

KOREAN LITERATURE NOW

Special Section

Dogs and Cats

The New Companions of Korean Literature

Featured Writers

Ha Jaeyoun
Kim Jeong-hwan

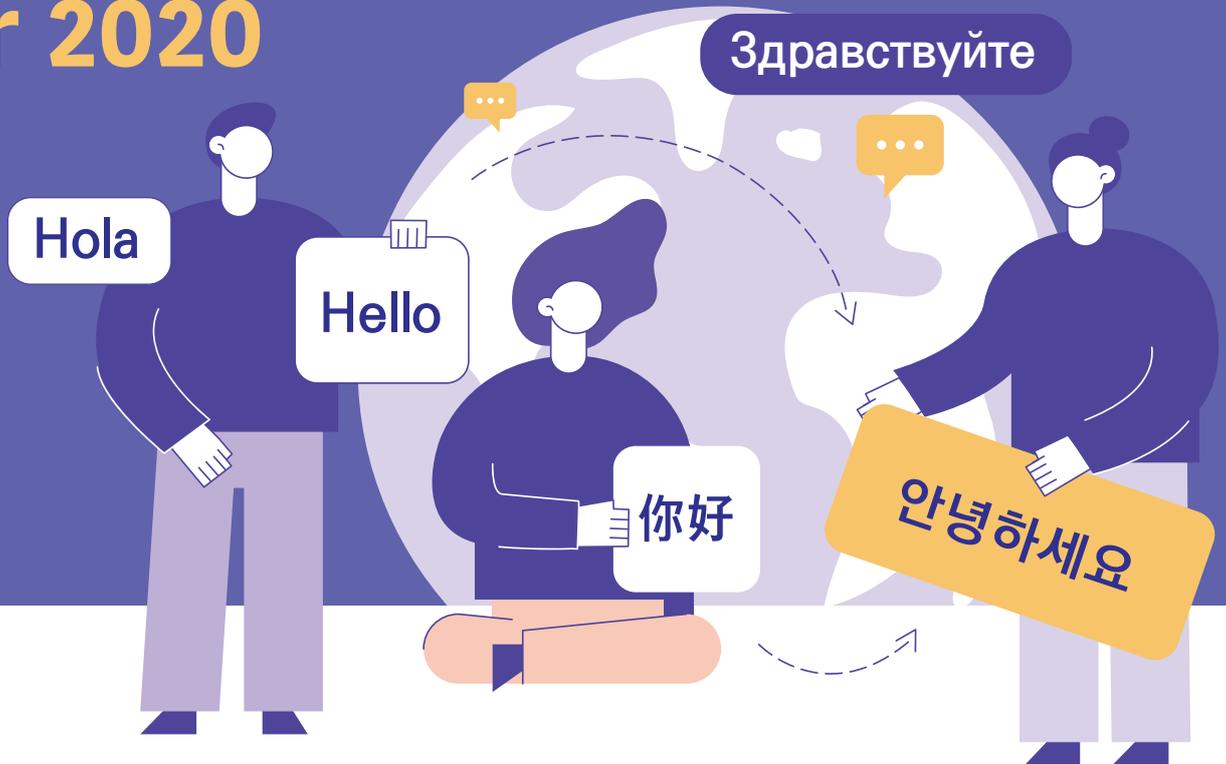
Bookmark

Madame Myeong-du
Ku Hyoseo



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Overseas Translation Workshop Program for 2020



LTI Korea organizes translation workshops at prestigious foreign universities with Korean literature or Korean studies programs to help foster and encourage potential translators of Korean literature. We are now accepting applications to the program for 2020.

Target Language: All languages

Recipients: Overseas universities

Eligibility: Universities with Korean language or Korean literature programs and at least seven bachelor's and/or master's students with sufficient proficiency in Korean

Grant Details: Partial funding toward operational costs and faculty fees

Dispatch of Korean Authors: We provide funding (travel expenses and honoraria) for inviting the Korean author or scholar of the selected text to participate in the workshop.

Application Period: December 2, 2019–January 5, 2020 (24:00 KST)

For detailed guidelines, please visit:
<https://www.ltikorea.or.kr/en/overseaniv.do>

For further inquiries, please contact: Heesu Choi
(+82 2 6919 7756 / academy@klti.or.kr)

Concrete We Are Universal

Recently I've been noticing more stray cats on the streets. I wondered why: Has there been an increase in stray cats? But the number of stray cats has always trended upward. There will never be a night on earth when you can't hear the meow of a street cat.

The reason I've been noticing stray cats more often is something else entirely. It's simple, really: It's because I've had more exposure to stories about cats. Dogs too—I've heard as many stories about dogs as about cats. As the imagination regarding cats and dogs has grown in literature, my perspective on these animals has changed. I try to observe them more closely, try to approach them. The way that I observe and approach them has changed too, and I've become more careful than before. I want to respect them as they are.

The theme of this winter issue of *KLN* is "Dogs and Cats: The New Companions of Korean Literature." Animals have appeared in literature as variations on a classic theme: the relationship between humans and nature. They appeared as wild animals that haven't been domesticated, or as animals that are devoted and loyal to humans after domestication. But now animals in literature, like these cats and dogs, appear as an independent Other, or as a partner to humans. Rather than being domesticated through human language, it's almost as though these animals in literature are domesticating literary language in a new way.

If literature is a language that creates a bridge between humans and other beings—between humans and other humans, humans and other organisms, humans and objects—we can say that literature in itself is a kind of translation. The poets Ha Jaeyoun and Kim Jeong-hwan are the featured poets in this issue. Kim Jeong-hwan is also a translator, and in the past five years, he has translated



© Maimel Chung

Shim Bo-Seon
Poet

the collections of twelve contemporary poets into Korean. For him, translation is simultaneously an exchange between languages and solidarity between life and death. His translation philosophy, which aims to diversify and deepen public death via private life, has much in common with Ha Jaeyoun's poetics. She calls her poems an exploration of "the ironic relationship between death's universality and individuality."

Literature is always born of perilous times. Or rather, even in what are considered peaceful times, literature stakes out for itself its own sense of peril. But we are now in an obviously perilous era. It's just that the perils have become so normalized that our sensitivity has been dulled.

Even in the face of devastating global warming, which endangers every life, we are still lost in our anthropocentrism. Even as civil wars and terrorism turn so many into stateless refugees, we are still lost in our ethnocentric views.

Literature continues to tell the story of "the Other" because it argues that symbiosis and coexistence with the other, that being that is not oneself, is inevitable in these undeniably perilous times. This winter issue testifies to the urgency of that statement through the voices of many writers.

These voices insist: The concreteness and specificity of literature is not that of a single ethnicity or race but belongs to all ethnicities, all races. The translation of literature connects a singular concreteness to the concreteness of the whole, and through this connection, we reach toward universality.

Translated by Hedgie Choi

VOL. 46 WINTER 2019

KOREAN LITERATURE Now

PUBLISHER KIM SA-IN
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR KO YOUNG-IL
MANAGING DIRECTOR SEO HYOUNGBOM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AGNEL JOSEPH
COPY EDITOR CHARSE YUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR LEE SOO YEON
DIGITAL MEDIA EDITOR PARK MILL

EDITORIAL BOARD CHA MI-RYEONG, CHEON UN-YEONG,
JUNG BYUNG-SUL, SHIM BO-SEON

COORDINATION CH121
ART DIRECTION BY KIM JUNGWON
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT KIM YOONJIE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JO INKI
ILLUSTRATIONS BY AMY SHIN

PRINTING DAEHAN PRINTECH CO., LTD.

DATE OF PUBLICATION DECEMBER 5, 2019

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
LITERATURE TRANSLATION INSTITUTE OF KOREA
32, YEONGDONG-DAERO 112-GIL (SAMSEONG-DONG),
GANGNAM-GU, SEOUL, 06083, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

UPDATE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR MAILING ADDRESS AT:
KOREANLITERATURENOW.COM/SUBSCRIBE
KOREANLITNOW@KLT1.OR.KR
+82-2-6919-7714



ON THE COVER

Illustration by Ellen Weinstein
www.ellenweinstein.com

Ellen Weinstein is an illustrator, author, and regular contributor to the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, Pentagram Design, and many others.

FOREWORD

1 Concrete We Are Universal
by Shim Bo-Seon

FEATURED WRITER

Ha Jaeyoun

4 Interview_ Once I Lived on Earth
by Kim Hyun

11 Selected Poems

Kim Jeong-hwan

18 Interview_ To Write and Reason outside "My Poetry"
by Kim Suyee

23 Selected Poems



Scan the QR code to visit our website:
www.koreanliteraturenow.com

SPECIAL SECTION

Dogs and Cats

The New Companions of Korean Literature

Curated by Cha Mi-ryeong

- 30 Overview
- 34 Life of Myo, or a Cat Life by Hwang Jungeun
- 41 Swaying into the Darkness by Bak Solmay
- 46 The Dog Doesn't Know / The Unknowing Dog Knows by Song Seungeon
- 48 That Dog by Yu Gyeyoung

MUSINGS

50 Translators and Collective Action

by Jason Grunebaum

INKSTONE

59 *Yeorha ilgi* as a Korean Classic

by Marion Eggert

62 *Samguk yusa*: The Living (Hi)story

by Miriam Löwensteinová

BOOKMARK

65 Madame Myeong-du by Ku Hyoseo

80 About the Book

GÖTEBORG BOOKFAIR EPILOGUE

54 The Gift of a Question that Remains Unasked

by Kim Soom

REVIEWS

82 Réveillé au milieu de la nuit: Poèmes d'exil by Jeong Yakyong

83 *Āmondo* by Sohn Won-pyung

85 *Zarisovki Nochnoi Zhizni* by Kim Seungok

87 TRANSLATORS



INTERVIEW WITH HA JAEYOUN

Once I Lived On Earth

Interviewer Kim Hyun

Translator Hedgie Choi

Ha Jaeyoun (b. 1975) made her literary debut in 2002 when she won *Literature and Society's* New Writer's Award. She has published three poetry collections, *Radio Days* (2006), *Like All the Beaches in the World* (2012), and *Cosmic Goodbye* (2019), and the monograph *The Adventure of Modern Poetry and the Changing Korean Language* (2012). She is a visiting professor at the Korea University School of Liberal Arts Education.

Kim Hyun has authored the poetry collections *Gloryhole* (2014) and *When Lips Open* (2018).

Kim Hyun You published your third collection, *Cosmic Goodbye*, this year, seven years after your second collection, *Like All the Beaches in the World* (2012). There was also a six-year gap between your first collection, *Radio Days* (2002), and your second collection. You said once that “putting together a collection of poems requires quite a lot of courage.” What kind of courage did you need for this third collection?

Ha Jaeyoun I'm wary of romanticizing the past, of confession that reads as self-pity. When I'm looking closely over the poems I've written to pull them together into a collection, I worry that's the inclination they have. Being objective about oneself is always difficult, so I become suspicious: Is this poem too wrapped up in its own mannerisms? Does this poem call too much attention to itself, disrupting the flow of the collection? I have to get over these concerns and suspicions to send a collection of poems out into the world. It's an act of courage, an act of determination to move forward from where I am now.



© Joinki

KH Reading the introduction to *Cosmic Goodbye*, I was struck by your explanation that you set down these poems like the “following footsteps” behind a “disappearing child” and the “back of a mother receding into the distance.” It seemed, perhaps, like a message about “time,” which is an overarching theme in this third collection. I’m curious why you included this child and mother in the introduction.

HJ Once, on a rainy day, I was looking out the window and I saw a mother receding into the distance, one hand holding the hand of a five-year-old child with yellow rain boots, the other hand holding an umbrella. I watched them for a long time. Even now, when I visualize that scene, there’s something almost painfully poignant about it. I was looking down at them from a high window. The child looked so small that I felt he might disappear at any moment. In the mother’s bent back, I saw layers of the past stacked together. The child is always asking questions of the world, but the world, myself included, isn’t valuing that tiny voice enough to hear it and answer. The mother, who will soon disappear into the other side of time, won’t be able to say all the things she wanted to say, and those unspoken words will fade away. I may not be able to give form to their voices, but I wanted, in my poems, to at least remember what their backs looked like as they walked away in my poems.

KH I’m not sure it was intentional, but your collection came out in April and is titled *Cosmic Goodbye*. Since the Sewol ferry disaster on April 16, 2014, April has become a significant month for any writer in South Korea. It seems that this collection has been influenced by the “societal death” experienced then.

HJ I really wanted my collection to come out in April. I kept being drawn to the motif of “snow in April” that appears in the collection. Something

that makes you doubt your own eyes, that makes you wonder if what you saw was real, that makes the world suddenly strange. A moment, it’s there, and then gone. And what writer in South Korea wasn’t affected by the Sewol ferry tragedy? In this collection about death, many of the poems are related to that incident. Experiencing the death of someone else reminds you that death is universal, that you yourself will also die, and yet no death can be made into a universal or generalized event. I wanted to explore this—death’s insistent individuality and concreteness. I wanted to depict the ironic relationship between the universality of death, which is a part of all human existence, and its concrete specificity.

KH Ever since your debut you’ve been writing poems about the “I” and the “infinite you.” What does the poetic object “you” mean to you as a poet?

HJ Despite the singularity of pain and death, despite the absolute impossibility of sharing that experience, the issue of solidarity continues to be important to me. The “you” gives hope to the isolated “I”s, and makes it possible to dream of solidarity between the “I”s. But the “you”s also run away from me. They entice, but they’re opaque. For me, writing poems is the act of imagining the infinite “you”s, dreaming of communicating, and trying to get a little closer. Poetry is also a record of failure—the inability to describe, the falling apart, the defeat of being ultimately unable to get closer.

KH You’ve spoken up as a writer in regards to a variety of issues. You’ve spoken against the forced evacuation in Yongsan and the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project. You’ve also added your voice to the #MeToo movement within the literary community. Do you think there is power in a poet speaking up beyond the page?

HJ It's not so much that I think there's power in a poet who has left the page. It's more accurate to say that I go there, into that physical space, when I can no longer stand inaction. When disappointment in humanity encroaches upon me, along with sadness and pain, there comes a moment when I feel like I will tip into a kind of nihilism and cynicism. In those moments, when I step into that space of action, I learn so much from other people, their innovative and diverse movements. I don't go there as a writer; I participate as a person. Since writing poems is a part of my life, and I am a writer, the contribution I can make in those spaces is naturally connected to my writerly life.

KH When you are not a person who works, a person who researches, or a person who writes poems, what is your life like? And does that life influence your poems?

HJ I think in those times, I'm a person who reads, a person who sees, a person who listens. Those moments are reflected in my poems, and often I am motivated to read better, see better, and listen better in order to write poems.

KH What's the biggest difference you've noticed in yourself from before and after you started writing poems?

HJ I've started paying more attention to the unseen on the other side of the seen, the unspoken that comes just before or just after the spoken, the unheard on the fringes of the heard. I've also come to realize that there are so many people who are meticulously and passionately paying attention to those things, and I've come to value that effort.

KH You once said that you strive to "remember to record" and that faithfulness in "recording to remember" is the writer's work. As someone who believes that it's important work to know what you want to say in this exact moment and bring it out of

yourself, what has become important work to you after *Cosmic Goodbye*?

HJ Remembering and recording are still important issues for me. I believe the form of poetry occupies a unique area of this remembering and recording—not in the rendering of factual language, but in recreating the truth of what was felt.

I've just put out the collection, so I don't think that my interest has shifted. I want to continue thinking about the relationship between "work" and "art." Right now, when I try to perform the "work" activities of my life alongside the "art" activities, one tends to encroach upon the other. But this can cause a decrease in productivity or the quality of what I produce. Sometimes art falls within the realm of "work" for me, but not always. What's important to me now is how I establish a relationship between work and art. In the end, I think a person needs both in their lives, but there are times when it's hard for me to maintain respect for my own life as either a person who works or a person who makes art. It's something I will keep puzzling over, in my life and in my poems.

KH I've heard that translations for "Hello, Dracula" (from *Like All the Beaches in the World*) and a few poems from your third collection are being published. For foreign readers who are new to your work, could you talk about your own poetics in relation to these poems?

HJ "Hello, Dracula" uses the motif of vampires to explore why human love is so fragile and finite. To dream of love within the confines of these limitations seems almost impossible to me. If you think about the space-time of Earth, and, beyond that, space, then human beings are merely chance, coincidence. To roughly generalize, the other poems here are also written from a desire to speak on the irony and beauty of humans, who exist within this randomness and incompleteness and yet are able to imagine what might lie beyond.

I'm a person who reads, a person who sees, a person who listens. Those moments are reflected in my poems, and often I am motivated to read better, see better, and listen better in order to write poems.

KH I want to ask about two poems in *Cosmic Goodbye* collection, “Research on Light” and “This Life.” They’re romantic in a way that few poems in this collection are. Still, I feel like the theme of “the disappearing light and mom” is one of the pillars of this collection. How did you write it? What compelled you to write it?

HJ The occurrence of light has to do with birth. Researching the beginning of existence falls within the realm of science. I wanted to write not about the beginning, but rather the disappearance, and what is left after disappearance. Death is a powerful event which snuffs out existence, but there are things that remain and continue after death. What if those invisible things became a kind of sound, like a note, and floated all around us? What if the air around us was made up of these infinite notes? I started writing “Research on Light” from these imaginations.

“This Life” is related to these themes as well. Might there be a life beyond this one? And if so, will I be able to experience my mother’s life, which will be erased by death, in a different way in that next life? “This Life” is not entirely romantic though, because it begins with what my mother would not or could not do for me in this life. I’m not saying that my mother did these things for me in this life, and therefore I will do them for her in the next one.

KH In 2017, you participated in “Yeok : Si (譯 : 詩 Translation : Poetry),” the bilingual poetry reading event hosted by LTI Korea. What did it feel like to hear the translations of your poems read?

HJ Before I published my first collection, I had an opportunity to translate my poems myself. That experience of thinking about the universality and uniqueness of the language I used became a point of reference for my writing afterwards. When translating, the translator is both a reader of the work and a creator of the work. When I listen to or read translated poetry, I become both the creator and reader. I think this two-way process that inverts the role of the participants is the most dynamic way I can communicate with others through my poems. At “Yeok : Si,” I could hear the translators read their translations out loud, which allowed me to enjoy the visceral experience of hearing the rhythm of my language being transposed into the rhythm of another language.

KH If you could have your work translated, what collection would you want translated, and into what language?

HJ I have a collection that has been translated and is awaiting publication. To answer your question, it’s hard to say what collection, what country. But



I do imagine what it'd be like if a future collection of mine, the “best” one that is ahead of me, could be written in a future language or translated by a machine so that everyone could read it or listen to it regardless of national boundaries.

KH No doubt it wasn't easy for either the translator or the poet to translate a collection of poems. Are there any anecdotes you want to tell us about the process of translation? I'm also curious about your impression of the translator.

HJ The first collection was translated by a Korean American living in the US, who received funding from LTI Korea, and the second collection is being jointly translated by a Korean, a Korean Canadian, and an American. It was interesting to see the process of my poems being translated by those who didn't grow up in Korea, or learned Korean later, or learned another language as a Korean, and to see how they transformed my poems to a language that was or wasn't familiar to them.

KH Last question: if you were “alone, left in space” what's the first sentence you would write?

HJ “Once I lived on Earth, a part of the solar system in our galaxy.” Assuming, of course, that I'm given pen and paper.



On Video

Watch our interview
with Ha Jaeyoun at:

koreanliteraturenow.com/videos



**Selected
Poems**
Ha Jaeyoun

Machinery

We are not being stopped
merely in order to make boundless
and minute noises.

Just as I am not a musical instrument
that can be played by someone who is not myself,
just as I look at myself resulting from myself

Somewhere, as love is shared,
unqualified persons are conceived.

Leaving our former world, we
merely turn our new planet into a wasteland.

As the breath that I inhale through my gills
is conveyed to your lungs, like black spots
we grow colder toward each other,

grow darker,
piercing one another's surface.

Translated by

Chung Eun-gwi, Brother Anthony of Taizé

Cosmic Goodbye

Moonji, 2019

A Person

After I used to be like that frosty pink
On the night cloud hanging over that long, stretched out island,

Just as time passes slowly,
I became a person.

Sometimes I was like the murky shadow
That startled a friend awake
Who fell asleep for a moment at the end of a flowerbed
In the afternoon.

But now
I became a person.

Soft coral, the blue of cotton candy, in the ocean raindrops are falling
From the half-face of the night moon climbing above.

The lullaby in the dream of my child
Who sleeps in the future, the final verse
Of a song no one has ever heard.

After the tide rolls in, while it rolls out again, the waves
Pull white sand, the setting sun, and starlight,
Returning them back to their place.

Vanished seasons overlap
Darkening the sky outside the earth,

And I became a person
Repearling the seashells to the string of this necklace
That connects the colors, pieces, and names
Of all the beaches in all the countries
Floating on earth.

Translated by Jake Levine, Hyemi Seok, Soohyun Yang

Cosmic Goodbye
Moonji, 2019

Spirit and Opportunity

Without any reason whatsoever,
Did you start a program
Called the infinite vacation that never ends?

When the command that enters you
Pushes you forward
In a way that can only be described as fatal,

In order to record the soul of the sandstorm
Blowing in from the farthest lands,
Your whole body must be covered with dust.

The proof is in your pupils.
All worlds begin from dust.

Spirit tumbling down the canyon of broken time.

In a scene impossible to unfold,
Like the wings of a satellite that are eternally spread,

Sourced from infinity, sorrow is transmitted

Like a single speck marked between infinity and infinity,
To us.

Translated by

Jake Levine, Hyemi Seok, Soohyun Yang

Cosmic Goodbye

Moonji, 2019

The Things I Know

I know
An envelope has
Only a single person as its recipient.
The moment I stop breathing
On this side of this thin layer of air,
Is the moment I realize you start to run
On that side where the air is more thin.
When light flickers for a microsecond,
I know
Millions of messages are coming and going mid-air.
Without a single one crashing into another, they are
Delivered at high speed.
A feather of a little bird
Exposing its white belly, balancing in the sky
Falls and I know
That nobody remembers the moment
Of a feather falling.
To find the face you have now,
You threw out tens of thousands of expressions and
I know it isn't here, but over there
Where the snowflakes falling today
Make it cold.

*Translated by
Jake Levine, Hyemi Seok, Soohyun Yang*

Cosmic Goodbye
Moonji, 2019

An Acquired Life

The languages of other countries
Are all we need.
Love is that which disappears.
Your lips are your flag,
All that which pours out and pools,
The magic that fills your body with new blood
Rests at the tips of an exiled child.

No song begins with an anacrusis
Just to end.
Wearing a borrowed immigrant's coat,
Clearing an incomplete throat,
Yes, yes, I, am, here,
Torn up
Continuously

As one string from a scrap of cloth
Is swept away into the wind
Into a thing that cannot be, split
Apart into unwritable text.

Translated by
Jake Levine, Hyemi Seok, Soohyun Yang



Cosmic Goodbye
Moonji, 2019

Hello, Dracula

If you let me inside you
 I will stay by your side forever
 And with the face of a child or an old man
 I will give you all of my love.
 From beginning to end,
 Even though all the rooms of the world are filled with sunshine,
 The fact that you're alive, how beautiful to know
 That I'm the only one who knows it.
 It's okay if you don't abandon the boy in you and
 It's okay if I don't desert the girl in me.
 Even though all the rooms in the world are full of wide open doors,
 The fact you're in agony, how beautiful to know
 That I am the only one who knows it.

If you give me your permission
 To become a white bride or virgin lunatic,
 I will be the evidence
 That you are you.
 In the gushing darkness,
 Rather than birthing a baby,
 We will give birth to ourselves.
 The we that we will make
 Will really live.
 But only if you say hey
 In a voice that's never been used in the world,
 Only if my ears don't go deaf
 In the sunlight that brightens this world.

Translated by
Jake Levine, Hyemi Seok, Soohyun Yang



**Like All the Beaches
 in the World**

Moonji, 2012

INTERVIEW WITH **KIM JEONG-HWAN**

To Write and Reason

Outside “My Poetry”

Interviewer Kim Suyee

Translator Soeun Seo

Kim Jeong-hwan (b. 1954) made his literary debut in 1980 when *Quarterly Changbi* published his “Mapo, At a Riverside Town” and five other poems. He has authored numerous poetry collections over his long career, including *A Song That Cannot Be Erased* (1982), *The Biography of Yellow Jesus* (1983), and *We the Laborers* (1989). He has received the 2007 Baek Seok Prize for Literature and the 2017 Manhae Literature Prize. *An Embroidery Sample* (Asia Publishers, 2019) carries his Korean poems alongside his own English translations.

Kim Suyee is a professor at Kyung Hee University’s Humanitas College.





**My public death went through a whole generation.
I feel less shock as I approach closer to natural
death. My public death will deepen exactly as much.**

Kim Suyee I know it's a pain to have to explain your poetry, but I'd like to ask: What is writing poetry to you?

Kim Jeong-hwan Early in my career, I was commissioned to write a poem and asked to include an author's note. As soon as I started writing the note, I felt the life and blood being sucked out of me. You either put everything into a poem or empty it entirely. What more can you say? But when I read other poets' notes, they were often not only necessary but even better than their poetry. If you think of an author's note not as a short memo stuck onto a poem like leftover breath but more as a question to oneself—"Why am I writing poetry?"—then whatever you end up writing about, it begins a process of answering that question. Even if the question wasn't asked, you strive to answer it and the thought that your effort will never reach fruition makes you continue to strive for it. In fact, that's the most significant attribute of writing. If you write to organize your thoughts, the writing, in turn, organizes your thoughts. In this way, I think "thinking outside poetry" helps me clarify the direction of my poetry, which, for me, is very vague.

KS You've taken a deep look at and resisted the violence perpetrated in the name of modernity during military dictatorship in the late twentieth century and even into the democratized South Korea of the twenty-first century. I think the entirety of your poetics is one long contemporary poem exploring the corruption of Korean society and the life and death of the people in it. It's a poetic insight about what is personal and what is public. What is modernity and the ethics of modernity for you?

KJ For me, modernity is the aesthetic system of enduring and finding cohesion in the experience of being pierced by public death. I didn't begin to write long poems because of this realization. I wrote them for a long time and then realized: *Oh, this is what I'm on about.* The thought that national authority is public and that the individual stands against it is too simple and naïve. That's because when national authority reaches the point of a "public" that encompasses all classes, we call it utopia. "Public" and "private" truly are antonyms. The joy of

life will become more and more personal and death will become more and more public. It's been happening for a long time. When we start forgetting that, public death reminds us by abruptly ripping apart the boundary between public and private, returning them to their original status at the same time. In my early days of writing, public death was common. It happened nearly every day. One time, I got a call and had to give a eulogy in ten minutes. The deaths that suddenly ripped into my private everyday life felt alien and horrid no matter how many times they happened, but time passed, and I wanted to forget that experience and I thought I had. But I hadn't. Those deaths had spread far beneath my everyday life, becoming familiar, lifting it up. Recently, I've certainly felt that writing, especially writing long poems, is similar to living out the most public death in the most private way. Living out the death that was sudden because it was public. Living it out for as long as possible because it's private. I also feel strongly that all sudden, accidental deaths are public and even that all deaths are public. Whether they're far or near, long ago or in the future. That "public" has nothing to do with any existing ethics or nationalism. Actually, it's more like a minimum requirement for the future that if the ethics suffocates the new generation for the interests of the older generation, that if nationalism thwarts the advancement of the younger generation, then they need to be abolished. The minimum systemization of general knowledge as the negation of knowledgeability. Late last year, I finished a five-year project of translating the complete works of twelve contemporary global poets. That must've contributed to this feeling.

KS You're also a translator who has introduced world literature to South Korea, a representative translator of South Korea. Who are the authors that influenced you and what does translation mean to you?

KJ Robert Frost, the American poet whose entire life of poetry was the continued development of his "first"; T.S. Eliot and his poem "The Wasteland"; Giorgos Seferis, the Greek poet who overlapped ancient Greek myth with how James Joyce interpreted myth in *Ulysses*;

FEATURED WRITER

the German poet Ingeborg Bachmann who, as the new generation's conscience in a defeated Germany, performed a ritual cleansing of guilt by pushing language to its limits; the Irish poet William Butler Yeats whose entire poetry is a deconstruction and reconstruction effort of Shakespearean English as well as some of the greatest love poems ever written; the Peruvian poet César Vallejo whose figurative language and reasoning reached the depths of tumultuous anguish and remains the greatest achievement in 1922, "the year of modernism"; the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova whose "Requiem" expresses a sorrow of unparalleled depth in the age of Stalin; the Spanish revolutionary poet Federico García Lorca who expressed the rapturous body of dark despair with surrealist, extreme lyricism; the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert who is celebrated as the poetic conscience and pride of a people with little power; Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet who accomplished the "global" level of the countryside . . . Their poetry and the act of translation has deepened and variegated my public death.

KS This interview is accompanied by your poems which you have translated yourself. Why did you decide to translate your poems yourself and what are the benefits and limitations of that choice?

KJ The minor reason is that I wanted to deliver the meaning and nuance of my work as much as possible. The major reason is that, as when Samuel Beckett wrote most of his work in French and then in English, I find it interesting that, ultimately, the task of delving into the depths of the difference between two languages is impossible and, recognizing that at every step, a new domain of expression opens up.

KS "Public death" is a phrase that compresses the meaning of writing to you as a poet and your sense of social responsibility. In this way, it comes across as something similar to "public life." As someone who lives in Korean society, as someone who is public because he is private, and as someone who is a writer and a translator as well as a man of nature, how is your "public

death-life" going?

KJ Since the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster, my public death intensified in panic and confusion. Last year, many elders (who would be in their sixties this year) passed away. I would have rejected writing poems of eulogy if people my age had died, thinking, *I'm about to go, too*. About five poems in, I felt déjà vu. *Wait, I already did this a long time ago!* Yes. When young people took their lives one by one in the early '90s, these elderly were the ones who mourned their deaths, held funerals, and sang, "We are marching on; those who live, follow us." * Those adults are the elderly now. Yes. My public death went through a whole generation. I feel less shock as I approach closer to natural death. My public death will deepen exactly just as much.

KS What is the relationship between poetry and life for you?

KJ Poetry is the cause and result of my literature and the record of reconciliation between "the self I've lived" and "the self I haven't lived."

* These are the lyrics to the song "Marching for Our Beloved" written in the 1980s for the spirit wedding of Yoon Sang-won who died in the Gwangju Democratic Uprising. Over time the song has taken on a symbolic meaning and has been sung at public protests in South Korea and overseas, most recently in Hong Kong.—Ed.



On Video

Watch our interview

with Kim Jeong-hwan at:

koreanliteraturenow.com/videos



Handwritten Korean text in a grid notebook, including the characters "고향" (hometown) and "가" (possessive particle).

Selected Poems

Kim Jeong-hwan

We are carrying poems translated by the poet himself at his request.—Ed.

The Late Years' Future

What I would like to steal is not the future's
Time but the late years' future.
In library thicker than my span and heavier than my
Weight and fresher than my youth that
Webster's New International Dictionary
Second Edition
Unabridged
Was to be stolen then in my high school years not that but
At bouquiniste after half century for big money fifteen thousand Won
Bought that book, once-deep-yellow cover's
Little-finger-thickness board so worn
Beyond chimney-blackish yellow to be tattered clothes
Cloth is now.
Pages folded for fifty years are for fifty years ahead
Not to be unfolded. To unfold the year 1960 from now on
In that way unfold the cover we cannot but.
Always the future's quotation
Is forbidden. Word as if cannot be helped
Incarnates its own past several millenniums.
USA also once were quite progressive
Against British Empire the English-become-American
Dictionary to make I mean. Under that influence aviation's
Human civilization inside not the universe but nature's
Dream is flying. Inside the animals' and plants'
Flying as colors is as black-white
Photograph flying. Architecture's vessel also is so flying.
Learning is the learning in that what has returned is the very future, proper noun is
Measurement's grammar. Mentality is printing and vernacular is stamp and
Story is the holiest scripture sure.
That the pronunciation is the word-origin, that cannot be holier.
Younger than me first vinyl album that by stylus
Wearing and wearing without music in style younger than me
It is not accumulating the being accumulated but no matter what
Accumulating the accumulating its vocabularies are than OED

More chock-a-block is in one volume without even a synonym and words
Compete the meaning's piled-up depth and that is the only
Competition, that Webster's New International Dictionary
That late year's future steal I would like to.
Without epilogue, now and again for the brass band march's
Naked-body-sunny-effervescence-like
New coinages to ripen into it
Lending my helping hand too.

Heard Story

Heard story is an audible story's weary
 Turbulence. Holiness so comes. A halt it is. Human
 So stands. Holiness is not grace and mercy
 Sure. Something like a fear's expedient, like a story.
 Heard story is heard story's night and the first Words and
 War horses and night again. For pregnancy not to be
 Disaster Scheherazade, greeting the night visitors is. Joseph in the end
 Shall name such thing extravagance but I regard it much suitable
 And also lucky extravagance. Something like an embroidery sampler it is.
 That the constellations-tearing outside is due to the unrighteous,
 Is lucky. Because audible story is so
 Heard story in the end good news is. The descent sure it is.
 Wind is in sleep.
 Usual exile being always too close to body so
 Itself frightened, then story even is of no
 Use. Cow, cow . . . By the sound-excelling-meaning
 Sight can little by little erase something only.
 The (female)sex-overcome prosperity is Heaven. Even incest's
 Noah and even pregnancy itself's Jonah and whale and
 Macho Abraham and Moses also from the first story was
 Story-erasing story. A disreputable
 Deluge is great circumcision of gender and holiness. So
 Queen of Sheba, however sexy white-in-red honey-thigh
 What for should she connect, Saul and David Goliath homosexuality
 With Solomon's cheap-boisterous adultery?
 That the disaster's blessing and the blessing's disaster was the very chaos, the
 Story in isolation begins. We for the first time
 Continue in the separate story only. Without subject and object,
 Without liberation without independence even as it is separate story is continued.
 Never-existent grace in Sodom and Gomorrah's mud ground
 In great abundance wallows and the priest Zachariah the not-yet-conceived
 Son John the Baptist's decapitation news hears.
 In his wife terrible old body's pregnancy six months
 This time too young body's Maria inside her the baby's
 Crucifixion news hears.
 Must be indifferent, of course. So Zachariah
 To the today-soothsaying prophet rank rises.

He is Moses' elder brother, Aaron of eloquence, rather
 Idol singer rather the pronunciation 'cow' and rather
 That in Hebrew letter-picture's austerity still clothed,
 Jesus. The Old Testament's righteous party Enoch is a Koran's storyless
 Prophet . . . because so abundantly heard stories are the latest
 Good news Jesus,
 Of that all year round bursting, awakening agonal lifetime's
 Crucifixion pity, Genesis,
 Of that the birth-of-language-as-drama's flippancy's
 Crucifixion pity, Exodus,
 Of that the food's rule and mentality architecture law's confusion-incarnation's
 Crucifixion pity, Levi,
 Of that the knowing animal's more thirsty population havoc's
 Crucifixion pity, Numbers,
 Of That the absurd duration and bottom-endless boring intensification's
 Crucifixion pity, Deuteronomy
 Of writing of writing of writing . . .
 So heard stories are good news.
 Two nuance's
 Lingering imagery there is.
 One is Falstaff-resembled Arthur Fiedler Boston Pops.
 The new invented hi-fi stereo audio equipment, on his hip's
 1/3 extent steel chair seated, for himself music-
 Selecting hears he. With speakers as both side ears
 That the letter 'LIVING STEREO' is riding the flow, CD
 Label is recording equipment and music. The other is
 At antipode with Glenn Gould, Morton Gould. Impliedly surprise-attack-making
 March Symphony band. Both were in the classical music world
 Not all the way to overruling, just without offence-meaning to
 Grand style living genius popular music artists and
 So heard story is good news, in LIVING
 STEREO 60 CD Box bottled. Sampler too. Of course.
 For fifty years an insignificant matter with fifty years' authority
 Heard new, therefore Talmud,
 From Israel to Assyria to Babylon to Jerusalem
 To Babylon again and to irrevocable world
 Not over-2500-years' duration's Diaspora
 But over-2500 years' duration is Diaspora.
 Between portrait willing to scatter as color and bust willing
 To close ranks as death so
 Heard story is good news.

Aunt

Mother is deceased and Aunt is dead long too yet
 Aunt is not growing old. With Mother's lifelong face's
 Overlapping synthesis under three or four years overlapping
 Not, aunt is crying. Not sexy, sure. With Mother's
 synthesis' experience young and pretty and therefore
 as if she must cry she is crying. As if happy Aunt there
 Cannot be, as if Aunt must young nephew's lifetime long
 Be unhappy she is crying. As if because of the not-to-be-
 Minutely-seen crying Aunt is young and pretty and real
 Sexy she is crying. Invisible muscular man
 Dividing discontinuous stage's acts and scenes and
 Good-erasing, evil- continuing curtain raiser portents'
 Enter and realization. From purpose and suffering to purpose's suffering,
 And to without-purpose's suffering long ago, long ago,
 Long ago, education crush-chewing the old times.
 Mother is even in the margin without Father
 Cannot do the margin. Child is to Mother the brave
 Death sure. Velocity not knowing it is velocity walks into.
 Sonny, are you in sleep? Sonny, are you risen? Rather with wailing
 Greet please son's breakdown, Mama.
 Why must Pieta take off its savagery?
 Mother is deceased and Aunt is dead long too yet
 Over three or four years Aunt is the margin.
 Once-shiny Body's shining remoteness.
 So
 You awakening calling me are me.
 That you calling me are me, is a song.
 Only inside the ear hearable, growing away, being the side's
 Definition, your silence, admiration-begetting
 Exclamation mark without exclamation, one who cuts
 Time's eternity is hero and drama without a hero
 We call holiness.
 That when the light is unbending occupation, even before we can
 Bear the whole words dawn breaks and when what is new can be
 So worn fortunately running

River there is.
 Sense's bride, with familiar smell
 Hears without sense's rank, without thunderbolt
 Strange-Words-hearing on the first earth freedom folks,
 Supernatural because of the body.
 Resignation-unbending Constanze, on earth what
 Error she can have made you say? With happiest moment's misfortune
 Twisted pallid,
 The more beautiful woman there is. Her name also is like misfortune
 Goddess a pallid name.
 This morning whose laughter is thousand-years-old this goddess's
 Priest clown's melody-ignorant lyrics are,
 Death be there taking sorrow's greenhouse off
 I will go there. With death interviewing, without a
 Star that is incompatible with death, with part one and part two that
 Ritual the universe is.



An Embroidery Sampler
 Asia Publishers, 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Kim Jeong-hwan
 Translation copyright © 2019 by Kim Jeong-hwan
 Reprinted with permission from Asia Publishers



DOGS

THE NEW COMPANIONS OF
KOREAN LITERATURE

& CATS

Cha Mi-ryeong

Professor, Gwangju Institute of Science and Technology (GIST)

Korean literature is being overrun with cats and dogs. One glance at several recent titles is enough to make the case: “How Cats are Trained” (Kim Keum Hee, 2015), “Cats, Breaking and Entering” (Sohn Bomi, 2016), “Their First and Third Cats” (Yun I-Hyeong, 2018), and *The Dog I Love* (Bak Solmay, 2019) among others. In fact, animal-related episodes can be easily found in contemporary Korean poems, essays, webtoons, YouTube videos, podcasts, and television shows. Our impact on animals and our ways of coexisting with them have become issues of social concern, and it appears that in the future, we’ll likely see more activities centering on animal rights, such as the 2019 Sseudongshi (Trash–Animals–Poetry) project.

Of course, animals have always had a presence in literature and the arts. For instance, dogs and cats have been featured in numerous classical Korean works of art. In fact, tracing the significance of the animals memorialized in Korean literature and art is itself a meaningful humanities project. And yet, the fact that dogs and cats are so prevalent today seems to be one of the important changes that Korean society is going through.

Contemporary literary works question whether humans are the most superior species and whether they can truly serve as a measure for interdependent relationships. In Hwang Jungeun’s “Life of Myo, or a Cat Life,” the feline protagonist, named Body, declares, “[I]s it not true that determining whose subsistence ranks uppermost among all the beasts of subsistence is hardly a black-and-white matter?” For the non-humans of this world—the animals—what does it mean to navigate this world? How does the world stamp itself onto their bodies? Reading “Life of Myo, or a Cat Life” operates under the assumption that the reader must go through the world as a stray cat. Within this transposition, the reader is instantly laid vulnerable to the relentless violence the world inflicts upon the cat. In the story, the cat’s name is simply Body, with no other qualifiers, and Body’s body is not part of nature. Just like humans, animals too find themselves transported by different forces to the boundaries of nature, culture, and technology.

In the second half of the story, Body’s stomach is sliced open, then immediately sewn shut in a stray animal spaying scam. The cat is then altogether abandoned. “[D]’you know how much it costs to actually slice them open and cut out the ovary and testicles and shit? How much time and effort too?” The entire scene sheds gruesome light on a form of non-anthropocentric exploitation. “I couldn’t even close my eyelids because of how they’d paralyzed me. / I had to suffer through the entire ordeal with dry eyes. / After which I was stuffed in a sack, thrown back into the car, and dumped in an unfamiliar alley.” The force of this soliloquy is strong, because the reader is made to experience the horrific ordeal as the animal itself.

Furthermore, by seeing the world through the eyes of a cat and not a human, “Life of Myo, or a Cat Life” captures certain moments where humans are laid bare. The world of humans as seen by cats is ruthless to the point of completely destroying whoever is not on one’s side. In the story, Body cohabits with Old Man Gok and observes and records his behavior. The other humans in the novel view Old Man Gok as belonging to “a species different from themselves,” but the cat sees him as something else. What Body sees is the old man’s extraordinary dignity in collecting and processing food, and his pride in creating fire out of discarded waste. And yet, the old man is pushed further and further aside by the world until he ultimately goes missing, after which Body finds itself in a place where “only trash and dying cats lie.” Body is here reunited with Old Man Gok, both creatures who have been abused, then cast off. Which is why Body asks, “Even if I had the chance to live my life over again, what would I do?”

In works by Bak Solmay, a contemporary of Hwang Jungeun’s, human characters often find themselves together with cats, dogs, and even lions. As evidenced by the metaphor of the tent in “What Must I Call For?,” the production of a documentary in “The Eyes of Winter,” and Busan Tower in “Swaying into the Darkness,” Bak’s stories typically deal with the issue of irreproducibility. In her novels, the irreproducibility for Busan has to do with the risks of radiation exposure, unlike Gwangju where irreproducibility has to do with

the May 18 Democratic Uprising. The threat of a nuclear explosion on the Korean Peninsula, all of East Asia, and the entire world is a completely man-made outcome that makes us wonder whether humanity will be sustainable. This post-anthropocentric circling back by Bak is worth an observation from this context. Obviously, humans aren't the only inhabitants on planet Earth, and the chaos that ensues as the global balance collapses is felt not just by humans, despite the fact they were the only ones responsible for bringing about this downfall.

The city of Busan as it appears in Bak's story is both the site of the apocalypse and a place where humans have coexisted with animals. In "The Eyes of Winter" (2013) and "Swaying into the Darkness" (2014), which are set after an accident at the Kori Nuclear Power Plant,¹ the human characters' blood relatives, including their parents and siblings, are rarely mentioned. Rather, the characters are emotionally closest to their pet dogs and cats. For example, in "The Eyes of Winter," the director of a documentary on the Kori plant who was born and raised in Busan's Haeundae Beach is living with his dog Moja at the time of the accident, after which he evacuates with his dog to a friend's house. In "Swaying into the Darkness," it is not humans who reconstruct Busan Tower, which has surfaced as the multifaceted symbol of humankind's dreams and failures as well as of the apocalypse and global regeneration. It is not humans, but rather animals and objects that head towards the dark of night, "swaying" with the others. Bak Solmay's stories have as their starting point a daily communion with the companion species, then go on to experiment with a fantastical style that blurs the boundaries between humans and animals.

And what about poetry? An interesting new book was published this year. This extraordinary work, titled *Grateful to Have a Dog: On Time Spent with Dogs*, is dedicated to twenty-five dogs. Edited

by Yu Gyeyoung, this collection is a collaboration of different poems and essays written by twenty poets, including Kim Sang-hyuk, Park Siha, Shim Bo-Seon, and Yu Hyeong-jin.

As the foreword suggests, the contributors to *Grateful to Have a Dog* believe it is "now time for humans to ask ourselves what we can do," and the collection is full of imaginative versions of humans and animals coexisting and coevolving. In Song Seungeon's poem "The Dog Doesn't Know / The Unknowing Dog Knows," the special love between a dog and his companion that both protects them and brings meaning to their existence is brought to life to a rhythmic juxtaposition of the words "doesn't know" and "knows." Dogs are not only equal companions to their humans, but in some cases can take the lead—a fact that is explored by other poems in the collection. In Yu Gyeyoung's "That Dog," the poetically minded narrator comes across several dogs that encourage him to reflect upon his relationships. According to news reports, the same contributors to this book of poetry are now working on a cat collaboration. It appears the literary interest in our pets and animal companions will continue to grow ever deeper.

Translated by Amber Kim

This is an abridged and altered version of Mi-ryeong Cha, "Goyangi, saibogeu geurigo nunmul—2010 nyeondae yeoseong soseolgwa poseuteu-hyumeon 'mom'ui jinghudeul" [Cats, cyborgs, and tears—women's fiction of the 2010s and symptoms of the post-human "body"], *Munhakdongne the Quarterly* 100 (2019 Fall): 534–557.

¹ Both of these stories deal with the aftermath of a fictional accident at the Kori Nuclear Power Plant unrelated to actual incidents at the plant.—Ed.



© Shutterstock

Life of Myo, or a Cat Life

Author

Hwang Jungeun

Translator

Emily Yae Won

Hwang Jungeun debuted in 2005 with “Mother,” which won the Kyunghyang Shinmun New Writer’s Award. She has authored the novels *One Hundred Shadows*, *Savage Alice*, and *I’ll Go On*, the short story collections *Into the World of Passi*, *The Seven Thirty-Two Elephant Train*, and *Being Nobody*. This year, she published the serial novel *Didi’s Umbrella*. Her books in translation include *One Hundred Shadows* (Tilted Axis, 2016), *I’ll Go On* (Tilted Axis, 2018), and “Kong’s Garden” (Strangers Press, 2019).

And if I, whose human-given name is Body, were to respectfully ask, What else is worth your time then, if as you say a hand-to-mouth existence is not all there is to life, would they even retort with a What would a cat know? would they even stoop to engage a cat, if only to upbraid me, demanding What does a begging street cat know of the vicissitudes of human life, the daily grind just to get by that leaves a person with barely time for anything else? No, one can hardly expect an answer from a beast bent on holding up survival as a shield, refusing to spare a thought as to how it might live alongside a smaller creature such as Body.

Being a body, I cried as loneliness hit and ate as hunger struck.

Fucking cat, blasted cat, bitch of a cat: these were the words humans hurled at me, this body they rendered an enemy. It’s tough enough having to struggle for food and roof, now I gotta deal with a cat? they’d exclaim as they threw scalding water on my little skull, even as it throbbed with their insults, or they’d strike my mouth with a stick as I picked through the food they’d thrown out. Not for fun or for a laugh, but in a serious effort to find something to feed on, too, so how could I not resent being hit on the mouth while doing earnest work? Crying is as routine for humans as it is

for myos, and considering how humans are the noisiest life-form in this domain, the injustice would make me boil. Is it not the lot of this animal body, this Body who is no less beast than any other, to also prioritize food and survival, and is it not true that determining whose subsistence ranks uppermost among all the beasts of subsistence is hardly a black-and-white matter? And still humans glare and growl as if they alone deserve to live, and not only that, they dominate. But I say a world in which humans end up winning, where all is uproar and chaos, is one that is best obliterated.

Upon finishing his lunch, Old Man Gok would find a nice shady spot from which to gaze out at the sunlit street. He would sit with his back to the flower bed littered with beverage cans and ground-out cigarette butts, and watch the road with its constant stream of humans and cars and such. The man who sold things from behind a spotlessly clean glass wall tended to keep a close eye on him. One day this man slid the glass wall open and walked out to where the old man was seated. He proceeded to tell him not to sit in that spot. The gist of the argument was that his presence there was bad for business and could unsettle passing customers. I watched with interest as this scene of what amounted to human territoriality unfolded before me, but all Old Man Gok did was get to his feet and dust off his pants. Maybe it's inevitable, I thought to myself. Maybe the rule that says it's a rule that those who are unfit are disposable applies as equally to humans as it did to us myos. But Old Man Gok went on sitting in his usual spot. If the shop person made as if to approach him, Old Man Gok would rise, dust off his pants, and move on. Once he left, I would take up his place. Then I'd sit and gaze at the shop man until he threw a flat object at me. He would furrow his brows as if he were annoyed and this tickled me, so from time to time I would play this game with him.

*

Those were relatively laid-back days. Once I'd filled my stomach with rats or leftovers or whatever else, I'd find a comfortable spot to lick my paws, then head to Old Man Gok's room. I would call toward the round door-pull

that resembled a skull until Old Man Gok opened up. I'd gingerly step over the wooden case and shelves to reach the window. Granted, it was rather an odd thing to be called a window. The room itself was windowless; there was a technically rectangular, somewhat jagged opening that Old Man Gok had made near the ceiling for the sake of ventilation. Old Man Gok always kept that hole open, except on the coldest days of winter. Outside, the outer wall plummeted sharply down to the ground. From that high and narrow vantage point I would look down at the city, at the ribbons of light that traced the movements of humans. The twinkling lights never failed to fascinate me and I'd stare out for a long time, my eyes aglow. I knew danger and violence lurked in those lights, but from that distance and from that small space it felt relatively safe to observe the sights and sounds of the city. Outside, there were plenty of wide-open spaces where I might enjoy more or less the same view, but here was the spot I preferred. There were many nights when I would return to that room after dusk to sleep. Sitting on the windowsill I would flick my tail back and forth along the wall before dozing off. Sometimes the old man would stir in his slumber and wake me, and when I'd open my eyes the small room would be sunk in a darkness that was as swart and heavy and old as an ancient body of stagnating water.

*

You fucking dog, you fucking cur, were the words tumbling out of the unannounced visitor's mouth as he kicked through the old man's door that muggy afternoon. It was the shopkeeper from downstairs. The man with the little array of locks and tools from which he sold things or who cut keys for cash. One time he gave me the skin and head off a croaker, leftovers he'd picked off his plate and thrown in my direction. Then he'd watched me eat, his face gloomy, so I recognized him straight away. He wasn't as hoary as Old Man Gok but there were wild streaks of gray in his hair and his shoulders were broad.

Blocking the door he demanded to know what Old Man Gok had done with the money. The money my

money my fucking money what have you done with it, he shouted. Where is it, where has it all gone, he yelled and hammered the door with his fists. Flexing the same hands he used to cut keys with excruciating care, he glowered at Old Man Gok as though debating whether to jump him. The old man stood motionless. Did I or did I not give you the rent money for my shop, did you or did you not get it? the man insisted and still the old man didn't answer. He merely stared at his toes. The man's face was flush with anger and after a moment he picked up the old man's radio and hurled it to the ground. The radio shattered, its parts scattering. Roaches that had holed up inside scuttled out, saw the light was on, and scurried back inside the contraption. Answer me, the man demanded. Answer me, tell me what you've done with it, with the money, five months' worth it was so how come the shop owner says he's not seen sight of it, answer me that, tell me right now what fucking hole that money's vanished off to, right the fuck now, he said, then he grabbed a nearby chair and smashed it against the wall. The chair slammed into the wall, bounced, and dropped straight down onto the cot. When the old man still didn't answer the man put his hands on his hips. He gazed up at the ceiling as if to catch his breath, looked down at his feet, then shook his head as if defeated. Then he stepped toward the old man, kicking or tossing aside whatever stood in his way. Grabbing him by the shoulders, he started to shake Old Man Gok's entire body back and forth, back and forth with considerable force, saying, You call yourself a person?

What do I do with you?

Can't even beat you up.

You sorry excuse for a person.

Finally the old man staggered to the ground, and as he fell his old-man arm swept the magnifying glass the buttons the wooden tray for writing instruments and other such things off the desk and onto his frail old-man belly. The shopkeeper stepped back, looked down at Old Man Gok and said, Fix it. Sell, steal, whatever, just get it fixed. But even as he said these words his face was full of gloom. He glanced around the room as though in despair, then left.

*

I came out from where I'd been hiding with my hair raised. I took my time moving about the overturned room, sniffing out everything the man had touched. Then I sat and faced the old man. He moved very slowly. He removed the magnifying glass from his stomach, gathered up the scattered buttons the pens the pencils and the wooden tray from the floor, set them on the desk and carefully checked to see what was broken. With the radio he took extra care to gather all the fragments down to the smallest piece into a plastic bag. He righted the chair, swept the rest of the broken stuff to one side, straightened the blanket, rummaged around in a drawer to find a filthy bandage that was who knew how old, and put this over the cut he'd gotten on his elbow as he fell. Lastly he took his jacket from the wall, dusted it down, replaced it, then sat himself down on the cot to rest. The sun was fading. The old man remained on the cot, rubbing his knees with his fingers, and then he raised himself off the cot and headed over to the fridge. After opening the fridge door and peering inside, he came back with a tray. The plastic container of food was on the tray. He placed the tray on his knee and started to eat. I stepped closer to his feet and said, Myo. Oho there, the man said.

What's your name then and what sort of beast might you be? Is it nice to live without a name? How about I give you a name, one body to another? Body body. How's that for a name? The irrevocable body. Yes. See here, Body, well now that I look at you what a sorry sight you are, a mangy miserable thing, well I'm no different in fact, you could say my entire life is miserable, there's nothing to show for it, the food I eat is miserable, the life I live is miserable, no money no background no aspirations to make something of myself to make it out of here and no regrets either if I keel over tomorrow, I have got a son though, living out there somewhere if he's living at all, living his life of aspiration unlike his old man, eating all the fine things all the delicious fine food I've never even tasted.

He paused to take a few more bites of the cold food. Using his chopsticks he ate a strange radish thing that had a funny taste and smell, and then with liquid glistening on his chin he continued:

What a miserable life eh, can't even plead with your son as he packs up to leave, saying there's no future as long as he's by his old man, but d'you know what, that son of mine may have gotten out, fled to live a different life from mine but he's probably stuck living his own meager life now, in the end his won't be any different, he's likely to be just as miserable as his old man, he said, laughing. His cheeks, which were filled with food, jutted out. With my hair standing on end, I looked at the old man's human face: not laughing crying sorrowful or triumphant, but curiously contorted. It occurred to me that here might be a life worse off than a cat life, that perhaps his human life was even more terrible than the life of a myo such as myself. Was it worse off for being a human life? In any case he grabbed hold of the little container and drank from it as if he was choked up. He took his time gulping down the sour-smelling liquid, laughed again as if to say, All better, then went back to eating his cold dish of scrounged food as though nothing had happened.

*

I would be remiss not to mention Old Man Gok's fire.

Those blue flames that flared up from the flat, shimmering silver object. All gummed-up when the old man found it in a rubbish heap, it had gotten a new lease of life after he'd set to diligently fixing it up. He'd scrubbed at it with steel wool, checked the condition of the igniter, used a blunt brush to clear away the filth between its crevices, then he'd set it on the floor and spent an entire day fiddling around inside it to remove all the parts. Later he'd had to puzzle out how to put together all the parts he'd removed to make something else out of it, and when he was done had connected this new contrivance to a tube that hung from the wall, then turned the knob on its side. A short strong flame had leaped up. As a myo, I lack the means to describe just how immense the old man's pride in this fire was.

He called the object "bah-nah," and used and treasured it well. Even in summer he'd place a kettle over the fire and boil water to make tea, and sometimes in the middle of the night he might light it up with a click for no particular reason.

Days after I'd witnessed the old man's uncanny—that is to say his human—face, some people showed up and began removing the old man's things. Desk cot chair kettle heater radio fridge wooden case shelves a single blanket and various other objects were carted out of the room and piled along the corridor. Old Man Gok didn't react much. He shuffled in and out of the room a few times or stood at a distance and watched as they reluctantly laid their hands on his things. Once most of the stuff in the room had been unloaded outside, he spent half the day climbing up and down the stairs and moving everything to some other place. When that was done he'd come back to the room he no longer lived in. The people who were newly moving in had their broom out by then, and they grimaced at the smell seeping from the walls and the floor. Old Man Gok stood at the door and looked around the room, then pointed to his bah-nah. He'd refitted and remodeled it himself, he told them, but seeing as he had no use for it anymore he would leave it with them. It had a good strong flame and was very useful, he said, turning the knob to show them, and he gazed at the bright flame with a mix of pride and regret. The people who were to move into the room answered, Yes, yes, that's great, then went ahead and cut the gas tube and put the burner out in the street. Later in the evening the old man passed by and found his burner left out in the middle of the busy street. Without the slightest hesitation he picked it up and carried it back to his new lodging.

I followed on the heels of the old man up to the top floor. In an acrid-smelling dead-end room I found the old man's things. Otherwise the room contained none of the essentials for human life like electricity or gas. It was also windowless. The space between the four walls was very close and the ceiling so absurdly high that when I tilted my head back to peer at the latter from a corner of the room, it seemed to rise and rise while my body seemed to sink and sink into some bottomless box until

I was overcome with vertigo. Paint flaked off the damp discolored walls and onto the floor. I was unhappy with this room and made my feelings known by walking over the old man's things and crying out, Yowl. The old man took no heed of what I had to say; he switched on a round light bulb that was connected to something and began sweeping the floor. He left the door open a crack since there was no window, but the door kept closing by itself, so he found a piece of wood and wedged it under the hinge. One desk one cot one backless chair one kettle one heater the broken radio one fridge one wooden case filled with clothing and books two boards that had served as shelving one blanket—not a single thing disposed of, he'd brought everything with him. Carefully, he set these about the room, and when he was done he shook his jacket out and made to hang it on the wall, realized there was no nail, and draped it over the wooden case.

In this room Old Man Gok whiled away the time, mostly sitting on his cot; the burner was tucked away into a corner since there wasn't anything to connect it to. The days grew colder and then colder still, but he kept the piece of wood wedged in the door and I was able to come and go through the crack as needed.

One day when I returned with a wet belly the door was closed.

I have not seen the old man since.

*

As a drifter I lived in suspicion of humans.

There were kind humans too, but in the end, even kind or threatening came down to chance and so as a mere myo being with no means of predicting what chance had in store for me, I couldn't afford to be sanguine. I made it my priority to be wary of humans.

Being a body I cried when I felt pain. The humans shooed me away, said my crying was unnatural because all cats were sly tricksters, but who were they to call me unnatural? When humans were hands down the creatures with the most unnatural cries, or so it seemed to me, so how could I not resent being chased away, it made no sense. Night and day I could hear them

crying out. Each cry was different, each cry made my blood run cold, each cry fading away with a short, blunt sound. At nights especially the streets would fall abruptly silent or explode with the din of their cries.

One day I was chewing on an overly salty and skinny fish bone under a forsythia shrub, when a human approached, crying out at the top of its voice. In one hand it held a plastic bag while the other hand which held nothing was clasped into a fist, and it was staggering forward looking at the other humans with a murderous glint in its eyes and crying, WHACHA LOOKIN AT I'LL FUCK YOU UP.

My cat life ended when this human kicked me in the gut.

I hightailed it so fast I didn't even feel the pain, but I didn't get very far. Then, I couldn't move at all. For days I could neither eat nor drink, I was just spitting up blood—until I died, there beneath a yew bush. I was flattened by morning, by afternoon my leg lifted thanks to my rotting belly, and by night I was alive again. I was somewhat stunned by this turn of events, but reminded myself that this has always been the nature of cats. One night not long after, I saw a fellow myo get mauled by a car. It was a young spotted one who'd just started following me around for no apparent reason—well, for some myo reason—and I'd reluctantly let it. I'd just crossed the road and it was following a step behind, but the next moment its body splattered everywhere, purple muscles plastered on the ground throbbing thrashing then growing still.

It'll come back, any time now, I told myself and watched and waited, but it never did.

*

Is it good to have another life waiting after this one and the one after that?

What if it's just new breath and the life remains the same?

All Body has ever known is badness and cruelty.

If anyone were to exclaim, Surely not all of it was bad, I will say this:

Yes, all of it was bad.

Bad, bad, and more badness, nothing but badness, never an end to it, to the point I have lost all sense of what is and isn't bad and what does and doesn't count as bad, let alone the ability to distinguish between degrees of badness. Even the possibilities afforded by new breath have become narrow beyond measure. What followed after the life that was ended by being kicked in the gut was more deaths: I was thrown to my death or hit on the head, dead from disease, dead from eating what was not meant to be eaten and wasting away. Getting to breathe again after yet another death didn't mean the body became whole again, was healed, or made new. The bruises and the pain remained, and I would spend my new life lying prone in some corner. I was constantly hungry and thirsty. Irritated by the sensation in my back or chest I would lick myself and nearly choke on the mouthful of dead hair. My bones jutted out at strange angles, even my skull became rough and uneven. The more I lived and died and lived again the uglier, skinnier, more alarming my appearance became.

There's definitely been an uptick in the number of these foul, ominous creatures and they're really doing damage to our neighborhood, smearing our image and we can't have that now can we, was the reasoning behind the humans actively seeking to harm me. It was beyond exhausting to constantly be on the run from them. I dreamed of having enough fresh water to drink, and maybe being allowed an entire day of blissful sleep, free from all wariness, fear, anxiety—but that day never seemed to come.

One night I traveled a bit farther than usual to find food. I managed to feed on some eggshells and a dried-up apple core, then continued on toward the moon under the shadows. I was thirsty. I stopped to sniff a pool of water on the side of the street when there was a rustling behind me. Before I realized what was happening, I was thrown into a sack. Then I was transported somewhere in a car that smelled of rain-soaked fur. I could hear the cries of all the other beasts who had been captured when they'd briefly let their guard down. This body was placed in a cage smeared with the excreta of a dozen beasts, from fuzzy young ones whose ears hadn't even properly folded yet to the

ancients. There was an unpleasant smell, like something boiling at low temperature. Two humans with ashen complexions stared at us in the dim light.

Is this it, That's it for tonight, Well it's a hundred per head so let's see now one, two, and a three, so how much is that in total, Hey, hey, are you sure this is okay, what happens if we're caught, Come on man, there's no way they'll find out, d'you know how much it costs to actually slice them open and cut out the ovary and testicles and shit? How much time and effort too? So we just cut them, just for show, and then we'll let them go and no one's the wiser, I mean, what are they gonna do? Open each of 'em up to see if they've still got the parts inside or not? You think anyone from the district office would even think to do that? And it's not like these ones here are going around saying look I've still got 'em, and telling on us, are they? So shut your mouth and start snapping, we need the photos as proof, and besides even if we don't someone else will, 'cause at the end of the day it's all about getting that money, how else are we going to eat and get a roof over our heads, eh? And as he spoke he lifted us one by one and plopped us down on a plank next to a short knife with a narrow blade and a bloody metal bowl. They treated my body with some kind of chemical so I couldn't move. Left me flipped over so I lay with my belly exposed, then cut into me with a crude hand. Then they sewed me right back up again with stiff black string, announced me officially sterilized, and then clipped off the tip of my ear with a pair of scissors.

I couldn't even close my eyelids because of how they'd paralyzed me.

I had to suffer through the entire ordeal with dry eyes.

After which I was stuffed in a sack, thrown back into the car, and dumped in an unfamiliar alley.

Into the World of Passi

Changbi, 2012

Swaying into the Darkness

Author

Bak Solmay

Translator

Kari Schenk

Bak Solmay debuted in 2009 with the novel *Eul*, which won Jaeum & Moeum's New Writer's Award. She has authored the novels *Eul*, *I Want to Write a Hundred Lines*, *Time in the City*, *Slowly Head First*, and the short story collections *Then What Do We Sing*, *The Eyes of Winter*, *The Dog I Love*, and *International Night*. She has received the Moonji Literary Award, Kim Seungok Literary Award, and Kim Hyeon Prize.

I saw more than a few people sketching Busan Tower even afterwards, and some taking pictures, too, and a couple shooting videos there. Many people left Busan or left Korea after the Kori Nuclear Power Plant accident, but others had to keep on living in the same place. I don't know if tall buildings were required to dim their lights on a rotating basis or if they had an agreement in place, but at any rate, the lights were dim, and it felt a little odd. After the accident, when we saw the city lights shining at night, we thought, *Oh, it was all for that*. Oh, we asked and sighed, was it all for that? and we found it bittersweet and shook our heads. But others said, Yes, that's exactly what it was for! It was great and nothing else compares. The more brightly the nightscape shone, the more we'd have given for it. It may not be appropriate to call it "doing," it doesn't exactly feel right to call it that, but for the night to shine like the day, some things were spilled, stopped, and laughed

off, and this was just as viable a way as others were. The man who said this looked exhausted and cold and seemed to be putting his last ounce of energy into what he was saying. His lips were cracked and chapped white. The large companies and department stores had decided to scale back their light displays or light up on a rotating basis, and the news announcement said to dress in layers and conserve indoor heating. The electrical sign broadcasting this announcement would be turned off on Sundays. And whether it was because the tower was shining or the bright lights in the city were going out, or maybe because there was a budget shortfall, the city decided to close Busan Tower for the time being. I heard all of this not on the news but from the people sketching the tower, one of whom told me this wouldn't be on the news. That is to say, as long as the tower wasn't being demolished outright, it wasn't going to make the news. We could only keep busy and exert ourselves.

After the accident, Busan Tower's scope of operations was scaled down and it was closed indefinitely. I don't know whether to say they appeared, or they came into being, but at any rate, for some reason many people were often out sketching the tower repeatedly, almost drawn to it compulsively. Not being able to draw it myself, I just sat wondering, *How does the tower look?* I was thinking about how Busan residents would visualize Busan Tower when the sketch artists came to mind again. They'd sit on the steps with a view of the tower, sketchbooks in laps, looking back and forth from the tower to their sketches, drawing lines, erasing them, and re-drawing them. At the top of the stairs, there were two buildings the size of shoe stalls, one that sold coffee or *yuja* tea in paper cups, and another where pocket editions of Japanese books (mostly used) were sold. A small sign above the coffee shop had a black, coffee cup-shaped sticker on it. I've never been on the streets of Europe or seen the Eiffel Tower, but the sketch artists of Busan Tower sat in a line of four or so artists and drew Busan tower repeatedly, like the artists stationed in front of the Eiffel Tower or a cathedral or art gallery drawing and selling their wares. And then

they smoked cigarettes and drank coffee in paper cups from a shop the size of a shoe stall. Someone who was taking pictures would take shot after shot, from up close and far away. Some of the people drawn to Busan Tower in this way wanted it to be reopened. Others said, We do it for comfort. Busan Tower is one of the symbols of Busan, and Busan Tower gives a little comfort to those who have lost hope. We are soothed and comforted by things that seem not to be of any help at all and are in fact damaging. Some people say that for this very reason we must turn off the lights on Busan Tower and the tall buildings near Haeundae Beach; on the 63 Building and Namsan Tower in Seoul, as well as on many other buildings. In fact, the electrical consumption of Busan Tower and all these buildings together doesn't have much of an effect. But we shouldn't forget that we are in a very bad situation. We mustn't look upon the nightscape, exclaim at its beauty, and turn away from what has happened. We can't hide the cracks in the glass under our feet. After all, we're standing on it. Whether the people drawing the tower and drawn to it held either of these opinions, or indeed, none at all, they drew and re-drew the tower just the same. And they drew it again. Maybe it was only that I hadn't noticed, but no one seemed to be using oils or watercolors so far. With pencils or sharpies, they drew the tower and drew it again. Black and grey towers appeared, big and small, on white paper, lined notebooks, torn receipts, and newspaper corners, and they piled up and were lost. And then they reappeared. Busan Tower—Busan Tower viewed from a distance; a small dot-sized Busan Tower between two large Busan Towers; Busan Tower from across the sea; tens, hundreds of Busan Towers overlapping, redrawn, disappearing and reappearing. They appeared, overlapped with each other, and even as they were turned over, the process was repeated.

Among those drawn to Busan Tower was the tower itself, and I'd become closer to it than to the sketch artists, but I was thinking, *How do I address it?* when I stopped cold. I've stopped thinking about many other things, but none have confounded me as much.



© 2019. Ko Kyungwon

I first became acquainted with the tower around the time that people were starting to come out and sketch it. It was around the time the building was closed indefinitely, but really, this didn't matter, and whatever way you put it, it was a little strange, so let's just say it was on a winter's day.

Then, as usual, I was lying on the bed thinking various thoughts when the tower occurred to me again, and my cat, who'd been lying asleep next to me, surprised me by getting up, stretching his forelegs high in the air and then ducking back under the comforter, leaving a cat-sized Busan Tower in the air. I'm not saying that the actual building made of cement and whatnot appeared, but something stood in this shape. I lifted the comforter and called my cat's name, but he kept still, and I ran my fingers along the outline of the Busan Tower in front of me. I started with my fingers at the top, and by the time I'd reached the ground, the shape was gone. After closing my eyes and pulling the comforter up, I thought, *What's this, what's this?* and then, again, gripping my fingers tightly, *What was it just now? What was it?* and then slowly getting my breath back, I tried to recall the image of the tower I'd traced. It seemed more vivid than before, but after conjuring it up two or three times it was back to being indistinct. Then suddenly the pillow I'd been resting on slipped from under my head to the spot where the cat had stretched out and took the form of a pillow-sized Busan Tower. The cat tower and the pillow tower were the same in that they were the shape rather than the actual thing, but very subtly, almost imperceptibly, the cat tower was more like a cat, and the pillow tower was more like a pillow. Afraid, I put my head under the comforter, and the pillow slipped back to its original place on the bed in the same way it had come, as if its mission were complete.

This was repeated a couple of times a week. Although books and dolls or saucepans and kettles also became the tower, most of the time it was the cat, and one day when the cat stretched out and became the tower, I seized his legs and said, "Not yet!" holding his paws braced on either side to stop him. But he pulled free in an instant and came and pushed against

my leg, and the tower he'd made began speaking. The tower said a lot about itself but even though I'd watched it and listened to its story, many aspects faded once I lay down and pulled the covers up. Then the cat would stretch out its legs once more and I'd just observe the tower he made. Half the time I'd grab his legs and try to hold them but there was no winning against a kicking, thrashing cat, and so I'd let go. Some scratch marks appeared on my arms and hands. I'd lay down to sleep smelling of ointment.

Any time I lay down, the tower slowly faded, and I'd fall asleep trying to resuscitate the image in my mind.

When I walked along the streets, which were certainly darker than before the accident, I kind of thought it would be nice if there were something to light the way. The dark streets made people feel small. Sometimes trash cans by the side of the road also became Busan Tower. Busan Tower would change into a cat and slink along like a lion or tiger at the zoo and not a cat at all, and sometimes it would really change into a lion and walk down the alley at an eye level just below mine, and I'd think, *What the heck is this?* but just walk alongside. And strangely, time differed depending on the starting point, as sometimes the past that I'd been through seemed like the future, and the future yet to come felt like something all too obvious that was dragging on. Thirty or forty years ago, science fiction writers believed that things beyond one's imagining would happen in years beginning with the numeral 2, and in their novels, marvelous things had already happened. For this reason, the years in the 2000s that had already gone by did not seem like the past, but the future. We could only look at them with dread or surprise, or with our eyes closed in pleasure. The accident had happened in Unit 1 of the Kori Nuclear Power Plant, built in 1977. The plant had already reached the end of its intended lifespan in 2007, and operations were briefly suspended, and this was neither science fiction nor news, but a fact or minor incident. Adapting the perspective of the times, the year 1977 is science. It's the future. Energy. Growth. Development.

It's Developed Nation status. We are entranced by the bright energy produced, and this past isn't anything like what we think of as *those days*. But it's so dazzling that I can't stay long. Maybe if I could hold hands with the people next to me and trust my body to the rhythm of the future, I'd burst out laughing in that dazzling place, and be able to live there, in 1977, with the bright future. The future is a little more realistic in 2007, but if they'd stopped operations for good then, I wouldn't be walking in dark alleys with a lion, would I? Even though walking with a lion is not necessarily bad in itself. The future that lies before me in 2007 is just as it was before the accident. People don't leave, and no one dies. It looks ordinary and not much different, but the future viewed from 2007 is very vivid and I want to steal it and put it in my pocket.

And by the way, the lion was not a male with a mane, but a female, and when it came time for me to enter the house, she was watching from a couple of paces back as I opened the gate to see that I got home safely. When I opened the door to my bedroom, the cat jumped from the bed as if he'd been waiting, and made the tallest tower yet, one for the annals. I guess he didn't like me holding his paws.

I didn't know why Busan Tower appeared in front of me. Was it because I often wondered how it looked, or was it going to appear anyway and I was just there by coincidence? After it had appeared once, it didn't fade or go away, but sometimes even multiplied in number. Like the day it became a lioness, it sometimes transformed into something else and slunk along behind me. I wondered whether strange things were gradually emerging because the city was dark, or the darkness allowed things labelled strange to come out, and when I had this thought, I lowered the curtain, turned on the overhead light, and fell asleep. Whatever the case, it didn't matter. If I walked down a dark alley at night, sure as can be, a lioness appeared and walked with me, and one day a dog ran out barking and waited for us at the end of the street before turning into Busan Tower. A bird I'd never seen before alighted on my shoulder and then flew away. It was a vivid blue, like a

bird in a fairy tale. It wasn't just Busan Tower and these animals that followed me, but also a pipe; a pipe, drum and piano; and a piano and a trumpet. I saw a bear in uniform playing the drum. As soon as the sun rose the following day, I walked the streets to seek out human contact, but I couldn't see any faces, *What, no one?* So I walked until I was starving and returned home exhausted. To think, a bear playing a drum! A deep blue bird! Had I fabricated these things that I had seen? For a second, I didn't know whether to mock my own unconscious or be thankful for it. Upon returning home, Busan Tower was standing tall, as before, and I washed up and went to lie down.

"How many are you?"

"One, only one."

"How can that be?"

"I'm one, like the one standing there."

"One."

"Yes, now I'm a picture. Like a photo."

"Do you appear to other people too?"

And with that, it disappeared again.

The Eyes of Winter

Moonji, 2017



© Melmel Chung

The Dog Doesn't Know The Unknowing Dog Knows

The dog doesn't know: how to get the treat out of the toy.
But the dog knows: that he'll be eating that treat soon.

The dog knows: that when you went out today, it wasn't for dog-related reasons. (It knows, but still, what a fuss!)
But the dog doesn't know: that if you don't go out, no dog treats.

The dog doesn't know: that the outside is full of things the dog doesn't know.
But the dog knows: that's why the outside is interesting.

The dog doesn't know: why you're sad today.
But the dog knows: that you are sad.

The dog doesn't know: many things that you do know.
But the dog knows: there are many things you do not know.

The dog knows: how much you love the dog.
But the dog doesn't know: how much you loved the dog.

Translated by Hedgie Choi

Song Seungeon studied creative writing at Chung-Ang University. He debuted in 2011 when *Hyundae Munhak* journal selected his poems for its Newcomer Recommendations. He has authored the poetry collections *Iron and Oak* and *Love and Education*. His poetry has also appeared in multi-poet anthologies such as *Grateful to Have a Dog* and *Your Poetry, My Book*. He is a member of the poetry collective Jangnan (杖蘭).

That Dog

Yu Gyeyoung studied creative writing at Dongguk University. She debuted in 2010 when *Hyundae Munhak* journal selected her poems for its Newcomer Recommendations. She has authored the poetry collections *The Day of All Things*, *Now I Can Speak of Pure*, and *Does This Talk Make You a Bit Dizzy?*

Because that dog could be alive, just maybe
I stop every time I encounter a dog on the street
I think it looked like that I think it was about this big I think it was brown I think it
was spotted I stand there
and think about that dog I just can't remember.

I was nine then, so that dog is probably dead

I kept crying
That dog who kept trying to crawl on my lap whose body left behind a trace of warmth
who was desperate
who did not want to be left alone who had no name and wanted a name
who knew nothing who knew nothing and wagged its tail
was strange and scary to me

The soft and weak shouldn't be with the soft and weak
someone told me later
but I didn't want to know anything smart like that

Because that dog could be alive, just maybe
I dampened with sweat every time I came across a dog on the street
What that dog looked like, I just couldn't remember
but I could still feel the texture of that tongue licking my fingers like crazy

The tongues of the random dogs I came across were blooming red
and licking the black noses on the street shiny and clean

Twenty years later I got another dog
I no longer shuddered thinking that dog was alive, just maybe, but

I kept crying
because I thought this dog might die, just maybe
this dog might leave a trace of its body's warmth on my lap and leave me



© Melmel Chung

might desperately, utterly leave me
 might return to a nameless world because its name was too heavy
 might recognize me might recognize me and so not wag its tail

I heard dogs share the memories of other dogs and believed it

My dad sat the dog down and confessed his sins all night to the dog
 Next time, be born as a human, we'll meet again as humans, live a long, long time

His back, the moment before collapse
 looked earnest like the back of a giant dog

But this dog seemed to have no great interest in any of this
 Its tail slapped the wood floor, slap, slap
 and then it opened its mouth wide in a yawn

Translated by Hedgie Choi



MUSINGS

Translators and Collective Action

Jason Grunebaum

I've just come back from the annual American Literary Translators Association conference, or ALTA, which this year was in Rochester, NY. It's one of the highlights of my year, and I know I'm not alone. Part of what makes ALTA so special is seeing old friends who I only have a chance to catch up with in person once a year, and meeting new friends whose translations I've admired, or have yet to discover.

Other highlights include: the always glorious book exhibit, taking part in a lively panel on, say, footnotes, and enjoying the satisfying feeling that for three blissful days I can look around and say with great pride that *these are my people*.

I come back home each year heart full of love and enthusiasm for our art and for my fellow translators—and with more than a few ideas running around my head. This year I find myself thinking about literary translators and collective action.

As many have pointed out, translating, like any kind of writing, can be a pretty solitary and lonesome affair. But there are obvious mitigating factors we translators enjoy that other writers don't, like the fact that, at a minimum, we're in a relationship with someone else when we work: part of a literary dyad.

The not-translator part of this couple might be a hazy ghost from antiquity who may or may not have been a real person. Or, they might be a living, breathing author present in the flesh or via WhatsApp, ready to field questions about the tricky bits. And every possibility exists in between these two extremes. What's certain is that all translation is collaborative.

And then translators do something else that other writers rarely do: they found and join collectives. I attended a panel at ALTA this year called "A Collective of Collectives." It was comprised of members from six translators' collectives: the Seattle-based Northwest Literary Collective, the Michigan-based Emerging Translators Collective, New York-based Cedilla & Co., London-based Starling Bureau, Rochester, NY-based Plüb, and the Korean-language-specific Smoking Tigers collective.

Each of these collectives operates a little differently. Some are open to new members and hold public meetings, while others have a fixed membership. One has its own publishing arm, and another emerged from the question of why it's so hard for literary translators to find agents. Some help educate the public about literary translation. Most organize public readings.

What all of them have in common—including the Chicago-based Third Coast Translators Collective (TCTC) I'm lucky to be a part of—is a sense of shared purpose and collaborative spirit prevalent among literary translators.

We workshop one another's drafts. We help with each other's pitches. We share professional contacts and celebrate accomplishments. We feel deep in our bones that every new book published in translation creates a new space for a new translation. Whatever the opposite of a zero-sum game is, that's the one we play.

In 2015, I was fortunate to be part of our successful non-tenure-track faculty union campaign at the University of Chicago, and subsequent negotiations for our first collective bargaining agreement. Heroic organizing and great solidarity helped us win a strong contract that's significantly improved our working conditions, and our students' learning conditions.

Only after this year's ALTA and thinking about translators and collective action did it dawn on me that translators are the adjunct faculty of the literary world. It's a connection I should have made along ago, and one I'm sure others have already made. It was sitting in front of me the whole time, but it still felt like a revelation.

Like adjunct faculty, translators constantly struggle for visibility in a world that would rather pretend they don't exist. Translators are often not

considered “real writers” similar to how adjunct faculty are often seen as also-ran tenure-track professors. In a landscape of scarcity, most full-time translators, like adjunct faculty, have to hustle all the time, and live in a state of constant contingency, where being able to say no to work is a luxury. And how many literary translators are also adjuncts?

Despite all of this, why do they do it? Why do we do it? Another point of convergence: it’s a labor of love.

Even the greatest love is still hard work. Another shared belief among translators’ collectives is that this love ought not only be shared widely, but also compensated fairly.

Many countries and languages are very fortunate to have government-funded agencies to help foster, recognize, remunerate, and disseminate these labors of love: France, Germany, Israel, Poland, and South Korea are just a few.

In contrast, South Asia—the region I translate from—is unlikely to develop the same kind of institutional government support to bring non-English-language writers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal to the rest of the world.

One out of five people on the planet speaks a South Asian language, but literary translations from South Asian languages represent less than half of one per cent of translations published in the US.

A better support system for literary translations from South Asian languages is needed, and a different kind of translators’ collective is called for: a DIY initiative that mirrors the work of government cultural institutions that foster literary translation. Instead of hewing to national borders, this initiative will have a regional focus on South Asia—imagine an agency for all Scandinavian literature, or Balkan countries, or Romance languages, but in a region where thirty languages have over a million speakers, and seven languages are among the twenty most spoken on earth.

This greater collective will help translators find writers and works to fall in love with and translate, while allowing editors and publishers to discover new voices for readers who are seeking different kinds of stories. Funders will have the opportunity to underwrite translations of authors who are virtually unknown beyond the subcontinent.

We call this the South Asian Literature Translation Initiative (SALTI), and it represents yet another way that literary translators can work collectively to increase the visibility of writers, translators, and underrepresented literature

of the world. Translators like Arunava Sinha, Daisy Rockwell, Shabnam Nadiya, Mahmud Rahman, Aftab Ahmed, and John Vater are involved, and writers including Vivek Shanbhag and Amit Chaudhuri have expressed support.

We're still in the planning stages, but one short-term goal is to crowdfund a virtual space that connects all branches of the literary ecosystem necessary to bring good translations of South Asian literature to bookshelves beyond the Indian subcontinent. It won't take a lot of money, and we suspect there are individuals in the South Asian diaspora eager to assist with this and more.

We also want to sponsor an annual short-story translation contest from all South Asian languages to encourage emerging translators, and hope to help subsidize US book tours with both authors and translators to tell stories, raise visibility, and educate.

It's a collective response that can nourish the cycle where translations raise the visibility of the language and the writers in a language, who often then achieve a new level of validation as writers in their own languages, which then encourages more writers to write in that language.

Our collective spirit as translators can help pave the way for a literary future where artificial national and language boundaries are erased, and the conversation of literature is enlarged—a conversation that fully includes a fifth of humanity, with many stories to share.

Jason Grunebaum is a writer and translator whose books include Uday Prakash's *The Girl with the Golden Parasol* (2013), *The Walls of Delhi* (2016) and, with Ulrike Stark, Manzoor Ahtesham's *The Tale of the Missing Man* (2018). His work has been shortlisted for the DSC Prize in South Asian Literature, longlisted for the National Translation Award, and has been awarded the Global Humanities Translation Prize, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a PEN/Heim Translation Grant. He teaches both Hindi and literary translation at the University of Chicago.

THE GIFT OF A QUESTION THAT REMAINS UNASKED

Kim Soom

A Ferris Wheel Called Sorrow

From my hotel room window in Göteborg, I could see a giant Ferris wheel. For the first few days of my five-day trip, I never saw it move. In fact, the wheel had an air of permanent immobility, as if it would remain stationary forever. It was honestly much too big, looming against a sky that reminded me of the face of Rilke. I found myself wishing that the wheel would stay motionless for as long as I was there. If it did start to circle, I was afraid that the city and the entire world along with it would start to tumble and turn, leading to all manner of confusion and chaos.

Suspended as it was against the sky, the Ferris wheel looked like an image out of a calendar, and I felt a strange sensation of lagging time. The wheel was visible from each of the rooms the Korean poets and writers, including myself, had

been assigned (I don't know if it was visible from the rooms of everyone staying at the hotel).

I had received a list of questions from the organizers of the Göteborg Book Fair in advance. On my first night in Göteborg I tried to write down an answer to the final question on the list, and found some form of consolation in doing so. The question was actually two separate questions, and I found myself answering only partially to just the one question that spoke to me.

Q: What emotion do you want your readers to feel when they read your work? What is it that you as an author hope to accomplish through literature?

A: If I had to choose just one, I would like that emotion to be sorrow. This is because I personally find sorrow to be a beautiful emotion.



BOKMÄSSAN

GÖTEBORG BOOK FAIR

I realized that I value sorrow, that sadness is an emotion I hold dear. Could it be that we read poetry and stories, watch films, travel, listen to music, and love in order to arrive at sadness? That this is what impels us to carry on walking towards the end of our lives?

But why did I limit my answer with my own self-imposed condition to “choose just one”?

What is it I want to accomplish through literature? The reason I passed on answering this question was because I forgot it as soon as my eyes flitted over it. I have never thought to accomplish something through literature. That is not why I started writing, nor is it why I continue to write.

A Name I Couldn't Learn by Heart

Astrid Trotzig. This is the name of a writer I met during the book fair. She has a Swedish name and writes in Swedish. When she was five months old she was adopted by Swedish parents. (At Göteborg, I learned for the first time that Sweden has the largest number of Korean adoptees out of all European countries.) She spoke of a visit to South Korea several years ago, and how she had been asked a question related to her identity by a newspaper reporter during that visit. She answered by saying, “Although I think a lot about who I am, it would be hard for me to say I am Korean since I live in Sweden and think and write in Swedish.”



Writer Kim Soom

If she had grown up in South Korea and hadn't struggled with questions regarding her identity, would she have become a writer?

And then I realized that one does not "become" a writer.

I may soon forget her exact name, but her face is etched in my mind. I have thought of her from time to time after my return to Seoul, but not for the sole reason that she happens to be a Swedish novelist who was adopted from South Korea.

In one of my stories there is a scene where a Korean asks a *jaeil gyopo*, a Japanese national of Korean ethnicity, about their identity. Here is a slightly adapted version of that exchange:

"Samako, what's your identity? Japanese or Korean?"

"Ah, my identity? Well, my identity is that I am me."

"Surely you know what the word identity means, Samako?"

"Aah, I don't care to know about identity. It's too political and serious. I'm me, you're you . . . what do we need identities for?"

Political, Apolitical

Would you say your writing is political?

This question was posed to me during a reading at the Literature House. That morning I had gone for a walk along the stream that flows past the book fair venue. I saw ducks living there—I love ducks. As someone who had never placed the words "political" and "writing" together in a sentence, I had to try hard to grasp this somewhat aggressive question. As I struggled to understand I felt a rising desire to hide. And just as I had asked myself every other time this same desire had shaken me, I found myself repeating the question *What is it I'm here for?*

I think back to the questions that I and all the other Korean poets and novelists who

“ *At the reading I came to realize that my writing is in fact political. That even the seemingly intimate and extremely personal writing one might associate with diaries or personal chronicles cannot but be, even if to varying degrees, somewhat political.* ”

were attending the book fair with me were asked. To mark sixty years of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Sweden, the Göteborg Book Fair had chosen South Korea as the Guest of Honor and theme country for 2019. Various events were organized to promote Korean literature and its writers. Seminars and talks revolved around two main topics: Gender Equality and Human & Humanity. The questions the Swedish moderators posed to us Korean writers were connected to social and global issues. (The Göteborg Book Fair, which started in 1985, is the largest literature festival in Northern Europe. Authors and readers met and mingled in various venues, and earnest and respectful audiences filled the seats. Many of the Korean writers were impressed by the attentive “listening manner” of the Swedish readers.)

At the reading I came to realize that my writing is in fact political. That even the seemingly intimate and extremely personal writing one might associate with diaries or personal chronicles cannot but

be, even if to varying degrees, somewhat political.

That night I saw the Ferris wheel aglow and turning, drawing big bright circles outside my hotel window.

The Question That Remains Unasked

In the end, the question that touched me most out of all the questions given to me or to any one of us Korean poets and writers during the fair was: *What emotion do you want your readers to feel when they read your work?* The Göteborg Book Fair has ended, but this remains as a question for all of us.

Translated by Emily Yae Won

INKSTONE

KOREAN CLASSICAL L I T E R A T U R E

INKSTONE AIMS TO EXAMINE THE
TRADITION OF KOREAN CLASSICAL
LITERATURE WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES
BY OVERSEAS LITERARY RESEARCHERS.

*KLN HOPES THAT THIS SERIES WILL
HELP READERS GRASP THE BREADTH
OF KOREAN LITERATURE AND USHER IN
A NEW ERA FOR KOREAN LITERATURE
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY.*

Yeorha ilgi as a Korean Classic

Can a record of a journey that took place almost 250 years ago, a long prose piece written in a Literary Chinese so complex that even experts in this idiom sometimes find it difficult to understand, a travelogue that centres on China rather than on Korea—can such a text be a classic for Korea's twenty-first century? I would argue not only that it can, but also that it counts as being among the best candidates Korean literary history has for an enduring classic.

The travelogue in question is Bak Jiwon's *Yeorha ilgi* (Jehol Diary), written in the eighteenth century. In the summer of 1780, China's Qianlong emperor celebrated his seventieth birthday in the frontier town of Jehol (today's Chengde), close to Mongolia, where the emperors of the ruling Manchu dynasty used to spend their summers. The birthday festivities were meant to demonstrate the power of the dynasty which had recently annexed vast territories to the west of China, including Tibet. Thus, the congratulatory embassy from Korea which had been sent to Beijing, the capital, was ordered to travel onwards to Jehol in order to add to the diversity of nations that paid their respects to the emperor. No subject of the Joseon throne had set foot there before. The embassy was led by an official named Bak Myeongwon, and he had taken along his younger cousin Bak Jiwon (1737–1805), also known as Yeonam, who was in his early thirties at the time and already a well-known man of letters.

This journey was an extraordinary opportunity for Yeonam. More than ever, visiting China had by the mid-eighteenth century become a kind of Grand Tour for inquisitive minds in Joseon. While official court politics despised the Manchu rulers of China as barbarians and still dreamed the impossible dream of re-conquering China for the fallen Ming dynasty, awareness now grew among the more open-minded literati that the Qing Empire actually flourished both politically and culturally. Seeing this with one's own eyes became a major opportunity for Korean intellectuals to acquire a sound, up-to-date understanding of the world at large. And as before, taking part in an embassy was almost the only way to come into direct contact with Chinese literati and catch up with literary and intellectual developments on the mainland, still conceived of by the Korean educated elite as the centre of civilisation.

Bak Jiwon made the best possible use of this opportunity. During the journey, he astutely observed Qing customs and its lifestyle, highly attentive to details of everyday life, especially technology; he eagerly talked to people from all walks of life on the road; he used whatever chance he had to converse with literate people, be they of Manchu, Chinese, or Mongol ethnicity, through writing in so-called "brush talks"; and he took copious notes of what he saw and heard. Having returned home after roughly half a year of travel, he composed his travelogue, a massive

work that runs to about 1,500 pages in the most recent Korean translation.

Yeonam was not the first to write such an extensive record of his China experience. Gim Changeop (1658–1721) had forged the path with his Beijing travel diary of 1712. Different from earlier travellers, he wrote his diary not just as a dry record of events but in a fully developed narrative style, pioneering the detailed descriptions of seemingly mundane experiences from which *Yeorha ilgi* also derives part of its fame. Half a century later, Hong Daeyong (1731–1783) further expanded the stylistic and generic potentials of travel writing by delivering a variety of texts instead of a single record: a narrative diary in the Korean vernacular; a Chinese language text in the monograph style, with thematic chapters on different aspects of his experiences and observations; and a reconstruction of his brush-talks with Chinese gentlemen he befriended in Beijing. The work of Hong, who was a close friend of Bak Jiwon, had been instrumental in changing the outlook of progressive Korean intellectuals on what to expect from China under Manchu rule. It had also changed how it was possible to write about China—Hong was the first Korean to objectify China by choosing an encyclopaedic approach to describing the country in Literary Chinese, and he proved an excellent narrator in Korean.

With *Yeorha ilgi*, Bak Jiwon built upon the achievements of his predecessors and developed the art of travel writing to unprecedented heights. His work is even more creative in terms of genre than that of Hong Daeyong's. It consists of two parts: an actual diary comprising roughly the first half of the text, divided into seven chapters with individual titles (an innovative feature for Joseon diaries), and interspersed

with texts from different genres; and eighteen miscellanies ranging from extended conversation records over brief descriptive essays to notes of a seemingly academic nature. Taken together, *Yeorha ilgi* features fiercely satirical fictional stories (one in each of the two parts) as well as lyrical essays, geographical treatises and long emotional inner monologues, a discussion of the different perceptions of horses and humans as well as a conversation on a moonlit night on how inhabitants of the Moon may look towards Earth at the very same moment. Arguably, no other text in Korean literary history makes use of so many different literary and linguistic registers. This is also due to the fact that Bak was extremely conversant with Chinese literature of all ages, far beyond the canon, and did not hesitate to make use of it. In the diary, we find echoes of “heterodox” works such as the *Zhuangzi* as well as of Chinese vernacular literature. This was one of the reasons *Yeorha ilgi* triggered a “literature rectification movement” by which conservatives at court wished to contain the influence of the work.

For influential it was, until today. Bak's contemporaries literally tore the manuscript from his hands—chapters circulated before he could even finish them. This was not only due to its revolutionary literary style. What fascinated eighteenth and early nineteenth century readers most was the text's intense questioning of the Joseon literati's self-positioning in the world, now that traditional Sinocentrism had come to an impasse. Bak Jiwon did not provide clear-cut answers; instead he unfolded through his complex narrative the many aspects in which the multi-ethnic, flourishing Qing could provide inspiration for new Joseon identities. In the late nineteenth century, the diary was valued

for its engagement with Western knowledge and advocacy of political reforms, and thus, Bak Jiwon became a figurehead for the twentieth century's search for indigenous "sprouts of modernity." From this rather austere image, he was rescued early in the twenty-first century by the public intellectual Ko Misuk who, in a well-received monograph, focussed attention on Bak's exquisite sense of humour, his deep-seated scepticism and his seeming refusal to commit to a fixed ideological standpoint, thus rendering him a post-modernist *avant la lettre*.

Bak Jiwon and his masterwork cannot be fully captured by any of these interpretations. The multifocality and polyphony of *Yeorha ilgi* is an important precondition for its lasting appeal to readers. However, my claim that this text has the potential to be a classic for contemporary Korea is not based on an assumption of any protean nature of the text. It cannot be stretched to indiscriminately fit changing reader expectations. Rather, what makes this text a real candidate for being regarded as an enduring classic is its deeply ingrained humanism. Bak knew about his own limitations—his ethnic and class prejudices, for example—but he continually strove to overcome them. His work is testimony not only of knowledge gained through travel, of a dialogue between cultures, but also of epistemological struggle and of an individual's journey towards wisdom. As such, it remains relevant, as long as readers have command of the hermeneutical competence necessary for unravelling its complexities.

Marion Eggert

Professor, Korean Language and Culture
Department of East Asian Studies
Ruhr University Bochum

Samguk yusa: The Living (Hi)story

The Korean medieval chronicle *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, traditionally dated to ca. 1281) is a collection of narratives that have been retold based on textual sources of varying levels of reliability, from official histories to local legends. The text is already the result of re-reading previously existing histories, decoding them, and then recoding and composing them in such a way that they would be comprehensible to a thirteenth-century readership. In other words, using the terminology of Paul Ricoeur, the chronicle underwent prefiguration and refiguration. The substantial part of the chronicle was compiled toward the end of the Goryeo dynasty and presents approximately one thousand years of Korean history from the Three Kingdoms to Unified Silla periods. Its authorship is attributed to the Buddhist monk Iryeon, who claims that the stories of the events and heroes he has compiled must be embedded in the national memory and therefore passed down to future generations. It is in this way I also understand the word “yusa.” However, the tradition established by the *Samguk yusa* was not central to the society and culture of the subsequent ruling dynasties; it was a work of peripheral value for a relatively long time also for its unofficial character. The chronicle

started to be important—and canonical—only in the modern era.

The Sacred Book of National History

In the early twentieth century and especially after the fall of the Joseon dynasty in 1910 when Korea lost its independence, ancient Korean history acquired new significance, and the term “tradition” took on new meaning. Tradition has since that time been closely associated with the perception of the “national.” The new “national” history (*minjok sabak*) started by Sin Chaeho’s works focused on both a blood-based concept of nation and state (Dangun as forefather suited this purpose) and a shared national space (which included Manchuria, a part of Dangun’s legendary Gojoseon Kingdom). For the new “national history,” the *Samguk yusa*, together with the *Samguk sagi*, seemed to be an ideal source for popularizing the idea that Korea had always been a glorious, independent, and ambitious country. In the historical context of Japanese annexation, it was one of the most influential concepts.

This text is a part of a paper that will be published in: Marion Eggert, Florian Pölking, eds., *Cultural Transmutations in Korea's Past and Present. Transcoding, Code-Switching and Other Cultural Practices* (Peter Lang, 2020).

Since the *Samguk yusa* was originally created, it has been reconceptualized several times. Some of the legends it contains have more or less retained their original meanings, whereas the meanings of others have been reinterpreted, particularly to strengthen the Korean national identity. During the Japanese era, Korean myths and legends were also reworked to recontextualize them within the greater framework of East Asian history and Korea's relations with its neighbors.

Ways of Recoding Stories

Not all stories from the *Samguk yusa* maintained their relevance for later societies, not even tales that had acquired some level of local significance. The current coding of stories contained in the *Samguk yusa* is the result of two phenomena: *continuous coding*, in which various levels of code transfer have occurred over the centuries; and *discontinuous coding*, in which the stories' contents have been changed in central or local lore during the past century. Naturally, these two processes also interact to create an infinite spectrum of variants on the tales. Thus, the *Samguk yusa* has been recoded, its codes updated. Updating old stories to meet the needs of the present is nothing new as this approach has long been applied in folklore and the novel tradition. New stories can be created by further developing basic motifs from ancient histories; story titles as well as hero or place names can also serve as inspiration. When this happens, the original is substantially transformed. The old legends have been exploited in Korean literature and culture on a large scale since the early twentieth century.

A fundamental criterion for a myth, legend, or story to become productive is continuity.

Narratives that can be described as continuous are typically transmitted as a whole. When only parts of such works are passed down, decoding may become impossible and discontinuity may occur. Discontinuity is also the result of a single motif being selected and developed. Updating discontinuous narratives from the *Samguk yusa* results in recoded stories in which we can find sculpture, landscape compositions, a single motif or detail. Recoding can give birth to a new iteration of an old story by taking an old motif and imbuing it with a modern meaning.

Literature has “legs” and can “travel.” An eight-hundred-year-old work can “travel far”—that is, several versions of it may exist or it may have been reworked in various genres. Take, for example, the modern and postmodern adaptations of ancient stories in comics, film, and so forth. But not all modern traces of old stories reflect the coding of the original. Some reflect an ancient motif as it was developed in a local version of the story or in an already recoded story that proved to be viable or successful.

This process has also occurred beyond the confines of literature. The *Samguk yusa* has also been recoded in the visual arts. Updating a narrative for modern times does not just mean geographically anchoring it in a specific place and basing it on reliable sources. Some stories in the *Samguk yusa* have been coded into dummy symbols that represent the entire narrative. Hence, tales can be expressed in the form of pictures, which often adorn the outer walls of monasteries, or in the form of sculptures placed in a landscape. Legends can be “re-established” in places that roughly correspond with the spaces mentioned in the original sources. They can also be condensed into metaphors or symbols or established in a new place. Some old narratives

have been updated to promote regional identities, economies, and tourism, though such objectives are often hidden behind slogans about educating young people. In short, *Samguk yusa* is visible in many forms and no Korean can overlook it.

Still Necessary, Still Viable

From a global perspective, the *Samguk yusa* is not a unique historical record. It is one of many medieval chronicles produced throughout the world that were later employed during nation-building processes and in the post-war era. Ancient legends and stories have been used to legitimize the existence of every nation based on shared “blood” (ethnicity) and a common territory. Since the medieval era, ancient stories have been the most convenient means for communicating and teaching history to the broader public. Hence, the transcoding of history for political and ideological purposes is not novel to Korea. For example, the mythology was exploited to support the idea of the nation state throughout Enlightenment-era Europe.

This kind of history, in which the sacred history of the nation, that is, its essence, is told through ancient stories, conceptually meshes with notions held by the modern Korean state as well. The *Samguk yusa*'s stories have been continually recoded to make them relevant, comprehensible, and accessible for everybody, irrespective of age and educational level. However, the stories from the *Samguk yusa* that have proven to be constantly viable forces in Korean culture have not lost their original meanings. Their codes have only been modified to accommodate modern audiences and global trends.

In conclusion, the stories contained in the

Samguk yusa live a “natural life” in modern Korean society, as documented by their broad understanding, the continuous recoding of some of their narrative elements, and, more generally, in the continuous nature of the *Samguk yusa* tradition, which is visible in such recordings and reconceptualizations.

Miriam Löwensteinová

Professor, Faculty of Arts
Charles University in Prague

BOOKMARK

A Showcase of Unpublished Translations Supported by LTI Korea



© Amy Shim

p. 66

Madame Myeong-du

by Ku Hyoseo

p. 80

About the Book

For publication inquiries,
please contact:
koreanlitnow@klti.or.kr

Madame Myeong-du

Ku Hyoseo

Ku Hyoseo debuted in 1987 with “Joints,” which won a prize at the *JoongAng Ilbo*’s annual contest. Ku is a prolific writer with more than thirty books over a career spanning thirty years. His best known works include *Where the Clock Hung*, *Nagasaki Papa*, *Secret Door*, *How to Cross a Swamp*, *Rhapsody in Berlin*, and *A House with a Beautiful Sunset View and Other Stories*. He has received the Hankook Ilbo Literary Award, Lee Hyo-seok Literary Award, Hwang Sun-won Literary Award, HMS (Hahn Moo-Sook) Literary Prize, and Daesan Literary Award. His books in translation include *Rhapsody in Berlin* (Yilin Press, 2013) in Chinese and *Nagasaki Papa* (CUON, 2012) in Japanese.



I'm dead. I've been here for twenty years standing as a dead body. I look pretty much the same as I did when I was alive, except I don't have any leaves. And this helps people better remember me, since I look the same throughout the year by not having foliage that seasonally alters my appearance by blooming and shedding. Villagers who were born and lived here for over thirty years remember me as an Asian oak tree.

But people who see me for the first time stare as if I were some kind of specter though some come closer and touch or tap my bark while muttering, "What kind of tree is this?" Frowning, they then brush off their hands or wipe them against their trousers, fearing that my dead energy might spread to them. Thus, those people never discover what kind of tree I am. In

fact, they don't care to know anything more about me. To them, I'm just a dead tree. And what good is it to know the species name of a dead tree.

But twenty years ago I was still flourishing with thick leaves. In those days, like the other trees, I lived a peaceful life; in spring I bloomed new leaves and nurtured them during the summer before shedding them in the fall. The time came, though, when a large-scale development swept through the poor village here. And during this upheaval, the whole village at the foot of the mountain was razed and a new village, consisting of tidy concrete houses, was built halfway up the mountain. A wide paved road was also constructed and butted against my feet. Before I stood aloft and looked down upon the village, but now I have to look up at it. And this is how my domicile

suddenly changed from woods to a desolate roadside.

If it weren't for Madame Myeong-du I would have probably been cut down or uprooted and disappeared without a trace. Myeong-du literally used her body to protect me. She placed her own life in harm's way for my sake. So this is why I'm still standing here next to this road looking rather unsightly.

In one way a huge oak tree towering next to a newly built road could have been seen as something grand and beautiful, but because of me, the road now needed to bypass me and this interfered with someone's plans. A man was dreaming of becoming wealthy by opening an upscale restaurant alongside the new road, and I, causing a detour and thus thwarting his plan, angered him. Anticipating that the road would be constructed as originally planned if and only if I were dead, one night the man came to me and drilled two large holes at the bottom of my trunk and poured four cartons of chili pepper powder into one hole and two bottles of herbicide into the other.

So I died that summer. But regardless of my death, the road was never built the way the man had hoped for and that was because Myeong-du saved me from being cut down by hugging my dead trunk tightly and thus blocking anyone from harming me. No one in the village would stand up to her. And that's how I ended up standing here, alive for one hundred and fifty years and dead for twenty years.

Grass fields surround me. A long narrow path snakes across it and stops shyly at my foot. The other end of the path vanishes behind a distant hedge of spindle trees.

After building the asphalt road, they planted grass all around me. And of course, at that time there wasn't any path. After two years, though, they suddenly ceased maintaining the grass for no particular reason. Soon dandelion seeds floated in and put their roots down, as did wild lettuce and fleabane plants. Golden foxtails and wiregrasses also grew thick and tall. Dandelions in spring, wild lettuce in summer, and wild chrysanthemums in autumn bloomed everywhere in the grass. Even though the grass was giving ground

to these plants, it also thrived. As the grass and flowers flourished, a narrow path appeared and grew wider, like a living, breathing creature. And it was Myeong-du's daily visits that created and widened the path. But since she was the only person who used it, the path no longer grew once it reached a certain width, and this helped maintain its slender and delicate shape. And the path helped the plants and wild flowers alongside it look more friendly and beautiful. This was because the person who used it daily to visit me didn't forget to also look affectionately at them.

Myeong-du won't visit me today. She has come to me every day for about fifty years, thirty of those years when I was alive and living in untamed woods and twenty of them since I've been dead, but this will finally end.

Rain or shine, she came to me. When sick, she walked slowly like the ticking hand of a clock. During droughts she brought water in a jar and poured it on my feet and during holidays she brought special offerings from ancestral memorial services or from other ceremonial rituals, such as apples and pears. An aspiring movie director who was born in our village once recounted a legend where a dead tree bore fruit after it was devotedly watered for three years. A famous Russian movie director also told the same story in his last film. But Myeong-du has never prayed for such things to happen, like my dead body sprouting new leaves or bearing fruit. She just came to me and left. She did this throughout her life, and now she is senile and about to die. Yes, soon she will be dead like me. But since she's a human, she won't be standing through the years as I have. Anyway, she is about to enter the world of death. Several village women rushed to her cottage some time ago. Even though I've seen her throughout most of her life, or maybe because of that, I don't have such an urge to see her now as they do.

No one but me knows this story. Maybe the trees that populated the woods with me did at one time, but for sure no villager knows it. Myeong-du buried her three babies under my feet. Each baby was less than ten days

old. She buried the first one under my southern roots, the second and third under my northern and eastern ones, respectively.

But during each of her pregnancies, people did notice her bulging belly. And the day would come when her swelling abdomen shrunk, and the village women seemed to know when this would happen. But they had no idea where the babies ended up once they arrived in this world.

Before the new village was constructed on the mountainside, I was still living in the woods with the other trees. It was rather a cozy grove, where a small woman could hide herself if she squatted down. And when Myeong-du, hidden by the trees, madly dug the earth beneath my roots, it was always at midnight. The soil was soft and her hands were tough like rakes, and so it was easy to bury an infant. She would pick a moonless night and leave her baby on its face throughout that day. Later, when the night turned pitch black, she would run to me and dig a hole at my feet, huffing as if she were angry. And when the baby's still warm body touched my roots, I would shiver.

By then Myeong-du already had two children around ten years old. She gave her eight-year-old daughter away as a babysitter to a woman in a neighboring village over the mountain, a woman who was the second wife of an impoverished nobleman whose fifth-generation ancestor had passed the first stage of the civil service examination. And her other child, a son, would accompany his father in a work trade arrangement with neighbors or strip away pine bark to eat or make brooms out of bush clovers. Since everyone in the village was more or less poor, no one could really afford to offer them work for any kind of payment. Doing things like that meant increasing the risk of starving themselves. It was such a remote mountain village, Toet-gol, a place where people rarely owned any land and even tenant farming was very hard to come by. It was a village founded by drifters and wanderers who had bountiful stories to tell but no house to live in. And after they formed a village, it was an unwritten law that the landlord of the mountain and the surrounding land would evict them if they

didn't bribe him with gourds of rice every year.

The neighboring villages weren't better off. To see a decently roofed, thatched cottage you had to walk a long way, long enough to become hungry. Toet-gol was such a destitute village that the majority of villagers who had been born in the village and fortunately survived hadn't seen a tile-roofed house throughout their entire lives. And they were often so hungry that they would huddle around the village well, seeking to soothe their empty stomachs with water, but their concern about losing face restrained them from drinking to their hearts' content. Parents, in a desperate effort to reduce the number of mouths to feed, would give their children to strangers or would offer their underage daughters to widowers with several children just because they were able to feed their families. Actually, there was recent media coverage of this very matter; a fifty-six-year-old woman, Ae-bong, who had been born in the village and left when she was a young girl, appeared on a morning TV show where long-lost family members were reunited and she had a tearful reunion with her brother after forty-four years.

If children didn't die right after being born, many would die either of diseases or of starvation before they reached the age of ten. Nonetheless, women's bellies would rise and fall for the simple reason that they were women and alive. But the population of Toet-gol didn't grow. Villagers either died or were abandoned or sent off somewhere. And parents, who prolonged their miserable lives by killing or deserting their own children, were in turn killed or abandoned by their offspring before reaching a ripe old age. Others, having lost their minds after sixty or so, were left alone to freeze to death or to drown. Numbed by the endless births and deaths, people simply had no room left in their hearts to be happy or sad. It was all willed, they said, by the King of Hades and the Three Goddesses of Procreation. When a child died somebody would say, "The Three Goddesses of Procreation must've given it a short life cord," and then others would respond by saying, "Yes, that seems so," and the child then would fade from their memory. When an old and malnourished villager silently starved to death, the



© Amy Shin

most they could say was, “The King of Hades must’ve been impatient for that soul.” And some of those who had said this would later be possessed by ghosts or go mad before they suddenly died. And all the deceased, young or old, were soon forgotten. Nowadays people view all these tales as if they were some kind of ancient horror stories, but they aren’t that old nor are they the tales of others.

The destitute couple, Myeong-du and her husband, who barely fed their own mouths, had no other option than to let their son go hungry, even after reducing one mouth by giving away their daughter. And, of course, they went hungry more than their son did. But often, when the season changed and the persimmon tree beside the village well bore fruit, a baby would find its way into Myeong-du’s hungry belly, and when the persimmons fell to the ground, the baby also would drop out of her crotch. And while she was burying two of her babies at my feet, as if throwing out bitter tasting persimmons, her famished husband would grab his empty stomach and sprawl out on their mud

hut floor like a dead body. Her last baby’s father was unknown, since she had conceived it two years after her husband had died of snakebites.

And even though other families in other villages may look better off than Myeong-du’s, it didn’t mean that they had a very different life. Maybe they hadn’t buried three babies as she had, but they were all poor and couldn’t bear the long nights, so it was common that couples ended up having sex and unwanted babies that would soon disappear. And this was just an open secret that the villagers dealt with while reciting the names of the Three Goddesses of Procreation and the King of Hades. Villagers were bound together by these deeds, making them all accomplices, and an old taboo silenced their mouths, and if by any chance someone questioned such practices, that very person would suffer the wrath of the earth gods. As long as they were not free of poverty and hunger, their fear of death was an ordinary part of their daily lives, menacing them at times like a sharpened blade. Fearful, villagers would breathlessly hug whoever was next to them, as



though trying to escape death or trying to hasten it, or maybe they would just make love without thinking of the result, and so naturally new unwanted lives arrived with their predictable wretched end. Yes, death endlessly bore new lives and new lives delivered endless death.

Thus, their stories were not really confidential but rather common knowledge. Only the precise time and place of their deeds were hidden. And only persons who were involved remembered them, but even they forgot as time passed. Their desperate attempt to escape death made them forget even the time and place of their deeds. They buried the dead here and there; sometimes a new burial was made at an old burial site. And throughout their lives they lived not knowing if they stepped or rested their heads on the land of the dead. Well, actually, they didn't want to know.

Myeong-du, though, didn't forget the time and place of her babies for fifty years, not even for one day. But the villagers, who grew old while burying and forgetting others, didn't know that she had buried her three babies at my feet.

One reason people didn't know about Myeong-du's burials was because of a false rumor that Myeong-du didn't bury her babies but mummified them in earthen jars. This eerie rumor began circulating after she showed signs of possessing a miraculous power to cure crazed villagers and the ghost-possessed.

Traditionally, it is believed that people with shamanic powers kept body parts of the dead hidden somewhere on them. Body parts from a person who died unfairly and bore a great grudge were considered to be highly efficacious. On the other hand, body parts from someone who died in bed after living a full life, experiencing their share of life's pain and sorrows, weren't efficacious at all, since these people would be satiated after living their lives to the full and thus would harbor little or no vengeance or bitterness. Only a ghost consumed by vengeance would continuously drift about in this world, endlessly intervening in people's affairs. The less somebody suffered from worldly afflictions before meeting with an unjust and

untimely death, the higher the purity of malice their ghost harbors. So a newborn baby who dies with its soul bearing a deep grudge was considered the best. Thus people who possessed shamanic powers would speak like a baby with a songbird's voice while healing the sick. Encountering such a death required luck, but some people couldn't just wait forever. They had to make it happen. And rumor had it that Myeong-du made it happen.

What has to be done first is for a mother to stop nursing her baby. But a newborn doesn't die easily, even without milk. After three or four days of not being fed, the baby finally cries frantically, its limbs writhing. The mother then puts the baby in an urn and places a cover on it before putting it in a dark corner. The baby now intuitively realizes that it will soon die of hunger and cold in the darkness. After a couple of days pass, even this little baby will push at the jar top fiercely in order to escape from the urn. At that point the mother places a large stone on the jar's cover. But innocent of this world, the baby's fear is immaculately pure. It soon moves the lid with the stone on it up and down. Next to the jar, though, the mother waits holding a honed knife, and when the baby's hand sticks out of the jar, she instantly cuts off a finger. Falling back into the jar's darkness, the baby cries out. The mother then adds several more stones atop the jar's lid. In pain and fear and without knowing why, the baby dies. And this death bears fruit as the purest kind of vengeance. The mother then wraps the baby's finger in a silk cloth. When it's halfway dried, she then keeps it for one hundred days on her bosom, still wet with milk meant for her dead baby. All this is done so that she can manipulate the baby's vindictive spirit as she wishes.

This finger fetish is called *myeongdu* and that is why she was called Madame Myeong-du. People knew that the reason her magical power was so strong was because she possessed three *myeongdu*. But although the villagers knew she had jars for soybean sauce and paste, there was no way for them to verify whether she had urns with bodies of babies in them. Nonetheless, it was true that she did have a small white porcelain jar,

resembling one containing ancestral tablets, enshrined on a rack at one corner of her room. People believed that she must have kept her babies' three fingers in the jar. What they didn't know was that Myeong-du had buried her three babies intact at my feet. And so of course they also didn't know why she visited me every day.

While she treated the sick in the village, using the power of her *myeongdu*, her daughter, who had been sent off as a babysitter, married a male servant of the house, and had two sons and two daughters. What enabled her to take care of four children and even furnish her home with a TV set and a refrigerator while living such a slavish life was not only her hard work, but more importantly the changed times. Myeong-du's son, on the other hand, left the village after his father died and drifted about, but as villages grew into towns and towns into cities, he managed, one way or another, to feed himself. Like a fish that has left its old home and like a bird that has left its nest, her children lived their lives as best they could, riding the fluctuating waves of life, and thus she stopped worrying about them.

Toet-gol changed a lot, too. Electricity and phone lines were installed. And when the water supply system was established, the village well was left to the frogs. Bus service began and a public health center opened nearby. Villagers could also get to a modern hospital by bus. And no more children or old folks were abandoned or starved to death. But the number of sick people coming to Myeong-du didn't diminish. And that's because they preferred her to the public health center or the Western-style hospital. As time passed, her well-fed face bloomed like a cherry blossom flower above her well-rounded neck. And as her face widened and her cheekbones sunk deeper into her ample flesh, she gradually began to look like a Bodhisattva. Her tranquil but piercing eyes and imposing presence contained the power capable of expelling any evil spirit at the first encounter. Sitting with dignity like a grand mountain, she would shout out her mantra "Never Forget" at patients with ghastly pale faces due to blockages of *chi* energy. She would also ask her

patients, those who had fits and became absentminded, "What is it that you forgot?" And she would tell them, "There is something that you have forgotten that saved your life but you're oblivious to it."

While building the road, the construction crew cut away large sections of the mountain and were about to cut down many more trees, including me, when Myeong-du began railing at them. She stood right in front of me, a tree five or six times taller than her, and acted like a wild-eyed protector. "Who do you think saved your lives? Have you all forgotten what has kept you alive? Are you all that stupid?" Hearing her irrelevant questions, the villagers and the construction crew, who were all directly facing her, looked at each other, bewildered, feeling that they maybe had to answer her questions. They looked at Myeong-du as if watching a masked bogeyman in a survival game show, where participants can't move in any direction unless they answer questions within five seconds. Baffled, the people at the construction site asked themselves, *Has that tree saved our lives? Is she talking about nature? Maybe she's saying that the forest itself saved us. So she must then be a conservationist. What do you think?* The people shared such absurd speculations. Meanwhile, Myeong-du tied her body securely to my trunk, with her back pressed against me. The people there continued to puzzle over what the forest and trees had contributed to their survival during the harsh years. Soon they remembered that during the famines the forest shared its fruits and roots with them, along with firewood and water and lumber, and that it also enabled them to meet clandestinely with their lovers beneath its shade. By swaying the bushes and branches, the forest breeze muffled the ecstatic groans of women and the sounds of their men climaxing. Much of the forest is still there, with its mighty vegetation covering up the whole mountain, but people no longer pick fruits or collect fire wood or make spur-of-the-moment love there. After pondering things over, the people there first nodded yes and thought that the forest did help them but soon they shook their heads.

Removing Myeong-du from the tree by force

wouldn't have been difficult at all. Many construction workers and heavy equipment operators looked strong enough to battle an army. But they couldn't defeat her, and even the chief of police and the governor of the province stood there, dumbfounded, sighing and shaking their heads. Grasping the situation, the field

**Who do you think
saved your lives?
Have you all
forgotten what has
kept you alive?
Are you all that
stupid?**

boss finally made a timid suggestion that they detour the road and bypass the tree, and no one disagreed.

Standing there, they all seemed to recall an event that had happened half a year ago. It was when the Korean War was nearing its end. It was the time when the village at the foot of the mountain, where people had lived for generations in poverty,

was demolished. Before that happened, they heard that the government was planning to build a new village on the side of the mountain. It wasn't that difficult to tear down the old village and its flimsy structures. Like tanks, giant tractors plowed through the village. And the demolition workers just followed the tractors leisurely like lazy infantrymen. As they passed by, everything crumbled into ruin. It was a war without any chance of victory for the occupants, as they were not the owner of the land and thus had no other option but to leave when asked to do so. But villagers who had no place to go gathered and put up tents at the site and protested, and later they built an iron tower in the middle of the village, with the idea that they would make their last stand on top of it by threatening to jump off. But as there is always internal discord in such situations, one by one, villagers, worn out by the lengthy resistance, were bought off and gave up the fight. The number of those who surrendered and accepted half of the originally requested

compensation steadily grew. Only the iron tower stood wretchedly in the middle of the now destroyed village. An angry young man, the last protester, smashed the ladder that was the only way to the top of the tower and barricaded himself up there. But when one of the tower's iron beams collapsed and lay perilously on its side, it provided a new bridge to the tower's top. It was too dangerous, though, for people to climb up or for the young man to climb down. Villagers threw a rope up to him, but it didn't even reach half way up before dropping to the ground. And so, three weeks passed and he was still up there. But no one knew whether he was alive or dead.

And it was then that Myeong-du suddenly volunteered to rescue him. Considering her age and body, she wasn't the right person for the task at all. The iron beam was so narrow and at such an angle and height that even professional rescue workers only looked up at it without even thinking of climbing it. But Myeong-du, holding one end of a rope, climbed up on the beam. Way up there, her plump body looked like a small black bird. With their mouths agape and their heads tilted up, people anxiously held their breath watching her. Regardless of the concerned and astounded crowd, Myeong-du proceeded slowly but surely up the beam. Upon reaching the top of the tower, she tied the rope to it for the rescue workers to hold on to while climbing up, and, as if performing a tightrope walk, she stepped down the beam, freely and easily, and soon landed on the ground. The rescue workers found the young man so exhausted that he had collapsed.

Even though they had witnessed her magical balancing act, they still couldn't believe it. Her amazing feat was captured by a hastily-dispatched TV reporter and it was aired throughout the country six times. When the reporter asked Myeong-du how it was possible for her to perform such a feat, she answered in two short sentences: "I just couldn't let him die" and "I'm not afraid of death." "But how is it possible that you don't fear death?" the reporter then asked her. "It's because I never forget," she answered.

When she again said that she never forgot, the

**Don't avoid death but get acquainted with it.
And swallow it and keep it inside you forever.
Remember! Never forget!**

people there saw her gleaming, razor-sharp eyes, eyes that didn't look like they belonged to a person of this world, and this made people shiver in fear. In other words, the reason people didn't cut me down and had the road bypass me wasn't because I, a tree, was that important or because of the soundness of her answers or because they didn't have the means or manpower to force her away from me. No, it was because of the unearthly and piercing gleam that shot out from her eyes. It scared people into believing that if by any chance they disregarded her, they would no doubt meet with the worst kind of fate—an odd and sudden death not only in this world but also in the world beyond.

It was the same when I died because of four packs of chili pepper powder and two bottles of herbicide. People thought that Myeong-du would now give up on me since I was dead, but she remained fiercely protective and this stunned them. Obviously, no person existed in the village who could stand up to her.

But she wasn't that way in the past. She had appeared then to be a woman whose soul had departed, with sunken eyes not focused on this world. After her husband died from snakebites, she was like a dumb mute and a helpless victim until the village men raped her in turn while the whole country was engulfed in war.

Her husband died after being bitten by snakes on his way to an herb patch, but oddly enough the snakes were nonpoisonous. The field he had to pass through just before reaching the wild bellflower patch was thick with water pepper plants and infested with swarms of garter snakes. It was as if the snakes were guarding the patch from the villagers seeking out its medicinal

roots, and so the roots had time to fatten up, year after year, and grow as big as radish roots, all the while radiating a licentious aroma. Of course, Myeong-du's husband knew about the snakes, but becoming blind with greed for the herb roots, he entered the snake field and tripped over a group of snakes copulating and fell and hit his forehead on a rock on the ground, resulting in quite a serious wound. Angry, he gathered up whatever firewood he could, torched it, and burned the whole field. Afterwards, he dug up the herb's roots to his heart's content. The following year he went back and had to once again pass through the snake field, but this time he lost his life after again tripping over entangled snakes. The water pepper plants were thicker than the last time he'd passed through and the number of snakes hadn't diminished at all. But even though the snakes killed him, he didn't die of snake poisoning. What happened was that after tripping over the snakes he lost consciousness and the snakes, like bamboo roots, coiled around his neck and body and strangled him to death. When found, his dead body looked ghastly. Not only did the snakes thread through his eye sockets but they also slithered through every other bodily orifice: his mouth, ears, nostrils, anus. And the once burned up field was again blanketed with thick vegetation and bulging herbs and copulating snakes glittering in the sun.

During the Korean War, when half of the village's mountain was consumed in flames, the snake field was again burned. And people who fled to the mountain and were hiding there, people whose dead bodies were dumped in the snake field after being shot, and people who were being taken away with their hands tied, all were incinerated and turned into ashes, along

with the pine, oak, and alder trees. What followed this was soldiers stealing cows and dogs and butchering pigs and goats. In ruins, the village and the mountain became uninhabitable, but the water pepper plants gradually grew back and new trees sprouted fresh leaves and all together they cloaked the horrible memories. And once again baby goats bleated and dogs barked and the brooks trickled.

What the male survivors of the war did first, as soon as they were able to get back on their feet, was to rape Myeong-du, now living all alone. Like thieves, they would sneak into her cottage and knock her down, or drag her to the straw pile in the barn, or get her on the ground while she was collecting wild herbs, or they would snatch her away from a lonely mountain path and drag her into the forest. These men would sympathize with her in public but turned into rapists when alone or at night, thrashing her with their cock-clubs. The third baby Myeong-du buried was conceived in this way, and after this burial, she suddenly changed.

A man named Se-geun, who abused Myeong-du the most, had a clandestine visit from her one night. He was knitting a rush mat under a dim kerosene light when he felt someone's presence and stopped what he was doing. But he heard nothing. So he went back to his work, but he soon again felt someone close by. Cautiously, he opened his door. There, in the middle of his dark yard, stood Myeong-du, like a totem statue. Taken aback at first, he, a man who would jump at the first chance to perform any evil act, soon grinned wolfishly. He murmured to himself, "Well, there you are. And you already know the taste of my manly stick." At that moment, Myeong-du, without saying a word, turned around and began walking away. Flinging aside his knitting, he followed her.

Arriving at her front yard, Myeong-du, for the first time since her husband's death, suddenly spoke and said, "I need your help." She then entered her barn. Bearing himself haughtily, Se-geun said, "Of course I'll help, no problem" while walking behind her.

What was waiting in the barn was a huge man sprawled on the ground. Even in the darkness it was

obvious he was dead. Right then, the clouds cleared away and blue moonlight seeped into the barn through a big gap in the partially collapsed roof. The corpse had deep horrifying gashes on it. But since its heart had already ceased beating, at least the bleeding had stopped. The gashes' wide furrows, clogged with coagulated blood, gleamed like ebony under the moonlight. Terrified, Se-geun stood motionless at one corner of the barn. "Can you come here and help me," she said, nonchalantly, while lifting up the body's head. She was composed as if she were just taking away a bothersome trough. Finally, Se-geun managed to grab the body's feet. When he lifted up the heavy, still flabby corpse, it drooped. This caused Se-geun to tumble down to the ground and land on his rear. It was a time when discovering dead bodies lying about was not unusual. It later came out that the man found dead in Myeong-du's barn was the last surviving communist guerilla head in the area who had been pursued by the army for over a year.

Myeong-du carried the corpse almost by herself to the hilltop where the village shrine was located. While dragging the body, she now and then stopped and stretched her back while staring at Se-geun as if he was pathetic. It was then that he noticed her unearthly eyes. While dragging the huge corpse, she appeared sluggish and languid, but he felt an unnatural power in her nonetheless. It was more than physical strength; it was closer to being psychic power. And this power of hers wasn't emitted from her body but rather from her eyes and spirit. Even the night's dreadful *chi* energy that pervaded heaven and earth couldn't challenge her. Yes, that night Se-geun witnessed Myeong-du's unyielding spirit and stately physique, something no one would even think of defying. On the hilltop she took care of the corpse by covering it with stones, and afterwards, she shoved Se-geun, who was standing there benumbed, to the ground. As if a mountain landslide had slammed against him, her shove toppled him over, and when he landed on his back, Se-geun pissed in his pants. Afterwards, he couldn't imagine ever being anywhere near her nor could the other village men. The unyielding power that enabled her to



© Amy Shin

perform the miracle of climbing the iron beam during the demolition protest and the menacing spirit that guarded me faithfully, dead or alive, germinated in her from that time onward.

After that night, Se-geun soon died of a jaundiced liver that hardened like a stone. No one died of starvation anymore, but people still died of old age, shock, and pent-up anger. While others suffered from waist and knee conditions, abdominal and heart ailments, and many other internal diseases, Myeong-du's body fattened and her skin whitened, giving her a noble appearance, and both her voice and shamanic efficacy deepened. Mysterious but solemn, with an elusive facial expression and looking like a bodhisattva in a Buddhist temple fresco, she expelled numerous ghosts afflicting people with diseases. During those sessions she pounded a stone block with a wooden club and like a ventriloquist, she spoke in a baby's voice. If this voice was heard from outside her room, it would sound like a songbird chirping in a high note from a distance, and the pounding sound resembled that of a monk's wooden gong. The patients who needed her help were mostly womenfolk. They were the ones who had already sought a cure for their lingering illnesses from Western doctors, but nothing worked. Upon kneeling down next to her stone block, they would prostrate themselves. But Myeong-du didn't tell them ghosts possessed them or that she would expel them. What she instead said was, "There must be something you've forgotten, correct?" Her patients, though, couldn't understand what she was talking about. But after Myeong-du spent half a day pounding the stone block and summoning the baby spirits that would rant and scold the patients in harsh language, they then would finally manage to remember long suppressed events in their lives.

They remembered babies that had died naturally or that they had killed. They remembered parents who died of old age or were murdered. Some even remembered ancestors who died during the Japanese or Chinese invasions hundreds of years before.

"I forgot about the baby that I sent off from this

world years ago."

"Why did you do it?" Myeong-du would ask.

". . . I had to live. Sorry Madame, but you remember, don't you? Didn't we all live like that?"

"And that's how you survived."

"Yes, Madame."

"But did you really forget?"

"Maybe I wanted to believe I did. Shouldn't we forget such things?"

Dialogues like this continued endlessly between the pounding sounds and the bird-chirpings. Myeong-du would shake her head and say, "You killed your baby in order to live, and so you have to live well so that your baby's death won't be in vain."

The sick women would then cry while nodding in consent.

"Why the hell have you become sick then?" Myeong-du would shout.

At this point the women would not only have flowing tears but also runny noses.

"Do you know how you can live well for the dead?" Myeong-du would ask.

The women would raise their heads and look at her. Myeong-du would then thunder at their faces,

"Never forget!"

Her voice was so loud that most of the women would fall on their backs.

"What good is it having killed your innocent baby if you get sick and die? If you killed your baby in order to survive, you have to live well, even as you request forgiveness from your baby's ghost."

"You're certainly right, Madame. Yes, I would like to be cured of my illness, and this is why I'm here before you."

"If you don't want to die, you should stop being afraid of death. It's your fear of death that caused all your shitty chronic diseases. And to be able to overcome your fear, you shouldn't run away from it or forget about it, but rather you should learn how to live with the bastard throughout your life. If you ever try to escape from it or dismiss it from your mind, fear will enter you and then you'll either go crazy and die or dry up and die. Understand? Forgetting is dying. If you die

like that, you blockhead, what good came from killing your child? You better know this: If you drop dead now, it'll be the real death of the child that you killed. If you die now, your child's ghost in the afterworld will feel that its death went for naught, understand? You killed your child to save your life, and so you have to survive. In order not to die of illnesses, insanity, or despondency, you ought not to be afraid of death, and in order not to fear death, you ought to make friends with death. You must understand the provision behind death sparing lives. Let me repeat, you dumb women, since your dead child saved your life, you should live well so that its death won't be in vain. And if its death isn't in vain, then you can say that it is alive in you, understand? If you forget your child, you'll become afraid of death and you'll want to flee from it, and when this happens, you'll get sick and die, and this will result in your child's real death. Don't avoid death but get acquainted with it. And swallow it and keep it inside you forever. Remember! Never forget!"

Myeong-du would yell out all this, but it didn't really help the women folks understand what she was saying.

"How can I stop forgetting, Madame?"

"Are you ready to do as I tell you?"

"Yes, by all means."

Myeong-du would point to a small white porcelain jar and say, "Bow deeply to that jar nine times. You bitches should come here to bow until my doorsill wears out, but I know that probably won't happen, so instead, bring me things like your baby's birth clothes or dried umbilical cords if you kept them. No need to fetch me the whole thing; a little piece is enough. I'll then swallow them and keep them inside me. And as long as I'm alive, I'll be walking around here, and so whenever you see me, bow nine times in your mind as if you were seeing your baby's ghost and welcome me as part of your family. Don't run away, understand?" Myeong-du ranted.

As she had ordered them to do, women reverently brought her a piece of cloth from their baby's birth clothes or a bit of their baby's dried umbilical cords. People who didn't have any of those things brought

parts of their baby's pillows or a little dirt from their burial ground. Every first day and every full moon of each month, they would visit Myeong-du and bow down to the porcelain jar under the ceiling. With so many remains of the dead supposedly inside her, Myeong-du became well rounded, and when she strolled through the village, it looked like death was tottering about. Catching a sight of her, women would silently bow from a distance, with their palms pressed together on their bosom. And as before in the village of Toet-gol, babies of villagers and domestic animals were born and died, plants were cut and burned and others soon sprouted and bloomed, and people grew up and caught diseases and maybe cured them, but sooner or later, all the villagers died of old age. Meanwhile I, too, died. And now the time came for Myeong-du to also die.

It is early in the evening and it's overcast, so the darkness is deep, as if it were midnight. Blue light shines out from the village windows. Sitting on decent-looking sofa chairs, villagers are watching on TV a qualifying soccer match for the World Cup next year. Only a few streetlights know that several village women hurriedly rushed to Myeong-du's cottage.

Myeong-du's son, who has come home after receiving news of his mother's impending death, sits at one corner of her room. Her daughter, now sixty, sits at her mother's bedside with her now grown-up children.

Upon the arrival of the village women, Myeong-du's son and daughter stand up.

"How is she doing?" one of the women asks.

Lying straight on her back on the warmest part of the room, Myeong-du moves her eyes slowly.

"Can you recognize me, Madame?" another woman asks. But Myeong-du only smiles faintly.

"Can she speak?" one woman asks her son. Not answering, he gazes at his mother.

"I'll be leaving soon," Myeong-du says, her words sounding weak and dark and heavy.

"What will we do without you?" a woman laments, tearfully.

Myeong-du then gazes at the rack at the corner of the room for quite a while. Seeing this, her son carefully takes down the white porcelain jar. While doing so, he pauses for a moment, giving his mother a chance to look at it. Since Myeong-du doesn't respond, he puts it down on the floor.

"Everyone, take what belongs to you," says Myeong-du, in a voice that has already changed into that of a baby's.

Some silent moments pass before her son carefully tears open the jar's seal. He then takes out the items inside the jar, one by one, items like small pieces of baby clothes, parts of dried umbilical cords, bits of pillowcases, dirt wrapped in medicine paper, thin strands of baby hair, tiny plastic noisemakers, an old woman's ornamental hairpins, fingernails, parts of stained collars, gloves, eyeglass cases, rings and necklaces, lighters, and three ultrasound scans of fetuses that were only recently printed out. They are the items of the deceased that villagers believed Myeong-du had swallowed.

Her son and daughter and grown-up grandchildren and village women gaze at the items strewn on the floor.

"What is this?" one woman wonders, picking up a strange object. It is a small piece of wood from a tree's branch that looks like a baby's fingers. Its bark was peeled away and the wood was sandpapered smooth. Looking also like a chicken's foot, the wood has three stems forking out of it. And there are three such wooden pieces.

But Myeong-du doesn't react to anything. She's now crossing death's threshold. But I know that she took the wood pieces from me each time she buried a baby at my feet. She then peeled and trimmed and sandpapered them. They're now over fifty years old, but they look as though they're still filled with life compared to my dried dead branches. Actually, they are her *myeongdu*.

"What should we do with all these things?" a woman murmurs. By then, Myeong-du is taking her last breath.

"Where do we send you next? And what do we do

with the oak tree by the road? Who will guard it now? The path to it will soon disappear. Would you like us to visit the tree for you and keep the path open?" the women ask.

But Myeong-du doesn't answer.

The night is dark, so dark that it can't possibly get any darker. One by one, the lights from the village windows fade away. But the light from Myeong-du's cottage remains lit. No longer breathing, Myeong-du is pale but looks as peaceful as white snow. And maybe that's why those around her dead body don't cry out loudly.

I know they won't hear my words but I still speak to myself in the dark while looking at the village: "You see, we needed death in order to continue living, but we don't need it once we die. The many *myeongdu* and Myeong-du's body are now the concern of the living. What you do with them does not concern us dead. That's probably why Myeong-du didn't answer those last questions, even though she may have been still conscious. And don't feel sorry about the path being run over with weeds and grass. You all now have your life path within you to tread."

Translated by

You Inrae, Louis Vinciguerra



On Audio

To listen to the audio

version of this story, visit:

koreanliteraturenow.com/audiobooks

About the Book

A House with a Beautiful Sunset View and Other Stories (Random House Korea, 2009) is filled with characters confronting death or things that bring to mind death. Death for them becomes an act of “disappearing” and “remembering” and they come to accept it as a part of life.

“Scenic View,” the opening story, is set in a small village called Tateno near Nagasaki, Japan. The first-person narrator, a novelist, tells the story of Kim Sang-ho, who goes by the Japanese name Yanagawa, and his Japanese wife, Hirata. When the atomic bomb is dropped on Nagasaki, the peak of a nearby mountain is flattened, causing the village land to lose its balance, thereby bringing misfortune. Kim Sang-ho, who becomes rich selling pickled foods made from his mother’s secret recipe, uses his money to dig an artificial lake and restores balance to the village land.

In “Tuning: Piano *Worincheongangjigok*,” the narrator gets a job teaching young students the piano even though she herself has never had a formal piano education. Before she starts, she calls a piano tuner to tune her piano. As he works, they come to share deep feelings about their lives and end up forming a relationship. *Worincheongangjigok* (Songs of the Moon’s Reflection on a Thousand Rivers) in the story’s title refers to a Buddhist hymn from the mid-fifteenth century with the message that “As the moon in the sky shines down on the river and reflects back the image of a thousand moons, so shall the Buddha’s teachings shine throughout the world.” This story, like the hymn, looks to alleviate the heartache caused by a world full of false lusts and bring comfort to the reader.

The narrator of “Flower Snake: Seep In, Serpent!” is a young man who works at the front desk of a hotel. The man mediates on the restlessness of the lives of the guests he sees always on the move. The title comes

from a poem by the poet “Midang” So Chong-ju, and the subtitle is a verse from that poem that refers metaphorically to the enticement of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. This sentiment is echoed in the sexual attraction the narrator feels for some of the hotel guests. The story depicts the temporality of human relationships in hotels where people stay for a short time and then leave. How life paths may momentarily, but never continuously, connect.

The word *myeongdu* in “Madame Myeong-du” is a Korean Shamanist term that refers to an enchanted object possessed with the pain and sorrow of a child. In this story, the people in a village believe a tree, which narrates the story, has the supernatural ability to cure illness, while also worrying that it acquired this power through a *myeongdu*, in this case, a container containing the bodies of dead babies. In a serene narrative voice, the tree tells of how the destitute Madame Myeong-du has to kill off her babies because she cannot afford to feed and care for them. This piece is able to transcend the brutality of its subject matter with its surprising warmth and humanity.

In “Moon in Leo: When Love Falls,” a college student travels to her grandmother’s house in the countryside to recover from a breakup. She finds peace of mind as she watches her mother “converse” effortlessly with her mute grandmother. When the “moon is in Leo,” that is when the moon is aligned with the constellation Leo, it is exceptionally bright and round. On a clear night, the moon will fill the dark blue sky with radiant light. In the same way, her grandmother’s warm eyes and soft touch comfort the girl’s broken heart.

Due to an accident he suffered when young, the narrator of “TV, Overlap” is intellectually “stuck at age twelve.” The narrator’s older sister, Youngju, gives up her upcoming transfer to an advanced high school to get a job to support her family instead, thereby helping her brother have a full and happy childhood.

Because of his unfortunate circumstances, the narrator cannot understand all that his sister has sacrificed and is unable to feel sympathy for her. Because readers understand that the boy has “insufficient understanding of the world,” they can’t help but feel heavy remorse over Youngju’s early death.

The narrator and his older sister in “A House with a Beautiful Sunset View” purchase land and build adjacent houses to live next to each other. The only problem is their houses look out at upon a gravesite, which is very inauspicious in Korean society. They think about moving the grave but are unable to do so. While living in this house, the narrator first meets his sister’s husband, Bruce, an older American man who fought in the Korean War. Later, when the narrator hears that Bruce has died, he realizes that life is not so distant from death and accepts the grave in front of his house. He learns to embrace death (the grave) without worrying about his place in life (his house).

In “Farewell Party: The Man Left as a Bicycle,” a screenplay writer decides to take a break from work and travels back to her hometown on a small island. There, she meets her friend from elementary school, Jaeho, who tries to teach her how to ride a bicycle on the large, old bicycle that he once rode as a boy. One night after the lesson as they eat dinner together, she ponders how it seems that Jaeho, this person in front of her, is so similar to a bicycle.

“Aunt” is a story of familial love and compassion between two sisters-in-law, told through the eyes of a young boy. The narrative is split into two storylines. One tells of the boy playing a video fighting game and how the boy continues to verbally attack one of the characters who always loses the fight. The other story line is about how the boy’s paternal aunt comes to live with him and his mom after a fight with her husband. The boy watches as his mother and aunt argue back and forth about their relationships while also occasionally sharing a drink as they lament their lots

in life. As the two storylines switch back and forth, the boy comes to find the arguments between his mother and aunt to be comical, but is surprised at the end when his mother becomes sad and forlorn after his aunt moves out.

Translated by Jason Woodruff



**A House with a Beautiful
Sunset View and Other
Stories**

Random House Korea, 2009

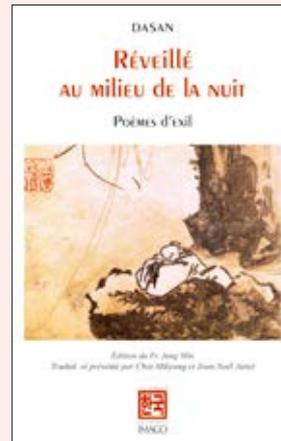
REVIEWS

| FRENCH |

From the Summit to the Abyss: A Long Story of Exile

Réveillé au milieu de la nuit: Poèmes d'exil
(Awoken in the Middle of the Night: Poems of Exile)

by Jeong Yakyong, trans. Choi Mikyung, Jean-Noël Juttet
Editions Imago, 2018, 108 pages



Here, finally translated into French, are the poems of one of the most brilliant, inventive and modern of all nineteenth century Korean thinkers – “Dasan” Jeong Yakyong (1762–1836). These poems of exile form just a small – but deeply moving – part of the immense oeuvre of a universally talented author who has some seventy volumes on a wide variety of subjects to his name. In the introduction, translators Jean-Noël Juttet and Choi Mikyung trace, in broad outline, the magnificent and painful story of his life. Like “Chusa” Kim Jeong-hui, one of the greatest calligraphers of the period, Dasan occupied some of the highest offices of state (he was adviser to a king whose untimely demise prevented a planned break with the stifling rigidity of neo-Confucian tradition), before falling victim to the malicious rumours spread by his enemies. Accused of associating with Catholics, Dasan was sent into exile – a more merciful fate than the death sentence received by his elder brother. He was almost forty when he was sent to Jeolla province, far from the capital, where he

remained for eighteen years.

At the peak of his success, the winds of change were blowing. Dasan was not satisfied by merely embracing foreign influences and studying new technologies, designing machines to save time and effort, creating complex, da Vinci-esque designs featuring wheels and pulleys, or even drawing up the plans for the Suwon Hwaseong fortress (now a UNESCO world heritage site). He situated this research in the wider context of his thoughts on humanity,⁸ considering not only the material needs of humans, but also their profound – that is to say, spiritual – aspirations. In other words, thought about man remained at the centre of his quest for progress. And what daring thought it is. His writing, anchored in his lived experience draws upon his own joys and pains rather than elaborating on abstract theories. Dasan wants to open up to the Other, to help them to live. Here, the Other means the poor, the isolated, the enslaved and the excluded: those invisible people that no one cares about. But it also means foreigners, their culture and thought.

* As the translators point out, one of his most significant treatises on government, in many respects a revolutionary work, has been translated into French as *L'Art de gouverner* by Philippe Thiébaud (Autre Temps, 2007).

All this can be found, and suggested by the most delicate of strokes, in his poems of exile. They speak of nostalgia, the pain of absence, regret and loss. There are visions of the people and places he pines for: his charming young daughter with her graceful movements, or his longed-for home where he used to sit against a paulownia tree and chat with friends. There are occasional eruptions of bitterness, combined with a piercing satire of the ways of the world, the Court and its minions, the meaningless honours sought by the mediocre, and those who spew forth slander and malice in order to hold onto power. He attacks institutions, the civil service examinations and the excesses of Confucianism. Time passes, while he, Dasan, remains on the margins, forgotten, counting his white hairs – so many of them now – and those passing hours, which he can do nothing about. Old age, soon to envelop him, is envisioned as a desiccation of one’s being. But he never forgets the task of inner growth.

Nature, and the joys it brings, is placed in constant opposition with this hollow, inert world: animals and plants, fish and crocodiles, sea monsters, whales and dragons, snakes, the white clouds (drifting and detached like him), storms, rain, the wind, the stars. He writes of daily life in all its simplicity and tranquillity. His poems, the fruit not only of a joy in contemplation that is renewed daily but also of a long internal labour, depict his reality and the emotion it awakens in him. Dasan, like Chusa on the distant island of Jeju, “sees” the drifting cloud not as a symbol of wandering but as a beloved companion.

As explained in the introduction, if Dasan seems close to us today – “all geographical, temporal and cultural distance erased” – it is because of the profound sincerity and simplicity to which these poems attest. The translation renders their graceful ease without stumbling, conveying the exile’s varying and often contradictory states of mind – nostalgia, anger, outrage, admiration, passionate criticism – but also his admirable desire to always keep growing, and to “become more honest”.

Christine Jordis

Editor and Reading Committee Member, Gallimard

Author, *Paysage d'hiver: Voyage en compagnie d'un sage* (2016)

| JAPANESE |

A Way to Understand Love



アーモンド (Almond)

by Sohn Won-pyung, trans. Akiko Yajima

Shodensha, 2019, 267 pages

In Sohn Won-pyung’s *Almond*, a Korean coming-of-age novel, Yunjae, at six years old, witnesses a gang beating of a boy, yet he expresses none of the emotions that one might expect after encountering the gruesome scene. In fact, Yunjae has never laughed or shown any sign of emotion. Later, a visit to the doctor reveals Yunjae’s amygdalae, two almond-shaped neurons located in the temporal lobes of the brain, are smaller than average, and as such, Yunjae doesn’t feel fear or anger, or read others’ emotions. Upon learning this diagnosis, his mother sets about teaching him a multitude of possible social scripts—to express envy when a classmate is showing off a new toy, or to mimic the facial expressions of the person he is talking to—so he will appear “normal” to others. His acerbic grandmother affectionately calls him an “adorable

monster,” an example of an oxymoron that Yunjae comes to realize is commonplace in communication.

After years of estrangement, mother and grandmother reconcile and manage to cobble together a modest living, running a secondhand bookstore from out of their tiny apartment. The musty bookstore, which Yunjae describes as quiet yet filled with the voices of different experiences, quickly becomes a place where he identifies with the feeling of comfort. Then tragedy strikes. On Yunjae’s fifteenth birthday, the family is involved in a random knife attack, resulting in the death of his grandmother and the confinement of his mother to a hospital bed in an unresponsive state. With the help of his kindly upstairs neighbor Dr. Shim and the lessons his mother has embedded in his memory, Yunjae tries to make his way alone in the world.

Enter Gon, a transfer student to Yunjae’s high school class, who has bounced in and out of juvenile detention after tragically being separated from his mother during a trip to the amusement park. Unlike Yunjae, Gon is violent, loud, and angry at the world for depriving him of a family and a happy childhood. Yunjae is oddly drawn to Gon, mainly because he is so transparent and pure of heart that Yunjae can easily read his feelings. Through an unlikely friendship, the two boys find a way to understand something they thought was unlikeliest of all: love.

Almond is Sohn Won-pyung’s debut novel, which won the Changbi Prize for Young Adult Fiction in 2016. It has sold over 300,000 copies in South Korea and, in addition to this Japanese version, is slated for release in English, Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages. Although the novel has been tagged “socially-conscious YA” and has been praised for its criticism of the social media age and the loss of empathy, any didactic thrust it may have feels gentle and assuming, if not altogether imperceptible. Yes, Yunjae falls prey to the cruelty of his classmates for not being “normal,” but the author prefers not to focus on the boy’s victimization but on his effort to understand his classmates’ behaviors and how neurotypical

interactions work.

While the author offers a brief explanation of alexithymia, the condition Yunjae is diagnosed with, she avoids cluttering the novel with medical jargon and research as a way to lend credibility to the protagonist’s depiction; in fact, she makes clear in the endnotes that the portrayal of Yunjae is based on both medical knowledge and her own imagination. Also refreshing is how Sohn does not pathologize Yunjae’s condition as abnormal or problematic. Actually, it is Yunjae who observes, with arresting clarity, the oddness of others’ behaviors. He notes, for example, how easily people throw up their hands at the challenge of fixing remote problems, and in turn, cower in fear at the thought of fixing those nearest to them. There is a devastating eloquence in how Yunjae is able to express the complexities of human behavior and interactions with such simplicity, and through Yunjae’s eyes, the reader is given a different way of looking at the world.

This is a coming-of-age novel that is highly affecting and is sure to delight readers of every age. In the prologue, Yunjae, as narrator, tantalizingly teases the reader by stating that he has no intention of revealing whether the story he is about to tell has a happy or tragic ending. Readers will be so enthralled with finding out that they won’t be able to keep from turning the pages.

Takami Nieda

Translator, *Go* by Kazuki Kaneshiro (2018)

Winner, Freeman Award for Young Adult Literature 2018

I RUSSIAN I

When Worlds Collide



Зарисовки ночной жизни (Sketches of Nightlife)

by Kim Seungok, trans. Sofia Kuzina

Hyperion, 2019, 256 pages

A volume of the Korean writer Kim Seungok's collected prose since the 1960s was published this year by St. Petersburg's prestigious Hyperion press in its Contemporary Korean Literature series. Only two of Kim's stories are readily accessible in English, his earliest, "Seoul: 1964, Winter," and "Record of a Journey to Mujin," and so even the most conscientious reader is faced with the daunting task of having to navigate rudderless across not only three languages, but three cultures and two time periods, all of it without any direction from the original. (Kim stopped writing in 1979, so these stories are also speaking to us across a distance of over forty years!)

That the book's title, *Zarisovki Nochnoi Zhizni* ("impressions," or "sketches," of nightlife), is an adaptation of the title of one of his stories, "Scenes from the Nightlife," speaks volumes of a strongly felt need for contextualization. (Perhaps similarly, in adapting his own "Mujin" into a film, Kim transposed that story's title to the inferior, I think, title of *Mist*). What I mean is, the reader's primary difficulty, of having to figure out "how" to read these stories, is initially disorienting to the point of distraction. We come to the texts having been told that Kim had captured the zeitgeist, what it

felt like to be Korean during the turbulent '60s, with its attendant industrialization, political tyranny, and intellectual ferment, and expect psychological realism and, perhaps, sentimental fiction.

What I believe we have here is nothing of the sort: always ironic, tongue-in-cheek, often caricaturish to the point of verging on "bad" writing. (It is apropos to note Kim's early work as a caricature artist.) Sofia Kuzina's translation is occasionally able to rise to the level of lyricism necessary to capture such flat, minimalist prose, especially when the conclusion achieves a certain pathos, as some of the earlier pieces here do ("His Wife's Body," "Christmas Gift," "The Husband's Pockets"). I am afraid that most don't quite live up to that standard, and the dialogue often reads like a pastiche of clichés and stilted expressions. I can't say if this is so in Korean, but suspect it is not, because the reader is in on the joke. Generally speaking, the book comes across as painting the canvas with broad strokes, slap-sticky, always intentionally artificial. In the West, the best of it would be categorized as post-modernist, experimental, or genre fiction (campy). There is simply no equivalent "in our culture" for Kim's jokey tone, which seems to belong to some earlier, oral tradition of storytelling.

And so it is the later pieces, which stray the furthest afield from realism, that hold, I think, the greatest literary interest. Like “The Ocular Finger,” in which a wife’s desire for a third eye, on her index finger, is fulfilled, these at times adopt the fable for their form. “We Are the Weekly Papers” consists of a conversation between a Humor, a Scandal, and an Erotic rag on a recycling trash pile. Typical is the “prophetic” late short story, “Chun’s World,” which straddles dystopian fantasy, dreamlike folk narrative, and the Absurdism that would be immediately familiar to a Russian reader, through the work of the beloved Russian “surrealist” writer Daniil Kharms whom I have translated into English.

It features advanced telecommunication technology, self-driving cars, artificial wombs, and electromagnetic pulses that disrupt the aforementioned. (The piece has the feeling of social satire, but I am uncertain of even that.) The following incident, or chapter, has Chun’s mother appearing on a national Big Brother “Breakfast with the President” TV program; their talk of some criminal on the loose smacks of Kafka’s *The Trial*. We later learn that he is a serial killer of young women, and then receive a long address apropos of the subject by a “mad scientist,” who also happens to be the expedition leader of Earth’s mission to Mars and the first man born of an artificial womb. All of this proceeds in dream-like, nightmarish fashion, with recurring references to Chun’s own dreams.

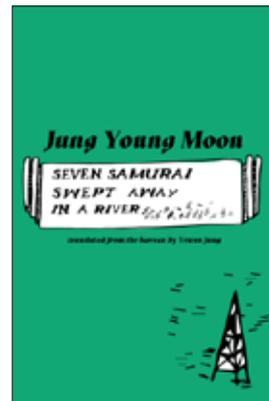
Though difficult for me to judge definitively across two cultural divides, I suspect that Kim’s book is more likely to find sympathetic readers in Russian than in English because of their more closely shared oral traditions. There is a kinship here with the Russian love for telling “anecdotes.” I would also conjecture that Kim’s early study of French literature accounts for another shared heritage, that of the humorous journalistic sketch, “the feuilleton.” If I am correct, then this volume is likely to become a welcome addition in a language that, moreover, counts some half a million ethnic Koreans (the Koryo-saram) among its speakers.

Alex Cigale

Author, *Russian Absurd: the Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (2017)

Free Book Giveaway

Give us your
feedback and
win a copy of
*Seven Samurai
Swept Away in a
River*
by Jung Young Moon



Tell us what you
think of this issue at

KoreanLiteratureNow.com

and stand to win
a free book!

Deadline:
February 29, 2020

TRANSLATORS

Brother Anthony of Taizé has lived in South Korea since 1980. He is professor emeritus at Sogang University and chair professor at Dankook University. He has published over fifty volumes of translations of Korean poetry and fiction. His recent publications include volumes of work by Kim Sa-in, Kim Jong-Gil, Ko Hyeong-ryeol, Jeong Ho-seung and Lee Seong-Bok. He took Korean citizenship in 1994. An Sonjae is his official Korean name. (p. 12)

Hedgie Choi was born in 1994 in Gwangju, South Korea and graduated from Yonsei University in 2018. She is a fellow at the Michener Center for Writers in Austin, Texas. (pp. 1, 4–10, 47–49)

Chung Eun-Gwi is an associate professor in the Department of English Literature and Culture at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. She earned her PhD in poetics at SUNY Buffalo. She has translated many contemporary Korean poets into English. (p. 12)

Amber Hyun Jung Kim is a conference interpreter and translator. She has received multiple LTI grants and the *Korea Times*' 2014 Modern Literature Translation Awards Commendation Prize in Fiction. Her published translations include Park Min-gyu's *Pavane for a Dead Princess* and Eun Hee-kyung's *Nobody Checks the Time When They're Happy*. (pp. 31–33)

Jesse Kirkwood studied modern languages at Oxford before spending a year in Japan on a Tsuzuki Scholarship. He currently works full time as a literary and commercial translator, and is a member of the Unitrad network of independent translators. (pp. 82–83)

Emily Yae Won has translated novels, essays, graphic novels, and children's books into Korean, and translates Korean fiction into English. Recent translations include Cheon Heerahn's "Five Preludes and a Fugue," Kim Soom's "Divorce," Hwang Jungeun's *I'll Go On*, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, Deborah Levy's *Things I Don't Want to Know*, and Joanna Walsh's *Hotel*. (pp. 35–40, 54–57)

Jake Levine is a professor of creative writing at Keimyung University and an instructor at the LTI Korea Translation Academy. You can learn more about him at his website: <http://jakelevine.org>. (pp. 13–17)

Kari Schenk was the co-winner of the *Korea Times*' 2006 Modern Literature Translation Awards Commendation Prize in Fiction. She has regularly contributed translations for this magazine since being

nominated to the LTI Korea Translation Atelier in 2011. Her reviews have appeared in *Wasafiri*, and her translations have been featured in the Modern Korean Literature series issued by ASIA Publishers. She is currently located in Seoul. (pp. 41–45)

Soeun Seo is a poet and translator from South Korea. Her translations have appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Circumference*, and *Poetry and Criticism*. Her original poems can be found in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Potluck Magazine*, *Witch Craft Magazine*, and *Fuck Art, Let's Dance*. (pp. 18–22)

Hyemi Seok is a translator and musical writer/lyricist from South Korea. She earned a BA from Yonsei University and completed the Regular Course at LTI Korea's Translation Academy. Her original works include the musical film *Ordinary Stories* and the musical *J-Nomad*. (pp. 13–17)

Louis Vinciguerra has written a stage adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, and his stage biography of Hermann Hesse, *HH:77-The Magic Spiral*, was part of the US's representation at the 1978 Hesse Centennial Exhibition in West Berlin, Germany. His verse play *Saint Rene* won a special citation in Dragon Teeth Press's International Competition in Poetic Drama. He was also a case study in Marsha Sinetar's *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics*. (pp. 66–79)

Jason Woodruff is a writer and literary translator whose work has been published in *Asia Literary Review*, *Asymptote Journal*, and *Korean Literature Now*. He was a finalist in the PEN Presents East and South-East Asian Literature translation contest. He lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. (pp. 80–81)

Soohyun Yang received a BA from Western University, an MA from Ryerson University, and completed the Regular Course at LTI Korea's Translation Academy. Her translations of poems by Jin Eun-Young, Kim Kyung Ju, Ha Jaeyoun, and Kim Haengsook have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* and *Korean Literature: Stories & Poems*. (pp. 13–17)

Inrae You graduated from Seoul National University of Education and was a teacher for twenty years in South Korea, Japan, and the US. In 1998, she received a Monbusho Fellowship to study child psychology from the Japanese government. In 2001 and 2002, she wrote children's science reference books for Dooji Publishers in Seoul. (pp. 66–79)

KOREA **KF**
FOUNDATION

You won't want to just flip through



Everything you want to
know about Korea

KOREANA

Your reliable source for the latest information on Korea's culture and arts

Koreana is a quarterly magazine that specializes in Korea's culture and arts, which is published in nine languages, with various articles about Korean culture, arts, lifestyle, natural environment, literary works, and notable artistic figures. [www.koreana.or.kr]

For subscription or general inquiries, please register online or submit email: koreana@kf.or.kr

AN-MEOW HASEYO?

Hoomans, we want to see pictures of your lovely doggos, puppers, pupperinos, your cattos, kitters, kittehs, your fishes, parrots, rabbits, your hamsters, chickens, ferrets, or any other animal companion who's the love of your life.



Tweet or gram a picture of your animal best friend with a short & sweet caption telling us why you love them, along with the hashtag **#KLNanimalfam**.

Don't forget to tag us **@KoreanLitNow**.

* Bonus points if you sneak in KLN's winter issue into the picture!

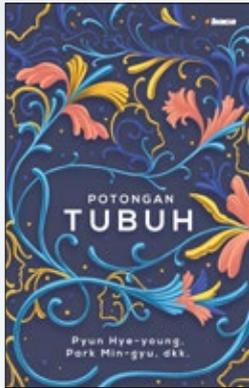


The 20 people with the best pictures and captions will receive
a \$50 AMAZON US GIFT CARD OR
a KRW 50,000 STARBUCKS GIFT CARD



**Doo dis
Paw-sitvely!**

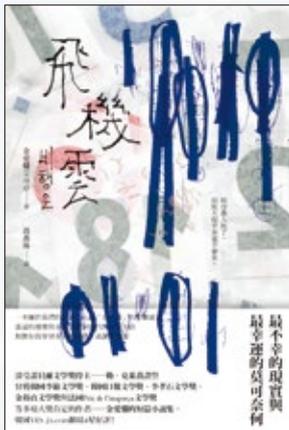
**Deadline
February 29, 2020**



Potongan Tubuh

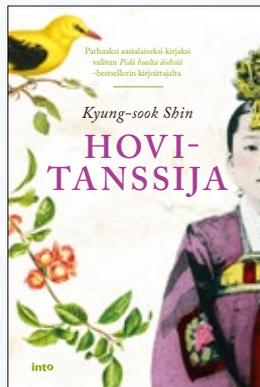
By Pyun Hye Young, Park Min-gyu, et al.
Trans. Dwita Rizki Nientyas
Indonesia, PT Bentara Aksara Cahaya, 2019

NEW TRANSLATIONS OF KOREAN LITERATURE



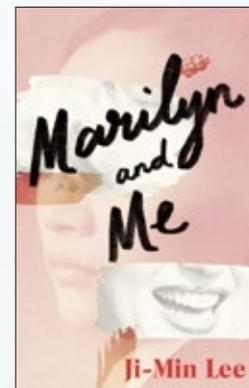
Feijiyun by Kim Ae-ran

Trans. Feng Yenchu
Taiwan, Kate Publishing, 2019



Hovitanssija by Shin Kyung-sook

Trans. Taru Salminen
Finland, Into Kustannus Oy, 2019



Marilyn and Me by Lee Jimin

Trans. Chi-Young Kim
UK, Fourth Estate, 2019