

## KIM SOWŎL (1902–1934)

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

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

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

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

*Translated by David R. McCann*

### *Azaleas*

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

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

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

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

### *A Day Long After*

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

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

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

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

*The Golden Meadow*

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

*Mountain Flowers*

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

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

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

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

*The Road Away*

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

Yet shall I  
 just go,  
 once again . . .

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

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

*Cigarette*

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

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

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

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

### *Ferryboat and the Traveler*

I am the ferryboat  
You the traveler.

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

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

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

I am the ferryboat  
You the traveler.

### *Your Touch*

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

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

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

### *The Master's Sermon*

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

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

(KJC)

*Blue Grapes*

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

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

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

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

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

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

(DRM)

IM HWA (1908–1953)

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

*Translated by Jiwon Shin*

*My Brother and the Brazier*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tonight as in the past, life's tragedy would sleep on your  
stone steps.  
Tomorrow, they would collect dust from your  
ground.  
And without knowing where to go and what to do for a  
living,  
the heavy steps of those would tread on you with their  
heads down.  
But you wouldn't, perhaps, forget all this,  
send them away with no more than fatigue, sorrow, and  
despair.  
Though quiet and faint, they will hear in silence the  
great song of tomorrow,  
And walk by outside the gate at a distance.

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

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

\*The underscores represent words censored in the original.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Windowpane I*

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

### *Spring Snow*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *I Wed a Toy Bride*

#### I EVENING

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

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

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

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

#### 2 EVENING

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Mirror*

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

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

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

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

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

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

(WLK)

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

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

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

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

### *Spring of the Steel Bar Window*

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

The place where the woman laid her eyes,  
 In the spot where the snow melts, a blue mugwort has  
     sprouted.

A few days later  
 The woman who always would be looking out the window  
 Abruptly fell ill.

### *A Lemon for Me*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Nostalgia*

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

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

(MH)

### *Deer*

Sad creature, neck stretched out;  
 Dignified always, you say nothing at all.  
 With your crown so fragrant,

## PAEK SŎK (1912-?)

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

*Translated by Kyunghwan Choi*

*Samch'ŏnp'o*

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

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

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

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

*Mountain Rain*

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

*Sound of the Mountain Bird*

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

*Natasha, the White Donkey, and I*

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

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

## YUN TONGJU (1918–1945)

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

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

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

*Self-portrait*

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

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

And a young man.

Somehow despising  
that young man  
I turn away.

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

Returned, looking in as before  
is a young man.

Again somehow despising  
that young man  
I turn away.

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

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

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

(DRM)

*Foreword*

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

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

*His Last Words*

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

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

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

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

*Hospital*

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

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

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

*The Cross*

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

How can I get up  
that high on the steeple?

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

*Winter Sky*

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

*Like a Wind from Lotus Blossoms*

Sadly, though not  
 terribly  
     just  
 a bit  
 sadly

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

like a wind away  
     not toward  
 lotus blossoms

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

*In the Old Capital*

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

*Autumn, 1949*

## AT THE "FLOWER" TEA ROOM

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

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

on a solitary peak  
where pine pollen blows in the air

puts her ear to the lattice door  
and listens.

### *The Wayfarer*

Across the ferry  
by the path through the corn

like the moon through the clouds  
the wayfarer goes.

The road stretches south  
three hundred *li*

every wine-mellowing village  
afire in the evening light

as the wayfarer goes  
like the moon through the clouds.

### *A Bare Wind*

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

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

Eternity  
cut on the prow of the  
old

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

### *Hanbok*

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

<sup>\*</sup> *Korean-style clothing.*

Fair star!  
There in the dark night sky.

(KJC)

*Ancient Temple*

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

the lovely young monk  
has drifted into sleep.

As the Buddha wordlessly  
smiles, just smiles,

along the thousand league western border

under a dazzling evening sky,  
peonies fall and fall.

*At Toriwŏn*

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

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

Today I pass by dejectedly  
this village fallen into ashes.

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

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

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

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

the sad cosmos flowers  
bloom and at once fall.

(DRM)

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

Will it fall in ruins, in ruins

### Grass

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

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

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

(KO)

### PAK INHWAN (1926-1956)

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

*Translated by Scott Swanner*

### *The Rocking Horse and the Lady*

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

## PAK CHAESAM (1933-1997)

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

*Translated by David R. McCann and Jiwon Shin*

*Looking at Winter Trees*

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

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

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

*The Road Back*

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

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

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

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

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

### *They*

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

(KO)

### *Farmer's Dance*

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

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

by the school.  
Suffocating, exhausted,  
lamentable life.

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

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

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

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

### *Country Bus Station*

Once past the sixth block  
of Ülchiro, downtown,  
come the smells of my country home:

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

an old man, ice  
 dangling from his moustache—  
 a neighbor, from Sinni Village.  
 Worried about the rice stacks  
 still ungathered in his fields,  
 he curses this cold  
 and the windy snow.  
 “Oh, is that all you have  
 for complaints?” some woman  
 sighs.

“Is that all  
 you have for troubles?” adds the mistress  
 of the wine shop at the crossing.  
 The waiting room turns colder  
 as it grows more disordered.  
 These people from home  
 are somehow too much for me.  
 Shall I just leave my seat,  
 quietly, and take the bus  
 back to Ŭlchiro, downtown?  
 Returned to the sixth block, I grow  
 all the more cowardly.

### *Market's Closing*

We fools are pleased enough  
 just seeing each other's faces.  
 Carving a melon by the barber shop,  
 gulping *makköllli* at a wine stall,  
 we all have old friends' faces.

Talk of drought in the southwest,  
 of debts to the co-op.

Tapping time with our feet  
 to the remedy vendor's guitar,

why do we always feel  
 such longing for Seoul?

Shall we find some place to play cards?  
 tip out our wallets  
 and head for the wine house?

Gathering on the school grounds  
 we eat pieces of dried squid  
 and we drink.

Gradually,  
 the long summer day ends  
 as with a pair of rubber shoes  
 and one salted fish,  
 down the moon-bright road  
 market limps to a close.

### *That Day*

Alone, a young woman wept,  
 following the bier,  
 a procession without bells  
 or funeral banner.  
 Along the fog-shrouded, evening road,  
 phantom shadows.  
 The wind lifted tree leaves  
 on a street without doors or windows,  
 while others watched, hidden  
 behind phone poles or trees.  
 No one knew the name  
 of the one who had died,  
 that dark day,  
 with no moon rising.

(DRM)

*A Slice of Moon*

As king I grow thin  
 the people grow fat.  
 As I grow fat  
 the world grows thin.  
 Always  
 I watch the moon.

*Into the Woods*

The woods were dark.  
 The child with me  
 held my hand tight.  
 Two of us as one,  
 silent, for a time  
 we moved on.  
 It was there in the woods  
 my childhood lingered still.  
 A fawn was on the run.

*Memory of the Graves*

As a youth I was obsessed with graves.  
 There are six-hundred-and-eighty-nine  
 mounds in Hwandung Cemetery.  
 At Sarabong graveyard on Cheju Island  
 I would stop on the way every night  
 to sleep by the graveside.  
 Word spread that I was a ghost  
 residing in that cemetery.

A lucky day it was  
 when someone died and his grave was dug.  
 I would say with joy,

So, you have come here at last?  
 What can be a better place  
 to come to than this one?

At day's end once  
 drunk as could be I fell asleep  
 somewhere among the graves  
 and was stung by a scorpion.  
 For a week I wore a piece of pumpkin  
 bandaged to my cheek,  
 all swollen, in deadly pain.  
 And again, as a novice monk  
 on my way to Marae Temple  
 in T'ongyong, I once spent half a day  
 in a graveyard, forgetting  
 the errand for my master,  
 a lapse that cost me dear.

A few decades drifted past  
 until I came to realize  
 wild animals have no graves!  
 Animals are better than man;  
 they are superior to God!  
 They do not leave their graves behind.  
 They are far better than myself.  
 Have I been infatuated, crying and weeping  
 over graves, in order to awaken  
 to this simple truth?

(DRM)

*No-More-Daughters's*

There were three girls in the Kalmoe house  
 we called "No-more-daughters's":  
 Toksun,  
     Poksun,  
         and Kilsun;  
 and this time around another charcoal daughter