip* (The Flower-snake Collection) in 1941, followed by *Kwichokto* (Nightingale) in 1946; other collections of poems followed regularly after that. From 1948, he held posts at a newspaper and in the Ministry of Education; during and after the Korean War, he taught at colleges and universities. From 1960 to 1979, he was a professor at Tongguk University, of which he was in his later years a professor emeritus. In later years, he travelled widely in the world.

It is generally agreed that So Chong-ju was the greatest poet of modern Korea. He was by nature a conservative and in his old age was often vilified for the subservient attitude he adopted toward the Japanese, and then the dictators who ruled Korea after Liberation. Throughout his poetic career his work underwent notable changes, but he was always recognized as the most outstanding lyric poet in Korea. He received numerous awards and translations of his poems have been published in several languages.

Self-portrait

Dad was a slave. Never home even late at night.
Only old Gran was around, like a leek's roots,
and a flowering jujube tree.
Pregnant Ma craved to eat just one green apricot --
Ma's black-nailed son, under an oil lamp in a mud wall.
Some say I look like her dad:
the same mop of hair, his big eyes.
In the Year of Revolt Grandad went to sea
and never came back, the story goes.
What's raised me, then, these twenty-three years
is the power of the wind, for eight parts in ten.
The world's course has yielded only shame;
some have perceived a felon in my eyes,
others a fool in this mouth of mine,
yet I'm sure there's nothing I need regret.
Even on mornings when day dawned in splendour,
the poetic dew anointing my brow
has always been mingled with drops of blood;
I've come through life in sunshine and shadows
like a sick dog panting, its tongue hanging out.

Flower snake

A back road pungent with musk and mint.
So beautiful, that snake. . .
What huge griefs brought it to birth?
Such a repulsive body!
You look like a flowered silk gaiter ribbon!
With your crimson mouth where that eloquent tongue
by which your grandsire beguiled poor Eve
now silently flickers
look, a blue sky. . . Bite! Bite vengefully!
Run! Quick! That vile head!
Hurling stones, hurling, quickly there
headlong down the musky, grass-sweet road,
pursuing it
not because Eve was our grandsire's wife
yet desperate, gasping
as if after a draft of kerosene. . . yes, kerosene. . .
If I could only wrap you round me,
fixed on a needle's point;
far more gorgeous than any flowered silk. . .
Those lovely lips, blazing crimson,
as if you'd been sipping Cleopatra's blood. . .
sink in now, snake!
Our young Sunnee's all of twenty, with pretty lips, too,
like those of a cat. . . sink in now, snake!

Leper

A leper mourned
the sun and sky.
The moon rose over the barley fields
as he ate a baby's flesh
and wept crimson like a flower all night.

Noontide

The path winds between fields of crimson flowers
which picked and eaten yield sleep-like death.
Calling me after, my love races on,
along the sinuous ridge-road, that sprawls
like a serpent opium-dazed.
Blood from my nostrils flows fragrant
filling my hands as I speed along

in this scorching noontide still as night
our two bodies blazing. . .

Barley-time summer

A stony stream burns beyond yellow clay walls,
heat bleaches barley that seems to hide guilt.
Where has mother slipped off,
leaving her sharp sickle back on its shelf?
Among the rocks where a wild boar once went
gasping, bleeding, along the path, the field path,
a leper wept, his clothes all crimson,
a girl stretched snake-like on the ground
sweating, sweating,
as I stood dizzy, she drew me down.

Nightingale

The path my love took is speckled with tears.
Playing his flute, he began the long journey
to western realms, where azalea rains fall.
Dressed all in white so neat, so neat,
my love's journey's too long, he'll never return.
I might have tressed shoes or sandals of straw
woven strand by strand with all our sad story.

Cutting off my poor hair with a silver blade,
I might have used that to weave sandals for him.
In the weary night sky, as silk lanterns glow,
a bird sings laments that it cannot contain,
refreshing its voice in the Milky Way's meanders;
eyes closed, intoxicated with its own blood.
My dear, gone to heaven's end alone!

Open the door

Your pale breast grows colder and colder,
though I bathe it with tears, to no avail:
will it gain warmth if I rub it with this flower?
I've prayed and prayed, for nine days and nights,
but your azure breath still flees away:
will it return if I rub it with this flower?
High up in the sky, in the Milky Way,
where pairs of wild geese plough the frost,
ah! that desolate flower-bed, blue and red!

Open the door! I beg you, open the door!
Dearest lord, my love!

Beside a chrysanthemum

For one chrysanthemum to bloom
a nightingale
has sobbed since spring.

For one chrysanthemum to bloom
thunder
has pealed in dark clouds.

Flower! Like my sister standing
at her mirror, just back
from far away, far away byways of youth,
where she was racked with longing and lack:

last night's frost came down
to bid your yellow petals bloom,
while I could not get to sleep.

Pak Mog-wŏl (1916 - 1978)

Pak Mog-wŏl was born in 1916 in a village near Kyŏngju, North Kyŏngsang Province, and finished Kaesŏng High School in Taegu. He made his debut in 1939 in the magazine, *Munjang (Literature)* on the recommendation of Chŏng Chi-yong. He was another member of the 'Green Deer Group', his early poems being first collected in the three-men anthology *Chongnokchip (The Green Deer Collection, 1946)*. The first collection on his own was published in 1954 under the title of *Sandohwa (Mountain Peach Blossoms)*, followed by several more volumes of poems.

Having worked in a local branch of a finance corporation, he started teaching at his alma mater upon Liberation in 1945. He subsequently moved to Seoul, where he taught at a girl's High School and at Hangyang University, while editing and publishing poetry magazines including *Shimsang (The Image)*. He was President of the Korean Poets Association and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Hanyang University, before he died in March, 1978. The awards he received include The Free Literature Prize (1955), the Republic of Korea Literary Arts Prize (1968) and the City of Seoul Culture Prize (1969).

Lonely appetite

I crave to eat buckwheat jelly,
that bland yet savory
plain yet gentle

farm festival raised on an eight-sided board,
when you welcome new in-laws.
That is the food a desolate hunger dreams of,
when in the dusk of a darkening spring day
a lonely hart
soothes a heart.
Or the food of a lonely taste, craved by
the full liberal tears
of one who has realized life's true sense.
Father and son sit to table
guest and host sit to table
with mountain herbs
placed at the side;
they eat the food as they murmur of life
like a shabby water mill at the foot of a rustic hill.
And, when, with words thick in dialect,
each gently loving and pitying the other,
thus neighbors
pass through this world
for the world beyond:
Lookahere, ain't this a fellow I know?
Lookahere, if it ain't Squire Yi from up the road!
Calling to each other, they travel on and rest,
And at the last inn, share a cheerful cup of makkolli;
It is on this food
that their chopsticks unwittingly light.

Animal poems

The Hippopotamus

With sullen face he comes toward me, on staggering stumpy feet. Does he want to get acquainted with me? But the skin of my face is too transparent for his acquaintance, and his face looks too humane to be shunned. I think of a language that would fit richly with his enormous mouth, a bold language. But mine, cunningly refined, is fit only to be rolled on the tip of my tongue.

The Ostrich

On its too long neck, it is an unearthly face. So I am surprised to find his face in some unexpected space. Again, I am bewildered when it descends from heaven to pick up a few biscuits.

Is eating a child-like, innocent act? Or is it a dirty, mean instinct? Surely the ostrich takes both sides. The boy-like naive face and the selfish old face, hardened with red flesh...

This cursorial bird with its strange visage gazes at my eyes today.

The moon

The moon goes
Half across the branch
Of pear blossoms:

Naedong-myon, Kyongju-gun
Or Oedong-myon;
Around the site of Pulguksa.

The moon goes
Half across the branch
Of pear blossoms.

On a certain day

The word 'Poet' is a title
That always comes before my name.
With this worn hat
On my head,
I have wandered through the rainy streets.

This is something too awkward
To be a perfect cover for myself,
Too absurd to be a shelter
For my little ones
Who have nobody else to look up at.
Yet how could a man
Be safe from the wet all his life?
To keep my hair dry--
That is enough
For grateful tears.

Lowering the coffin

The coffin descended
As if lowered with a rope dragging at my heart;
O Lord,
Receive him, please.
Placing a Bible by his head,
I took soil in my coat
And sprinkling it, bid him farewell.

*

Afterward
I met him in dreams.
A long-jawed face turned to me
And called out:
Brother!
Yes, I replied with my whole being;
Still he couldn't have heard me.
For here
Is the world of falling rain and snow
Where now I alone hear your voice.

*

Where
Have you gone,
With that kind, shy, tender gaze?
Brother!
I hear you calling,
But my voice cannot reach you.
Here
Is the world
Where fruit thumps
When it falls.

Kim Su-Yŏng (1921 – 1968)

Kim Su-yŏng was born in Seoul in 1921. His early poems, some of which were published in 1949 in the collection *Seroun dosiwa simindurui hapchang* (The New City and the Chorus of Citizens), were marked by the Modernism so popular at that time. In his lifetime, he only published one volume of poetry, *Dalnaraui Jangnan* (A Game Played in the Moon), in 1959. After his death in a car accident in 1968, further collections of poetry and of his critical essays were published. Mineumsa Publishing Company published his complete works in two volumes in 1981. His last poem, *Pul* (Grass), only published after his death, has provoked particular critical attention and debate. The essays *Siyeo, chimul beteora* (Poetry, spit it out, 1968) and *Bansi-ron* (Theory of Anti-Poetics, 1968) are particularly important manifestos arguing for a renewal of poetry and aesthetics.

In his early poems he employs all the strangeness that Korean versions of Imagism permits, in a highly aestheticizing vein, but after 1960 he came to reject the idea that certain lofty topics alone are worthy to be the subjects of poetry. Later works focus on the most ordinary events of daily life, often pathetic or bathetic, domestic and social. He equally rejects the idea of "decorum" (special poetic language and tone) and uses ordinary speech, vulgar terms and slang expressions. His tone is frequently colloquial, satiric or self-mocking. Yet in poems addressing social realities, sufferings, and hopes, he can rise to a rhetoric of heroic style. His poems are often prosaic, since he consciously rejected artificial techniques of rhythm, yet he is capable of great intensity because his poems are always reflections of his own intense emotion, even at their most iconoclastic.

A Prayer

A song for the students who died for the nation on April 19, 1960

With the heart of one writing a poem,
with the heart of one picking flowers,
with the heart of one hearing the breath of a sleeping babe.
with the heart of one seeking a sweetheart who died,
with the glad heart of one who lost his way then found it again,
let's see our newly found revolution through to the end.

Imitating the common laws of nature
by which water flows and moons rise,
since achieving our revolution
was simple to the point of folly,
we must keep it from being hurt, slashed, diverted, soiled
by snake, by caterpillar, rat, or lynx,
by mite, by crocodile, panther, coyote,
by wolf, by hedgehog, fox, eagle, or bug,

then passing beyond this society,
far more perilous than the jungle,
more dizzying than a maelstrom, deeper than the ocean,
society still has its corruptions, injustices, murderers, thieves,
harder to cross than abyss or desert or mountain range

though now we may turn into snakes, into caterpillars,
though now we may turn into rats, or lynx, or mites,
though now we may turn into crocodiles, panthers,
coyotes, or wolves,
though now we may turn into hedgehogs or foxes,
into eagles or bugs,
though we may turn into such dread, filthy creatures,
ah sadly, sadly, now, on that final day
when our revolution is achieved,

though all my sins be hammered home like thorns
into the trillion pores of my sin-filled body,
still not a single hair of mine will be hurt, so

with the heart of one writing a poem,
with the heart of one picking flowers,
the heart of one hearing the quiet breath of a sleeping babe,
with the heart of one seeking a sweetheart who died,
with the glad heart of one who lost his way then found it again,
let's see our newly found revolution through to the end.

Remembering That Room

The revolution has failed, I've only moved to another room.
The "Fight, Fight, Fight," on the walls of the previous room
may still be there in the dark — vain words.

I left every song behind in that room when I moved out.
So now for no clear reason my heart is dry,
as if the walls of that room were my heart and limbs.
The words "Work, Work, Work,"
are still ringing, in vain, in my heart but
I have quite forgotten all the songs, those former songs, too.

The revolution has failed, I've only moved to another room.
I am skilled at finding my wealth in despair's lightness:
rusty pens, bare bones, madness.
Maybe this lightness is history too,
and I've made that lightness my wealth.

The revolution has failed, I've only moved to another room.
In my mouth, in place of sweet remnants of will,
I find nothing but a bitter savor come alive again

yet though I lose room, and words, and expectations,
lose songs, and even lightness,

I do not know why, but I am glad;
for no reason, my heart is overflowing.

Variations on the Theme of Love

Open your lips, Desire, and there within
I will discover love. At the city limits
the sound of the fading radio's chatter
sounds like love while the river flows on,
drowning it, and on the far shore lies
loving darkness while dry trees, beholding March,
prepare love's buds and the whispers
of those buds rise like mists across yon indigo
mountains

Every time love's train passes by
the mountains grow like our sorrow and ignore the lamplight
of Seoul like the remnants of food in a pigsty.
Now even brambles, even the long thorny runners
of rambling roses are love.

Why does love's grove come pushing so impossibly near?
Until we realize that loving is the food of love.

Just as water in a kettle boiling on a stove
nearly spills over but not quite, love's moderation
is a torrid thing.

Interruption is love, too.
I know nights when love persists
like the green eyes of a cat shining in
death-like darkness, from this room to that,
from grandma's room to the room of the errand-boy.
And I know the art of producing such love.
The art of opening and closing eyes
--the art of the French Revolution,
the art we learned not long ago on April 19,
only now we never shout aloud.

*

Lovely firmness of peach seeds, apricot seeds, dry persimmon seeds.
Wicked faith
of the storm stirred up by silence and love.
The same in Pompeii, New York, and in Seoul.
Compared to the vast city of love I am burying,
greater even than faith,
aren't you a mere ant?

My son, this is not designed to teach you fanaticism.
Grow up until you come to know love.
Humanity's final moments,
the day you drink your cup to the dregs,
the day America's oil dries up:
before you reach such distant times, the words
you will register in your heart are words you will learn
from the city's fatigue.
You will learn this firm silence.
You will wonder whether
the peach seed is not made of love!
Sometime the day will come
when peach seed and apricot seed
will leap up, maddened by love!
And that will not be the false meditation
of a mistaken hour like your father's.

Grass

The grass is lying flat.
Fluttering in the east wind that brings rain in its train,
the grass lay flat
and at last it wept.
As the day grew cloudier, it wept even more
and lay flat again.

The grass is lying flat.
It lies flat more quickly than the wind.
It weeps more quickly than the wind.
It rises more quickly than the wind.

The day is cloudy, the grass is lying flat.
It lies low as the ankles
low as the feet.
Though it lies flat later than the wind,
it rises more quickly than the wind
and though it weeps later than the wind,
it laughs more quickly than the wind.
The day is cloudy, the grass's roots are lying flat.

Cho Chi-hun (1920 - 1968)

Cho Chi-hun, whose real name was Cho Tong-tak, was born in 1920 in a remote village in Yongyang, North Kyongsang Province. He spent most of his childhood and boyhood in his native village, studying Chinese classics under his grandfather. In 1936, when he was sixteen years old, he moved to Seoul and taught himself modern subjects in order to pass the qualifying examination for college entrance. In 1941 he graduated from Hye-hwa College (the former name of Tongguk University) and started to spend time in a Buddhist monastery, in Seoul, and in his native village, up to the time of Korea's liberation from Japan. After the liberation, he was an outstanding figure in South Korea, distinguished as poet, critic, scholar, planner, and as organizer. As a teacher, he taught Korean literature at Korea University for twenty years up to his death in May, 1968.

The youngest in age of the Green Deer trio, Cho was the most learned and many-sided character among them. He made his debut in the same magazine and through the same poet's recommendation as the other two poets, and produced several separate volumes of poems of his own, which are contained in the Complete Works of Cho Chi-hun, published by Ilchisa in 1970.

To my disease

Though you have gone away somewhere with no news at all
When I turn away from the work I was long occupied with, to take a moment's breath,
You call on me without fail.

You, always the gloomy visitor,
Come treading a dark sound scale, leading an ominous shadow,
But since you are my old friend,
I regret the time I had forgotten you.

You persuade me to rest and teach me reverence of life.
And what you whisper into my ear is always such nothing
That I close my eyes tightly, though I am terribly glad
To hear that low and heavy voice of yours.

Your hand feeling my warm brow is warmer than my hand,
The wrinkles on your thin brow are more pathetic than mine.

I see my emaciated form of younger days in you,
Hearing the echo of those days
When I tried and tried to be a little more sincere.

When I said that I found this life boundlessly beautiful,
Though I had no attachment, no indulgence in life,
and that I did not fear death, even though punishment in hell awaits me,
You were deeply angered, weren't you?
You are my cordial and respected friend.

No matter what you say, I am never offended.
But yet you are of a strange temper.
When we disagree, with unpleasant air or discouraging words,
You come ceaselessly seeking to persuade me for days and months,
But when I am willing to worship you,
You take off, leaving me alone.

So long, old friend;
Come any time you feel like it.
Let's talk of life together again, over a cup of tea.

Kayageum

1

I open the window and sit alone when the moon shines bright. O the chrysanthemum
fragrance that fills my bosom! A disease indeed, my loneliness.

Blue tobacco smoke wafts in the cold air; the crimson hue of wine warms my cheeks.

The universe is still; no one will visit me. Remote as this cosmos is, remembrance
ever renews.

As I fall under the moon, the deep night seems a sea: the remote sound of the waves

washes the hut away.

2

After placing the *kayageum* before me like an oar for a small boat and tuning its twelve strings, I lean silent on the wall.

No sooner are my eyes closed than I feel inspired. I will leave alone my ten dancing fingers.

A goose flies crying on the lofty road at the end of the clouds; O that stars should be immersed in the clear water of the Galaxy.

What is my grief, why do I call the name of my Lord, whose journey was lost in dreams but revives?

3

The elegant *kayageum* rouses a boundless dream. Though all twelve strings should be broken they must resound this sentiment.

Pressing the strings I will dissolve this sorrow, nodding and raising my hand at times,

“Dung dung dung tu tu dung dung heung heung eung tutu dung dung.” blood reddens my fingertips as I am carried away.

Shin Kyong-Nim (1935 -)

On a Winter's Night

We're met in the backroom of the co-op mill
playing cards for a dish of *muk*;
tomorrow's market-day. Boisterous merchants
shake off the snow in the inn's front yard.
Fields and hills shine newly white, the falling snow
comes swirling thickly down.
People are talking about the price of rice and fertilizers,
and about the local magistrate's daughter, a teacher.
Hey, it seem's Puni, up in Seoul working as a maid,
is going to have a baby. Well, what shall we do?
Shall we get drunk? The bar-girl smells
of cheap powder, but still, shall we have a sniff?
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 to the bar-girl's chop-stick beat,

and as we cross the barley-field to give a hard time
to the newly-wed man at the barber's shop,
look at that : the world's all white. Come on snow, drift high,
high as the roof, bury us deep.
Shall we send a love-letter
to those girls behind the siren tower hiding
wrapped in their skirts? We're
the only ones who know our troubles.
Shall we try fattening pigs this year?

Country Relatives

Nowadays I hate our uncle's place down in the country.
Once uncle's at market he's slow coming home,
rooks flock fit to darken the sky, cawing
in the persimmon tree that's dropped all its fruit.
My cousin, a college graduate, says he hates
the whole world. When he suddenly goes rushing out
after browsing through letters from friends, I know
he's off to an all-night game of mahjong again.
The chicken coop looks bleak,
with just a few feathers left drifting from the chickens
sold off last spring. I wonder if my aunt
misses her eldest son? Clearing out what used to be
his study-room on the other side of the yard, she cries
at the sight of the mottoes he wrote on the wall:
*We may be poor, we're not lonely; We're
powerless but not weak,* only I don't understand
what the words mean. I wonder
if he's living in some other country now?
The pigs have gone to pay off co-op debts.
In front of their sty chrysanthemums bloom bright.
My oldest cousin planted them. Now his wife
wants to pull them up and sow pretty
cosmos in their place and I hate
my grandmother too: she used to be so kind, now
she keeps gazing at the ridges in the sold-off fields
and sighing away with watery eyes.
Nowadays I hate our uncle's place down in the country.

Farmers' Dance

The *ching* booms out, the curtain falls.
Above the rough stage, lights dangle from a paulownia tree,
the playground's empty, everyone's gone home.
We rush to the *soju* bar in front of the school

and drink, our faces still daubed with powder.
Life's mortifying when you're oppressed and wretched.
Then off down the market alleys behind the *kkwenggwari*
with only some kids running bellowing behind us
while girls lean pressed against the oil shop wall
giggling childish giggles.
The full moon rises and one of us
begins to wail like the bandit king Kokjong; another
laughs himself sly like Sorim the schemer; after all
what's the use of fretting and struggling, shut up in these hills
with farming not paying the fertilizer bills?
Leaving it all in the hands of the women,
we pass by the cattle-fair,
then dancing in front of the slaughterhouse
we start to get into the swing of things.
Shall we dance on one leg, blow the *nallari* hard?
Shall we shake our heads, make our shoulders rock?

Mokkye Market

The sky urges me to turn into a cloud,
the earth urges me to turn into a breeze,
a little breeze waking weeds on the ferry landing
once storm clouds have scattered and rain has cleared.
To turn into a peddler sad even in autumn light,
going to Mokkye Ferry, three days' boat ride from Seoul,
to sell patent face-powders, on days four and nine.
The hills urge me to turn into a meadow flower,
the stream urges me to turn into a stone.
To hide my face in the grass when hoarfrost bites,
to wedge behind rocks when rapids rage cruel.
To turn into a traveller with pack laid by, resting
on a clay hovel's wood step, river shrimps boiling up,
changed into a fool for a week or so, once in thrice three years.
The sky urges me to turn into a breeze,
the hills urge me to turn into a stone.

Ku Sang (1919 – 2004)

During the Armistice Negotiations 1952-3

Oh, my country! Pitiful as Simchong, no less.
The poet's throat contracts to speak your very name.

Just over there, all the century's butchers are come
to carve you up like meat on a slab.
And why are the heavens so utterly indifferent?

Oh, my country! In your streets the people grow daily madder,
incapable of hope or despair.
Your foes and those friends who serve your foes
are poised again to cut you in two.
Are you simply a reed that topples as it thinks?

Oh, my country! Nation of spirits unjustly killed!
Preserved until now by violent death alone!
Here once again, like a final pulse-beat,
young tattered brethren go tramping North,
with never a song to comfort the souls gone before!

Oh, my country! Pitiful land
As pitiful as Simchong, oh, my country!

Before a War Cemetery of North Korean Dead

Ah, surely they could never close your eyes,
you, souls now resting here in rows?

It was these our hands, that until yesterday
pressed the trigger and took your lives,
that gathered up your broken, rotting bodies, your bones,
then chose a secluded mountainside where the sun is right,
and quietly buried them, even covered the spot with turf,
for truly death is more mysterious
than hatred or love.

Not far from here the road is blocked,
the homeward road your souls, like mine, must take,
and the mere silence of the empty, desert hills
weighs on my breast a thousand tons;
so while in life we were only united in hate,
now rather the tragic longing
you were not able to allay
dwells within my aspiration.

In the spring sky, nearly close enough to touch,
a cloud indifferently
floats North-ward;
gunfire echoes from afar
and before these tombs of love and hate
all I can do is weep copious tears.

Easter Hymn

On an old plum tree stump,
seemingly dead and rotten,
like a garland of victory
flowers gleam, dazzling.

Rooted in you, even in death
all things remain alive;
we see them reborn, transfigured.
How then could we doubt
our own Resurrection since
by your own you have given us proof?

Since there is your Resurrection and ours,
Truth exists;
since there is your Resurrection and ours,
Justice triumphs;
since there is your Resurrection and ours,
suffering accepted has value;
since there is your Resurrection and ours,
our faith, hope, love, are not in vain;
since there is your Resurrection and ours,
our lives are not an empty abyss.

In this lost corner of the earth,
dappled by the spreading spring,
as I imagine that Day's world,
made perfect by our Resurrection,
I am overwhelmed in rapture.

Mysterious Buds

The pitiless whirlwinds
have blown themselves out, and within me
mysterious buds have begun to grow.

What then is this freshness
touching my gaunt senses
that were dry as winter acacia trees?

All the things of creation,
once plunged in darkness,
turn into stars
and twinkling begin to shine;

until now locked in a tangled mesh,
my ideas flow free like thread from a skein.

Now there is nothing sad for me
about being born only to die;
all is just one aspect of eternity.

I still feel hungry if a meal is delayed,
my limbs still have rheumatic twinges,
nothing has changed, but within me
mysterious buds have begun to grow,
preparing to bloom with new flowers
once in Eternity's land.

A Pebble

On the path before my house
every day I meet a pebble
that once was kicked by my passing toe.

At first we just casually
brushed past each other, morning and night,
but gradually the stone began to address me
and furtively reach out a hand,
so that we grew close, like friends.

And now each morning the stone,
blooming inwardly with flowers of Grace,
gives me its blessing,
and even late at night
it waits watchfully to greet me.

Sometimes, flying as on angels' wings
it visits me in my room
and explains to me the Mystery of Meeting,
reveals the immortal nature of Relationship.

So now, whenever I meet the stone,
I am so uncivilized and insecure
that I can only feel ashamed.

Chŏn Sang-Pyŏng (1930-1993)

River waters

The reason why the river flows toward the sea
is not only because I've been weeping
all day long
up on the hill.

Not only because I've been blooming
like a sunflower in longing
all night long
up on the hill.

The reason I've been weeping like a beast in sorrow
up on the hill
is not only because
the river flows toward the sea.

Back to Heaven

I'll go back to heaven again.
Hand in hand with the dew
that melts at a touch of the dawning day,

I'll go back to heaven again.
With the dusk, together, just we two,
at a sign from a cloud after playing on the slopes

I'll go back to heaven again.
At the end of my outing to this beautiful world
I'll go back and say: It was beautiful. . . .

In the manner of Tu Fu

- Ch'usŏk, 1970

Father and mother lie
in the family burial plot at home

I'm all on my own
here in Seoul

brother and sisters
are down in Pusan

I don't have the fare
so I can't go.

If there's a fare to pay
when you pass away

does that mean
I'll never be able to go?

When you think of it, ah,
what a deep thing life is.

Wings

I want wings.
I want wings
that will carry me wherever I want.
I can't understand why God
didn't give humans wings.
Being a pauper
the only trip I've ever had was our honeymoon
but I want to go any and everywhere.
Once I have wings I'll be satisfied.
God
give me wings, please. . .

Kim Kwang-Kyu (1941 -)

Going Home in the Evening

We gave up any thought of flying long ago.

These days we don't even try to run.
We dislike walking, so we try to ride.
We mostly travel by bus or subway.
Once on board, we all try to get a seat.
Once seated, we lean back snoozing.
Not that we are tired,
but every time money-making is over
our heads become atrophied
and scales sprout all over our bodies.
Our blood has grown cold
but still, with our eyes half-open
our practiced feet take us home.

We return every evening to our homes
like reptiles returning to their swamp.

No! Not so

All the pain of the leaves
bursting out in anguish
through their hardened shells
and the pain of the blooming azaleas
had become a furious cry
on that day the earth shook
as he raced ahead of the others
then fell near the Blue House.
His satchel was still bulging
with lunchbox and dictionary
as he fell to the roadway,
never to rise again,
robbed of his bright smile
and supple movements.
So did he die in vain
in the twentieth year of his youth?

No.

Not at all.

Since the day he cried: 'Drive them out!'
he has become a lion, eternally young,
roaring fiercely.
On the central campus lawn
he has become a fountain
that rises skywards.
His surviving companions sheepishly
graduated and did their military service,
got married and had children so that
before you knew it today they are
middle-aged wage-earners,
while he has remained unchanging
a young university student
attending lectures regularly
absorbed in impassioned debates
skillfully pursuing the ball.
Look there and see his vital image,
unswervingly following truth
in his proud successor,
defending the nation with his whole being:
our promising son
tending anew those ideals
we had forgotten.

So it is.
Since the day he fell near the Blue House,
endlessly rising again
he races on
ahead of us.

Faint Shadows of Old Love

In late 1960, the year of the April Revolution,
we met at five in the afternoon,
happily clasped hands in greeting
then sitting in a chill unheated room,
our breaths condensing white,
we engaged in heated discussions.
Foolishly enough we believed
we would live for the sake of something,
for something that had nothing to do with politics.
The meeting ended inconclusively and that evening,
drinking grog at Hyehwa-dong Rotary,
we worried in a pure-minded way
about problems of love and spare-time jobs
and military service.
Each of us sang as loud as he could
songs no one listened to,
songs no one could imitate.
Those songs we sang for no reward
rose up into the winter sky
and fell as shooting stars.

Eighteen years later we finally met again,
all wearing neckties.
Each of us had become something.
We had become the older generation,
living in dread of revolution.
We chipped in to cover the cost of the party,
exchanged news of our families
and asked the others how much they were earning.
Anxious about the soaring cost of living,
happily deploring the state of the world,
expertly lowering our voices
as we discussed rumors,
we were all of us living for the sake of living.
This time no one sang.
We parted, leaving abundant drink and side dishes behind us,
after noting one another's new phone numbers.
A few went off to play poker.

A few went off to dance.
A few of us walked sadly
along the University Street we used to frequent,
clutching rolled-up calendars under our arms,
in a place we had returned to after long wanderings,
in that place where our former love had bled.
Unfamiliar buildings had appeared suspiciously
though the roadside plane trees stood in their old places
and a few remaining dry leaves trembled there,
forcing us to bow our heads:
Aren't you ashamed?
Aren't you ashamed?
As the wind's whisper flowed about our ears
we deliberately made middle-aged talk about our health
and took one step deeper into the swamp.

The Land of Mists

In the land of mists,
always shrouded in mist,
nothing ever happens.
And if something happens
nothing can be seen
because of the mist.
For if you live in mist
you get accustomed to mist
so you do not try to see.
Therefore in the land of mists
you should not try to see.
You have to hear things.
For if you do not hear you cannot live,
so ears keep growing bigger.
People like rabbits
with ears of white mist
live in the land of mists.

Chonggi Mah (1939 -)

Deathbed

When the light goes out in the westward sickroom,
the dark shadow of winter
passes beyond the low hills

and the chill bricks of the autopsy room
ring to the sound of a skull being sawed,

it's no finale.

I first learned about
natural life in anatomy class.
That's when the cold came.

On my lonely, youthful bed
I often found myself sentenced to death.
The dazzling vertigo of the remaining hours.
Don't you see? The solitary deathbed
of the tall guy who gave up.
Don't you see? This is no finale.

The reason for flowers

Before, I never knew
why flowers bloom.
I never knew that the whole tree trembles slightly
when it blooms.

Before, I never knew
why flowers fall.
Whenever blossoms are falling, all around the tree
the sound of water-drenched wind
awakes from sleep.

What am I going to say, if someone asks,
'Have you ever been in love?'

Allegorical river 1

If one person meets another and they like each other
a river opens between them.
If one grows sad, the friend's heart aches;
if one surges with joy, the river shines bright
and the friend's laughter can be heard to the river's very end

The first wave that arises is short and awkward,
so they'll often have to send water mixed toward one another
but the waves of a life of lengthy devotion cannot be many.
Graceful streams that neither flood nor dry up cannot be many.

The river understands all by its waves' lapping, without long talk,
never sleepless though not meeting once for several years;
how could any great river ever flow meaningless?
In this world, how could meeting someone, then for long years cherishing them

be easy and light like life and death?

Of course, there can be no knowing the start and end of any great river,
but I long to meet someone who always insists on clear waves.
When my soul falls asleep, I want you to watch over me;
when I think of you I see a fresh river
the person I want to grow close to, cool and charming

Kim Seung-Hee (1952 -)

Walking on a washing line

I'm walking on a washing line.
I would really like to be engrossed in the task of aestheticizing the crisis
without exaggerating the crisis,
feeling I'm walking on a washing line high above the clouds.
If that's a lifelong task, now is the time when it comes to the fore in
Capital Letters.
If that's the poet's task, although it may only be at the level of
family handicrafts,
ultimately it can include a quite significant cosmic content.
In this age of vandalistic capitalism
it means that this creature known as a poet, gaunt and withered
like the pencil-lead of dire poverty, with nothing to eat or put on,
digging a well in the lines on her palm then planting above it
a single fantasy rainbow like a clothesline,
is aestheticizing and maximizing the washing.
Drawing from her own palm spring-water more lovely
than Crystal Water or the Indians' Arrow Head Water,¹
then walking on the clothesline-rainbow formed
as it comes gushing out must be really historic.
"Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." (Mark 6:50)
A gladiolus, lips full of blood blooming above the basin
more gracefully and urgently than even a cloud above a rainbow,
destiny's crimson flames dangling everywhere, impossible to measure,
the day my friend who worked in the East Gate clothing market²
was discovered dead in a motel beside the Yellow Sea,³
so utterly without any close family in this world
I came down off my washing line, went to the police morgue
and I felt like a fire blazing up in a darkened theater—
she lay there above the clouds with an expression that seemed to say
there's nothing as simple as nothing, things simple as nothing are good.

Why couldn't you have held on a bit longer on the washing line,
why did you fall down like that?
Unable to cry though longing to cry.
Unable to fly though longing to fly.

I resolve to live gracefully.
Though every evening I ram the car into the walls of the
underground parking lot,
I really have to immerse myself in the task of aestheticizing the washing
feeling I'm walking on a washing line high above the clouds.

Rainbow regrets

I was waiting so eagerly
for an egg to hatch
but a rainbow took the egg away.
I was waiting so eagerly.
It's because it had been raining far too much

The rainbow gave me many things but
from a certain moment, it took away rather more than it gave.
Never think of a rainbow in the rain.
Since the eggs were carried floating away,
once it's stopped raining
just look up at the rainbow

I dreamed too many rainbow dreams
though the eggs were swept away in the rain.
I dreamed only that one dream.
Please, acknowledge that the rainbow which emerged over the world
after the rain stopped
sprang up because of my blood and devotion

Rainbow! You take far too many things away,
but look at the two eyebrows on my face,
the tree top I'm holding on to,
intending to catch the rainbow for sure,
a black despair, planted by the departing rainbow,
but promise me
I'll lay some more eggs.

The woman who wrapped the wind in clothes

A woman,
a woman who wraps the wind in clothes
and binds up water in a cloth,
nursing sun and stars at her breast,
gathering together sperm and blood
(ah, so you did it, it was you . . .)
that was the wind's love, that woman who brought a person to birth

A woman who, gathering the wind with both hands,
weaves together bone and muscle, nerves and marrow,
a woman who wraps the soul in flesh,
a woman who sets in the heart a flame that should never go out,
a woman who is always more dangerous than danger,
more empty than emptiness,
more fleeting than time.

The wind gathered by both hands scattered
the water bound in a cloth flowed away
the soul enclosed in flesh flew off
though she made clouds of breath
this woman who cherishes in her heart
a flame that should never go out,
a woman who has, generation after generation,
wrapped the wind in clothes,
a cottage aflame, a woman who plucks on human strings.

What a woman gives birth to

Everything a woman gives birth to
turns into water.
Everything a woman gives birth to turns into wind.
So does a woman give birth to water or wind?
Is what a woman gives birth to nothing more than bones and clay?

Wind's mother
water's mother
bones' mother
clay's mother

Behold, from moment to moment
from dew to dew
what a woman gives birth to is the most precious thing in the world
and what a woman gives birth to
is also the most painful thing in the world.

The things we left behind in the womb

We set off, our faces
covered with blood,
cheering like mad
that's how we emerged,
unable to bring anything with us, empty-handed
crying, shouting, that's how we emerged

The wrapping of blood was torn,
the wrapping of water was torn,
huge forceps approached, never seen before,
we burst out into the valley between a lovely pair of legs.
Inevitably, too vast a sky,
inevitably, too much light,
inevitably, the blue birthmark on the bottom.

That's how we emerged.
Thrown out, leaving everything behind, we emerged.
Leaving something behind,
we emerged with only our bodies.
A whole lifetime of yearning's not been enough,
we should go back and check.

Parrot breeding

One parrot wanted to propagate a lot more parrots.
It wanted the whole world to become a nation of parrots.
The parrot hoped to make the realm larger
by propagating parrot eggs everywhere.
That parrot loved parrot-power.

It went to the schools.
They were the best places to propagate parrot eggs.
But kindergarten and elementary schools are difficult places.
In their heads they have doubts about parrots' songs,
they have more vitality than parrots' songs,
they have tremendous courage, intent on singing their own songs
but still there was no need to worry about them too much.
Once they began to attend middle and high school with their hair cut short
they would surely come to realize
that unless they were incorporated into parrot breeding
they would have no way of living.

The parrot wanted a lot more parrots to join in.
Which was boss parrot?
Which was slave parrot?
As clone gave birth to clone the distinction grew hazy.
What remained was parrot-power and parrot-chorus.
Everyone would come to know that dropping out of that chorus
left no option but death,
because without a helping hand you're bound to fall.

Nation's parrots!
Empire's parrots!

There's also a book titled 'Killing Parrots' but
(what is a nation? and what is an empire?)
what's being promoted now is parrot breeding,
parrot breeding alone is a brilliantly thriving business.
Your voice, your songs are not worth a jot.

Other Poems

Hwang Dong-kyu (1938 -)

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 me 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 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 all the body's last drop of blood has dried
let me play with the wind.

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 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.

Flower by Kim Ch'un-su (1922 – 2004)

Before I spoke his name
he was simply
one set of gestures, nothing more.

Then I spoke his name,
he came to me
and became a flower.

Just as I spoke his name,
I hope that someone will speak my name,
one right for my color and perfume.
I long to go to him
and become his flower.

We all of us
long to become something.
You for me, and I for you,
we long to become a never-to-be-forgotten gaze.

Ko Un (1933 -)

Ch'oŏn-uŏn Temple

They live
in a world all their own

Their spirits float
below the valleys and up on high
Echoes of wind

They are
a sound of night wind in pines

Bare mountain slopes
Boulders

Autumn coming

As the sound of the wind-bells
drops weeping from the rock-perched eaves
to temple courtyards

they live
in a world all their own

Now, back in the world, all that forgotten,
they long to return to the slopes
swept by the spirit wind

where they live
 they
 live

In a Temple's Main Hall

Pull down Buddha!
Pull down that handsome, well-fed Buddha!
What's that oh so casually elegant wispy mustache?
The next day,
break down that painted whore of a crossbeam!
What the hell's that dragon's head for?
Tear the whole temple down,
drive out the monks,

turn it all into dust and junk!

Phew.

Non-Buddha, that's real Buddha.

Our foul-mouthed Seoul street-market mother, she's real Buddha.

We're all of us Buddhabuddhabuddha real.

Living Buddha? One single cigarette, now
there's a real cool holy Buddha.

No, not that either.

For even supposing this world were full of cake,
with everyone living it up and living well,
in gorgeous high-class gear, with lots of goods produced
thanks to Korean-American technology partnerships,
everyone able to live freely, without loss of rights,
Heaven, even!

Paradise!

utter Eden unequalled, plastered with jewels, still, even then,
day after day people would have to change the world.

Why, of course, in any case,

day after day this world must all be overturned
and renewed as a newly blooming lotus flower.

And that is Buddha.

Down with those fifteen hundred years rolling on foolishly, rumbling along:
time fast asleep like stagnant water that stinks.

A Drunkard

I've never been an individual entity.

Sixty trillion cells!

I'm a living collectivity

staggering zigzag along.

Sixty trillion cells! All drunk.

A Shooting Star

Wow! You recognized me.

The Moon

Bow taut.

Twang!

The arrow strikes

your eye.

By the pain of your darkness the moon rose.

A Green Frog

One green frog.
Black clouds are filling the sky.
Just because you croaked.

What a Hercules.
You squirt.

Ripples

Look! Do all the ripples move
because one ripple starts to move?
No.
It's just that all the ripples move at once.

Everything's been askew from the start.

One Day

Lightning over the hill in front
thunder over the hill behind
between the two
one dumb pebble.

Old Buddha

Hey, were you talking about old Buddha?
Why, old Buddha's no Buddha.
Real Buddha's a fish just netted,
still leaping and struggling.

Rocks

Cloudy skies.
Don't just hang there, content to be sky!
Dip down, enamored of that boy at Namwon

riding a bike and towing a second alongside.

Here, one wintry midday, a flock of rooks is settling.
The bare furrows in the fields, once frozen, now melt.
Wonderful!
Wonderful!
Dry grass is fluttering.

Wild Lilies on Nogodan Ridge

Maybe the darkness far beneath the sea
off Sohuksan Island is really their neighbor?
How else can that patch of wild lilies on Nogodan Ridge
be so alone?

Perhaps that's why the sea
is so inlaid with wavy ridges
while they blossom and wither?

On the Suspension Bridge at Namhae

Why should I bother going to Namhae
to visit Kuksan or Bori Hermitage?
I stop
and gaze down
at the water
under the bridge.
I imagine an animal rising to its feet
after giving birth.
I imagine a few of that old animal's kids.

I throw a stone into the water.
From far below,
I hear nothing.
Plop-splash!
No such sound.

I long to ask those new-born animal kids:
What were you born for?

The Passage of Time

Long ago
on his deathbed
the Buddha said:

"In days to come
when I am no more
I beg you, make no images of me."
After that request
the people who had lost their master
had no choice:
the buddha was nowhere else
but in their hearts.

Everywhere they went,
no matter where, he was surely within.

But that, it seemed, was not enough.
Since he'd become enlightened at Bodhgaya
at dawn under a bodhi tree,
people took one leaf from that tree
offering it reverence
bowed down to it
joining palms before it.

Then one day some artists of Gandhara, inspired by Greece,
carved sensuous statues of seated buddhas

to which people offered reverence,
bowed down,
palms joined.

From Maninbo / Ten Thousand Lives

Pyöng-ok

If you're born a yokel out in the backwoods
once you've reached five or six
there's no time left for play,
forced to become a drudge
following your father,
with work piling up like the hills.
When autumn comes
if mother tells you to bring home mud-snails
you go rushing out to the rice-paddy:
foraging for snails half a day
in the wide open spaces out there
is great, really great.
Being away from his rotten job is great.
Pyöng-ok,
expert snail-catcher Pyöng-ok,

drank lye by mistake and died.
None of the local kids know where he's buried.
Kids die -- no tomb, nor rites. People will have more.

Pong-t'ae

You and I vied for first place in grade-school.
You from a rich house
had really nice clothes
your five buttons always shining bright and
every day a boiled egg snuggled
bright in your lunch-box, where the white rice
contained very little barley
but you were never boastful, oh no,
not by so much as a fingernail-paring.
We had a paddy-field just beside yours.
'Let's you and I get on well together,'
you said, and gave me dried rice-cakes.
But Pong-t'ae
first your father died
when the Reds pulled back north
then you were dragged off by the local people
died in a cave in Halmi Mountain
shot by a black UN soldier.
One moonlit night
in a dark cave you died.
Pong-t'ae, *ah!*
I couldn't do anything to save you,
though you were sixteen
and I was sixteen.

Chae-suk

Chae-suk, the girl from the house by the well,
a brimming crock of water perched on her head,
gazes into the far-off distance as she walks along.
The early autumn open road lies clear ahead.
Next year
Chae-suk will be leaving here.
Chae-suk's heart swells in expectation.
Chae-suk, so like the darkness left after the moon's gone down.

The Well

There's a well in the yard of that house,

a well more than ten fathoms deep.
In Pullye's snug family house,
Pullye's mother, bright as a gourd-flower,
and little Pullye, a lily-flower,
live together, just the two of them.
The mother a widow, young,
discreet in every word,
never dousing herself with water,
even in midsummer heat.
When I used to go on errands there,
if I took one sip of the blue-black water,
of that water's silence and the dread
that Pullye's mother,
letting down the heavy bucket,
drew up from her ten-fathom well,
my whole body would tremble, my heart would pound.

Headmaster Abe

Headmaster Abe Sudomu, from Japan:
a fearsome man, with his round glasses,
fiery-hot like hottest pimentos.
When he came walking clip-clop down the hallway
with the clacking sound of his slippers
cut out of a pair of old boots,
he cast a deathly hush over every class.
In my second year during ethics class
he asked us what we hoped to become in the future.
Kids replied:
I want to be a general in the Imperial Army!
I want to become an admiral!
I want to become another Yamamoto Isoroko!
I want to become a nursing orderly!
I want to become a mechanic in a plane factory
and make planes
to defeat the American and British devils!
Then Headmaster Abe asked me to reply.
I leaped to my feet:
I want to become the Emperor!
Those words were no sooner spoken
than a thunderbolt fell from the blue above:
You have formally blasphemed the venerable name
of his Imperial Majesty: you are expelled this instant!
On hearing that, I collapsed into my seat.
But the form-master pleaded,
my father put on clean clothes and came and pleaded,
and by the skin of my teeth, instead of expulsion,

I was punished by being sent to spend a few months
sorting through a stack of rotten barley
that stood in the school grounds,
separating out the still useable grains.
I was imprisoned every day in a stench of decay
and there, under scorching sun and in beating rain,
I realized I was all alone in the world.
Soon after those three months of punishment were over,
during ethics class Headmaster Abe said:
We're winning, we're winning, we're winning!
Once the great Japanese army has won the war, in the future
you peninsula people will go to Manchuria, go to China,
and take important positions in government offices!
That's what he said.
Then a B-29 appeared,
and as the silver 4-engined plane passed overhead
our Headmaster cried out in a big voice:
They're devils! That's the enemy! he cried fearlessly.
But his shoulders drooped.
His shout died away into a solitary mutter.
August 15 came. Liberation.
He left for Japan in tears.

Man-sun

Her face was a mass of freckles,
as if she'd been liberally sprinkled with sesame seed,
but her brows were fine, and her eyes so lovely
they made breezes spring up from the hills and plains.
Her shadow falling across the water
was like nothing else in this world.
Near the end of Japanese rule, after she had picked
and handed in the castor beans,
she left, wearing a headband stamped with the Japanese flag,
to become a comfort woman.
A woman from the Mijei Patriotic Wives Union took her away,
saying she was off to earn money at a factory
making airplane tails.
Took her away with the Japanese flag flying.
Then, *ho-ho*, a bottle of liquor
and a ration ticket for rice arrived at her family's house
from the village captain.
'*Ho-ho*, what have we done to deserve such a favor?'
After Liberation, when everyone came back
not a word was heard from Man-sun . . .
though white campanulas blossomed
and cicadas sang.

No-More's Mother

Three daughters had already been born
to No-More's parents over in Kalmoe:

Tök-sun,

Bok-sun,

Kil-sun.

Then another daughter emerged. Once again
the sacred straw stretching across the gate
held bits of charcoal, but no red peppers!
She got the name 'No-More.'

Furious, No-More's father went drinking.

When he came home, he declared:

'A woman that can only have girls
deserves to be kicked out of the house!'

He grabbed his wife by the hair,
although she'd not yet fully recovered,
and dragged her outside,
smashing down the rotten fence.

'Uhuhuh!' he cried. A fine sight.

But oh the tasty red-pepper paste
that No-more's mother makes!

How does she do it? Why, people come
from Namwön, Sunch'ang, even,
eager to learn the art of her pepper-paste.
A few of the myriad pepper-red dragonflies
that fill the clear, late-autumn skies
often fly down and perch on the heavy lids
of the pots bulging with red-pepper paste
up on the frugal storage platform
there behind the house.

The local women at the well,
with much smacking of lips, claim
this special pepper paste is made
by No-more's mother and the red dragonflies,
working together, a collaboration!

On one such day, Sun-ch'öl's ma came sneaking
through the bamboo grove into the back yard
to scoop out a bowl of the famous paste,
and it just so happened Tok-sun was there,
washing her back.

Struck by the sight of that abundant flesh
she murmured:

'My! Sun-ch'öl, dear, it's Tök-sun here
that you should marry! A hometown bride!

I never saw such a luscious girl!

An Do-Hyon (1961 -)

For You

Yesterday when I met you
I was feeling sad.
On the way to my dreary home
the sound of the stream was louder
because so many wrongs are being committed.
But it was only after meeting you
that I started to realize
that the wrongs in my heart
grow deeper the more I try to forget them,
grow remoter the more I bring them to mind.
Among all the things I have
for you,
I desire to keep hidden for ever
the things that should stay hidden.
But still, since I have learned that anyone
who cannot feel pain on your account
is unable to comfort the world in its pain,
insofar as my shame and my pain
are all for you,
I long to reveal them all.
Since I first met you
a wind has been gusting in my heart,
about twice the affection you feel for me
and my heart has been aching but
as I think of all I have to give
for you
I feel increasingly happy.

One coal briquette

There are lots of other ways of putting it
but it's as if what we call life
means becoming a coal briquette
for someone other than myself.
From the day the floors first feel chilly till the following spring,
the loveliest thing on all the roads of Korea
is the briquette truck chugging
its way up steep inclines with all its might.
I eat piping hot rice and soup every day,

but it's as if I had not realized that once the flame has caught hold,
each briquette grows scorching hot,
seeming to know just what's required of it.
It's as if I have been unable to become a briquette for anyone so far
because I was afraid of the way, once love has caught fully hold
all that remains is a sorry handful of ash?
On careful thought,
it's as if what we call life
is pulverising me
in order to make a safe path where someone other than myself
can walk at ease on slippery mornings after snow has fallen
and I had failed to realize that.

A Sealed Map by Lee Pyŏng-Ryul (1967 -)

In times when the earth and the moon were much closer together than now
and the moon looked bigger
in times when one year lasted eight hundred days and one day was eleven hours long,
you went dragging the animals you'd caught in your snares,
there was a day when snow fell intent on obliterating the path you had made
and all things under heaven froze.
As the ice melted again, the world briefly grew sad,
then that nameless night froze again, just like the river,
and once the people on the far side of that frozen night, seeming anxious, gathering by the
riverside, lit fires,
the people on this side of the night lit fires too, anxious for those on the other side.
Taking thought for one another that dark night
you finally cut off a finger.

In times when the earth and the moon were much closer and the moon looked bigger,
in times when one year lasted five hundred days and one day was sixteen hours long
you came to take me away.
Seeming disinclined to reveal the promise you made to God, you said:
no one survives such seasons now,
so let's return to wrinkled faces aged 120, 90, 82 years old.
However, the promise I have to keep
means advancing toward that dark, silent vanishing point.

Until the earth and the moon have moved far apart and the moon looks small.
Until one year lasts three hundred and sixty five days and one day is twenty-four hours
long.

Winter Pond by Jang Seok-Nam (1965 -)

I walk across a frozen pond.
Here is where the water-lilies were.

Under here was the black rock where the catfish would hide.
Occasionally a cracking sound as if it is splitting
as love grows deeper.

All the irises are bent over.

My shoulders, knees, feet, that all summer long I saw reflected, sitting on this rock, have
frozen like the irises.

They too show no sign of having watched the reflection of something before this.
Although the fourteenth-day moon comes in its course, icily
all remain silent.

Suppose someone comes along,
loud steps treading on the pond,
and addresses me anxiously, saying:
“This is where I used to be.”
“This is where that star used to come.”

Flatfish by Mun Tae-Jun (1970 -)

In Room 302, Gamcheon Hospital, a room for six,
she lies wearing an oxygen mask, battling cancer.
Like a flatfish resting on the ocean floor, she lies flat and low.
I lay myself by her side, parallel and flat as a flatfish.
As one flatfish glances at the other, her eyes swell with tears.
In her thinness one eye has skimmed over to the other side,
she only looks at death while I gaze at the sea of her life.
I recall her ocean life, swaying left and right, in the watery seas,
her wooded trail, its noontime cuckoo song,
thin noodle dinners, a family that owned barely a mud wall.
Her two legs are being slowly broken apart,
her spine bent like a tree branch crushed by the sudden snow.
I think of that winter day.
Her breath grows rough like the bark of an elm.
I know now she cannot see the world outside of death,
her eyes are swept into each other's darkness.
Left, right, I rock toward her to lie next to her in the sea
as she blankets me softly with water inhaled through the oxygen mask.

Giraffe by Song Chan-ho (1959 -)

On top of the giraffe's long, lofty head there are vestiges of an ancient hilltop lake. I
wonder who put the thirsty gourds up there? And in those missionary days how did the
clams climb into those waters?

Counting stars one night, we used the giraffe's neck as a net handle and landed some.
Those grazed by his head crooned and time flew like stars falling.

I fell more than once when I was young, climbing the sunflowers to remove the stones adults had weighed the heads down with to stunt their growth. Now I know the sorrow of the yellow-billed oxpecker in Africa hanging from the giraffe's steep neck and back eating ticks.

Ah, to buy one day a ticket for the orbiting train that scales his nape to cross the plateau, to collect the homerun ball knocked out of a distant park to give to children, to wander and pick icy red lilies that resemble his horns.

Hey, he said, coming close, wearing a pointy hat and balloons strung in clusters around his neck. I'm tied up today because it's Children's Day, but when the zoo closes sometime soon, let's go for a bite in the reeds. Look at that ridiculous creature lumbering back to the kids who call after him. Look at the last chieftain of the poetry tribe.

The Two Rooms of the Heart by Na Hui-Deok (1966 -)

Obliterate me!

I opened the window onto the street
and called thick fog into my rooms.
Fog that obliterated the traffic lights.
The fog evaporated after crossing the window sill.
Even fog loses its way here.
Obliterate me!
Material things gulp down the thick fog.
Still they rub dry, sandy eyes.

Fill me up!

Thick fog crept like the tide
through the window that opens to the sea.
Fog that obliterated the horizon.
The fog flowed into me after crossing the window sill.
Even fog reels here.
Fill me up!
Fog wet the chair; fog wet the mirror.
Material things suddenly were one with the fog.

The heart has two contiguous rooms,
each careful in its movements
not to waken the other.
All that moved between the rooms
was the silent, restless, undulant fog.

Shall we spread the tarpaulin? by Kim Ju-Tae (1966 -)

Rice had run out and I was hungry.

I brought out mother's handcart
to sell little melons sweet as dreams.
Polishing the handles
that mother's dirty hands had stained
I decided to do without lunch this first day.
If Mother gets out of hospital quickly
I can go back to school again.
The sky keeps clouding over, mother,
it looks as though it'll rain today.
Pulling the cart
mother's wrinkled face
soundlessly fell
in each drop of sweat pouring down like rain.
How hard it must have been for her!
My wishes for her speedy recovery
urged me to push the heavy cart on,
escaping from the traffic cop's whistle
stuck at a crossroads unable to budge.
I followed the road that mother took.
Stationing the cart
at a corner that seemed to smell of mother's sweat
I began to cry out: Honey melons. Sugar melons.
Our teacher stopped by to warn me:
The last year of middle school's an important time.
But how can I leave this spot
abandoning our cart?
Mother
it's starting to rain
but it's too soon to spread the tarpaulin, isn't it?

Mendicant by Yi Mun-Jae (1959 -)

Hawk
impaled in air;
vertical dive;
300 km an hour.
Sky drops hawk.

Wings folded
to utmost;
bones hollowed
to utmost.
Two eyes and beak
form a keen triangle,
gravity defiant.
Shocked air particles
badly abrade;

lumps hacked out
in places.

At the yard entrance
where the hen disappeared,
two or three
tail feathers
fluttered and fell.

Paektu Range
is like a reclining Buddha,
chin cupped to the right.
First village under heaven.
A bull,
belly distended,
slaps his tail across his back.
Mountain and valley
seem fuller now.

May midday:
a mendicant monk
crosses the ridge,
his body in his rucksack.

Melancholy Walnut Pie by Hwang Pyöng-Süng (1970 -)

When I suddenly woke up feeling hungry
I felt sorry for the people I had left in my dream. Because of me,
their journey in search of the rainbow hill must have been troublesome.

Butterfly! Butterfly! Outside the window someone is anxiously calling a cat named Butterfly.
I said, meow, meow, here I am, and there I was,
crying for no reason hiding under the quilt.
Then I felt sorry for myself. Butterfly is Butterfly, what butterfly is a cat, and I closed the
window with a bang.

Would I be feeling bad if I'd been pricked by a thumbtack, a small, rusted thumbtack, been
infected with tetanus, and forced to have my arm cut off?

Days spent being stained by slow music,
a hair comb, a single button, an old postcard,
for no reason I began to dislike the things that await my touch,
and buried them deep in the backyard. When snow falls and winds blow
may grudges like spears grow someday out of the small graves here and there, and poke
out my eyes.

Around sunset, disliking those clouds sitting plump everywhere,
today I bought a sweet, delicious walnut pie
a sweet, delicious walnut pie that would slide in and melt in my mouth.
When it dropped to the deep bottom of my stomach
someone in a dark corner of the kitchen, unwillingly,
said . . . love you.

Dry Ice by Kim Kyöng-Ju (1976 -)

*--Actually I am a ghost. A living being could never be this lonely. **

There are times when, suddenly, I cannot recall mother's handwriting.
And I can feel from the December windows that
the time separating me and my birthplace is in a critical condition.
That's romance.
This life will be troubled to the very end.

My head thrust into the refrigerator of the supermarket at the end of the alley,
I rummage among the frozen goods,
and suddenly touch a piece of dry ice.
The frozen hours burn and stick to my skin.
What could life—living in such cold, and then disappearing in such hot particles—
be wishing finally to deny?
Could it be that, in that brief moment of touching,
the hours, purer than the listless ardor,

lived out all the times that had taken root in my body?

I shiver as if all my body heat has been lost.
I shine briefly in the alley with a gleam of mercury
as if I have revealed all the nightscapes inside me.
I shall perish as a martyr in the times that I could not live.
A muddy wind passes through the moon
while the airs that could not slowly rise into the sky
flow, frozen, into the houses
like ghosts.

* *Line from a poem by the ancient poet Cham Yeon.*

Sandybrook Bus Terminus by Ch'on Yang-hui

Late autumn rain falls, the day ends early.
The trees lining the street stand bare, complain of the cold.
The last bus is just arriving at the Sandybrook terminus.
The late evening sky is dark and deep. The wind comes gusting,
piercing to the very bones. Labor done, a few people
get off the last bus. The tip of a dry branch sways in the wind.
To it the world is climbing to the branch's tip. And slipping back.
The world complains it's too slippery.
What? If cold air is overturned, warm air results?
The yard in front of the station is desolate. One old drunk
disappears, waddling like a goose. 'A bird flew over the cuckoo's nest.'
What? A bird! Movies? Ridiculous,
crumbling to pieces even in the dim lamplight,
the glittering sands and sandbanks of times past :
is someone trying to tear his breast open with bare hands?
Waterlight can never conceive
that this world has tears clearer than water.
There, the sandy brookside people who live embracing sandbanks
as if eager to uncover the depths of their sand :
all that remains in the net of the ground, caught in the water, is sand.
The night flows past like water. Sitting on the sand
I listen all night long to nodding Sandybrook, to its wheezing sounds.
Standing at the far end of the bus terminus.

Note: Sandybrook and Waterlight are English place-names corresponding to Moraenae and Susaek, two neighborhoods in western Seoul whose names the poet plays with in this poem.