

Korean poems for an unpublished anthology

Translated by Brother Anthony (and others)

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Im Hwa 임화

The Black Sea Straits 현해탄

The waves of this sea
have been high since long ago.

Yet our youths
excelled in courage, not fear.
Mountain fires
have driven baby deer
down into rough fields.

Once past Tsushima
there is nothing in sight but a strip of horizon.
Here the rough waves of the Pacific and
the north winds from the continent in their south-bound course collide.

Waves higher than Mont Blanc,
rain and wind and fog and clouds and lightning and
in Asia's skies even the stars are dim,
sometimes red signal lights are hoisted on our land.

Would our youths ever
have set out on this sea's wild waves
in quest of peace or happiness?

Learning to smoke on the first crossing,
then learning love on the second crossing,
learning to like the feel of money on the next—
not one of our youths did that.

Always our youths
crossed over embracing hope
then returned with determination.
They grew up like flowering stalks

amidst tales told beneath the village tree,
lullabies from secluded rural streams.

But now
white faces have grown hard
in foreign water, wind and rain,
while onerous tasks
have bent upright backs like farming work.

I know the pitiful names of several people
who have been scattered on this sea
like petals.

This one crossed over but never returned.
This one returned and set about dying.
Of some there's no knowing if they are alive or dead.
Others wept for pain of defeat.
—If there were any among them who shamefully sold hope, resolve and pride, I have no wish
to remember that now.

All I want
is to sing this sea
in union with the honor of all those youths
who remained constantly virile
amidst north winds from the continent
rougher still than the sea.

Even on days of bitter funeral
when they buried deep in the ground
all youth's fresh joys and hopes
the Black Sea Straits never once lowered
a black curtain of mourning before those youths' eyes.

Still today, our young men, our youths
like hard-working children
ceaselessly come and go across this sea
and still tomorrow, too,
the Black Sea Straits will be those youths' straits.

They are ours for ever.

Deep down in cheap cabins
grimy beds soaked up mothers' tears
and fathers' sighs fogged the feeble lamplight.
In the painful, bitter weeping
of babes that have lost their parents
what sin was there?
I remember vividly the foreign word
that put to silence the sound of weeping.

Oh! Black Sea Straits, Black Sea Straits,
sea that we can never forget, everlastingly,
together with our destiny.

Youths!
You spurned the great waves of the Black Sea Straits
more lightly than pebbles.
Yet was the early spring breeze
blowing toward the Kanmon Straits
so much warmer than our land's north winds?
Were the waves from the continent
on Pusan's dear wharves
that much lighter than those of the Black Sea Straits?

Oh! One day
one day far far in the future,
together with our history of pain
I know that your wretched lives and hidden names
will be written large.
You of the 1890s,
the 1920,
the 1930s,
the 1940s,
the 19xxs,
.....
When the morning star shines on your names

inscribed upon a huge, rough memorial stone in the ruins
left when all has become past history
the waves of the Black Sea Straits
will whisper your life stories
among beautiful legends,
like when we as children
used to drive shoals of fish into the shallows.

But meanwhile,
we are still on the high waves of the sea.

Note: *Genkai-nada* (玄界灘 Genkai Straits ‘black frontier straits’) is the Japanese name of the south-western tip of the East Sea, the straits between Kyushu and Korea. Its Korean name is *Hyŏnhae-t’an* (玄海灘 ‘black sea straits’), the title of this poem. Tsushima Island divides the straits into two parts. Today it is commonly known in English as the Korea Strait. It was the shortest and therefore the cheapest journey by boat between Korea and Japan and in the Japanese colonial period many poor Koreans crossed it on their way to Japan in the hope of finding work.

이상화

병적계절(病的季節)

기러기 제비가 서로 엇갈림이 보기에 이리도 설은가.
귀뚜라미 떨어진 나뭇잎을 부여잡고 긴 밤을 새네.
가을은 애달픈 목숨이 나누어질까 울 시절인가 보다.

가없는 생각 째 모를 꿈이 그만 하나 둘 찾아지려는가.
홀아비같이 헤매는 바람떼가 한 배 가득 구비치네.
가을은 구슬픈 마음이 앓다 못해 날떨 시절인가 보다.

하늘을 보아라 야윈 구름이 떠돌아다니네.
땅 위를 보아라 젊은 조선이 떠돌아다니네.

Yi Sang-Hwa 이상화

Morbid Season 병적계절

translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Peter Lee

Geese and swallows never meet, their ways never cross—why is that so sad to my mind?
Clutching a leaf from which a cricket has fallen, I watch through the night.
Autumn seems to be a season for weeping lest sorrowful lives be separated.

Is it time now for my endless thoughts, ceaseless dreams to subside one by one?
Swarming winds that have lost their way like a widower rush into my boat, make it roll.
Autumn seems to be a season when the doleful heart is so sick it runs wild.

Behold the sky. A haggard cloud goes wandering.
Behold the earth. Youthful Chosŏn goes wandering.

Kim Tong-Hwan

Night at the Frontier (Part 1)
(국경의 밤 Kukgyöung-üi Pam)

By 김동환 (Kim Tong-Hwan)

1.

“Ah, has he got safely across?
In dead of night has my husband crossed
the Tuman River without accident?”

“Out there, dark sentries wearing greatcoats
come and go,
guarding the frontier marked by the river bank—
up and down they march busily,
has he got across safely without being discovered?”
After sending off the cartload of smuggled salt,
all night long the tense and anxious young woman,
whose hand loses strength while turning the spinning wheel
simply stares into the fish-oil lamp, that she fills with a sigh,
and the northern winter’s night slowly deepens.

2.

A sharp sound suddenly rings out: “O – i!”
seeming to emerge from under the ground.
Taking it for a military password signaling the approach of something from the west,
the villagers, stunned, shudder in fear;
the wife alone reckons it’s the sound as her husband is arrested,
strikes her breast, sighs a long sigh.
It was only the voices of forest rangers coming down late
delayed by a blizzard after burning charcoal.

3.

Wrapped in the mournful soughing of the wind

that sounded like a sick man's last groans,
a loud cracking sound split the night sky,
followed by the sound of noisy foot-steps running.

While people turn pale and hold their breath, suspecting another disaster had occurred,
the wife alone reckons it's her husband, struck down before he could cross the river,
and grasping the door-frame, she weeps, sobbing.

It was only the sound of fishermen cutting through the ice
in the coldest time of winter, starlight permitting.

4.

Fire is visible, a crimson fire
over on the river's far side
by the guards' sentry-post down on the opposite shore
a fire of burning corn stalks is visible.

In the light from the darkly burning bonfire
guards, drunk on rye liquor,
"Moon, O Moon!" singing poems by Yi T'ae-baek.

5.

Ah, the night slowly grows darker.
Languidly, the night at the frontier grows darker all alone.
In the clear sky, great flakes of snow all shaken off,
a few stars shine pale,
blinking like the eyes of a girl who has lost her mother
and on the snow-swept river bank
the bare trunk of a white poplar
standing alone, dances, embracing the wind.
Even the sound of its breaking branches
makes the woman's heart leap, leap for dread.

6.

The electric lines are weeping with a sorrowful ring,
the telegraph lines crossing nations weep bitterly.
Houses, poplars, mountain valleys, donkeys in stables, all cry with them.
Today is so cold

there are almost no people making their way to Manchuria.
Those people from Hamkyōng who night after night,
bearing bundles on their backs, cross over, lonely,
cross the riverbed covered by that sheet of ice,
there is almost no sign of them on the move tonight.
In Hoiryōng the last sound of cars has already died away.

7.

In the hills beyond
where not a flower blossoms even when spring comes
the snow is swept by the wind
until in the middle of the river
it forms a tomb high as that of Qin Shi Huang
then soon it digs another Anapchi pond and escapes.
Sky, earth, all wrapped in darkness, only moonlight like platinum
stretches, as snow for 500 *li*, as moonlight for 3,000 *li*.
This winter's night over the Tuman River is so cold, so silent.

Yi Yong-ak

Chöllla lass
(전라도 가시내 Chollado Kasinae)

by 이용악 (Yi Yong-ak)

You grew up kissing soft clams with colorful shells,
your eyes are blue as the sea, your face lightly tanned,
little lass.

And I am a lad from Hamkyōng who crossed the iron bridge
with freezing feet.

The sound of the wind and of tigers howling are not so fearful now.
Beneath this feeble lamp I long to drink down the cares crowding in like fog,
but I feel as though some appalling news will come rushing in,
in this Manchurian tavern where I cannot trust thick walls or neighbors.

I have come harboring all kinds of curse.
I have come through fierce blizzards.
Little lass,
as I wander down the shady woodland lanes that lie in your breast,
pour wine, pour to the brim daintily
and steep it softly in your story of destitution, please.

You crossed the Tuman River three months ago, you say?
Surely every hill you crossed, mile after mile after mile was aflame with scarlet leaves then?
Still, you must have hidden your face in your skirt, lonely and sorrowful?
You must have wept like a crane for two days and nights
as the train went hurrying as if in the clouds, the windows must have misted over?

Seemingly intoxicated by the gentle breaking of waves,
you sometimes smile a frozen smile, silently showing dimples,
little lass,
about to weep, about to weep, never weeping Chöllla lass,
let me summon out-of-season spring with a few words in your dialect.
Go back for just a moment to your homeland,

your pink pigtail-ribbon with its dirty finger marks flapping in the wind.

As soon as the icy road grows light

I shall be setting briskly off across the snow-swept plains

I shall vanish without so much as a song.

I shall vanish without a trace.

Offerings in moonlight
(달 있는 제사 Tal Innŭn Chesa)

By 이용악 (Yi Yong-ak)

Walking on moonlight he will come from afar.
If I join my hands and make three prostrations he will come.
Mother wept,
wept all night long,
two drops of dew in a white gourd flower.

Kim Yǒng-nang (김영랑)

The Cuckoo (杜鵑 Tukyŏn)

Little bird, weary of a lifetime in rancor and sorrow,
you cough blood while singing, then swallow it again;
you came to this world to carve it deep with sorrow by your blood,
your tears have constantly clouded a myriad ages.

This southern region is secluded, you can hide in exile;
The moonlight is so dazzling, shrouding this dawn in desolation,
your song at such a dawn startles fish a thousand leagues under the sea,
makes infant stars at the sky's edge shudder.

Tears pooling and pooling late at night for so many years
that I could never wash away, they simply pooled and flowed,
and I—sorrowful, lonesome, pining away—
finally grew weary of the wine-glass you kept filling;
songs from the beyond that echo near in this fearsome dawn,
death's boastful voice circling the foot of the city walls!
That pale lantern, overshadowing the moonlight's heart, withdraws sobbing.
This long-since emaciated, gaunt heart likewise longs to go.

As your song of anguish makes every red heart wither then bloom,
how could Ch'unhyang avoid death in prison in highest spring?
In ancient times a deposed child king, expelled from the palace,
wept all alone in a mountain valley, then followed you;
on the south coast opposite Gogeu Island, on a bitter homeward path
the sound of a pony that had come a thousand leagues halted, wearied,
and a scholar's haggard face floated in blue waters.
There your regret-filled voice conjured death for him.

Even without your song, this world is so sorrowful, so wracked;
early in spring the groves put on green, bathe in grass's fragrance.
While a crescent moon, hung on slender bamboo fronds, sheds pathetic bright darkness,
you tremble, hoarse with weeping, overwhelmed with pity;
without that sobbing, you would surely have died, oh, soul of anguish!

When you call late at night, thick-clustered azalea flowers fall,
vague mountain ranges draw back lightly,
and little villages collapse, overwhelmed.

Note: The name of the bird evoked in this poem is usually translated “cuckoo” although “nightingale” might be more suitable as it is heard by night. Its plaintive song is said to be the lament of the spirit of a former ruler of China’s Shu Han kingdom who died in exile and longs to return to his lost kingdom. Gogeu Island lies just off the coast close to Gangjin, the poet’s home. In times past it often served as a place of banishment for scholars exiled from Seoul for political reasons. Ch’unhyang is the heroine of a tale of faithful love; the scholar she loves has gone to Seoul to pursue his career but she promises to wait for him; a cruel magistrate has her imprisoned when she refuses to submit to his desire. In most versions, there is a happy ending but in another poem, Kim Yŏng-Nang suggests that she died in prison.

Ko Un

Homeland stars
(조국의 별 Chokuk-ŭi Pyöl)

By 고은 (Ko Ŭn) Ko Un

Gazing up at one star, let's stay youthful.
In the darkness
let's be our children's vibrant hearts.
With hearts brimming full,
let's be hundreds of light years of our fatherland in the middle of night.
Although we may fall, bodies wounded,
now youth is the nearest thing to truth.
All you who are alive on this land, let's stay young.
Tears streaming from our eyes all through the long night,
our fatherland
is a joy overflowing between that star and each of us.
Gazing up at a star, let's stay youthful!
A burning star of our fatherland
that cannot be disgraced,
let's make it be
the day for your children and mine.

Yes, the end of this beauty,
birth always comes at the end. Let's be morning.
Our fatherland where morning's sunlight vibrates!
Let's be the youth of an encompassing unity that embraces here and today.

김춘수

인동잎

눈 속에서 초겨울의
붉은 열매가 익고 있다.
서울 근교에서는 보지 못한
공지가 하얀 작은 새가
그것을 쪼아먹고 있다.
越冬하는 인동잎의 빛깔이
이루지 못한 인간의 꿈보다도
더욱 슬프다.

Kim Ch'un-Su 김춘수

Honeysuckle Leaves 인동잎

In the snow, early winter's
red berries are ripening.
Little white-tailed birds
I have never seen around Seoul
are pecking them up.
The color of the hibernating honeysuckle leaves
is more sorrowful
than someone's unfulfilled dreams.

만폭동 萬瀑洞

이병기

골이 아늑하매 해도 별양 다스하다
새로 드는 단풍 잎마다 빨갛고
바위도 희기도 희도 물은 몹시 프르다

섬긴 덤불 속에 머루 다래 드리우고
시드는 산초山草는 뿌리에 살 오르고
미미히 이는 골바람 되우 상긋하도다

새긴 바둑판에 그대로 남아 있다
청학靑鶴은 어데 간고 신선이 따로 없다
바위에 고요히 앉아 물소리를 들어라

Yi Pyöng-Gi 이병기

Manp'okdong 만폭동 萬瀑洞

The valley is snug, yet quite warm.
Every leaf of the just-turning maples glows red,
rocks are white as white can be, the streams are extremely blue.

In rough thickets wild grapes and berries hang
the roots of withering undergrowth grow plump
the light valley breeze smiles sweetly.

I linger on at my engraved paduk board.
Where have the cranes gone? This is immortality.
Sitting quietly on a rock, listen to the stream.

바다 9

바다는 뿔뿔이
달아나려고 했다.

푸른 도마뱀 떼같이
재재발렸다.

꼬리가 이루
잡히지 않았다.

흰 발톱에 찢긴
산호(珊瑚)보다 붉고 슬픈 생채기!

가까스로 몰아다 부치고
변죽을 둘러 손질하여 물기를 씻었다.

이 애쓴 해도(海圖)에
손을 씻고 떼었다.

찰찰 넘치도록
돌돌 구르도록

휘둥그란히 받쳐 들었다!
지구(地球)는 연(蓮)잎인 양 오프라들고 펴고

Chǒng Chi-yong 정지용

Sea 9 바다 9

Scattering, the sea
was intent on making its escape.

It was agitated
like a pack of green lizards.

There was no way

a tail could be caught.

Torn by white toenails, sad scratches more crimson than coral.

Surging painfully, breaking,
it reshaped the shoreline, removed the moisture.

It washed its hands, withdrew
from this labored chart,

then to make it brim full,
roll back again,

it held and raised it roundly!
The globe wrinkled like a lotus leaf . . . unfolded . . .

All poems from here until "Snow Falling in the South" were translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Eun-Gwi Chung

Kim Ki-rim 김기림

Weather Chart 기상도에서

World's Morning 세계의 아침

Sprouting

scales,

the straits

came alive like

a snake's back,

the youthful mountain ranges robed in colorful Arabian garb.

On the shore the wind was sleek like a swathe of Saracen silk,

the arrogant landscape lay sprawled at the climax of seven in the morning.

Spraying old fragrance

over the panting fields,

the ringing of a church's rusty bell.

Calves, go back to the fields.

Again today a girl sees off a steamer heading out to sea.

A station close to the border.

An international train stamping its feet,

impatient for the conductor's signal.

At every window

ladies' twisted faces,

weeping for unspoken farewells.

Airliners have scattered like motes of dust in the air above the continent

Members of a genteel family are heading for Geneva

to test the quality of long-range radio broadcasts from home.

Champagne. The deck. "Goodbye!" "See you soon!"

The crew members entrust their sighs to the sirens

and return to their stations.

Colored ribbons fluttering from the wharf.
The colored ribbon in that woman's hair.

Homing pigeons

set off from the cabin roof
toward the capital city.

. . . East of Sumatra. . . . 5 kilometers out to sea nobody among us has a cold.
We are close to the Equator. . . . 10am on the 20th. . . .

Sim Hun 심훈

When That Day Comes 그 날이 오면

If that day comes, when that day comes,
Mount Samgak will rise and dance joyfully,
the River Han's waters will surge and seethe, and if only that day
comes before my life's end,
like the crows flying in the night sky I will
strike the curfew bell in Chong-no with my head, make it ring.
Suppose my skull breaks into shattered fragments,
what regret would remain, since I died for joy?

Once that day comes, once that day has come
if I should fall sprawling as I race in tears along the wide road
in front of Kwanghwa-mun,
since my heart might well burst for over-much joy,
I will take a sharp knife, strip the skin from off my body,
make a huge drum, raise it high on my shoulders
and lead the way at the head of your parade.
If I could but hear those roaring voices
before I collapse, I will depart in peace.

Manhae Han Yong-Un 만해 한 용운

I saw you 당신을 보았습니다

Ever since you went away, I cannot forget you.
The reason is much more for my sake than for your sake.

I have no land to plow and sow, I reap no harvest.
Having nothing for supper, I went next door to borrow some millet or a potato but the owner said: "Beggars have no character.
People without character have no lives. Helping you would be a crime."
Having heard that, as I came away, in my flowing tears I saw you.

Since I own no house, and for other reasons too, I am not officially registered.
"Someone not registered has no rights. How can you be faithful when you have no human rights?"
So one general tried to insult me.
After I resisted him, at the very moment my hatred for others was turning into sorrow for myself, I saw you.

Ah! I understood that all ethics, virtue, law are merely smoke offering worship to the sword and to gold.
As I hesitated, wondering if I should accept eternal love, or leave a blot on the first page of human history, or turn to drink, I saw you.

Love's Last Act 사랑의 끝판

Yes, yes, I'm coming, I'm coming, at once.

Alas, I meant to light a lamp but I've put the taper in backwards. What will become of me? Those people are going to blame me.

My dear, I am so busy. You scold me for being lazy. Alas, listen to that! You say, "Being busy is being lazy."

Why should I be discontented on hearing your scolding? Only I fear that the strings of your kōmun'go have lost their tempo.

My dear, after crossing a skyless sea, it is the spilling dawn, not moonlight, that is effacing the elm tree's shade.

The chicken on its perch is shaking its wings.

The harnassed horse is stamping its hooves.

Yes, yes, I'm coming, I'm coming, at once.

Kim Hyŏn-sŭng 김현승

Plane tree 플라타너스

When I ask you if you are acquainted with dreams,
plane tree,
your head is at once drenched with blue sky.

You are incapable of affection,
plane tree,
but with what you have you extend shade.

As I approached along a far away path,
lonesome, all alone,
plane tree,
you travelled that path with me.

Now I wish I could breathe my soul
deep into your roots before I leave, but,
plane tree,
like you, I am no god!

The day we reach the end of our wearisome journey,
plane tree,
is black loam set apart in some far away place to receive you?
My only wish is to protect you, be a neighbor to you,
that place is a path opened by beautiful stars and my loving window.

Pak Mok-Wöl 박목월

Orchid 난

I want to take a last farewell now.

At present, while I still have some leisure, with both hands

I would like to give back the remains of what was granted.

How beautiful is

a leisurely farewell.

Like cultivating an orchid,

quietly coming alive

out of what was regretfully cast aside,

extending branches

and then that longing

producing its own bud,

ah,

I want to exhale

a delicate fragrance in a distant place.

Pak Yong-Nae 박용래

Evening Snow 저녁눈

Snowflakes falling in late evening through beneath the oil lamp of a wide-eaved house.

Snowflakes falling in late evening through beneath a pony's hooves.

Snowflakes falling in late evening through to the sound of fodder being chopped.

Snowflakes falling in late evening through only round outlying empty lots.

Pak In-Hwan 박인환

The Black River 검은 강

In the name of so-called God
we tried to find our last route.

One day, with the sound of a military chorus
on the station forecourt ringing in our ears,
we sat in a train headed in the opposite direction
to those going off to die,
and glanced at novels exhausted like lust.

Regions passing like the wind now,
where every kind of impure craving is reflected;
expressionless, farmers' sons set off
for the battlefields of life and death
full of explosions and cordite fumes.

The moon is bleaker than desolation
Far off, freedom's citadel
built by human blood
on which we focus our eyes—
it has nothing to do with folk retreating like us.

In the name of so-called God,
in that moon we saw
a bleak, black river flowing

Han Ha-Un 한하운

Ch'olla-do Road 전라도 길

--The road to Sorok Island

Onward, ever onward, along earthen tracks,
nothing but stifling heat.

Encountering an unknown friend,
glad meeting of leper with leper.

Once past the Ch'ŏnan junction,
the gourd-like sun lingers over the western hills.

Onward, ever onward, along earthen tracks,
swaggering into the stifling heat,
onward.

Take off a shoe,
take off a jikatabi beneath a willow tree
and find another toe's gone.

Until it's time to cut off the remaining two toes,
onward, onward, a thousand *li* down distant Ch'ŏlla-do roads.

Barley Flute 보리피리

Blowing a barley flute,
a springtime hill,
yearning for home,
Pil-nalliri

Blowing a barley flute,
blue mountains in flower
yearning for childhood,
Pil-nalliri

Blowing a barley flute,
amidst crowded streets,
yearning for a human touch,
Pil-nalliri

Blowing a barley flute,
roaming for years over hills and vales,
past hills of tears
Pil-nalliri

Hwang Dong-Gyu 황동규

Snow Falling in the South 三南에 내리는 눈

Pongjun is crying, ignorantly, ignorantly,
quite ignorantly—ah, if he only knew Chinese,
if he only knew how to cry gently.
Great kings follow after kings,
and great kings' whips!
Those horses often crossing frontiers in winter fog
with no token authorizing a change of steeds,
ground cracking open like fan-ribs,
guns roaring like kids with smashed faces,
if he knew he'd be rubbing his cheeks with icy snow, alone,
he might have go up Kyeryong-san mountain, quietly absorbed himself in farming,
absorbed, skillful with Chinese scythe or Japanese scythe,
but snow is falling, on the stone bridge we cross thoughtlessly
in the shade of the hovel where those brother's father is sick in secret.
Listen carefully, snow is falling thoughtlessly, under a boringly lowering sky,
ignorantly, ignorantly.

Kim Yong-T'aek

Sömjin River 1

Look as you follow the Sömjin River in drought.
Though people draw and draw from it, Chöllä's vein-like
streams keep flowing into it unceasingly
and on its twilit banks, as the sun is setting,
white clover flowers blossom like balls of rice
and vetch flowers like glowing charcoal bow their heads.
On river banks no map ever mentions,
on plants no book of flora mentions,
it draws and sets darkness,
then hangs floral lamps
brightening sunburned brows.
Look as you follow the Sömjin River
that, after flowing and flowing, if it thirsts,
summons the streams on their way to Yöngsan River,
takes them longingly in a bone-crunching embrace,
as it twists its way round Chiri Mountain's stubby waist.
How could the Sömjin River ever dry up,
even if a few louts come rushing to draw from it?
Once Chiri Mountain has washed its face in the twilit river,
risen again and laughed aloud,
it looks toward Mudüng Mountain and asks: Is that not true?
Then Mount Mudüng, bathed in the glow of twilight, replies: Of course it is,
and nods its bright brow. Just watch it,
as you follow the Sömjin River, look.
How could the Sömjin River ever dry up
even if a few ignorant bastards draw from it?

김용택

섬진강 1

가문 섬진강을 따라가며 보라
퍼가도 퍼가도 전라도 실핏줄 같은
개울물들이 끊기지 않고 모여 흐르며
해 저물면 저무는 강변에
쌀밥 같은 토끼풀꽃,
숯불 같은 자운영꽃 머리에 이어주며
지도에도 없는 동네 강변
식물도감에도 없는 풀에
어둠을 끌어다 주이며
그을린 이마 흰하게
꽃등도 달아준다
흐르다 흐르다 목메이면
영산강으로 가는 물줄기를 불러
뼈 으스러지게 그리워 열싸안고
지리산 뭉툭한 허리를 감고 돌아가는
섬진강을 따라가며 보라
섬진강물이 어디 몇 놈이 달려들어
퍼낸다고 마를 강물이더냐고,
지리산이 저문 강물에 얼굴을 씻고
일어서서 꺾꺾 웃으며
무등산을 보며 그렇지 않느냐고 물어보면
노을 떠 무등산이 그렇다고 흰한 이마 꼬덕이는
고갯짓을 바라보며
저무는 섬진강을 따라가며 보라
어디 몇몇 애비 없는 후레자식들이
퍼간다고 마를 강물인가를

Hwang Ji-U

Road

The thought that life
is a road that can only be traveled
at the price of some humiliation.

As you go traveling around
all the roads throughout our land,
every propitious grave-site is a guard-post.

The wake left behind by the belly of a ship
passing through the Hallyö Channel was a road,
a foam-like road.

Let all the people in the world who are suffering
from having nothing to worry about join me here.
Here, where the road turned into foam as I went along,
the anchor I dropped, was my snare.

길

삶이란
얼마간 굴욕을 지불해야
지나갈 수 있는 길이라는 생각

돌아다녀보면
朝鮮八道,
모든 명당은 초소다

한려수도, 내항선이 배때기로 긴 자국
지나가고 나니 길이었구나
거품 같은 길이어

세상에, 할 고민 없어 괴로워하는 자들아

다 이리로 오라
가다보면 길이 거품이 되는 여기
내가 내린 땀, 내 땀이었구나

Sim Hun 심훈 (1901-1936)

When That Day Comes 그 날이 오면

translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé and Eun-Gwi Chung

If that day comes, when that day comes,
Mount Samgak will rise and dance joyfully,
the River Han's waters will surge and seethe, and if only that day
comes before my life's end,
like the crows flying in the night sky I will
strike the curfew bell in Chong-no with my head, make it ring.
Suppose my skull breaks into shattered fragments,
what regret would remain, since I died for joy?

Once that day comes, once that day has come
if I should fall sprawling as I race in tears along the wide road
in front of Kwanghwa-mun,
since my heart might well burst for over-much joy,
I will take a sharp knife, strip the skin from off my body,
make a huge drum, raise it high on my shoulders
and lead the way at the head of your parade.
If I could but hear those roaring voices
before I collapse, I will depart in peace.

Sim Hun

Dream of Frenzy 광란(狂亂)의 꿈

translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Blow, blow!

From the height of the sky

Come plunging, west wind,

Drive your shaft into the ground,

Engulf everything and make it spin.

Like a millstone turning in the head.

It's the end of the world. Come, blow!

Pour, pour!

Falling headlong like the sea,

Thick raindrops like a waterfall,

Pour slanting down unceasingly,

Wash and rinse away

Everything on earth

That man-cubs have trampled!

Lightning, flash,

Crack, Crash, Boom,

Thunderbolts, explode in balls of fire,

Demolish churches,

Topple idols, statues

Smash at a touch

Memorials, eulogies, everlasting tributes in stone,

Baptize with thunderbolts

All that claims to be holy.

Earthquake, earthquake, great earthquake!

Tree roots rising to the sky,

Great rocks rolling down,

Fireballs surging up from the Earth's heart,

The Earth split in two,

Everything turned upside down, overturned.

Fire, fire!
Burn off the powdered faces of young girls,
Scorch off the lips
That say 'I love you.'
Destroy the history of mankind piled along the roadside
Starting with the first page,
Burn completely, utterly,
The ten million volumes recording lies.

Roaring, roaring!
Houses collapse and mountains crumble.
Seeds of six billion people
Thunder, shout.
People grind their teeth,
Biting at human flesh,
A sound of famished beasts growling
As they fight and bite at bones!
The cawing of crows that gnaw at skeletons!

Flames flare up,
Engulf the whole earth.
Crimson tongues lick the sky.
Everything has died,
Has died forever, forever.
Honor, desire, power, savagery, civilization—

A sound of wind, of rain!
As the sun falls, the stars scatter,
The land weeps, the sea boils.
Everything is reduced to its elements,
All that remains is empty space.

Oh, mankind that was has been destroyed!
Oh, the universe that was has finally been reborn!

(October 1923.)

Kim Chi-ha

Empty mountain

Empty mountain.
Empty mountain
nobody will ever
climb again.

Lonesome, naked mountain
lashed by sun and winds,
ah, empty mountain

Remote mountain we can never set out for,
not even in a bier, once we die and cease to be,
empty mountain.

Too far off.
The midday struggle too wearying.
Hidden at present
deep deep down in that soil, in that silent massif,
hidden, burning charcoal, no-one expects tomorrow
to be a burning flame.

You wail as you grasp a handful of soil,
as you die in that mountain of destined death,
endlessly die
in the mountain,
that far-off mountain, ah

Do not expect a flame.
Do not expect tomorrow to be
a fresh green pine.

Kang Ŭn-gyo

I Love you

I never knew then
that an empty chair is waiting for someone.
See how very smooth the chair's brow has become.
See how the chair's legs have become so scarred.
I never knew it then—
that shoes complete that path.
See those shoes' inner heart.
See that dark shadow sitting crouched there
waiting for the light.
I never knew then
that the apple's cheek is so red
because it has touched the wind's soft thighs.
I never knew there were flowers within flowers.
I never knew
that the sunset flocks of birds lapped the nape of sunrise.
I thought that flowers were outside flowers.
I thought that sunrise looked askance at sunset.
I thought that time existed in a clock.
I thought there was hope within hope.
But ah, I never knew then
that hope is the hope of despair.
That the shoulders of hope as it leaves despair's room
are infinitely plump.

I love you.

Kim Nam-Ju

A handful of ash

It's a flower. It's blood.
It's blood. It's a flower.
The flower is invisible.
The blood is invisible.
Where is the flower?
Where is the blood?
Is the blood sleeping in the flower?
Is the flower sleeping in the blood?

It's a flower. It's a soul.
It's blood. It's flesh.
The soul is invisible.
The flesh is invisible.
Where is the flower's soul?
Where is the blood's flesh?
Is a soul lodged in the flower?
Does the flesh flow in the blood?
Is the soul growing the flower?
Is the flesh making the blood flow?
Ah flower! Ah soul!
Ah blood! Ah flesh!

Have you ever
thrown the soul
into blazing flames?
Did you throw the flesh
into the sea's abyss?
How is the soul burning the flower
in the flames of death?
How is the flesh making the blood flow
in the waves' abyss?

It's a flower. It's blood.

It's flesh. It's a soul.
How did you treat the flesh
in the realm of the soul?
How did you treat the soul
in the flowerbed of the blood?
How did the waves' silence, the fire's song,
the soul and the flesh all meet
and sing in chorus with the flower and the blood?
Did they burn black like a piece of charcoal,
vanish with a handful of ash?

Setting off at dawn
cutting across ruins
did you meet twilight?
What did you see
on twilight's hill?
Did you see a ship sinking?
Did you see a pillar of fire ascending?
What did the sinking and pillar of fire look like?
Like a flower?
Like blood?
Like death?
Did you
descending twilight's hill
cutting across ruins
did you wait for yet another
dawn? Did you see
the moon disappearing from the western sky
as the sun rose in the east?
Dead stars
stars on their way to death,
stars waiting for death:
did you pray on twilight's hill
for the resurrection of moon and stars?

Did you spend winter
in a manner worthy of winter?
Did you

greet a springlike spring?
How does the winter make blood flow
and melt the frozen ground?
How does spring raise flowers
out of ruins? For what does barley
whisper in the snow
brow to brow on winter's
and spring's hillsides?
Why does barley spring up more spryly
if it's trampled down?
How do weeds put down roots
and flourish in barren ground?
How does the dog-rose pierce through rocks
and increase like thorns?
Why does mould breed life in a dark room
and grow in secret like leaven?
What is the bamboo shoot preparing underground?
Is it sharpening bamboo spears
planning to stab at the sky with the snake?

Do you know
how strong are the labor pains
of winter nights pregnant with spring?
Do you know
how the flesh makes the blood flow
how the soul makes the flower grow
how flesh and soul meet
and sing in chorus with the flower and the blood?

Ah flower! Ah blood!
Ah blood! Ah flower!
In the flower blood is flowing.
In the blood a flower can be seen.
In the flower flesh can be seen.
In the blood the soul flows.
It's a flower. It's blood.
It's blood. It's a flower.
That's it!

Mister Poet's words

Those people took hold of me,
hugging their own navels at the same time. They said
they would give me a penname, as though that was really funny,
addressed me as "Oy, Robber Poet,"
and as "Hey, Poet Robber," laughing gleefully as they did so.
I let them do as they wished.

Once night had come, they grew serious,
started to question me. They tied me to a chopping board,
stripped off my skin, scooped away my flesh, picked out my bones, asking:

— How did you know there was a golden axe in that house?

— What did you intend to steal from Chairman Choi's house?

— Why on earth did you break into that big house in broad daylight?

— How many times have you visited North Korea?

I answered them:

I merely exchanged an iron axe for a gold one.

I didn't enter it to steal anything. I went in to recover
the people's sweat and blood that the big conglomerates had taken.

You say the world's gotten crooked, but shouldn't I speak the truth at least?

At that, they hugged their own navels again

and started to laugh gleefully as though it was really funny.

— Right, our Mister Poet's words are right, a hundred thousand times.

Kim Yong-T'aek

That girl's house

The house the leaves of the gingko tree dyed yellow when autumn came,
the house that first struck my eyes from afar as the sun was setting,
the house I used to long for at the thought of it,
used to be fond of at the sight of it,
the house with lamplight, warm lamplight flickering alive
on the dark hillside on evenings as I returned late from somewhere,
the house where my hand would grow warm at the thought of the black hair
and the shoulders of the girl sitting there in the lamplight embroidering.

The house with apricots blooming,
the house where apricots blossom white in spring
then the petals go flying white beyond the wall,
the house I long to reach like the ripples caused by those petals
as they fall into that girl's water pot as she passes, after drawing water,
beneath the apricot tree from which those petals fall.

The house where, when bright yellow gingko leaves are falling,
that girl's
father and her
older brother
climb onto the roof
and all day long lay yellow thatch:
that yellow thatched house.

The house where occasionally the yard is visible through the open door
and as that girl comes and goes in the yard
the sound of words, not clear what is happening,
and the fringes of clothes are briefly visible through a crack in the door
and I used to long to go into that yard and join in the work.

The house where the sunlight is yellow in the yard,
the house where the evening smoke rises straight,
the house where persimmons ripen red in the back yard,

the house where flocks of sparrows twitter,
the house where the flails threshing barley or beans can be seen above the roof,
the house where it snows,
the house where, when morning snow falls white past the eaves
into the yard
and that girl crosses the still unswept yard
her body slightly bent
on her way to fetch kimchi from the back yard, then says:
“My, how prettily it’s snowing,”
looks up at the sky full of falling snow
then brushes away the snowflakes caught on her delicate brow, her black eyelashes,
and when she opens the kimchi jar
white snowflakes fall white
into the dark interior of the kimchi jar,
the house where white snowflakes fall white, so white,
onto that girl’s back bent over the kimchi jar,
the house where I long to fall, turned into snow,
the house where, after snow has fallen all night, several nights long,
late at night when no one is stirring
and warm lamplight issues from that girl’s room alone,
with muffled steps crossing the yard of that girl’s house,
gazing at her snow-covered shoes as I stand in the space before her room
brushing away the snow piled on head, on shoulders,
I long to call to that girl quietly, quietly
with a voice that even the quietly falling snow cannot hear
that
girl’s
house.

There was a day,
when was it? Having carried food on her head to the workers planting out rice,
she suddenly came face to face with me, and taken aback she exclaimed, “Oh goodness!”
stopped suddenly, round eyes open wide, gazing at me, not at all attempting to conceal her
joy,
then laughed so brightly, showing bright white teeth
bright as the rice she had served, heaped up, out in the fields, that
girl like snow, that
girl

The house where that girl lived until she was flower-like nineteen,
the first house in a narrow alley in the neighborhood just above ours,
the house my eyes sought out first as I got off the bus
coming home from somewhere,
if there was no sign of that girl as I passed in front of the house,
my steps would slow down and falter, that girl's family house,
now, alas, now the house no longer exists,
a house constructed in my heart,
a house where apricot blossoms scatter white in the wind if I shut my eyes,
the house where snowflakes like cotton
once fell for three whole days,
snow fell, ah, snow between the apricot tree twigs,
that girl's house,
the house my heart always used to visit first
at any time,
that
girl's
house
when I think, when I think, when, I, think . . .

Lee Si-young

Preface

Come now, I so yearn for your face.
You once set out to walk over hills, over streams,
and now faces are waiting for you whenever bamboo leaves blow.
They open tightly closed windows and glance about with grieving eyes;
come, before this night is over, making the ground ring.
Quickly, let's listen to mother's long tales.

Chang Chǒng-il

Shampoo fairy

This man hates Mystery Theater. He hates
domestic news. He hates sporting contests and problematic
foreign films. He won't watch them. A lot of the women
broadcasting are revolting. I only watch her.
I wait for the eight-thirty woman. Want to watch?
For fifteen seconds she publicizes some
shampoo company. Want to watch?

She greets you nicely. Hello.
She whispers with a smile.
In a nightdress with a pattern of blue waterdrops
she washes her hair. Round, rainbow-tinted
bubbles fill the television screen completely.
Then the shampoo fairy whispers:
The new shampoo, the shampoo you've selected,
a sweet-scented shampoo, in use all over the world,
maybe you will fall in love with it too,
is what she whispers.

There is a cosmetics company. There is one of Asia's top
cosmetic companies. And
we have a fairy. The only fairy that really exists
every evening at eight-thirty, rending the television screen
she comes flying to our side, the shampoo fairy. For fifteen seconds
she chatters on, then vanishes behind the dark screen. At eight-thirty,
every evening at eight-thirty, there's a commercial
featuring her. Just wait.

Once the advert is over he languidly turns off
the television. Fifteen seconds each night is all he needs.
He stares at his photos. Unrequited in love,
he collects photos of her. He pins them up in his room.
Smiling showing white teeth. In a swimsuit.

Smartly dressed in riding gear: he collects her photos.
He cuts them out with a knife. The shampoo fairy
once starred in a movie; he cuts out with a razor blade
a photo showing her lips the moment before
they touched the male star's lips

Does she not whisper softly
at eleven thirty, when advertisements abound?
Does her song not turn about my ears?
Use it, use it. Enjoy the perfume
of love. Then won't her promise
throb within my heart? Tonight
I'll come to you: she promised
in the advert. His head is full of cravings.

Fairy stripping. Fairy reclining at an angle on the sofa
perforated by cigarette burns. Fairy relaxing mysteriously,
so mysteriously. Fairy whispering
with warm lips: come here, pretty baby.
At twelve midnight, when fantasies swarm, now the shampoo fairy
pulls his head down,
smells it. You'll use what I recommended, won't you?
You will, of course, for sure?

Half past midnight, he longs to talk about things
other than shampoo. He wants to try
something else. But how nimbly she avoids him,
shuffling around in her slippers. You've done very well.
Our shampoo really is the best. Do keep on
using it. Trailing her pink nightie
the shampoo fairy vanishes. Ah !
Stay a bit longer ! Just a bit !

Roused from his dream
he bangs at his typewriter.
tacktacktack
There's a cosmetics company.

And the only fairy that really exists
is the shampoo fairy.

Dad

False laughter makes bubbles.

When small kids eating a McDonald with coins they've scraped together
chew with their little lips at the pink steak wedged
in a darkly toasted bun. False
laughter makes bubbles. When they're obliged to suck
at empty fingers smeared with brown sauce, saying it tasted good

False laughter makes bubbles.

When Macdonald shouts full of confidence with the long gash of his lips
it's so funny it makes you cry. When they falsely claim every
one in the world eats McDonalds. Or proudly exaggerate
saying a quarter of the world lunches on a McDonald.
And how about this kind of song you hear
on the radio that broadcasts thanks to the taxes we pay?
Girls just love McDonalds.
All the time everywhere they eat McDonalds.

False laughter makes bubbles.

When we see the jar of souring kimchi
above our kitchen sink,
when we see the lumps of rice in the fridge being eaten by fungus:
Mother, false laughter makes bubbles! When you
place before my nose a McDonald wrapped in a white napkin
laid on a tray with a CocaCola, when you
command: This is your breakfast, when suddenly
I want to protest: I want to eat soy-paste soup

False laughter makes bubbles.

The mouth of every Korean girl is biting into
one McDonald each. When they munch away at that greasy
thing dripping mayonnaise, unable to say
a word, eyes brimming with tears, when they have to put
into their mouths and so quietly let melt the so soft sausage
they can neither chew nor put down that McDonalds keeps producing
when they have to say boldly: Your method is best

False laughter makes bubbles.
Your stinking mass, American
McDonald, with hugely expanded, swollen
legs, falls deep into my throat,
and laughing I stuff my gullet and guts all the way down
to the anus with your body. With your left hand tickling the lobe of my ear,
you whisper: Call me Father. Sure, OK, I'll call you Father Shit!
You cocky, ill-mannered louts, making any and everyone fellate you!
"I'm sick of your insane demands!"

(The last line is from Allen Ginsburg's "America.")

Yi Mun-jae

(Translated by 안선재 / 이형진)

The last dawdler

No one walks here.

Either they go rushing about or they collapse
onto the roadway, that's all.

It looks as though this city really
hates relaxed strolling. I assume
this city knows the secret: strolling,
and only strolling, opens eyes and ears wide.
They say this city does not want this secret to be found out
by people. By all those glistening invitations
to Utopia it is obstructing strolling
on and off the roads.

The city is determined not to allow
even one person to go strolling. Dawdlers
are pursued as the greatest sinners.
Any idleness, any attempt to be alone,
and the city will get you.
This city is a vast cemetery of strolling.

The roof of the old house where we used to live

Ever since I left that house for the last time, it has been empty
but every time I missed the river, or longed to see the sea,
the green roof of that old house would shine at the height of river or sea.

For example, when I was abandoned by some unknown force,
and therefore wept, being abandoned, saying: No, no, I should not have done that.
I remember memories
flowing out like music from the empty house.

The roof of the old house where we used to live
was full of weeping stars
that we used to name as we wept,
the stars we used to long to bury in the sky,
and the trees rising near the roof of the old house where we used to live,
when the wind blew
would shake their heavy-growing leaves and rejoice
then, before our very eyes,
draw in a perfect circle their year's annual ring.
Where might the passing river of stars
flowing over the roof of the old house where we used to live
be headed for once tonight is over, I wonder.

There could be no question of dying in that house,
no question of dying while gazing up at that beautiful ceiling.
We used to love till nose-blood flowed,
loved till nose-blood stopped flowing.
As the sea was so very far away
we would demolish the house's walls facing the sea and raise up the sea
as the river flowed away far off
we would cut off our flesh and send it floating
like leaves toward the river's bright estuary,
at that time dawn goes flowing, vanishing toward
the stars' stream, the stars' dark sea,
at that time, once I die
in which previous existence shall I go roaming?

There is no knowing.

The big nail I hammered into the door
as I was leaving that house for the very last time has grown
and hammered nails into the trees around the house
hammered nails into the stars in the sky
and every time I think of the old house where I used to live
I feel as though the house and I may each be collapsing. Gradually,
gradually I collapse toward death,
crumble away from love.

There is no knowing
if a hand like a cord might descend
from some bright star and lightly
lightly lift me aloft,
even if I die looking out at sea or river.

O Sang-Sun (오상순)

Scenes of Asia's Last Night

--Asia's Truth is Night's Truth

아시아의 밤風景

--아시아의 眞理는 밤의 眞理이다

(Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé & Hyung-jin Lee)

Asia is governed by night, and it rules over the night.
Night is the symbol of Asia's Heart, and Asia is the embodiment of night.
Asia's night is eternity's night, and Asia conceives night
Night is Asia's woman in labor and midwife
Asia is indeed a gift born by night.
Night is the lord, the god guarding Asia.
Asia is a country, a world governed by the sword of darkness.

Asia's night is endlessly deep, unknowably deep.
Night is Asia's heart. Asia's heart beats at night.
Asia is night's respiratory organs and night is Asia's breathing.
Night is Asia's eyes. Asia clearly sees the image of everything by night,
as owls do—
night is Asia's ears, Asia hears every sound at night.

Night is Asia's senses, sensibility, sexual urges.
At night, Asia feels love for every being in the cosmos and embraces the beloved.
Night is Asia's appetite. Asia's body feasts upon night and grows full of life.
Asia seeks its soul's food by night as fierce animals do.
Night is Asia's fragrant liquor. Asia, intoxicated by night, sings and dances.

Night is Asia's mind, wisdom, and practice.
Asia's perception, prescience, and faith are all embodiments and expressions of night.
Oh—Asia's mind is the mind of night—Asia's physiological systems and mental
structures are truly mysterious creations of Asia's night—

Night is Asia's aesthetics and religion.
Night is Asia's only love, its pride, its treasure and its glory.
Night is Asia's palace of the soul, arena of individuality, matrix of character.

Night is Asia's inexhaustible treasure-house, like a magician's magical treasure-house.

Night is truly Asia, Asia is truly night.

The history of Asia's enduring life, individuality, character is a record of night, footprints of the god of night, the achievement of night, a history of the creative progress of all-living night—

Behold Asia's mountains and rivers, land, objects, scenes, personality, graceful manners and culture—

See if there is anything in all that exists either with shape or without that does not receive night's baptism—

Asia's mountain ranges symbolize the rhythms of Asia's flowing streams, the rhythm of Asia's flowing streams symbolizes the rhythm of Asia's night—

The flow of the glossy black hair of Asia's daughters is the rhythm of Asia's night's deep breathing—

No matter how robust and fierce Asia's men may be, able to seize and shake the Earth's axis with one hand or move the world at will, they surely have in some corner of their hearts a rhythmic soft curve that flows like the waves of night, resembling the endless twirling of the hair of pure virgins—

And those Asian sons who sell themselves to buy liquor and beauty and sighs overflow with a boldly extravagant wanderlust—all on account of this irresistible night.

Drunken with night, loving night, enjoying night, praising night, worshipping night—to be born by night, live by night, and die in the night—is that meant to be Asia's destiny?

Asia's silence, tranquility, profundity, grace, elegance, its curves and lingering resonance, mysterious obscurity, secluded shadows, nimbus, rich savor, three flavors, and utter delicacy—all the musical notes of the symphonies at the banquets of Asia's night spirits—

Oh—sublime, profound, mysterious, enigmatic, Asia's night—

The sun is youthful and fierce and exaggerating and arrogant and overbearing and domineering.

It is masculine, paternalistic, positivistic, aggressive.

Thus it is physical, realistic, scientific, self-centered, combative, substance-oriented, materialistic.

The sun's sons and daughters act with unbending spirit and envious spite, they fight and

construct and demolish and rush ahead.

Under bright sunlight they confidently analyze, anatomize, synthesize, unify everything,

They only know how to prosper, never decline, valiantly they venture, manufacture, exclaim, struggle, grow weary.

Faced with discrimination, they equivocate, but they stubbornly stick to what is or what can be possessed.

Herein lies the germination and birth of unintended tragedy.