_list: Books from Korea

VOL. 31  SPRING  2016

Special Section
Korean Short Verse

Featured Writer
Hwang Sok-yong

Spotlight on Fiction
The Castle of the Baron de Curval
Choi Jae-hoon

Cover image by Kim Hyojin
Call for Applications to the LTI Korea Translation Academy Regular Course

The LTI Korea Translation Academy Fellowship offers several courses for aspiring translators of Korean literature from all around the world. Designed for people who are deeply interested in translating Korean literature, the Regular Course was earlier offered as a one-year program. With the vision of transforming the Academy into a graduate school of translation, we expanded it into a two-year program in 2015. We are looking for talented applicants who will rise to the challenge of translating Korean literature, thereby contributing to the growth of its global readership.

How to Apply

- **Application Requirements**: Application form, personal statement written in Korean, a letter of recommendation, an application for a literary award, and a certificate of Bachelor's degree. The application and personal statements forms, and the letter of recommendation form can be downloaded from the LTI Korea website. (http://www.lti.or.kr)
- Foreign applicants may submit a certificate of registration and academic transcript in place of a Bachelor's degree certificate.
- Test to be translated: "호랑이의 이야기" (Kim, 2013), "제1 대전의 미학막장 작품집" (Korea Foundation, 2016, pp. 42-50) and the BRK test (the last page of the page)

- **Selection Criteria**: Application review, sample translation test and telephone interview. Applications can be made online (academy.lti.or.kr) or by email (academy@lki.or.kr). The applications should be received no later than 2400 (Korean standard time) April 30, 2016.

- **Selection Process**: Application Period: April 1-30, 2016
  - Announced of Eligibility for Telephone Interview: May 10, 2016
  - Telephone Interview: May 15-27, 2016
  - Final Result Announcement: June 3, 2016

Contact: Ms. Lee Min A (Tel: +82-2-3918-7732 | E-mail: academy@lki.or.kr)

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)

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Spring 2016 is a welcome guest for Korea and Korean literature. After surmounting the MERS crisis that hit us hard last year and surviving a winter that was unusually severe, the first stirrings of spring invigorate us and give us renewed hope.

Accounts of people overcoming adversity become the stuff of literature. The site of literature is the human world and life itself. Literature is a colorful narrative of human experiences and a catalyst that revitalizes our lives. Our latest issue of _list_ has been prepared with this in mind.

The Featured Writer Section focuses on Hwang Sok-yong, a writer renowned both in Korea and abroad. Hwang's writing focuses on the lower classes who were forced to leave their homes during Korea’s modernization, and the weary-hearted who are unable to put down roots in reality. His early works, such as *The Road to Sampo* and *Far from Home*, are among the first works of Korean literature to confront issues of the working class head on. Following up on these seminal works, Hwang took on the role of a public figure working to mend North and South Korea's strained relationship as he wrote several masterpieces exploring this theme.

The epic *Jang Gilsan*, generally regarded as one of Hwang’s finest works, was written over the course of a decade, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. It chronicles the exploits of Jang Gilsan, a fabled Robin Hood figure active during the Joseon dynasty, and captures an earnest dream of reforming the world through alliance and horizontal class solidarity. Hwang did not stop at portraying the life of a historical figure from over 400 years ago but presented us with a way to overcome the murky political situation Korea was plunged into at the time.

The Special Section covers much ground, approaching modern and contemporary Korean poetry along the lines of “short poems, lingering impressions.” Poetry offers solace from the difficulties of life, and overcoming life’s hardships by vocalizing them through poetry is in itself the pursuit of a healthy, artistic spirit. N. Hartmann’s remark that realism is a healthy trend in art alludes to this poetic model.

Traditional forms of Korean poetry such as *sijo* and Zen poetry are not buried in past traditions but retain their venerability even today. Established Korean poets with long years of practicing their art have realized and expressed the profound and mysterious meaning of life in short lines of poetry. This is a sophisticated literary accomplishment that demonstrates a state of mental awakening in the thick of quotidian life. The scale of a nation’s literature holds no special meaning if the literature is not at a stage where it can leave a lingering impression through a few lines of poetry.

In particular, the recent literary trends of extreme lyricism and “Dicapoem” movements can be said to be alternatives devised to meet the changing times and as breakthroughs from poetic conventions. These trends hint at how our literary perceptions and expressions will get handed down to the coming generations. Younger writers who wade through cultural currents to produce a wide range of works are to be cherished in this respect. The Younger Writers section, focusing on Kim Junghyuk and Hwang Jungeun, is a reflection of a literary continuity and expectations for the future, and will leave you with feelings of a warm, generous spring day.

by Kim Jonghoi

Literary Critic and Professor of Korean Literature

Kyung Hee University
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Spotlight on Fiction

The Castle of the Baron de Curval
Choi Jae-hoon

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All correspondence should be addressed to the Literature Translation Institute of Korea
32, Yeongdong-daero 112-gil (Samseong-dong), Gangnam-gu, Seoul, 06083, Republic of Korea
Telephone: 82-2-6919-7714
Fax: 82-2-3448-4247
E-mail: list_korea@klti.or.kr
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EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Ko Young-il
MANAGING DIRECTOR Lee Yoon-young
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Three students from LTI Korea’s Translation Academy won the Grand Prize and the Commendation Awards at the award ceremony for The Korea Times 46th Modern Korean Literature Translation Awards held on November 30th, 2015.

Sophie Bowman, who won the Grand Prize in the poetry category for her translation of poems by Jin Eun-young, including “When You Were a Boy,” attended LTI Korea Translation Academy’s Regular Course and Special Course. She is currently enrolled in the Translation Atelier at the Academy and is doing her Master’s from the Korean Language and Literature Department at Ewha Womans University. She was awarded an LTI Korea translation grant in 2014.

Slin Jung, who won the Commendation Award in the fiction category for her translation of “More Than Half of Haruo” by Lee Jangwook, also attended the Academy’s Regular Course. She won the 13th LTI Korea Award for Aspiring Translators in 2014 for her translation of “Krabi” by Park Hyoung-su. She is currently enrolled in the Master’s program at the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

Helen Cho, who also won the Commendation Award in the fiction category for her translation of “The Old Diary” by Lee Seung-U, attended the Academy’s Special Course and Intensive Course. At present, she is enrolled in the Translation Atelier and Regular Course at the Academy, and is working as a professional interpreter and translator. 😊
Jan Henrik Dirks Wins Daesan Literary Award

The Daesan Foundation announced the winners of the 23rd Daesan Literary Awards in five categories, including poetry, fiction, drama, criticism, and translation, on November 2nd, 2015. Jan Henrik Dirks, professor at Gachon University’s Department of European Languages & Literature, won in the translation category for his translation of Jung Young Moon’s *Vaseline Buddha*, which was judged to be the most outstanding German translation of Korean literature published in the last four years.

Professor Dirks teaches at LTI Korea’s Translation Academy and has also won several translation grants from LTI Korea. *Vaseline Buddha* was published by Literaturverlag Droschl in 2015 with funding from LTI Korea. The literary value of the original Korean prose as well as the elegant translation based upon a strong understanding of Korean language and culture were both rated highly by the judges. 😊

Jan Henrik Dirks (left) and Shin Chang-Jae, Chairman of the Daesan Foundation (right)
Seven Years of Darkness by Jeong Yu-jeong on German Best Crime Novel List

Seven Years of Darkness by Jeong Yu-jeong, translated and published in Germany with funding from LTI Korea, ranked 9th on the Best Crime Novel 2015 (Die besten Krimis des Jahres 2015) list published by the major German weekly Zeit and radio channel Nordwestradio. This novel was translated by Kyong-Hae Flügel and published by the Swiss publisher Unionsverlag in 2015.

Seven Years of Darkness plays out over seven years and is about a father who dreams of avenging his daughter’s death and a father who wants to protect his son from this vengeance. It flew off the shelves after its publication in Korea, gaining praise for its tight plot and outstanding literary merit. With funding from LTI Korea Seven Years of Darkness has been translated and published in German, Vietnamese, and Chinese, and is currently being translated into French.

Nowhere to Be Found by Bae Suah Longlisted for PEN Translation Prize

Bae Suah’s Nowhere to Be Found, translated by Sora Kim-Russell and published by Amazon Crossing in 2015, was longlisted for the 2016 PEN Translation Prize. Sora Kim-Russell is a prolific translator of Korean literature with several titles under her belt, including “Highway with Green Apples” by Bae Suah, Princess Bari by Hwang Sok-yong, Our Happy Time by Gong Ji-Young, and I’ll Be Right There by Shin Kyungsook. Bae Suah won laurels for Nowhere to Be Found and “Highway with Green Apples,” both of which are published by Amazon Crossing. She is set to have more books published in the Anglophone market.
News from LTI Korea

LTI Korea Signs MOU with British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT)

LTI Korea signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the British Centre for Literary Translation on November 6th, 2015 at the LG Convention Hall at Ewha Womans University. LTI Korea and BCLT will organize Korean literature translation sessions for the next three years as part of the Translators’ Workshop held at Writers’ Centre Norwich.

LTI Korea began talks with BCLT in 2014 to hold a Korean literature translation workshop, and as a result of this dialogue, Korean literature translation classes were organized at the International Literary Translation and Creative Writing Summer School in 2015 for the first time ever. Out of the four LTI Korea students who participated in the summer school, two students (Sophie Bowman and Slin Jung) won The Korea Times 46th Modern Korean Literature Translation Award in November 2015.

BCLT will organize regular Korean literature translation classes at the Translators’ Workshop for students from LTI Korea’s Translation Academy, thereby helping them develop their skills and network with other translators from Europe. The two organizations will also collaborate in other avenues of literary translation.

Kim Seong-Kon, president of LTI Korea and professor emeritus of English at Seoul National University (left) and Duncan Large, academic director of BCLT (right)
Featured Writer  Hwang Sok-yong

Hwang Sok-yong

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photographs by Seo Heun-Kang
Always in the Thick of It

Hwang Sok-yong was born in Changchun, Manchuria in 1943. After the liberation from Japanese occupation, he moved to his mother’s hometown Pyongyang, where he lived with his mother’s side of the family. In 1947, his family moved to the South and he grew up in Yeongdeungpo. Hwang left Kyungbok High School in 1962 and left home to wander the southern provinces. He returned home in October, and in November of that year he won the New Author Literary Prize from the magazine Sasanggye for his short story, “Near the Marking Stone.” Hwang lived life as a drifter, taking up manual labor and temple jobs until 1970 when his short story “The Pagoda” won the Chosun Ilbo New Writer’s Contest and he began his writing career in earnest. He also participated in the Vietnam War.

Throughout the 1970s, Hwang Sok-yong published a continuous stream of works that became well known such as “Far from Home,” “Mr. Han’s Chronicle,” “The Road to Sampo,” and “A Dream of Good Fortune,” becoming a foremost author in the Korean literary world. For the duration of the seventies, he went undercover working at the Guro Industrial Complex and took part in the resistance movement through his membership in the Association of Writers for Actualized Freedom while penning his epic novel, Jang Gilsan.

In the 1980s, Hwang completed his full-length novel, The Shadow of Arms, which shines light on the capitalistic world system during the Vietnam War. He did this all while working tirelessly to organize the fight to spread the truth about the Gwangju Democratization Movement as well as a variety of other resistance movements. After visiting North Korea in March 1989, Hwang was unable to return to South Korea and took refuge as an invited author at the Berlin Academy of Arts. In 1991, he continued his exile in New York. After returning to South Korea in 1993, he was sentenced to seven years in prison, but was released in 1998 after serving five of those years. Following this, he has shown year after year that his creative spirit will not die with the publication of The Old Garden (2000), The Guest (2001), Shim Cheong (2003), Princess Bari (2007), Hesperus (2008), Gangnam Dream (2010), A Familiar World (2011), The Sound of the Shallow Water (2012), and Dusk (2015). He has been awarded the Manhae Literature Prize, the Lee San Literature Prize, and the Daesan Literary Award, among others. Hwang’s major works have been translated and published around the world in countries such as France, the US, Italy, and Sweden.

by Jung Hongsoo
Literary Critic
I was born in 1943 in Changchun, Manchuria—an area that was occupied by imperial Japan at the time. Around the time of my birth, the fascist powers-that-be had been driven out by the strategic cooperation of the socialist and capitalist camps. Throughout the world, the nations that had favored direct rule and the tenets of imperialism gave every sign of backing off. In point of fact, however, these countries remained chained, militarily speaking, to the politics and economy of their former suzerain states.

In our country, America took the position that had formerly been held by Japan. As was already the case in many countries in Latin America and Asia, revolution, the Cold War, military dictatorship, poverty, civil war, and oppression came to represent life for much of the Second and Third Worlds during this time. Upon Korea’s liberation from Japanese rule, my family was living in the North, in the city of Pyongyang. It was only when the political administration that favored the division of North and South came into power that my father was given a job and we all moved down south. As soon as I entered elementary school, the Korean War erupted around us and with it, the skeleton of the Cold War infrastructure that Europe imposed upon Asia finally reached completion.

The administration of the South, having set forth anti-communism and pro-Americanism as its most basic ideology, soon metamorphosed into a military
dictatorship following the onset and resolution of several crises. The first show of resistance to this regime came in the form of the "Student Revolution" on April 19th, 1960. I, too, participated in this demonstration. My generation became the first to grow up hidden behind the backs of adults, peeking out at the horror of a race of people bent on killing one another. We were the first to reach adolescence and find ourselves ready to take the establishment head-on. We were called the “April 19 Generation,” and, at times, the “Korean Generation,” a testament to our role as the first generation to be educated in our native tongue after liberation from the Japanese. Our generation was also the first of the modern age to have grown up with the goal of achieving a universal democratic state and overthrowing the Cold War-imposed division of North and South as an intrinsic facet of our very identity.

During my college years I fought against the military regime over issues such as the Korean-Japanese Summit of 1965, and when I was called upon to serve my term of mandatory military service, I found myself dragged off to fight in the Vietnam War. As to the real difference between the generation of our fathers—recruited and drafted into service by the Japanese to further their aspirations of Asian dominance—and our generation, packed off to Vietnam to help realize America’s Cold War dreams of instituting a Pax-Americana in Southeast Asia? We ourselves have no idea.

Upon my return from Vietnam and my discharge from military service, I reentered the Korean literary community and found myself face to face with the effects of the military regime. Working in factories and rural communities, I began to actively take part in the nation-wide popular movements, which led to my participation in the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement. This incident was soon followed by similar popular movements for democratization in countries such as the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Burma, and Indonesia: in essence, what the sixties were to the West, the eighties were for Asia.

In the aftermath of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, I left Korea to attend "The Third World Cultural Festival," which was held in Berlin. I then began to work towards founding a cultural organization for Koreans living abroad, visiting countries like Germany, America, and Japan. During the course of these activities I met a number of Korean political figures in exile. As a part of this process, I had the occasion to visit North Korea. For this, I was to experience exile and imprisonment.

More than sixty years have now passed since the Korean War, and even after two meetings of the South-North Summit, we are still unable to identify the exact nature of this war. This is because we remain divided, maintaining what is not peace but a truce.

**The Shadow of Arms**

It was in the eighties, in the midst of this maelstrom of change, that I published the work that would mark the end of the first half of my literary career: *The Shadow of Arms.*

Unlike Hollywood films and novels that deal with the Vietnam War, *The Shadow of Arms* has nothing to offer to the genre of struggling with life and death on the battlefield; its pages contain no humanitarian conflict, no ideological protest against the war. Nor is it a mix of colonialism and Orientalism in the tradition of *Apocalypse Now,* presenting a detached but darkly emotional condemnation of war itself. *The Shadow of Arms* is a cold-hearted novel that deals instead with the business aspects of what was an intrinsically capitalistic war.

War is nothing more than a fiercely violent reaction to a conflict between different races, nations, and/or classes that is guaranteed to either solve or exponentially aggravate the issue at hand. Without question, war results in the appearance of a hell on earth, full of destruction and slaughter. On the other hand, this hell is accompanied by the emergence and activation of an extremely dispassionate, precise mechanism of political and economical logic. *The Shadow of Arms* is an attempt to reveal both the surface appearance and inner workings of this very phenomenon. America’s “intervention” in Vietnam, which came on the heels of their activities in the Philippines, was simply a move calculated to expand America’s imperialistic market control to include the
rest of Southeast Asia, and war was considered to be the quickest, most efficient means of achieving this end: in essence, a business conducted on a rather grandiose scale.

As such, *The Shadow of Arms* uses the back-alley black markets of the Vietnam War as its stage, a market that turns into a setting more fitting than any jungle to discover and explore the core of the war. The more we learn about the system that was used to circulate US Army munitions, the closer we can come to understanding the true nature of the war. Because achieving this understanding became my overarching goal, it was necessary for the perspective of the story itself to be multilateral. In this novel, we see the perspective of the US government and soldiers, the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, the South Vietnamese under American rule, and the “psychological refugees” who refuse to intervene and become a part of the war, searching endlessly for an escape route instead. Lastly, we have the perspective that overlaps with that of the author: the dazed ROK soldier who has somehow become involved in this foul war.

In the preface to the first publication of *The Shadow of Arms*, I wrote that I would “never indulge in the depiction of an individual who was scarred” by the Vietnam experience. This was a manifestation of the obstinate self-consciousness that is controlled by the guilt we Koreans feel in our treatment of the Vietnamese, a substantial limitation that was difficult to overcome with only the perspective of an irresponsible outsider.

Truly, if there is one thing that must make a deeper impression upon the hearts of the Vietnamese than the victorious outcome of their war for independence, it can be nothing other than the painful memories of all they lost in order to achieve that very victory.

**The Old Garden**

For five years I drifted around Berlin and New York. Upon my return to Korea, I was arrested for violating the National Security Law and spent the next five years of my life in prison. Those ten years given over to wandering and imprisonment, from my late forties through my early fifties, changed me; the world I once knew changed as well.

Through my numerous visits to the North during my exile, I was able to witness a face of the country’s division that was as different as the far side of the moon. As the downfall of socialism led to the reorganization of the capitalist world order, I was wandering about Germany and America. It was during the five years of confinement that followed that I was able to ruminate over and come to terms with the experience as a whole. And with that, I was reborn as a “different author.”

*The Old Garden* is a title I obtained from ancient Eastern legends that refer to a beautiful garden nestled within a hidden valley and a dreamlike island paradise. In actuality, however, the title is meant less as a positive literary allusion and more as a kind of utopian paradox. Watching the changing world from Berlin, my home in exile, I whispered to myself: “The revolution is over. It’s a new beginning.”

Since 1998, the year I was released from prison, the end of the century during which I wrote this novel, the world of today has reached a point where we must face bitter disillusionment.

Even now, the environment is being mercilessly destroyed, local and civil wars are waged according to religion and race, and anti-terrorism, like terrorism, has become a banner under which we can justify sweeping across the world in order to attain hegemony. The so-called Second and Third Worlds still suffer through the cycle of dictatorship, resistance, and despair, constantly struggling with fearsome enemies such as poverty and hunger. Since the fall of socialism, the world’s capitalist infrastructure has had the stage to itself; now, as common sense begins to reveal symptoms of an uneasy end, we find ourselves investing our expectations in an uncertain future.

In divided Korea, the resistance against the military regime in the South and, more specifically, the democratization movements of the seventies and eighties did succeed in making some changes, at least for the time being. Despite this, however, the fact remains that the onset of the nineties brought with it the inevitable conflict between the passionate beliefs
Even now, the environment is being mercilessly destroyed, local and civil wars are waged according to religion and race, and anti-terrorism, like terrorism, has become a banner under which we can justify sweeping across the world in order to attain hegemony. The so-called Second and Third Worlds still suffer through the cycle of dictatorship, resistance, and despair, constantly struggling with fearsome enemies such as poverty and hunger.

of the past and the daily life of the metamorphosed present. In whatever form, this conflict tore at the body and soul of those involved. The danger here only deepened with the extinction of ideology that followed the collapse of the socialist states, only worsening with each regurgitation of what was lost.

*The Old Garden* is a “love story.” It is a love story, however, not because of any overly romantic tendencies on my part, but because the inevitably separate lives of a man and a woman living in this era of crises was the best possible frame for me to express the thoughts I have outlined above.

With this novel, I cast aside the realism of the past. Instead, a man and a woman in love each declare their own innermost thoughts and feelings, and the time that passes is recorded in a confessional style. Each character’s inner world meddles with and severs the story’s organic synthesis; these inner worlds also visit the real world at different points and at different times. To begin with, the two axes of narration which should, from the perspective of a linear chronology, match up from beginning to end, is instead related in two distinctly insular, first person voices that form a pair of parallel storylines. Since eighteen years of the female’s narrative takes place while the male character is in prison and the receipt of certain letters and diaries only occurs after the death of the sender/writer, a spatial and temporal distance is created that serves to further segregate and sever the characters’ different realities. *The Old Garden* boasts a form that encompasses every perspective: each character’s own writing and thoughts make up the first person perspective; the words and actions of others within their individual realities constitute the second person perspective; and lastly, the reader who studies each of these characters and their individual worlds provides the third person perspective. In this way, the love story of *The Old Garden* is perfected through the act of reading it.

The two characters’ inability to meet eventually becomes an intrinsic limitation of the narrative form: as Oh’s experiences in prison and Yoon Hee’s bitter trials and travails in the outside world are read separately, a conflict arises. It then becomes apparent that this disruptive conflict is the inevitable outcome of an individual’s past participation in the reform movement, and, as such, a part of life that must now be dispassionately accepted as a historical setback.

Due to the limitations of earthly time, the progress of the historical truth that keeps humanity alive becomes separated from any symbols of vested significance in that it is only ever experienced in a belated fashion. It is impossible to overestimate the value of our ability to tolerate the passage of time, supreme on this earth, and our possession of a memory capable of recognizing the things that “twinkle within the dust of this mundane world.”

**The Guest**

I began work on *The Guest* in 2000, which was the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War. The September 11th attacks occurred a year after *The Guest* was first
published; the onset of this new “Age of Terror” and the inclusion of North Korea in the so-called “Axis of Evil,” along with the threat of a whole new war, made our position clearer than ever. It was a chilling experience to realize that, despite the collapse of the Cold War infrastructure that had been formed during the Korean War, our small peninsula was still bound by the fragile chains of war.

I first conceived of *The Guest* during my exile in Berlin. There, I witnessed the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which was really the beginning of the dissolution of the Cold War system. In the pages of the notebook I kept during those years, I found the following passage:

The “realistic” narrative form of the past needs to be broken down and reconstructed into a bolder, richer style. It is in the moments we let slip by and the traces of those moments that have accumulated that take part in history itself and, like a dream, drift past us in our daily lives. History and the individual dreamlike day-to-day existence are joined; I believe they must be linked together in the realm of reality. Subjectivity and objectivity should not be separated from each other, and the narrator should not be limited to one perspective; neither the first, second, nor third person. A narrative voice that travels between the perspectives of each of the characters intersecting each other is likely to be more effective at conveying the essence of reality. Even with one character and one event, the diverse thoughts and perspectives of all the other characters could be employed to illustrate the scene akin to an elaborate embroidery technique involving many different colors of thread. Though an objective narrative voice can give a plausible depiction of events, reproducing a slice of life and its condition of reality is impossible. If prose is unable to reproduce life, might it be possible to restore prose to a position closer to the flow of life? This is my main concern with form.

In the Hwanghae Province of North Korea, in a district known as Sin-cheon, a museum indicting the American military of the massacre of innocents was built. The literal translation of the museum’s name is “The American Imperialist Massacre Remembrance Museum.” Many years ago, when I visited the North, they took me to this place as a matter of course.

Later on, during my stay in New York, I met a minister and heard his eyewitness account of his childhood, which answered many of my questions. Not too long afterwards in Los Angeles, I was lucky enough to meet an extremely pious Christian woman, the mother of a friend’s friend, who shared with me her detailed firsthand account of the actual incident during the Korean War that led to the founding of the aforementioned museum.

In Berlin, where I was on site for the rapid changes that swept across the world after the wall came down, a certain thought crystallized in my mind: namely, the notion that I ought to “look upon the world in my own, unique way,” and the idea to try and take “‘realistic’ thought and imbed it within the East Asian form.”

The truth of the matter was that the atrocities in question were committed “amongst ourselves,” and that the inner sense of guilt and fear sparked by this incident eventually formed the roots of the frantic hatred that thrives to this day. Even a couple of years after I completed *The Guest*, I received fierce attacks from nationalists in both the North and the South.

I returned from my exile while I was still in the process of gathering data and eyewitness accounts, and my imprisonment halted my progress for quite a while. In my cell, I tried applying a slew of different forms to the storyline until the plot had ripened effectively; the delay was, in a way, almost a blessing in disguise. Through Korea’s identity as a colony and a divided nation, both Christianity and Marxism were unable to achieve a natural, spontaneous modernization; instead, they were forced to reach modernity in accordance with conscious human will. In North Korea, where the legacy of class structure during the traditional period was relatively diluted compared to the South, Christianity and Marxism were zealously adopted as facets of “enlightenment.” As it were, the root from above may have had two branches.
During the modern age, when smallpox was first identified as a Western disease that needed to be warded off, the Korean people often referred to it as “mama” or “sonnim,” the second of which translates to “guest.” Shamanic exorcisms, called “guest exorcisms” were often held. With this in mind, I settled upon The Guest as my title, to represent the arrival of Christianity and Marxism in a country where both were initially as foreign as smallpox.

The Guest is essentially a round of shamanistic exorcism designed to relieve the agony of those who survived and appease the angry spirits who died during the fifty-day nightmare that occurred in Hwanghae Province so many years earlier. The work is modeled after the “Chinogwi Exorcism” of Hwanghae Province, which is made up of twelve separate rounds. The Guest has twelve chapters. As is the case with an actual exorcism, the dead and the living simultaneously cross and re-cross the boundaries between past and present, appearing at what seems like random intervals to share each of their stories and memories. My intention was to create a kind of oral discourse in which a type of time travel provided the latitudinal coordinates of the story, with the longitude provided by the individual characters’ first person narratives, revealing a wide range of experiences and perspectives. With these lines of latitude and longitude, I was able to knit an overall narrative structure through a process akin to that of weaving a strip of hemp cloth.

If it is true that trying to rid yourself of your residual memories and the events that created them simply results in the memory becoming clearer and more solid, then the spirits of the past must be impossible to escape regardless of whether one is alive or dead. Furthermore, these apparitions can be more than mere phantoms: at times they are sent to us by the tragic wars of the past as a form of karma with which we must deal like the burden of history, a vivid reality even now.

The spirits of the dead who leave the Grim Reaper to attend the exorcisms and interact with those who are still alive then assume the absolute authority of the divinity that a particular shaman worships. Many people have been sacrificed by the blind inevitability of history itself; hence, dismantling this structure and returning to a state in which time belongs to the people is one goal of this novel.

It would seem that with these three novels, I have completed a twentieth-century trilogy of sorts, but it seems the world has still not been able to extricate itself from the same conditions and situations.

by Hwang Sok-yong
Novelist
In truth, presenting a timeline of Hwang Sok-yong’s life would be a sufficient introduction to his literature. Although no one can choose the time period they are born, few live in their given time with such depth. Hwang’s life and literature manifest what pushes forth from the deepest and most painful places in recent Korean history. The latter is explosive and entangled between the division of the peninsula and the compressions of modernity. The violent flow of this history might have altered course due to the great resistance against oppressive regimes and the hardships that accompanied them, but literature has played a continuous role in embracing and meditating upon issues deeper and broader than physical struggles. As literary critic Jin Jeong Seok writes, “Hwang’s novels are the most true, ethical participation with the Korean people’s modern experience, as well as the most fierce artistic investigation into the question of ‘How can a person set themselves free?’ In Hwang Sok-yong, modern Korean literature has found the complete profound union of emotion and awakening, imagination and historical consciousness, ethics and aesthetics.”

It is easy to list the places where Hwang’s novels take an emotional hold over us and evoke admiration. His work shows a piercing authorial insight into the truths and contradictions of an era—a deep and strong empathy for those who have been uprooted and have lived through marginalization and deprivation in the shadow cast by modernization. In doing so, Hwang also shows a comprehensive understanding of human psychological predicaments, the various trivialities of humanity, and much, much more. However, we must not forget that these aspects of Hwang’s literature are only possible due to his solid sense of aesthetics along with an experimental style and structure to his stories that have been apparent from the beginning of his career. When looking at what he accomplished with his early works such as “Far from Home,” “Mr. Han’s Chronicle,” “The Road to Sampo,” and “A Dream of Good Fortune” we behold what is often said to be the height of “mature realism.” Hwang’s short stories make use of his strong and concise writing style to achieve maximum poetic feeling and emotion by capturing the objectivity of the third-person perspective, having vibrant descriptions, strong narrative, and pathos for
deprived people. This is the true meaning of “realism.” If you take a closer look, however, from around this point in time, his novels reveal a writer in search of a way to separate from the modern Western model of the novel through the freedom of his words, the pacing of the sentences, and the rhythm that links the narrative.

“Mr. Han’s Chronicle,” for instance, depicts one man's tragic life as it is destroyed by the terrible ordeal of the partition of Korea. The story ends from the perspective of the main character, the daughter of Han Yeongdeok, a doctor who fled south, named Han Hyeja. “Han Hyeja was born from the union of an alcoholic doctor who fled south and the war widow of a police officer kidnapped to the north. When this girl was fully grown she went by the nickname ‘Wild Melon.’ A small and sturdy fruit that tenaciously sprouts from human excrement and grows in the wastelands amongst the weeds. But people who have experienced separation and lived the lives their new relationships have forged can only accept a child born when all hope has been tossed aside as a joke from their previous lives.” Skipping over the pressure of tragedy, Hwang innovates a completely new sentence rhythm for the times that summarises the old and new through experience, relationships, and “jokes.” This depth of heart shows that even from the narrative framing, Hwang is demanding a freer and more creative style. In accordance with this, the story ends with this scene: “The funeral has finished, and now father is buried so deep in the ground that even his soul won’t be able to roam. (...) Hyeja took the paper lantern and blew out the almost completely melted candle. Even though it was still too early for the first train, she ran all the way to the station.” Right before showing a scene of preemptive and serious “modernity,” Hwang’s novel predicts the inherent time and form of this land enduring and overcoming its historical tragedies.

However, after Hwang completed Jang Gilsan and The Shadow of Arms in the eighties, he reflected upon the “narrow scope” of realism as a form and, as he entered the 2000s, he began to actively affix his name to the freedom of “poetic narrative” that puts “content” over “form.” While he was doing this, he worked tirelessly as a public intellectual to get justice for the victims of the government crackdown on the May 18th Gwangju Democratization Movement. He visited North Korea and went into exile, and through his subsequent imprisonment showed his opposition to the contradictions of the Korean division and the world order that enforces it. This nearly ten-year “break” was time spent making his perspective on reality and literary effort even more accessible and flexible. After his return to writing with The Old Garden, an emotional story of the 1980s democratization movement’s human dignity and the scars left behind, he has continued to produce a stream of masterpieces. In particular, novels that use traditional Korean narrative forms, such as the “Chinogwi Exorcism of Hwanghae Province,” “The Story of Shim Cheong,” and “Baridegi Shamanistic Folktales,” in a creative way.

The publication of the trilogy of novels The Guest, Shim Cheong, and Princess Bari are the result of the author’s long exploration of the aesthetic form. Of course, this trilogy did not stop at simply recreating the narrative form. Hwang uses this new style to address critical historical events and real issues that cross the boundaries of the Korean peninsula, such as the horrors of foreign modernity trespassing in the North (The Guest), the suffering of the East Asian peoples in the modern transitional period (Shim Cheong), and the destructive shadow of globalization as intensified by separation and conflict (Princess Bari). In a similar vein, Hwang’s recent work, The Sound of the Shallow Water, has the author projecting his own destiny onto the life of the storyteller Lee Shin-Tong, who dreams of the dawn of civilization in the modern period of awakening. This novel has reached a fully developed stage of perfection that encompasses history and humanity to their utmost. As such, Hwang Sok-yong’s literature continues to be in the present progressive form.

by Jung Hongsoo
Literary Critic
Shin Hyoung-cheol: Was there a particular moment in your life or a particular work that you read that opened your eyes to literature for the first time?

Hwang Sok-yong: My parents were intellectuals of the colonial era who had studied in China and Japan. My mother bought me lots of books and also got me to write book reports and essays about what I read. Also, in the 1950s right after the Korean War, there were so many old and second-hand books in the night markets. They would sell books and lend them out as well. From among those books I read whatever fell into my hands. The very first thing I read was Alexandre Dumas’ *The Man in the Iron Mask*, during my second year of elementary school. Then, I read his *The Count of Monte Cristo* when I was in fifth grade. I also read novels like *Crime and Punishment* and *Wuthering Heights* when I was an elementary school student. When I was in the fourth grade, I won the grand prize in a national creative writing competition. When we returned after having been evacuated to Daegu, our house was in ruins; I wrote down my thoughts from the day. The title was “The Day We Came Home.”

Shin: In 1962, when you were still a high school student, you won the Sasanggye New Author Literary Prize, but your writing career officially began in 1970 when your short story “The Pagoda” won the Chosun Ilbo New Writer’s Contest. You have lived almost fifty years of your life as a writer. Would you be able to divide that long period of time into different eras or themes?
Hwang: There are literary critics who divide my career into the early years and the later years with my visit to North Korea and subsequent exile, imprisonment, and release as the turning point between the two, but I would rather make a more detailed distinction.

The first period would be from my initial literary debut in 1962, to 1966 when I was conscripted into the army. During that time, I wrote a number of short stories. You could say it was a time of individualism and estheticism. Then, I joined the marines and went off to the Vietnam War. It was only through my experiences of the Vietnam War that I realized the real meaning of the Korean War. For that reason, from then on I would always say “the Vietnam War is the Korean War.” They say that young people who have been to war are no longer young. By the time I returned to Korea my perspective on the world was very different.

The second period begins after 1970. I wrote works such as “Far from Home” and “Mr. Han’s Chronicle,” and in 1974, the serial publication of my epic novel *Jang Gilsan* began (which was completed with the 10th volume in 1984). During this period, I participated in the democratization movement in resistance to the Yushin dictatorship, and got involved in different kinds of cultural resistance activities. I guess I would have to say that the second period lasted up to the publication of *The Shadow of Arms* through which I revisited the Vietnam War.

The third period, which follows on from that is actually a time when I wrote nothing at all. This is the time during which, following my visit to North Korea in 1989, I lived in exile in places like Berlin and New York, and then, when I returned to Korea in 1993, was imprisoned until my release in 1998. But if you consider that a writer’s behavior is in fact an extension of his or her literary activity, this period too would have to be considered one of the stages in my life’s work. I refer to this period as my time doing “community service.” Before traveling to North Korea there was no way I could completely free myself from the ideological oppression that was controlling South Korean society. My visit to North Korea was an attempt to overcome the division that existed within me. Through my visit to the North a considerable part of my person did become much freer. And during my years of exile, I was able to see the Korean peninsula objectively, from the outside, and I came to identify myself as someone straddling the border between South and North. I also thought that I wanted to free myself from the frame of ethnic nationalism and become a citizen of the world. In terms of literature, I came to think that I needed to break away from the various disciplines of realist aesthetics, which I had stuck to in my work up until that point.

And then the fourth era in my literature began. This period began with *The Old Garden* and runs right up to my latest novel, *Dusk*. I can sense that the so-called “later years literature” nature of my work is becoming stronger.

Shin: Although your latest work *Dusk* was quite a short novel, it left a strong and lingering impression. The main character, Park Min-woo, is of pretty much the same generation as Oh Hyun Woo of *The Old Garden*. But his is a case of someone who has lived a completely different kind of life. The perspective and tone of the novel did have a similar feeling though. By returning to *The Old Garden* it seemed to me as though you were tying up the loose ends of an era. So I wonder, is the fourth phase of your writing finishing now to make way for the fifth?

Hwang: I would prefer it if you just saw it as a continuation of the fourth period. I don’t think there will be a fifth period in my work.

Shin: You have lived through the mid to late twentieth century as a writer in Korea, East Asia’s divided nation. During that time, have you come upon anything you have considered particular to the tasks of Korean literature?

Hwang: With the Korean War, the capacity of national literature in Korea was almost reduced to nothing.
Many writers were displaced, many went north, and many died. Then, in the North, literature for the Party, and in the South, anti-communist literature, were each emphasized as the only possibilities for literature. Then, in the South, with the April 19th Student Revolution in 1960, the rigidity of society was alleviated somewhat, and as literature from all over the world flooded into the country, Korean literature was finally able to take on a sense of modernity in the work of the April 19th generation of writers. After that, we went through all of the things that the populations of developing nations go through, such as military dictatorships and rapid industrialization. Then came the watershed, I would say that this came at the time when the Cold War system crumbled with the demolition of the Berlin Wall. Following this Korea, too, entered into the system of globalization and now people in South Korea are experiencing almost everything in real-time together with the people of the world.

I want to say something about the topics that I believe contemporary Korean literature needs to consider. The first is migration and harmony. From people to capital, everything is constantly moving. And as unfamiliar things gather in one place, intense conflicts are forming. The second topic, which is connected with the first, is identity and universality. Because we are now in an era when we each need to be aware of our own identity, but also have to know how to live alongside others. The third is desire and moderation. We are living in a time of low-growth globally, but the size of people's greed is the same as it ever was, so problems are occurring. We may indeed be living through a transition period of great suffering. These days you can see young people boycotting values like success or happiness. Perhaps we can call this the “minimalization of life,” choosing to live in a kind of anarchy?

Shin: You said that the period in which you did not publish any literary works should also be regarded as a phase in your literary career. In fact it would not be an overstatement to say that, as well as your writing, your life itself has been a work of literature. I am reminded of the English word “commitment.” It has various nuances including dedication, devotion, intervention, and participation. For people who believe that a writer must show complete commitment to their craft, you are surely the most exemplary model of this kind of writer. In your view, do we still need writers like this? Or is it even possible?

Hwang: Hmm, could it be possible? Some time ago, when I met people like Oe Kenzaburo or Le Clézio, they would tell me they envied my having been born in a country with so many stories to tell. They are referring to the turbulent modern history of Korea. I have lived my life thinking that as a writer from such a country, I must make my life and literature one and the same. I am not judging myself as having succeeded. Thinking about it now, it’s as though I have been in the throes of an epic dream. But nowadays it’s difficult even to dream such a dream let alone live it. Literature doesn’t have the same standing as it once did. Also, it seems as though writers these days are getting more inspiration from other texts rather than from their own lives or the lives of others.

Shin: As you are the writer who has broken out of the particular conditions of South Korea in the most intense way, when you have participated in events overseas I imagine that journalists and readers want to hear about the political situation on the Korean Peninsula and your opinion on the subject. Has that been the case?

Hwang: It is inevitable really, as North and South are still in confrontation on the Korean peninsula. But here we have become somewhat numb to this state of affairs by now. When North Korea tests out a missile or nuclear device or whatever, people merely think, “Ah, that again,” and carry on with their day. On the contrary, my friends overseas get worried and ask after me, they take it very seriously.
Shin: As you traveled to North Korea in 1989, and then after many twists and turns were finally released from prison in 1998, the after-effects of your visit to the North presided over almost ten years of your life. You must have been asked this question countless times but, looking back, how do you feel about that period?

Hwang: After I traveled to North Korea, I experienced exile and imprisonment, and there might be those who say that in this way I wasted too much time at a very important stage in my life as a writer, but if I hadn’t been through those years I doubt whether my later literature would have become so established. Before all of that I had already written Jang Gilsan and The Shadow of Arms, but if it had not happened, I don’t think any of my later works would have been particularly special. During that time, I was able to stand right at the center of a violent upheaval in world history. If my later literary works have a certain universalism and are appealing even to international readers it is because of the things that I absorbed during that period.

Shin: The outlook for unification is not particularly bright. The younger generation seems generally unconcerned and even writers don’t show much interest in the issues of division and unification.

Hwang: Because unification is merely being used as fodder for political marketing, it has already been many years since I stopped referring to it. Instead I talk about a peace structure. There are certain risks facing each and every country. These risks must be well managed. In our case, the risk comes from division. Proper management of that danger would necessitate the establishment of a peace structure. There are many crucial reasons for this, but the economic factors in particular have the strongest appeal to ordinary people. Following the financial crisis in 1997 the capitalist capacity of South Korea reached its limit. We need to undertake economic cooperation with North Korea to develop the Tumen River and also to make inroads into places like Siberia and Mongolia. That is precisely why I have been calling for East Asian solidarity, but unfortunately this project is currently at a standstill. It may be fair enough that the younger generations are uninterested in unification, but it is difficult to accept their apathy towards the establishment of a peace structure. I mean, it is directly connected with all of our everyday lives. World peace is not something to be scoffed at. It starts with no one else but ourselves.

Shin: That which critics have called your “later era” and what you have referred to more specifically as the fourth era in your career, the fifteen years from 2000 to now, has also been a period of literary experimentation undertaken from the basis of realist aesthetics.

Hwang: That’s right, in the novel The Guest, I tried to break through the genre of realism by using the form of the Chinogwi shaman exorcism rites to structure the narrative. Then, with Shim Cheong and Princess Bari, I reinterpreted the pre-modern pansori of the story of Shim Cheong and the Baridegi shamanistic folktale respectively, to reflect deeply upon immigration in the 21st century. But I’m not satisfied yet. The novel that I am working on at the moment looks back on the modern history of Korea through the lives of three generations of railroad workers. In the beginning I intended to go back to the style I used with The Shadow of Arms and write it in a traditionally realist way, but recently I have become sick of it and so I was even about to give up on the whole idea. Now, I am thinking that if I take the story apart and completely re-order it to write it in a new form then I might just about be able to reach the sort of expansion of realism that I have been working towards for many years now.

by Shin Hyoung-cheol
Literary Critic and Assistant Professor of Creative Writing
Chosun University
Shining a Light on the Shadow of Globalization through Shamanism
The Eurocentric narrative of world history began to be questioned during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Johann Gottfried Herder resisted the Western-centric “universal history” with his statement “that which is ethnic is worldly” and promoted the right of non-Western peripheries to historical sovereignty. Going further, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe advocated the concept of “World Literature” (Weltliteratur) with the idea that it holds a great purpose for the Progress of Man when ethnic literature crosses national boundaries and becomes a tool for communicating with the world. Hwang Sok-yong has worked passionately to help realize that “ethnic literature is world literature”—an idea that both Herder and Goethe pursued. In his literary career, which spans over forty years, Hwang has shown the reality of a divided Korea, given critical insight into the Cold War, and pursued a deep introspection of the problems of globalization.

Until the 1990s, Hwang Sok-yong’s novels were a model of traditional realism, but since the 2000s he has been trying something new by using traditional Korean narrative forms to explore current issues in East Asia and in world history. The first work in his “East Asia trilogy” is The Guest (2001), where he borrows the form of the Chinogwi exorcism of Hwanghae Province, a ritual used to release the pain and regrets of the dead, in order to write of those who were sacrificed to both the left and right’s ideological conflict during the Korean War. Thus Hwang attempts to knock down the walls built by the Cold War to begin the process of reconciliation. This was followed by Shim Cheong (2003), in which the structure of the tale of Shim Cheong, who sacrificed herself to the Dragon King to ensure a safe passage, is used to discuss the process of modernization through the plunder of East Asia by imperialist powers and its subsequent incorporation into the world market.

The third work in the East Asia trilogy is Princess Bari (2007), which deals with the diaspora issue facing the globalized age through the ordeals that a girl, a North Korean defector, undergoes. Muga or shamanic song, is a traditional Korean narrative form that, like the Greek myth of Orpheus, is structured around going into the underworld to rescue a soul. This novel borrows that narrative structure and takes the character of Bari, who travels to and from the underworld in Korean shamanic legend, and uses her trials and pain to tell the fate of a North Korean defector, a girl who has been tossed into the purgatory of the crashing waves of globalization. Through this story, the author views the starvation of North Koreans and North Korean defectors as the dark shadows of capitalism, which incites international polarization. Bearing that meaning in mind, London, where Bari arrives at the end of her Odyssean journey, carries the spatio-temporal symbolism of being a place steeped in old imperialistic history that receives a large influx of refugees.

Shim Cheong, who sacrificed herself, and Bari, who represents a healer in pain, are both characters comparable to figures in Western literature, like the heroine of Goethe’s play, Iphigenia in Tauris, who negotiated between the Greeks and the “wild men” and who was offered up as a sacrifice for a positive outcome in the Trojan War. Hwang’s novels use a unique style to take the specific fate of an individual and extrapolate it to not just a Korean or East Asian story, but a story of the world. In that aspect, Hwang Sok-yong can be considered to put into practice the most Korean, and at the same time most global, morality.

by Lim Hong Bae
Professor of German Literature
Seoul National University
I stripped off my shell of a body more than once during those long days of darkness and followed Chilsung down the white path to see my grandmother. Once, after coming to briefly and taking a look around, I realized that the world of the dead was no different from the place I was in. I travelled in the ship through the different layers of the otherworld.

I lay with my eyes closed and my back pressed to the bottom of the ship as it rose and fell with the waves, the din of machinery constant, and let my spirit rise into the air. It was indeed like slipping out of a shell, or removing a garment. It didn’t make a sound, but there was a sensation like soft fabric tearing each time I shed my body and drifted about in the dark.

Then Chilsung would appear, his white fur dazzling my eyes as he wagged his tail in front of me. We would walk single-file along the white path that hovered in the blackness like a belt of moonlight. After a long walk, we would arrive at a riverbank, where a light breeze blew and a bridge arched over the river. The water looked black as tar. Only the bridge was illuminated, as if by lamplight, and Grandmother would come across it, the hem of her white skirt swaying.

Bari, come this way.

When Grandmother walked back over the bridge, it lit up with all the colours of the rainbow. Chilsung walked ahead of me. I followed him across this rainbow bridge. Just then, I heard voices coming from the dark water below, voices crying out to be saved. A woman’s ragged screams. Weeping and wailing. Groans of pain. A baby bawling. Voices moaning under the lash. Dying breaths. Teeth chattering as voices cried out about the cold. Shrill screams following one after the other, wailing about the heat. Hollow giggles from going mad. I could barely bring myself to cross the bridge.

Don’t listen, and don’t look down. If you stray from the path, you’ll lose all your good karma.

Once I was over the bridge I saw that the sun was shining there, and everything was strangely quiet. A wide field filled with fresh grass stretched away evenly, and a delicate breeze stirred the wildflowers.
Grandmother pointed to a zelkova tree at the far end of the field.

_When you get closer to that tree, your guide will appear. Hurry off now._

_Grandma, aren't you coming with me?_  
_I can't. My world ends here._  
_What about Chilsung?_  
_He slowly wagged his tail and didn’t answer._

Grandmother held out her hand.  
_Take these with you. It'll help._

She dropped three peony blossoms into my palm. I put them in my pocket and floated over to the tree, bobbing gently as if carried there on a current. The tree was enormous; it had to have been as tall as a three- or four-storey building. The branches were completely bare, though it wasn’t winter. The closer I got to that tree, with its countless branches twisting out of its thick trunk in all directions, the scarier it looked. On one of the lower branches perched a magpie, flicking its tail. When it saw me it rubbed its beak against the tree several times and then addressed me.

_Hey, Stupidhead, where you think you're goin'? Oughta give you what for._

_What did I do wrong?_ I asked angrily. Despite everything that had happened to me up until that point, I had submitted to all of it meekly, without a single word of blame or complaint, sorrow or frustration, so I truly felt this was uncalled-for. The bird opened its beak wide and laughed at me. Then it said:  
_You're still a long way from bringing back the life-giving water. How the living do suffer, do suffer!_  

_I clamped down on my anger._  
_Show me the way to the western sky, I said._  
_Follow me, follow me._

The little featherbrain spread his wings and took off from the tip of the branch, circled overhead several times and flew straight into the side of the enormous tree trunk as if to crush his own skull.

_Serves you right, I thought. Now you're dead of a busted skull._

But the trunk opened like a yawning mouth, and the bird disappeared into it. I placed one foot inside the shadowy hollow, and the rest of my body was sucked inside. I slid down, down, down. When I reached the bottom, the top of the tree hovered far above my head and I saw a road stretching out in five directions: north, south, east, west and centre. In the middle of the road stood an envoy from the otherworld, dressed all in black and wearing a black horsehair hat. He clutched a folding fan with both hands. _Where are you going?_ He asked.

_I'd been wondering the same thing, so I had no response at first. But then I said the first thing that came to mind:_  
_They told me to come over for dinner._

The envoy considered this for a moment and then asked: _The great kings?_  

_I didn’t know what else to do, so I nodded. He pointed to one of paths with his fan. I walked for a long time and eventually reached a large plaza with torchlight glowing on all sides. The same envoy appeared again and dragged me to the centre. A huge, towering platform, like a judge’s bench, appeared along the opposite wall. Seated atop the platform were ten great kings, each with a different type of crown: a horned crown; an ornament-covered crown that stuck straight up like a chimney and gradually widened; a round crown; a wide, flat crown; a crown that bulged out on the sides. The great kings seemed to stir, and then the one seated in the middle wearing the horned crown glared fiercely at me from above his black beard. He called out:_  
*_Loathsome worm! You're not dead, yet you dare call us forth in your dreams?*_

_The great king with a white beard and a crown with triangular horns yelled:_  
_You lied and said we invited you here!_  
_The great king with the flat crown said:_  
_We cannot send you back to the flesh you abandoned!_  
_Another said:_  
_An insignificant speck like you arrogantly vows to take the life-giving water from the ends of the Earth?!_  

_The great kings of the otherworld called out my crimes each in turn, and at the very end the king with the round crown said:_  
_*You are guilty of abandoning your starving kinsmen. Even if you spend the rest of your life offering food and reciting sutras to the spirits of these dead, you will never*
beans, every kind of fish and meat, fritters and savoury pancakes, wild greens, stews and soups of every flavour and colour and variety, plates and dishes and platters and saucers galore. All around me I heard the sound of lips smacking and teeth chomping.

Words — half-song, half-incantation — burst out of me, and even in the midst of singing, I recognized them as Hwangcheon muga, the shaman song to console the spirits of the dead. It was from the story my grandmother used to tell me about Princess Bari:

Aah, aah, deceased spirits!
At this open door between our worlds,
I pray, I pray.
To the mountains, to the rivers
you prayed, you prayed.
Hungry ghosts, starved spirits,
what became of the bodies you wore only yesterday?
Return! Return!
Go to Paradise, come back to life.
You are without sin;
lay down your burdens.

When the song ended, the smoke retreated, low to the ground, and vanished. Suddenly the floor of the hollow tree split in two to reveal a fog-covered pond. A breeze lifted the fog and the glassy, mirror-like surface of the water appeared. The water was the blue-green of moss, and under it a shadow was moving. Against this solid blue screen, images slowly began to take shape:

A stormy sea. A single boat tosses like a leaf amid mountainous waves, barely making it from crest to crest. It is a fishing boat with a squat cabin like a tiny house sticking out of the top. The belly of the ship is stuffed with the day’s catch. In that cramped space, where the ceiling is so low that a person can’t even sit straight up, water sloshes and rises. Then I notice the people squirming inside. Men, women, children. Ten,
Just then I remembered the flowers my grandmother had given me. I took one peony from my pocket and tossed it down. With a loud pop! the fire vanished, and something like a warm blanket or a cloud wrapped around me. I drifted slowly down through the air.

A woman crouches and covers her mouth to keep from crying, crumpled skirt and top clutched to her naked body. Her face blurs and begins to shake with laughter. She’s lost her mind.

She stumbles down a road as if drunk. A young man chases her and smacks her face mercilessly. She’s dragged away by the hair and disappears down a filthy alley.

A dark basement. A single fluorescent bulb hangs from a low ceiling. Women sit at sewing machines and stitch together mountains of fabric. Men walk up and down the rows, their hands idle behind their backs.

A storage room at the back of a restaurant piled high with vegetables and shellfish. Water sloshing underfoot. Men trimming cabbage and cleaning fish.

Another stormy sea. Men who have been gathering clams stand on a tiny sandbank, naked beneath their raingear. They bring their hands to their mouths to shout. The tide rises. The sandbank slowly vanishes and the water rises from stomach to chest. The floundering bodies disappear beneath the black water, and the waves cut furrows into the surface of sea before filling them again.

pp. 109-117
Translations of *Princess Bari*

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Korean Short Verse

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Editor's Note

Yun Dong-ju, one of Korea’s best-loved poets once wrote in a poem titled “Poem Written Easily”: ‘Life they say is hard/ that a poem should be written so easily/ is an embarrassing thing.’ But writing poetry, and even more so writing short poems, is an incredibly difficult task. From the sijo of literary tradition to the “dicapoem” movement of the present day, Korean short verse, or dansi, communicates the quintessence of poetry that lies in implication.

The Lasting Impression of Short Poems

I.
We stand in awe if a speaker gives a speech that is brief but deeply meaningful. It goes without saying that we feel the same when the pinnacle of expression is achieved in poetry, where thought and feeling are compressed to the greatest possible extent and delivered in cadences. Writers of classical Korean literature were particularly skilled at expressing profound sentiment in short poems. These poems included four- and eight-line classical Chinese verse, and also sijo, a form limited to only three verses, that is, three lines. These writers incorporated the principles of nature and the universe as well as the laws of the secular world into these short works, leaving them for posterity. Let us look at one of the numerous sijo that adorn the halls of Korean literary history, a poem written by Yi Cho-nyon (1269-1343), a writer who lived during the Goryeo dynasty.

The moon is white on pear blossoms
and the Milky Way tells the third watch.
A cuckoo would not know
the intent of a branch of spring.

Too much awareness is a sickness,
it keeps me awake all night.¹

This is a night when even the moonlight gleams
white on the pear blossoms, and the Milky Way tells us
the night is deep. “A cuckoo would not know the intent
of a branch of spring”—but the poet’s heightened
feeling is like a sickness and he cannot fall asleep. The
scene takes place in the middle of the night one spring.
This poem conveys the sorrowful beauty of the scenery
and the fluttering of the poet’s heart. It is as if the flow
of lyricism that is sensitive to these details can also
bathe the spirit clean. Well-known modern poet Cho
Jihun borrowed the last line from this sijo and used it
in the ending of his poem “Wanhwasam (The Scholar
Who Loved Flowers).” The line reads: “A mind aware is
a sickness, and [the man] trembles quietly under the

light of the moon as he walks.”

The poems of a Joseon dynasty gisaeng (courtesan) named Hwang Jini appear in Cheonggu Yeongeon, the oldest anthology of sijo. Her work is superb, transcending the limits of time as well as those imposed by her low social status. That this gisaeng had such remarkable ability, with many of her poems ranking on par with those of high-born classical scholars, is in part due to the neither long nor complicated form of the sijo. And yet, clearly it is difficult to write short, simple poems or pieces of writing that are deeply meaningful. Broadening the scope of our discussion a little, the fundamental teachings in religious scriptures that guide human beings along the road to eternal life are neither difficult nor complex.

II.

In central Seoul, at the main intersection by Gwanghwamun Gate, a company that owns a tall office building set up an oversize bulletin board on the wall outside. For twenty-five years, as an act of public service, the company has selected either individual lines of poems or the full text of short poems each new season for posting on what is known as the “Gwanghwamun poetry signboard.” This famous outdoor exhibition of illustrated verse has refreshed the landscape downtown and provided an enjoyable diversion for the one million people that cross the street there every day. Last year, on the twenty-fifth year of this campaign, a poll was taken of the hundred poems that have been posted to date, and Na Tae-joo’s “Wildflower” was chosen to be number one.

Beautiful when you look closely
Lovable when you look for a long time
You’re like that, too.

It is a very short poem. The full text could be printed on the signboard as it runs to only three lines. These poems, short as epigrams, leave a different impression depending not only on the reader, but also on the reader’s mood at the time of reading. The point I would like to emphasize here, however, is in regards to the power and efficacy of short verse. Readers are not necessarily moved by long speeches or texts. That is why, among the old Chinese proverbs, there is the extreme-sounding expression choncheolsarin (murder with a small weapon). Like this, a short, simple piece of writing can impart a devastating lesson. Poetry has this capacity, and it is all the more powerful in times like these, when people endure hard lives and spiritual fatigue. Perhaps the fact that many people have committed the short works of great Korean Poets to memory is testament to these conditions.

The following work by eminent poet Cho Byeonghwa (1921-2003) is called “Haeinsa”:

Whether a temple is large or small
The philosophy is one
Whether a house is large or small
All humans are one

The poet leads us to an awakening and sets up a surprising comparison with the same eye seeing spiritual devotion in the size of a temple and a person’s worth in the size of his/her house. The essential point is that one cannot judge from exteriors. This short poem demonstrates great depth, offering insight into the principles of both visible objects and intangible human affairs, and the ideas are joined together in lyrical perfection.

Let’s turn to a poem called “That Flower,” by Ko Un.

Going down I saw
That flower
I failed to see as I came up.

Everyone knows that life is filled with twists and turns. But without years spent trudging along this tortuous path, it is almost impossible for someone to incorporate into themselves the hidden lessons that are learned along the way. Learning from second-hand sources is different from learning from direct experience. What lies within this poem is a lesson

2 Translated by Brother Anthony and Lee Sang-Wha
A short, simple piece of writing can impart a devastating lesson. Poetry has this capacity, and it is all the more powerful in times like these, when people endure hard lives and spiritual fatigue.

awakening us to the profound inner workings of life, a lesson one spends one’s whole life learning.

**III.**

People are saying that short poems are a trend, and this is certainly true for the circle of poets involved in the movement known as “Extreme Lyricism.” Members of this movement denounce obscure poetry that alienates its audience, and advocate writing short, resonant verse that connects with readers’ sensibilities. Poet and literary critic Choi Dong-Ho is an enthusiast, standing at the center of the movement alongside Cho Jeonggwon, Moon Insoo, and Lee Ha-suk, among others.

Of course, the notion that “short equals good” in poetry does not always hold true. In Korean literature, or to speak more broadly, in literature worldwide, there are shelves upon shelves of symbolism-laden, difficult-to-decipher poetic masterpieces. But considering that we are at a juncture when readers of literature are gradually becoming distanced from these works, the potential impact of the reader-friendly Extreme Lyricism movement should not be taken lightly. Now, as the world is changing and the spirit of the times is changing too, the main axis of culture and literature is shifting from print culture and media to video culture and electronic media. At this time, a new genre of short, emotionally-charged “dicapoems” is rising to the fore in Korea.

The term for a poem written in this new form, dicapoem, is a synthesis of the words “digital camera” and “poem.” Poets now capture digital snapshots with smartphones and attach a few short, telling lines of poetry to the images. This contemporary genre of literature combines the use of readily accessible digital technology and the production of reader-friendly poems. But there is a huge gap between merely thinking of the possibilities of this form of visual verse on the one hand, and acting to encourage its systemization as poetry and championing it as a literary movement on the other.

A major advantage of this poetic movement, initiated by Lee Sang-ok and other poets, is that it is open and universal: anyone can be a writer of a dicapoem. Perhaps it is inevitable that we are witnessing the growth of a form of poetry that involves short, powerful, hard-hitting poems assisted by visuals. Whatever shape the world takes in the future, it is unlikely that a form of poetry so familiar and accessible to readers will fade from view. But the net worth of this outpouring of short poems will be determined by the measure of our minds as we read them. This special section of _list_ magazine invites readers to think about and discuss these ideas.

by Kim Jonghoi

Literary Critic and Professor of Korean Literature

Kyung Hee University
Part 1. Classical Korean Poetry

In Search of the Essence of Sijo
Suppose a Korean writer is participating in an international literary conference. And suppose there is a foreign writer who happens to ask him or her about the traditional literary genre of Korea. Most likely, sijo will come into his or her mind, for it is the extant poetic form that is still enjoyed in Korea ever since it emerged about 700 years ago. On mentioning sijo, the Korean writer will probably be asked what kind of literary genre sijo is. More often than not, he or she may not find a satisfactory answer, other than that it is a short three-line poetic form. Or he or she may quote one or two sijo works and add this or that interpretation.

If you are the Korean writer mentioned above, which work of sijo would you quote? Probably, most Koreans would be intimate with Jeong Mongju’s work beginning, “Though I were to die and die again,” or Hwang Jini’s work, “Blue stream amid the green hills”; and not a few Koreans would be familiar with Yi Saek’s, “In the valley of melted snow” or Yi Jeongbo’s “A pear blossom fallen by the raging wind” All of these works are poignant and meaningful in their own way; however, what are the common characteristics applicable to all these and, hopefully, other sijo works? An attempt to infer the common characteristics of sijo on the basis of a few works might be comparable to an attempt to see the forest in just a few trees. And yet, if you don’t figure out the overall view, how can you find your way through the forest?

One of the obvious facts is that sijo is a short three-line poetic form, as mentioned above. To be more specific, sijo is composed of approximately forty-five syllables (morae) arranged into three lines. If there is any comparable short poetic form in the world, it would be the Japanese haiku consisting of seventeen syllables in three lines. And yet, sijo is quite a different poetic form from haiku.

What makes sijo unique is its sense structure. Unlike haiku, whose sense structure is characterized by its attempts at the superimposition of one image or idea upon another, sijo mobilizes a different mode of presenting poetic ideas or images: a fourfold sense structure of introduction, development, turn, and conclusion. A theme is introduced in the first line; it is developed in the second; a twist or anti-theme is proposed in the first half of the third; and a certain conclusion is provided in the second half of the third. In this way, sijo evokes the dramatic unfolding of a poetic theme.

One might argue that such a description would be too sweeping to be of any practical value to the readers of the actual works of sijo. Sure enough, the above-mentioned works vary in theme and mood. First of all, Jeong’s sijo dramatizes the resolution of a man confronted with a political dilemma: Should one remain loyal to one’s lord, or side with the newly emerged political power about to overthrow him? According to a popular legend, shortly after Jeong recited this sijo in front of a key political opponent, he was killed by assassins on his way home.

Though I were to die and die again,
still die a hundred times,
And so my bones all turn to dust,
my soul remains or not,
My single-minded heart toward my love
shall never perish.\(^*\)

\(^*\) Jeong Mongju (1338–1392): One of the most venerated sages of Korea, who tried in vain to protect the waning Goryeo dynasty against the newly emerged political power.
In the valley of melted snow,
the clouds are gathering deep;
The heart-gladdening plum flower—
where is it blooming now?
I stand alone at sunset,
not knowing where to go.*

At a cursory glance, Yi Jeongbo’s work might be read as a song of nature. A closer look at this work, however, will reveal that this is not so. Above all, note that the pear blossom and the spider are not natural objects in the literal sense of meaning: how can the pear blossom have the will to fly back to the branch, and the spider to think? By personifying them, the poet leads us to read them as the metaphor of human beings who are at once the ones displaced and the ones eager to feed on the displaced. In this sense, Yi’s sijo can be interpreted as a biting, satiric criticism of human reality.

A pear blossom fallen by the raging wind
 tosses about here and there;
 Soon, failing to fly back to its branch,
 it gets stuck in a spider’s web.
 Look: that spider will pounce on it,
 thinking it has caught a butterfly.*

Hwang Jini’s work is a sort of love poem, and its major theme would be summarized as carpe diem. “Blue stream” is a pun on the name of a noble, Byeokgyesu, who took pride in his being impervious to any female charm, and “Bright Moon” was a pseudonym of Hwang, who was a gisaeng (a professional entertainer) at the time. The legend says that, while Byeokgyesu passed by, Hwang recited this provocatively suggestive sijo. Attracted to her beauty and poetic ingenuity, Byeokgyesu was said to have fallen in love with her. One might also read in this sijo a satirical tone of a commoner mocking the ostentatiousness of the nobility.

Blue Stream amid the green hills,
 better not boast of your speed.
Once you have reached the ocean
 there’s slim chance you will return.
When Bright Moon shines over the hills,
 why not stay awhile and enjoy it?*

On the other hand, Yi Saek’s sijo conveys nostalgia for the peace and harmony of bygone days. Yi was a surviving retainer of the Goryeo dynasty who refused to take office after its fall. Here in this work, he implicitly discloses his yearning to meet someone with political fidelity who could share his sense of loss. In the Korean literary tradition, the plum blossom is a symbol of loyalty or fidelity.

In the valley of melted snow,
the clouds are gathering deep;
The heart-gladdening plum flower—
where is it blooming now?
I stand alone at sunset,
not knowing where to go.*
What makes *sijo* unique is its sense structure. Unlike haiku, whose sense structure is characterized by its attempts at the superimposition of one image or idea upon another, *sijo* mobilizes a different mode of presenting poetic ideas or images: a fourfold sense structure of introduction, development, turn, and conclusion.

If there was anything the above-discussed *sijo* had in common, what would it be? Obviously, all these works are about human affairs. But is there a literary work that hasn’t anything to do with human affairs? In a sense, we should say yes. And yet, if compared with haiku, what we are arguing about *sijo* will become self-apparent: while haiku pursues the momentary or the intuitive knowledge of the phenomenal world, *sijo* aims at an understanding of human reality. In other words, whereas haiku is a poetic form oriented to symbolically reveal the state of mind that transcends time and reality, *sijo* can be understood as a poetic form oriented to allegorically describe human reality. Indeed, the essence of *sijo* lies in the sense of reality that the poet perceives within human time and along with human time.

It goes without saying that there are *sijo* in praise of the beauty or mysteries of nature. Even in such cases, however, the aim of *sijo* poets is the ironic and/or critical comment on human reality, as evidenced by Yi’s *sijo* about the pear blossom and the spider. Or, whether explicit or implicit, the poet’s conscious sense of reality plays an important role in *sijo* writing. In a nutshell, there is no *sijo* work that can be categorized as a song purely intended to say something about nature.

One more thing to point out is that the utilization of vivid images is a must for *sijo*. To borrow from the American poet Ezra Pound, “certain qualities of vivid presentation” of things to the mind’s eye could be considered as the common characteristic observable in the traditional poetry of all East Asian countries: Korea, Japan, and China. And yet, if we are allowed to add a few more words as to the essence of *sijo*, we may say that it lies in the dramatic presentation of vivid poetic images or ideas in the sequence of introduction, development, turn, and conclusion.

*Translated by Jang Gyung-ryul*

Professor of English
Seoul National University

2 Hwang Jini (1506?–1567?): The most illustrious and accomplished of all women poets of the Joseon dynasty, whose love poems, in particular, are highly esteemed for their poetic ingenuity.

3 Yi Saek (1328–1396): One of the most distinguished scholar-officials of the Goryeo dynasty, who, though he was on good terms with Yi Seonggye (founder of the Joseon dynasty), refused to work for him and retired to the country.

4 Yi Jeongbo (1693–1766): A renowned scholar-official who is regarded as one of the most prolific *sijo* poets of the Joseon dynasty.

*Translated by Jang Gyung-ryul*
Korean poets have been writing modern verse for over a hundred years, beginning in the early twentieth century after an influx of Western free verse arrived via Japan. Gradually, the poems have lost their musicality, and they’ve become longer and more abstruse. Whereas many tradition-oriented poets have given us outstanding short works, many of the Western-leaning poets have written long poems. Representative of the former group are Kim Sowol and Seo Jeong-ju.

**Mother and Sisters**

Mother and sisters, we’ll live together by the river with a sandbar blooming golden for our garden and reeds fluting music from behind the gate.

Mother and sisters, we’ll live together by the river.

Kim Sowol’s lyricism is commonly thought to reflect the influence of *minyo* (traditional folk songs). His poems have the rhythm of *minyo*, and are very short. Even his most famous works, “The Azaleas” and “Flowers on the Mountain,” are not very long. At this length, they are easily memorized; after memorization, they are often recited, and as recitation favorites, they linger in the mind.

The poet thought to have most successfully captured Korean sensibility in his works, Seo Jeong-ju, also wrote short verse.

**Cute Rhymes**

Sister, elder sister dear
dark and smart as sesame cake,
all I’ve got is new as new,
nothing of mine is faded yet;
so sister, elder sister dear,
sister dark as deepest night,
let me hug you once again,
shadows round your eyes and all.

This poem is reminiscent of children’s verse. The eldest sister assumes maternal responsibilities in a family with many children. She ages along with her mother while taking care of her siblings. The Korean word for sesame cake—the black, oily pulp from ground sesame seeds—is *ggaemuk*; variations are *ggetmuk* in Gyeongsang Province and *ggambugi*
in Jeolla Province. Like an ear of grain black with *ggambugi-byeong* (smut), she has aged prematurely, spending her days doing hard labor. The period from midnight to 1:00 a.m. is the “deepest night.” What does it mean if the sister is “dark as deepest night”? At this hour when everyone should be in bed, she is kept up by household chores of whatever kind, whether it be weaving or beating the washing with ironing sticks. There is nothing that the younger sister can do to help. So she stands in front of her like the shadow of a snowman on a snowy day, and asks to “hug [her] once again,” offering comfort, if only on an emotional level.

**Cold Wine**

Morning, worn out, exhausted after writing all night,  
Managing to go on by wetting my throat with cold wine.  
How I long for that lady in the rich man’s house  
Where they paid fifty thousand for each sixtieth-birthday verse.  
Oh, if only a line might form of fifteen or sixteen such ladies!

Seo’s sense of humor shines in this clever poem. Although he once said, “Poverty is nothing more than ragged clothes,”* here, in gently self-mocking tones, he depicts the daily life of a poet in straitened circumstances. From the poem it appears that he was once commissioned to write poetry, receiving “fifty thousand (won) for each sixtieth-birthday verse,” and that the patron was none other than “that lady in the rich man’s house.” His drinking table would be overflowing if only “fifteen or sixteen such ladies” formed a line. The wit of the poet expressing his honest feelings brings a smile to our lips. A poem of this kind cannot be long, or it loses its zest.

Baek Seok was a poet who wrote many prose poems and poems of some length, but also a great deal of short verse.

**Rain**

When did acacias cover the ground like white floor cushions?  
A stench overwhels us in the mugginess.

**White Night**

The moon, over the ancient fortress arose  
Atop the thatched roof, a gourd  
Like another moon shined brightly  
One day in the village, a chaste widow wrapped her neck in a night of death  
Yet another night like this

---

5. *Translated by Peter Liptak*
The first poem brings to life sights and smells in a sketch of a rainy day. The second poem, however, is more than a simple landscape painting. It is a portrait of reality, tinged with human sorrow.

A contemporary of Baek Seok, Chong Chi-Yong first made his name as a modernist and then devoted himself to a kind of tradition-oriented spiritualism.

**Lake 1**

A small face like mine
Can be fully covered
By my two palms;

But as my longing is
As wide as a lake,
I can only close my eyes.*

**Lake 2**

The duck twirls its neck
To wind up the lake;

But the duck only feels
Its neck tickled all along. *

The first poem expresses the longing the speaker feels for his beloved, and the second describes the concentric circles made in the water where a duck is playing. It is not that the duck’s neck is ticklish, but rather that this can be guessed from the ripples in the water.

**The Surface of the Lake**

As I clap my hands palm to palm,
The sound calmly crosses the lake,

While a white swan follows, gliding.*

**Winter**

Raindrops fall and roll as hail-beads,
Till at last they cross the dark sea at night.*

The above poems by Chong are also short and fun to read. Hearing a noise, the speaker looks at the lake to discover that the sound crosses first, in beauty, and is then followed by a white swan swimming over the water. The second poem depicts the transformation of winter rain as it falls and is changed into hail. Since the raindrops are rolling like glass beads, the speaker wonders whether they could roll all the way across the sea.

Of the poets active in the 1950s and 1960s, Kim Jong-sam wrote poetry that was notably short.

**Ink Wash Painting**

The old woman’s hand rests
on the neck of the ox as it drinks.
Saying this day too
they spent together,
saying they share swollen feet,
they share loneliness.
If the old woman is left to plow the field with the ox, it implies that there are no men in the family. The woman watering the ox has had him till the soil all day, and she feels both grateful to him and sorry. The ox cannot understand this even if she tells him, so she expresses her feelings by placing her hand on his neck. This poem captures the beauty of absence, widely known to be an aesthetic property of East Asian painting.

The contemporary poet most accomplished at writing short verse is Yoo An-Jin. The full text of her poem “My Ex” reads as follows: “I wonder if he saw me,/ If he knew me.” The speaker is very curious as to the mind of her former lover, who has passed by without seeming to recognize her. She thinks: obviously at one time we were a couple, but now, after so many years have passed, if he seems to pretend not to see me, is it because I have changed or grown old? Is it that he pretends not to recognize me, or does he really not know who I am?

**A Misunderstanding, Sorted**

Was it that way?  
Yes  
I had it wrong.

Then  
I see why  
You took it so far  
To extremes  
I’ve got it now.

Poems like this are overflowing with wit, but it is as a master of the language that Yoo astonishes.

**Showing Off**

A monkey watching a mother holding a baby  
Went scurrying off  
And reappeared to show us hers.

This is an example of a short poem used to full effect. Like a dart that flies at the brain and sticks there, a poem like this gives the reader pleasure, shock, and delight. In some instances, it conveys pain—all in a single motion.

by Lee Seungha  
Professor of Creative Writing  
Chung-Ang University

* Translated by Lee Sung-il
Principles and Potential of Extreme Lyricism in Korean Poetry

In the Korean literary scene lately there has been enthusiastic debate about what is known as “lyricism.” Such debate begins from critical reflection upon the way that the prominent concept of the lyric relies too heavily upon European aesthetics, which in turn, stems from the custom of a system of classification separating lyric, narrative, and drama. Indeed, theories of poetics throughout Korean literary circles all explain the principles of lyricism in similar ways: internalizing the external, lasting ephemerality, self-identity, or the abundant present tense. Therefore, while narrative explores the disconnect in the relationship between the self and the world, lyric in contrast removes any distance between the self and the world. However, such an explanation is merely an aesthetic custom. It does not itself express the unchanging concept of lyricism. In this regard, it is worth noting the efforts to reconsider the explanation of lyric principle according to European aesthetics as the self-expression of the ego.

Of course, until now the overriding view on the principles of lyricism in the Korean literary scene has been to define it as that which interprets and comes to grips with the world, then transforms it by means of the self-expression of the subject. This led to the lyric being understood as the expression of a kind of identity that does not come into conflict with the world; this notion was held up as a principle that takes the first person subject of “I” as the origin and expresses experience in “the abundant present tense.” In the end we can refer back to Hegel, who explained that “what is properly lyric is not objective fact and its plastic portrayal, but the echo of the external in the mind, the mood aroused by it, and the feelings of the heart in such surroundings.”

Accordingly, the urge to maintain and protect such principles of lyricism remains strong in literature to this day. This accompanies the belief that the aesthetic completeness of modern Korean poetry is realized through the dansi, or “short poem,” tradition. In excluding unnecessary language as much as possible and paring back to the minimum required for reason and feeling, the strength of short poetry comes from opening the possibility for readers to interpret a poem using their imaginations. Of course it is true that there is also an inherent danger that such practice can give rise to the over-frequent use of adage or aphorism, or of a poem ending with the abrupt transcendence of a subject, or even poems being written as little more than a memo of an idea without any linguistic artistry. The recent shift in Korean poetry towards narrative, as well as how poets are composing increasingly longer works, arise from a strategy to overcome such limitations. However, the movement towards short poetry that uses transcendence and implication as a foundation to realize an aesthetics of omission, is gaining strength on the value of the lyric as an invaluable method of creativity. This way of writing, which is vigilant not to

allow over-signification by leaving things unsaid, calls for a high level of craftsmanship from its practitioners. It is the concept of “extreme lyric poetry” that has naturally come to the fore at the very apex of such an artisan spirit.

The poet and critic Choi Dong-Ho sustains an enthusiastic engagement with extreme lyricism. While pointing out the various negative aspects he encounters in the poetry of younger poets, such as gratuitous difficulty, hybridity, fantasy, and redundancy, Choi uses the term extreme lyric poetry to denote an alternative path. Inherent in his usage of this term is the emphasis on the need for restraint and the blank space intrinsic to lyric poetry; a call to revive the condensed charm of lyric poetry eliminates any onerous rhetoric. He suggests extreme lyric poetry as a principle to give rise to a high level of poetic tension. According to Choi, short extreme lyric poetry denotes poetry that is formed as simply as possible—something that might be called the “minimal unit of the poem.” In this way, Choi Dong-Ho has designated the fruits of integration with the spirit of the twenty-first century digital age as extreme lyric poetry, within which lies a reflection upon an important artistic alternative for Korean poetry in the future.

We can think about this in the following way. It seems unnecessary to say that the criteria for extreme lyric poetry is not limited to the short length of the poems. However, the methodology of omission and condensation, which naturally leads to a relatively short poem, can also quite naturally be seen as the defining principle. In addition, gripping the hearts of readers with a singular message or image makes for a far more effective work. Accordingly, rather than signifying a physical minimum, the word “extreme” in the term serves to reflect the extremity of concentration and condensation. All of these precedents are achievements garnered in the “blank space and lyricism at the minimal point of language,” as described by Choi Dong-Ho himself in the poet’s preface of his 2011 anthology *Ice Face*.

Of course, for Korean poetry to maintain its abundance, we absolutely need a form of a certain length that can hold within it complex awareness, or the passing of time over a long duration. The key point is to what extent such work creates a new stir in aesthetic experience through impact and frisson. In that regard, the length of a poem is not of fundamental importance. To put it another way, something can be short and overdone, or long and still lacking. Therefore, it may be seen that the aesthetic potential of extreme lyric poetry lies in giving life to the condensed charm of a poem with the moderation and blank space intrinsic to the lyric and the removal of any unnecessary rhetoric. Of course, the term “extreme lyric poetry” has not yet gained universal acceptance in academia. Quite simply, it denotes the methodology of poems that are being written to hold together an aggregation of language and reason that stands in contrast to the overwhelming strand of overly long and difficult poetry being written in Korea today.

From the standpoint of extreme lyricism, the poem cannot exist without being condensed to a minimum. In an age where literature is overtly distributed and consumed as an artfully packaged product—an age where writers rightly consider themselves an important part of the culture industry—this kind of approach will remain fundamental to unlocking the identity of poetry itself, since it is at once both a key significance of poetry and an uncompromising indicator which will defend the essence of poetry in an age of great uncertainty. For this reason, extreme lyricism will continue to slowly emerge as a powerful means by which to maintain the diversity and balance of Korean poetry.

by Yoo Sungho
Literary Critic and Professor of Korean Literature
Hanyang University
Trees and Shadows

Trees and shadows.
Trees look down upon shadows.
Shadows look up toward trees.
Even as night settles,
Even as rain descends
Shadows are there.
Trees know it.¹

As the Spring Wind Blows

As the spring wind blows
ripples smile

and as the spring wind blows
from a cave a snake emerges

and as the spring wind blows
the base-stone is loosened

and as the spring wind blows
incurred debts are repaid
new debts made

and as the spring wind blows
ghosts loiter

and as the spring wind blows
starlight moving away
from the world's two green eyes.*

Visit www.list.or.kr to listen to readings of the poems.
Book of Bamboo 1 – Journey

Seo Jeong-Chun

From here, — far
aboard the azure train
every carriage in deep night
to the village where bamboo flowers bloom,
it takes one hundred years.*

Pebble

Choi Dong-Ho

Seated back resting on a cool wall
audible to my thinned ears

raindrops falling in the cold wind
from the eaves of a mountain village earthen house

winter snow skirting a walled path
makes way for new shoots and, minnows

spring light black-pupiled
a pebble glistens sprouting sound of breath.*

1 Kim Nam Jo, Rain, Sky, Wind, Port. Translated by Hillel Schwartz & Sunny Jung, Codhill Press, 2014, p. 22
* Translated by Sophie Bowman
Digital Communication and the “Dicapoem” Movement

Dicapoem: A Multi-Language Art Form
Poetry read from a printed text is the product of print communications that came to flourish following the invention of the Gutenberg letterpress in the fifteenth century. The large-scale circulation of knowledge and information made possible by print communication paved the way for the Renaissance, the Reformation, and subsequent civil revolutions that, in the end, led to the dawn of modernity. It is in this context that the history of humanity can be said to coincide with the evolutionary history of media technology.

By opening up a new era of digital communication where almost anyone anywhere in the world can freely access a worldwide computer network, the Internet heralded new progress in human history. Smartphones, which are basically handheld computers, have brought about the digital media era of the individual where communication takes place in the condensed time and space of social media.

As we can see in everyday social media exchanges, digital communication goes beyond text to communicate in multiple languages (text, image, etc.) simultaneously. The power of this second Gutenbergian revolution of digital communication has been too strong for poetry to continue following the tradition of only using written text. Accordingly, the “dicapoem” has emerged as a new poetry movement for the digital communication age, creating new prospects for poetry as a multi-language art form harnessing image along with written text.

As dicapoems establish the textuality of words and images, the image and the text are completely inseparable. This is very different from the common practice of making a “photo poem” by juxtaposing a text poem with an appropriate photograph. Photo poems combine a stand alone poem with another stand alone photograph to bolster the effectiveness of each, which means that the image and text are independent—the combination of photograph and written text a temporary arrangement. A dicapoem, on the other hand, is the result of a poet feeling inspiration in nature or an object and capturing what they have seen with a digital camera, then expressing their inspiration in writing and combining these two elements as a single text “written” in multiple “languages.” If you examine the image and written text of a dicapoem separately each loses its reason for being as neither image nor text has independent value as photographic art or written poetry. The culmination of that poetic inspiration is then instantly communicated via social media.

Experimentation and École
I coined the word “dicapoem” in 2004 by combining the word “dica,” short hand in Korean for “digital camera,” with “poem.” Following this, from April-June 2004, a total of fifty dicapoems were published online, and in September of the same year the concept of the dicapoem was brought before the public eye with the publication of the dicapoem anthology, The Way to Goseong. In the beginning the concept of a dicapoem arose from individual experimentation.
soon enough, with the opening of an online forum in 2004 and the creation of the “mook” (magazine-book), *Dicapoem Mania* (2006), the bi-annual publication, *Dicapoem* (2007), and the 2008 establishment of a dicapoem festival held in Goseong, South Gyeongsang Province, I joined with other poets such as Choe Gwangim and Cha Mingi to form an *école* and thus began dicapoetry as a literary movement centered around the Goseong region.

Professor Kim Jonghoi has said of dicapoetry: “Standing at the cutting edge of the era, this poetry movement, much like the modernist poetic movement led by Kim Gwang-gyun in the 1930s, sets a cultural standard which...is working to invigorate the reputation of an entire region and I believe it will surely develop its own important festival.” Indeed, the dicapoem has been heralded as a new classic form, working to restore the significance of poetry in the age of digital imagery and communicate with readers via digital media.

The specialist dicapoem magazine is now on its sixteenth edition with poets such as Cho Jeonggwon, Jeong Hanyong, Kim Wangno, Choe Chunhui, Byeon Jongtae, Kim Yeongtak, Park Seoyeong, Park U-dam, Kim Ryung, Cheon Yunghui, Jo Yeongrae, Yi Kiyong, and Jeong Da-in. At the same time, critics such as Kim Jonghoi, Lee Byeongheon, Lee Jaebok, Kim Jongtae, Kim Seokjun, and Oh Hongjin have gotten involved, and even academic articles and university dissertations have been written on the subject. Not only that, Chae Hoseok’s *The History of Korean Modern Literature* (2009) for young readers includes my dicapoem “The Way to Goseong” and offers dicapoetry as a new poetic genre for the Internet era.

Dicapoems go beyond print books, being communicated to a wide online audience instantaneously through social media and online news outlets. Currently, in the online newspaper *Money Today*, a twice-weekly column entitled “Dicapoems brought to you by poet Choe Gwangim” is being published (138 editions as of January 1st, 2016), while various dicapoems, such as Kong Kwang-kyu’s “Farming Pants Pattern,” Kim Back-kyum’s “Autumn Sunflower,” Kwon Jeong-u’s “As the Sun Sets,” Ban Chil-hwan’s “A Flower’s Home Address,” Seo Dong-gyun’s “Spring,” and Kim Miryang’s “Underlining,” have been featured on the mobile-version homepage of the search engine and portal site Naver, recording over 100,000 hits.

With the popularity of dicapoems growing, from 2009 to 2011 an outdoor evening poetry reading called “Seoul Flowing with Poems” was held, and since 2013, the “Gwanghwamun Kyobo Book Centre Dicapoem Reading” event has been staged quarterly. Last year, the event “A Night at Gyeolseong Hyanggyo (Confucian School)” was held, bringing together dicapoems and traditional heritage, and in 2015, at the Lee Byeong-Ju Hadong International Literature Festival, the first dicapoem competition and award ceremony was held.

**Significance and Outlook**

As smartphones have enabled us to capture a moment and instantly share that moment via social media, this new means of expression has opened up opportunities for real-time interactive communication, and as we have seen, dicapoetry continues to grow in popularity. In terms of creative aesthetics, if traditional written poetry is the result of one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent imagination, dicapoems turn that notion around as they are formed from ninety-nine percent inspiration and one percent imagination. As dicapoetry takes momentary poetic inspiration as poetic completion, it has garnered a fate by which even five lines of text seems long and, accordingly, a dicapoem will be a short witty statement of only two or three lines.

by Lee Sang-ok
Poet and Professor
Zhengzhou University of Light Industry
Spring

\textit{Seo Dong-gyun}

Shh!
Look look, it’s moving
wriggle wriggle
in the shade like sweet wormwood
a caterpillar going along hugging the green sunshine*

Autumn Sunflower

\textit{Kim Back-kyum}

Though your body withers your spirit shines bright
like the sun,
Oh autumn sunflower, like a phoenix you will shake
off the confines of existence
like the poet standing in the field
blooming poetic words like petals*
The line of a question thrown out to sea
at the end of a salty sentence
is stamped with a flickering exclamation mark*

Mother who had long since lost her shapely curves
would put on her work pants and head out to the furrows
and rice field borders.
She passed her hands over the land for over seventy
years then passed away.
Flowers came and gave themselves up
as a colorful flower print on the work pants she used to
wear.*
Kim Junghyuk

Kim Junghyuk made his literary debut in 2000 when his novella "Penguin News" was published in the quarterly Literature and Society. His major works include the short story collections Penguin News (2006) and The Library of Musical Instruments (2008), and the novel Mister Monorail (2015). He has won the Kim Yujung Literary Award, Munhakdongne Young Writers’ Award Grand Prize, Today’s Young Artists Award, Lee Hyo-seok Literary Award, and the Dongin Literary Award.
To Observe, Observe, and Observe

Kim Junghyuk, who is in the vanguard of contemporary Korean literature along with writers like Kim Ae-ran, Pyun Hye Young, and Yoon Sunghee, made his debut sixteen years ago. The jacket of his latest book, *Embracing with Fake Arms*, which won the Dongin Literary Award last year, sports a rather unusual author bio: a listing of his published titles, numbering around thirty short-stories and three novels, and nothing more. Kim is a versatile artist, having tried his hand at a number of roles like magazine reporter, illustrator, and web designer before debuting as a writer, and he’s still very much active as an essayist and podcaster. He once mentioned in an interview that he’s in a constant state of preparation for his writing, and that all this preparation entails is: “Observe, observe, and observe.” He said he enjoys talking to people and likes to note down the impression they make on him and the conversations they share. There’s nothing really surprising about his admission that these notes help him breathe new life into his characters, but it gives you an idea of how special the pleasure and gift of practicing the craft of writing is to him, as well as the significance of characters to his novels.

I’m a devoted reader of Kim’s books but I’ve only met him a couple of times in person—chance encounters at literary gatherings where we happened to share the same table. The impression I formed of him from only this handful of meetings is that he’s a likable guy, perhaps because of his natural affability, or, to be precise, his easygoing and well-balanced nature. Like any of us, he looks more comfortable in the company of close friends, but that doesn’t mean he feels uncomfortable or anxious in the midst of strangers. His demeanor betrays no hint of pretense or detachment meant to cover up the awkwardness of new introductions. He is gifted with a facility to make those around him feel comfortable. Perhaps, it’s better to call it naturalness, but that naturalness stems from a concern and affection for people or, more accurately, for relationships.

In a paper titled “The ‘Human Evolution’ of Game-like Realism” that I wrote when Kim won the Lee Hye-seok Literary Award for his short-story “Yo-yo,” I posited that the story marked a watershed in his body of work. “Yo-yo” is a story about one man’s solitude, about loss, about emotion, and about time. Unlike his earlier works that were more concerned with the world of “objects,” “gaming,” or “play,” characters in this story deal with real emotions in their relationships. His subsequent work “There Are Snakes” reveals a nuanced portrayal of jealousy and shows glimpses of his effort to deal with social pain. Kim continues to write stories that capture different aspects of human relationships without losing the warm humor and structural soundness that are the characteristic charm of his novels. He carries on doing what he does best: “Observe, observe, and observe.”

by Cho Yeonjung
Literary Critic
World of Lint

I’ve never been to New York. I haven’t been to Singapore, either. I don’t like rum. Rum, to me, is sacred music. The desk where I do my writing is two meters long. Those two meters are divided into four zones of exactly fifty centimeters each. Paper and pencil to the left, something to drink on the right, and a laptop in the middle. In the mornings, I drink coffee, and in the evenings, water. I’ve been to London. I love the weather there. I’ve been to Paris too, but the weather in Paris isn’t as dark and damp as in London. I savor my cup of tea as evening sets in, accompanied by a dampness that seeps into my bones. A guitar hangs on the wall opposite the desk. I contemplate the guitar and picture myself strumming it. I know how to play but not with the consummate ease I display in my vision. So, every day I imagine but never play. Now and then, my ears catch the strains of a guitar being strummed, but I can’t tell if they’re real or if I’m hearing things. When the writing doesn’t flow, I switch on a TV channel that plays classical music. I keep it on mute. The sounds of the orchestra strain to flow out of the screen. I often watch operas too. Likewise, I kill the sound. A man strikes down a woman with an axe. The shadow the axe casts upon the wall slices through the woman’s shadow. It’s an opera by Verdi. I’ve never been to Boston. I haven’t been to Oakland, either. Oakland is the home ground of my favorite basketball team. Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson play for it. The games, too, I watch without the sound. I like the sound of the ball bouncing off the floor, but it makes me dizzy. The sound of the ball is always louder than what I expect. The echo of the ball rebounding off the floor, interspersed with the sounds of shoes skidding across the court, should sound beautiful. I’m writing...
“Lint” Richard Brautigan writes: “I’m haunted a little this evening by feelings that have no vocabulary and events that should be explained in dimensions of lint rather than words. I’ve been examining half-scrap of my childhood. They are pieces of distant life that have no form or meaning. They are things that just happened, like lint.” That’s the whole story—fifty-two words long. Right above the guitar, hangs a huge panel. The characters of my love story live up there. According to the character chart, A loves B and so does C. D wants to kill A but also hates C. I want to know the whole story but I’ll have to wait for a while. I have several months of waiting ahead of me before the love story comes to a conclusion. To read the novel, I’ll have to wait until I finish writing it. I have an expansive world but the only world I know is that of lint. I picture bits of lint dancing in the air. I’ve been to Tokyo. I’ve been to Osaka and Sapporo. I’ve been to Niigata too. On my way there, I was thinking of Kawabata Yasunari’s *Snow Country*. Kawabata wrote the opening lines of his novel in Niigata. “The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky.” An escalator has been installed at the ryokan inn where Kawabata stayed while writing the book. I concentrate on my love story again. It’s a story of people loving people. I visualize people of other countries. I find it amazing that people who speak different languages share the same love. I slip in a joke in the middle of the story. The joke is quite funny, but I’m not sure yet if it heightens the romance or if it brings it down. If I eliminate all the sounds around my desk, I can hear the hubbub of water running through pipes. I can’t tell which house the sounds are coming from. I don’t know if you’ve been to Seoul. It’s a noisy city. The lights keep shining even after nightfall, and the bars keep teeming with drunks. The people here have a fiery temperament, but they love with the same fire. Winters here aren’t as dark and damp as in London, but they’re suitably nippy for afternoon tea. The alleyways here are slowly disappearing and this worries me. I live in this city. Or, more precisely, in its suburbs. It’s colder in the suburbs by a degree. I’m drawing with an Apple Pencil on the iPad I bought a few days ago. I’m sketching scenes from my novel. Whenever I write, I visualize a place faraway. Further away than Tokyo or Niigata, past New York, London, or Paris, more distant than Stockholm. I fly off into the grey distance. To a place probably more far-flung than the fringes of our galaxy, maybe even out of this universe. I’m flying off far away when I notice bits of lint stuck to my clothes. The moment I grab and pluck the lint, I’m transported back in a flash. I return from a place even further away than the universe. I’m seated at my desk, before me is the guitar, and it is silent. Above the guitar, hangs a massive blueprint of my love story.

by Kim Junghyuk
Novelist
I still hadn’t written the first sentence yet. I was already stuck in “Precautions.” If this was an ordinary product, writing the “Precautions” would be a piece of cake. Just recycle the old ones, with some rewording and rearrangement. For instance, replace ‘it could be dangerous’ with ‘it is dangerous’ and ‘disassembling could cause a severe shock’ with ‘do not disassemble.’ But this was no ordinary product; it had features I had never seen before. No wonder I was stuck, even though the product developer had explained them to me many times. I needed to think hard to figure out where to start. I believe in order and organization. Even the most insignificant manual must have it.

I still remember the first manual I had ever seen in my life: it was the manual of a digital camera that I had spent a month’s savings on. When I opened the package that came in the mail, it wasn’t my new digital camera that overwhelmed me. It was my new digital camera’s 300-page manual. I hadn’t even considered taking my camera out of the box when I picked up its manual, and I went on to read it all night, as if my camera would break if I started using it without reading the manual first. I carefully read and reread “Precautions,” “Parts & Components,” “Getting Ready to Take Pictures,” “Basic Features,” “Advanced Features,” “Tips on Taking Nice Pictures,” “Appendices,” and “Specifications.” My digital camera’s manual touched me. It had laid the groundwork for the structures of knowledge in my head and built them up with texts, figures, and tables. The result, it seemed, was the digital camera town constructed in my head. The manual struck me as a fascinating piece of architecture. By the time I finished reading it, I had a pretty good idea about what a digital camera was.

That’s when I began collecting manuals. They gave me the feeling of actually using products that I didn’t have. I downloaded free PDF manuals from the Web and scrounged free copies of all sorts of manuals from the salesclerks at electronics stores.

The hundreds of manuals that I have read tell me that there are two kinds of manuals in the world: good manuals and bad manuals. Good manuals lay solid groundwork in my head, whereas bad ones pile up random information like sandcastles. Good manuals
are logical and persuasive, whereas bad ones are self-assertive and unkind. I have been inclined to believe that people who make bad manuals are obviously bad people.

“You haven’t even started yet,” Park said. Our design manager was looking at my monitor. I knew he was laughing at me, and I hated him for it. But I couldn’t get mad at him because we made good manuals as a team, which meant that he couldn’t be a bad person.

“It’s your fault. You signed this contract.”

“Excuse me? You told me to go find contracts. If you don’t want it, cancel it.”

“No way. I have bills to pay.”

“Then write your texts already. You have people to feed, too. The product illustration is almost done, in case you’re wondering.”

“You sound like you run this place. I think if you were really the boss, you would tie my hands to the keyboard.”

“Wrong. I would fire you. You get paid too much for what you get done. You whine, too.”

“Enough. I’ll get my writing done by tomorrow. So stop bugging me and get lost.”

Sipping his coffee, Park returned to his desk. And my eyes returned to the monitor, a bleak desert. Blinking over the desert was the black cursor. The blinking cursor looked like a distress signal from someone buried in the desert. Look, I am suffocating almost as much over here as you are over there. Just stay buried, okay? Sending out distress signals is a waste of time. There’s no one out here to help you anyway. But I also felt like sending out distress signals to someone over there in the desert.

“Send me the production illustration file. I need some inspiration,” I shouted at Park. My voice had come out so loud that the faces of all three employees turned toward me. Making manuals for the product release was often stressful, but this project was an extreme case, even by my standards. The employees looked uneasy and weary as though they were handling a ticking time bomb.

“It’s not quite ready. Try touching the product, if you need a writer’s inspiration.”

“I did, until my hands hurt. Still no luck. Just send it over. I don’t care if it’s not ready.”

Judging by the volume of my voice, one might think that I was talking in an auditorium. But my office was a cubbyhole, just large enough for a company of four, including me, the president. The rest were a manager and an intern, which left only one position for an ordinary employee. Basically, we lacked a sense of balance as an organization. Worse, the four of us were all men. I opened the file that Park had sent me.

<A sketch of a globe with a grainy surface>

“What is this? Am I writing a manual for spherical cheese? Or a golf ball?”

Park walked over to my desk. He took a look at the monitor and laughed, “Wrong one. This is one of the initial sketches.”

“I’m struggling to pay bills, and you’re wasting your time and mine, sending me the wrong file, walking over here, walking back to your desk, and sending me another file, and me opening it. If I added up all this time . . .”

“Don’t start, boss. You aren’t good at math. So you’ll end up wasting more time doing that.”

“How can an employee humiliate his boss? What kind of company is this?”

“A fine company.”

The rest of my employees were chuckling, their faces turned away from me. I almost burst into laughter myself. When I was stressed out, Park always made some jokes to make me laugh. When he was stressed out, I did the same for him. It was kind of a give-and-take deal.

Park sent me another file, but I didn’t open it. I was still staring at the wrong sketch he had sent me. The sketch sitting in the middle of the monitor was quietly staring back at me. I felt as though I was looking at the universe where all but the “Planet Golf Ball” had disappeared. It looked forlorn. I felt suspense in the space, as if a golf club was going to appear out of nowhere and smash the “Planet Golf Ball” out of the universe. With the last “Planet Golf Ball” gone, the universe would be empty and the solemn voice of God would be heard: Nice shot!

“What’s the name of this product again, Park?”
“The Global Player.”
“That’s a lousy name.”
“Tell that to the client’s publicist when she gets here. She’ll be here in half an hour.”
“Relax. She’s coming to check out the illustration. She’d be disappointed, though, if she learned that you haven’t even started the texts yet. Tell her you think the product has a lousy name. It could buy you some time. I think it’ll take them at least a month to come up with another name. Or, they could also fire us and hire another firm. Then you’d be stuck with your lousy bills to pay.”

“Be quiet, all of you. Can’t you see that I’ve started writing?”

The office grew quiet. Everyone was hard at work, except for me and Park. I put on my headphones and set to work. With the half-an-hour deadline approaching, I felt ready to write anything. I was surrounded by a stack of developer’s handbooks to my left, Park’s new illustration file open in the monitor, and the product to be released under the lousy name “Global Player” to my right. I was all set. I began to write the first sentence.

The precautions when using the Global Player are identical to the ones when using the Earth. Treat the Global Player as the Earth. First, do not disassemble. Second, do not store at high temperatures. Third, do not drop. Imagine that you are God, the creator of the Earth. You wouldn’t throw the Earth around. Most importantly, keep the Earth out of the reach of children. They would certainly destroy the Earth.

I composed one sentence after another as I listened to what sounded like a hunting song of a native African tribe. Once the first sentence was written, the rest practically presented itself. When I wrote manuals, it seemed that sentences hesitantly came out of their hideout as opposed to me writing them. I was almost convinced that writing manuals was excavation rather than creation. All I had to do was dust the sentences. I felt like an archeologist.

In twenty minutes, “Precautions” was done. I read the first sentences to Park. He said, “not bad.” According to Park’s Conversational Dictionary, ‘not bad’ meant ‘good.’ Emboldened by Park’s compliment, I rushed through “Parts & Components” and “Basic Features.” They were easy sections to write anyway as long as I had the developer’s handbooks handy, which helped me paraphrase and translate.

As I started writing the “Advanced Features” section, the office door opened and a woman in a black two-piece suit entered. The moment I saw her in black, the passionate Greek singer’s sad ballad song that I was listening to almost turned into a funeral dirge. Her tall and robust body added to the solemn mood. When I took off my headphones, I heard her voice, which was shrill for a body her size. She was talking with Park without so much as casting me a look. I pretended to mind my own business, when Park introduced us. She handed me her business card.

Look, I am suffocating almost as much over here as you are over there. Just stay buried, okay? Sending out distress signals is a waste of time. There’s no one out here to help you anyway.

Translated by Kim Soyoung
Hwang Jungeun

Hwang Jungeun made her literary debut in 2005 when she won the Kyunghyang Daily News New Writer’s Award for her short story “Mother.” Her published books include the short story collections Into the World of Passi (2013) and The Elephant Train That Leaves at 7:32 (2014), and the novels One Hundred Shadows (2010), The Barbaric Miss Alice (2013), and I’ll Continue (2014). She has won the Hankook Ilbo Literary Award, Sin Dong-yup Prize for Literature, Lee Hyo-seok Literary Award, the 3rd and 4th Munhakdongne Young Writers’ Award, and the 5th Munhakdongne Young Writers’ Award Grand Prize.
The Place Behind: Contemplating Hwang Jungeun

I once had to call up Hwang Jungeun about doing a book reading. I was on my way back home after finishing a part-time job, so I was distracted during the call. In the middle of my spiel, she interrupted me, “I’m surprised you’re being so formal.” Was she right? Was I being too formal? Still swaddled in the exaggerated politeness demanded by the part-time job, I was stiff. When had I stopped behaving naturally? Or was this more natural for me? It felt as though I’d called her with a mask on, only to have my face exposed.

I think back to that day. Naturalness dawdles around unnaturalness before finally disappearing behind it, and only then do I think of the triumph of unnaturalness. I think of those moments when the masked and unmasked, insincere and sincere, and fake and real become inadvertently muddled. It occurs to me that our lives are stuck there for the most part. Matters become complicated at this point in my train of thought, because questioning the boundary between naturalness and unnaturalness begins with being wary of viewing them within a framework of simple dichotomy. Is this world so straightforward that we can easily distinguish between what is natural and what isn’t? I find Hwang scary sometimes because she obstinately takes on this attitude. Readers are placed before her writing with their bare faces only to have even the traces of their masks exposed by her.

Hwang’s latest short story, “Bokgyeong,” is about a saleswoman at a furniture store in a mall. Accused of ripping a sofa on display, the woman exposes the unfairness of being coerced into compliance. When she talks about the many unfair compromises people are forced to make for things to reach a stage everyone takes for granted, the reader is compelled to think about the appropriateness of distinguishing between the masked and unmasked, insincere and sincere, the fake and the real. At this point in the story, the writer’s eyes are strangely focused on the back of the woman’s head. The woman has a flat head from the time she was left lying on her back in her infancy because her mother was busy supporting the family all by herself. The woman’s flat head is a mark of her personal history of being born in straitened circumstances that she has to carry for life. Perhaps the writer can keep herself from lowering her guard against simple dichotomy when she gazes at the back of the woman’s head.

A person who has gazed at the back of someone’s head and discovered a unique expression and history in it can’t help but grow up hearing a distinctive voice. I feel that scenes like the one in “The Laughing Man” in which the narrator discovers that the wall beneath the wallpaper isn’t flat, or in The Barbaric Miss Alice, in which the narrator says he “lost sight of the backs” of Alicia, Alicia’s brother, and Gomi as they disappear into the darkness, laughing despite being hurt by the world, were written by such a person. I conjure up the forlorn eyes and quiet look of the writer who strives to be at a place where she can gaze at the backs of people’s heads, their hidden sides, and their shadows. There’s nothing plaintive or sad about it. You’re simply comforted by the fact that she has “ended up knowing” even the sight of your back and by her politeness in holding back from talking recklessly about the hardships this heartless world has thrown at you.

The place behind is another way of saying the spot left behind. Somehow I feel that Hwang is at that spot, and while I don’t want to make her feel compelled to remain there, there are times when her insights into the backs of people’s heads inspire me to think about life again.

by Yang Kyung Eon
Literary Critic
Jungeun

The title of this essay is my name. That’s how I spell it in English. It’s spelled the same way on my passport.

I began learning English in middle school. It was the first foreign language I learned. I remember staring blankly at the words “Good Morning” and “Good Evening” in my textbook on the first day of class, clueless of how to read them (the classmate who sat with me made fun of me at the time, but I had my revenge later when I used her name in a novel…). Soon after the semester began, I went down to the teachers’ lounge with a slip of paper in my hand and waited there for my English teacher. I was curious to see what my name looked like in English and was planning to ask her to write it down for me. Bashful and unaccustomed to making requests of adults, I was on tenterhooks as I waited for her. The English teacher was an old dame who wore thick glasses, read and wrote at a snail’s pace, and, come summer or winter, kept her calves ensconced in socks on account of her varicose veins. Beside the reddish glow of the heater, she mulled over my question for a while before finally jotting down “Jungeun.” So that was the spelling I used whenever I had to write my name in English. Only years later did I learn that I could spell my name as Jeong-eun too, but I stuck to Jungeun because it was shorter.

Jungeun (or Jeong-eun, as it is more commonly spelled) is a fairly common name in Korea. Apart from Hwang Jungeun, names like Park Jeong-eun, Lee Jeong-eun, Kang Jeong-eun, Ko Jeong-eun, Hyun Jeong-eun, Dokgo Jeong-eun, Shin Jeong-eun, Han Jeong-eun, Joo Jeong-eun, Jo Jeong-eun, Jang Jeong-eun, Hong Jeong-eun, Woo Jeong-eun, and Oh Jeong-eun are also quite common. So I was surprised to learn a commonplace name like mine could be difficult to pronounce in a foreign language.

I realized this in 2014. In fall of that year, I met the Japanese-German writer Tawada Yoko at the Seoul International Writers’ Festival. She told me she couldn’t pronounce my name in German and instead read it as “Yungen.” The pressing festival schedule left me with no time to think about what she’d said, and I simply thought of it as an interesting anecdote. That was how I felt at the time.

I heard that name again on a trip I took after the festival ended. It happened at a hotel in Berlin. The receptionist who was checking my reservation read my name as Yungen. It was as though she were saying, “Yes, Ms. Tawada, you’re right!” If Yoko hadn’t told me that my name was pronounced as “Yungen” in German, I wouldn’t have heard that “word.” Jungeun and Yungen are so different, I’d never have realized
she was calling out my name. I’d have assumed she was uttering one of the many German words I didn’t know or some technical term used at hotels... and would’ve given it no thought. As I’m writing this, a thought strikes me: How is the name of Kim Jung-eun (more commonly Romanized as Kim Jong-un), a figure of enduring interest for the international press, pronounced in German? I look it up and find it’s also pronounced as “Yungen.” No, since he uses a hyphen in his name, should it be spelled “Yung-en”? I want to tell my friends, “Listen, Kim Jung-eun is pronounced as ‘Kim Yungen’ or ‘Yung-en’ in some languages...”

Anyhow... back at the hotel in Berlin... “Yungen,” announced the receptionist and I answered, “Jungeun,” to which she countered, “Yungen,” forcing me to reiterate, “Yes, Jungeun,” at which point she checked her records again, then looked me in the eye and spoke. “Yungen.”

When I think of my stories being read by foreign readers I feel as if I’m back at that hotel. As I write this essay, I feel as though... I’m staring at the receptionist standing behind that immaculate, expansive, heavy front desk in the hotel lobby. Just like how I’ve never read “Jungeun” as “Yungen,” she’ll probably never read “Yungen” as “Jungeun.” And so, Jungeun can’t imagine Yungen, and Yungen can’t picture Jungeun... By any chance, could this be true for my writing as well? How is it being read? How is it being pronounced? Could my novel or some important part of it be present here but absent there and so be difficult to pronounce or even impossible to pronounce? With no choice, or perhaps quite naturally, is it being read as “Yungen”...?
But I’m used to such anxiety and discontent. I’ve had similar experiences with Korean readers on occasion. Sometimes, these situations are refreshing and intriguing. Like when I heard Yoko call me “Yungen.”

The original title of my short story, published in English as “Kong’s Garden,” is “Yang-ui Mi-rae.” Mi-rae means future in Korean but yang can take on different meanings, so when this story was published in Korea, readers were curious about the meaning of the title. Yang can mean sheep, or it can be used with a numeral to indicate quantity, or, very rarely, after a woman’s first name as a Korean equivalent of Miss. Sometimes, it’s used with a woman’s surname, a usage that smacks of condescension. For example, when a girl named Kim Bo-young is addressed as Kim yang, she probably ranks low in her social sphere, isn’t as educated as her peers, doesn’t earn as much as others, and is far removed from important decisions. A few female readers interpreted yang in the title to mean this, but most readers said they thought of sheep when they saw the title. This conjured up different thoughts in my mind.

What I had in mind when I began writing this story was to have a girl who worked temp jobs as my narrator. How would foreign readers interpret “a girl who worked?” Would they take it for granted that she “worked?” How would her “future” be translated? How would the feelings of loss and guilt she never shared with anyone be pronounced by foreign readers?

I’ve never shared this with anyone before, but I wrote this story for my little sister. 😊

by Hwang Jungeun
Novelist
It was at the bookstore where I saw the girl.

It was spring, a season that always seemed to drive us crazy with its beginning-of-the-semester frenzy. I was just standing around absentmindedly before the store closed and after I had sent away most of the customers who had rushed in at the same time. We sold cigarettes then. We displayed the cigarettes on locked shelves behind little glass doors by the counter. There were rules about selling cigarettes, and I always followed them. Since students frequented the bookstore, we only sold cigarettes to customers who presented their IDs, except for those customers we knew well.

That night, a girl came to the store and stood in front of counter and asked for two packs of cigarettes. She was wearing a school uniform with a ribbon around her neck and was holding paper money in her right hand. She was pretty and looked at me as if she was challenging me, although she also looked a little anxious. When I told her that I couldn’t sell cigarettes to a minor, she said that she was on an errand. The adults were outside, she told me, and gestured outside. I turned my head and looked out to see two men standing near the phone booth. One of them was wearing a hat and looking in our direction.

"Now, can you sell them to me?" she asked me a little more forcefully.

When I told her, I asked her for me. Why didn’t you sell her the cigarettes when you saw me outside?

His eyes were blank. They were shaded by the brim of his hat, although I could see that they were blood-shot and yellow-white. When I said that he had to show me his ID if he wanted to buy cigarettes, he seemed to grin, rummaged through his pockets, and
took out his wallet. It was worn-out leather. He took out a card that looked like his ID but didn’t hand it to me. He held it in his hand and stared at me. And why should I show you my personal information just to buy a few packs of cigarettes? Why should I do that, a full-grown man? How can I trust you and show you my ID? Please, try to be a better cashier next time, he said.

He thrust his ID back into his pocket and then strolled out of the bookstore. The other man and the girl were waiting for him at the top of the stairs. They stood next to the phone booth and discussed something. When the men said something, the girl either nodded or shook her head. The men took their hands out of their pockets and touched the girl’s head and the sides of her slender body. Every time they did this, the girl shrank back a little, and laughed. Above the girl’s head, flowers were falling like solid, dry snow.

What should I do?

It really was a strange scene. It was very strange, even though there weren’t that many things that made it immediately odd. They were just standing together and talking. The men and the girl looked so unrelated. I thought that they couldn’t possibly know each other very well and felt very uncomfortable thinking this. I tapped the counter with the tip of my finger and hesitated. Should I step outside now and ask her what her relationship was with them? Where and when had she met them? Did I have the right to ask her that? Should I just call the police? If so, what should I tell them? A girl was talking with some men? Was that criminal enough to report to the police? Was that a crime? Even if it was a crime, was it my duty to report it? What should I do if my actions later put me in danger? What if I became the target of some plot to get back at me for my suspicions? After all, the bookstore would always be here and I would always work here.

I finally decided that I probably shouldn’t get involved in their affairs. It was too troublesome and the situation too ambiguous. It was much easier to just think that they were acquaintances. Who really knew? I wasn’t casually nosy enough to meddle in other people’s business. I finished thinking about it even before I had time to reflect on my decision. I turned around and began to close the store, checking that day’s sales data on the computer. When I looked up and outside at some point, they were already gone.

After that incident, everyone kept asking me questions.

I had never been such an important figure in my life. All kinds of people asked me again and again what I had seen. What were they wearing, what did they look like, what were they doing, what was their manner of speaking, which direction did they go in? I answered what questions I could and said that I didn’t know to the questions I couldn’t. The more important the questions were, the more often I told them that I didn’t know. What the men looked like, which direction they had gone in. I was summoned to the police station and shown a lot of photos, but I couldn’t clearly identify them.

Who were they? Even now, when I think about that question, I can only remember the man wearing the hat and looking in my direction under the streetlamp. His face under the brim of his hat, even more shaded because of the streetlamp that poured light just above him, looked so different from—but, at the same time, so similar to—the photos I was shown. After sweating over the photos again and again, I pushed a photo over to the policemen. They asked if I was sure, and I thought it over, and said that he looked the most similar, but I wasn’t entirely sure. I really didn’t know much about the incident. I learned from the police later that the disappeared girl’s name was Jinju.

She disappeared after she had purchased a ticket to her favorite pop singer’s concert.

A bag was found hidden deep inside the bookstore’s garden at the entrance of the apartment complex. One pair of underwear, smeared with bodily fluids, was found at a construction site near the apartment complex. It was women’s underwear, rolled up in a ball and stuck between some bricks. Her classmate, who was the last person to see her before she disappeared, pointed to a bench under a wisteria 150 meters away from the bookstore as the place where they had parted. The police who came to search the area had eventually come to me. Since the incident involved a resident who had disappeared in an apartment complex, the news
It really was a strange scene. It was very strange, even though there weren’t that many things that made it immediately odd. They were just standing together and talking. The men and the girl looked so unrelated. I thought that they couldn’t possibly know each other very well and felt very uncomfortable thinking this. I tapped the counter with the tip of my finger and hesitated.

traveled fast. People visited the bookstore to check the location of the incident, or to ask whatever questions came to them. There were days when even random people yelled at me.

The girl disappeared here. You were the last person who had seen her.

The heartless eyewitness.

An adult who did nothing to protect a child who needed protection.

That was who I became.

Aunt, what do you want?

Do you know how busy I am? Do you know how much work I do here? I can’t ever come out and see the sun on beautiful days like this. I spend the entire day underground, never getting any sun, okay. So, why do you have to do this here? Why on earth here? Are you trying to put a curse on this store? Please just don’t ask me what I was doing. When nobody cares about me, why should I care about others? Jinju, your daughter, who is she? Nobody. She’s nobody to me.

I’m still doing the same sort of things. I still work and experience things that embarrass me, although not to the degree that they would bother me too much. If I feel too embarrassed to stand it any longer, then I quit and never come back. Of course, this doesn’t happen very often. I hope that if I have to move to another neighborhood there’ll be a lot of acacia trees there too. Still, even if I end up in a neighborhood without a single acacia tree, I’m sure I’ll end up adjusting to it all pretty well.

How am I? I’m doing the same.

Occasionally, very rarely, when the night gets too quiet, I search for articles about Jinju. An article saying that she’d finally been found somewhere. Even an article saying her remains had been found. I search for that article using all possible keywords I can think of.

I have told this story to no one.
Like Dante’s *Purgatorio*, Kang Young-sook’s *Rina* describes a harrowing journey through a land that’s neither here nor there—an in-between realm of transient suffering, viewed, in this case, through the eyes of a teenage refugee, fleeing the hell of one country toward the eventual paradise of another.

Born in 1967, Kang studied writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts and made her literary debut in 1998. She first came to prominence as a writer in 2002 with the publication of her short story collection *Shaken*, which set the tone of her later works by exploring the dark side of female subjectivity in the modern world.

With *Rina*, published in 2006, Kang’s literary world arrives at maturity, while simultaneously crossing over into timelessness. While her earlier works were effective evocations of the anxiety and imbalance of twenty-first century Korean society, *Rina* removes its characters from history and places them in a mysterious, stateless limbo.

Not coincidentally, the novel begins with a border crossing, with a group of twenty-two refugees—including the teenage Rina and her family—following a series of unscrupulous guides across the frontier into an unnamed foreign land, intending to arrive eventually in the so-called land of “P.” While Kang’s cultural context would seem to point to the situation between North and South Korea, the border theme lends itself to countless allegorical readings. Once over this first border, Rina marvels at the sight of “people...
leaving shops with happy faces and hands full of merchandise,” although the refugees themselves are all starving. While the border seems to separate poverty from abundance, there is also a sense of a loss of values in this consumer wasteland. This middle land, situated between the oppression the refugees are fleeing and the promised utopia of P, unveils itself as an anarchic purgatory of late-industrial society, where freedom prevails, but so too does greed and corruption.

While Rina has high hopes for this country across the border, the landscape she is confronted with is a dystopian one: a nuclear-age industrialized wasteland, populated by gruff, unwelcoming criminals, pimps, prostitutes, and drug dealers. Far from the paradise of P, this middle country represents all the worst aspects of the past century—the global trauma that gets filtered down through grainy photographs and fuzzy video clips. Environmental disaster, refugee crises, exploitation, and abuse in all their forms: economic, sexual, psychological. For Rina, like the multitudes of refugees fleeing war-torn, terrorized lands in the present day, the final border to P represents deliverance from a terrestrial hell where the threat of harm hangs like the sword of Damocles over the individual’s everyday struggles.

While bordering on fantasy, Rina is nevertheless narrated with a sharp realism, describing the refugees’ rough passage with abundant detail, sometimes passing into the grotesque when the characters suffer from sickness, violence, and other abuse. At times, Kang seems to be consciously trying to push the story beyond the comfort zones of the general public, luridly amplifying the morbid and scatological elements of the story in order to force an affective response. But at the same time, the novel is pervaded by an atmosphere of unreality, as if the events are the imagined specters of a nightmare, not real tragic occurrences.

Rina herself seems aware of the fantastic narrative element of her own fate, as she says to a companion:

“When I opened my eyes I was lying in front of a human trafficker. He said to me, how did you get here? Can you tell me? That’s the only way I can set you free. He said he liked fairy tales. So I told him stories every night. Stories of crossing the border, of splitting my shoes open. He enjoyed them.”

We, as readers, are also implicated here, following the grisly details of Rina’s hardships as a form of entertainment, a gruesome picaresque.

But the distant promise of peace across the final border gives the novel a hopeful and eerily comic feel: The sense that things will eventually turn out well lends an air of the carnivalesque to the disturbing proceedings. Finally, it is the admirable strength and determination of the heroic Rina—whose name, the translator clarifies, consists of the Chinese characters for “clever” and “beautiful”—and her willingness to struggle and survive despite the humiliation she suffers that both moves the novel forward and prevents the narrative from submerging into despair.

This spirit of resistance nourishes the unlikely peace that descends as the narrative progresses, and is reflected in Kang’s description not only of Rina, but her fellow strugglers in the purgatorial middle land:

“Some people were playing soccer in the square. They played at all times of the day. Sometimes they played in yellow dust, and sometimes in muddy rain. But they were also able to enjoy, from time to time, a shower of white pollen on balmy spring nights. Rina would rest her head in the laps of the boys who had been ordered off the field for fouls, boys who sat down with their hearts still thumping from the exertion, and she would think that everything was beautiful in its own way.”

This, in essence, is the challenge Kang presents with Rina: to find beauty despite the mud, despite the dust—or even precisely because of it.

by Nathaniel Davis
Assistant Editor, Dalkey Archive Press
Navigating Korea’s Modern Mazes

Characters in many works of contemporary Korean fiction bear a resemblance to those of Southern Gothic literature in that they are complex, ambivalent, insecure, and flawed individuals struggling to navigate a social landscape that is indecipherable and sometimes hostile toward them. They make their way through modernity’s maze in stories marked by dark humor and the absurd, and they rarely end up any more enlightened in the end. But instead of focusing on poverty, oppression, and violence, the aspect of the grotesque in Korean fiction corresponds more to the technocratic and monetized structure of a culture floundering between East and West.

The protagonists populating the stories of Kim Kyung-uk’s collection *God Has No Grandchildren* are no different. From the beginning of his career, Kim has explored the psyche of society’s outcasts in his writing—and indeed, he first gained recognition through a prize-winning story called “Outsider.” Powerless individuals face the numbing squall of late-capitalist popular culture in his works, from the disillusioned students of *Acropolis* to the young music fans witnessing the commodification of their rebellious heroes in *Who Killed Kurt Cobain?*. The stories that make up *God Has No Grandchildren* revolve around the epistemological struggle that confuses the modern subject’s attempt to make ethical and aesthetic judgments about a world governed by media, bureaucracy, and money.

In “Ninety-Nine Percent,” the protagonist is a moderately successful employee of an advertising firm. When the firm brings in a young, handsome, American-educated vice-president, the protagonist’s envy renders him paranoid about the newcomer’s identity and his role in the corporation. Kim has said he wanted to depict the psychology of the “Average Joes” of the ninety-nine percent who despise the privileged one percent while simultaneously aspiring to rise to their level. The protagonist believes that the vice-president is stealing his ideas, lying on his resume, and hiding his true identity; as his paranoia deepens, he begins to lose the balanced rhythm of his previously contented middle-class existence.

Toward the end of the story the vice-president, knowing the protagonist’s weakness for chocolate, offers him one of the popular new high-cacao dark chocolate bars—of course, the chocolate is ninety-nine percent cacao. “As it melted on my tongue, the chocolate released a bitter taste that grew terribly strong. It felt like I was eating lead or had taken a gulp...”

*God Has No Grandchildren* Kim Kyung-uk
Translated by Sunok Kang and Melissa Thomson
ISBN 9781628971170
of brandy. I frowned and they all giggled” (85). While this metaphor neatly summarizes the protagonist’s sorry state—his envy of the vice-president turns his middling position (as part of the ninety-nine percent) sour, or bitter, as it were, leaving him dismayed and ashamed—it comes off as slightly too clever.

The collection’s eponymous story concerns a man whose granddaughter has been molested by young boys at her school. The boys’ parents are wealthy, and the school principal protects them, appealing to the grandfather’s Christian faith, beseeching him to forgive “for they know not what they do,” and simultaneously offers a cynical bribe. The man must now decide between taking the rich men’s money, which he badly needs, and demanding that justice be done—or even going out to get it himself. The man’s predicament is a miniature of the human condition: to be in an intolerable situation, and to be surrounded by only wrong choices, and to see no right way out. The man is unable to decide, and ultimately leaves it to chance—which is essentially the same as leaving it to God to decide—and his throw of the dice determines his fate.

In “The Queen of Romance,” one of the collection’s high points, a young photographer gets an assignment to take pictures of the library of one of the country’s most famous romance novelists. Not knowing quite what to expect from his visit—having read all her books in preparation and found them to be lowbrow schlock—he is surprised by the elegance of her writer’s hideaway and her erudition in speaking about literature. But while she fits his image of writerly refinement, she is incapable of producing anything more than tawdry tales of romantic encounters, something even she seems unaware of: “I have never written a romance novel,” she says in reply to one of the photographer’s questions. “I just write novels. Or to be more accurate, I just write” (145). This disconnect between reality and expectations pops up constantly in Kim’s stories: “The Queen of Romance’s speech was eloquent and well reasoned . . . I had trouble picturing her as the same person who had written five successful romance novels” (146).

While this is taking place, the photographer is going through his romantic drama—struggling with his excruciating inability to decide to make a commitment to his girlfriend.

In “The Runner,” Kim offers a depiction of modern paranoia that is both darker and funnier than the other stories. The element of the grotesque is also more pronounced here, although it is a sanitized, plastic-and-aluminum grotesque befitting modern Korea. The protagonist is in the process of masturbating when he receives a call from one of his students asking if he wants to meet up. The libidinal disconnect is established already in the first lines of the story, which proceeds as a corrupted love story lacking the slightest sense of sex or attraction. Chemistry—the essential element of any engaging romance—is fully absent here, and in a larger sense this extends to the protagonist’s relation to the world as a whole: there’s no harmony, no easy relation between the young man and the city he navigates. This manifests itself primarily as his paranoia regarding the individuals he passes as they bike along a pathway. His irrational fears shape his perspectives on his fellow citizens, and in the end he digs himself into a hole and ends up alone, lost in an alien urban landscape.

While some stories come across as more lightweight than others—for instance, “Bastille Day,” whose emotional element seems like a slightly forced addition to what is essentially a comic story of a tour guide’s “bad day at the office”—Kim’s writing succeeds best when it hovers in the ambiguous spaces, avoiding clever turns and convenient coincidences, and leaving the reader essentially as clueless and confounded as the story’s protagonists: wandering through a strange and ornate literary landscape, looking for the threads that lead one forward.

by Nathaniel Davis
Assistant Editor, Dalkey Archive Press
When we consider the immense popularity enjoyed by Do Jong-Hwan, both as a poet and as a person, it is quite surprising that it has taken so long for a volume of his most popular poems to be published in English. This new publication offers the additional advantage of being bilingual, so that readers also have access to the original texts of the poems.

Ivy

At times when we feel that it is a wall, unavoidably a wall, then without a word ivy goes climbing up the wall. At times when we say that it is a wall of despair with no drop of water, where not one seed can survive, unhurrying, the ivy advances. Hand in hand, several together, it climbs on, a span’s breadth at a time. It grasps the despair and will not let go until the despair is all covered in green. At times when we shake our heads, saying that wall cannot be climbed, one ivy leaf leads thousands of other ivy leaves and finally climbs over that wall.

“Ivy” is one of Do Jong-Hwan’s most popular poems, reproduced (in Korean) thousands of times on the Internet by his admirers. Like many of his poems, it begins with a familiar scene linked to nature and the traditional countryside (modern apartment blocks rarely have ivy-covered walls) but then takes the scene as an image of a truth about human existence. The patient progress of ivy up a dry, harsh surface ends in victory as it reaches the top of the wall and passes beyond. Despair is overcome; new hope is born.

Born in 1954 in Cheong-ju, North Chungcheong Province, Do Jong-Hwan first became a recognized poet some years after he began to work as a high school teacher. The extreme poverty of his family had meant that the only form of higher studies available to him was the teacher training college. During his student days, seeing him confronted with many difficulties, friends persuaded him to join their literary club and so he first became aware of poetry.

The death by cancer of his wife in 1985, just two years after they married, and a few months after the birth of their second child, inspired him to
write a volume of love poems, Hollyhock You, which brought him critical acclaim and instant fame. It has sold over one million copies. However, he was so identified with the mourning voice of those poems that when he remarried six years later, many readers were scandalized. Some have never forgiven him, so strongly they had fixed him in a stereotyped situation of grief and loss. They forgot that grief, too, is at length overcome by new love.

In 1989, his efforts to democratize Korea’s educational system meant that he was forbidden to teach for ten years. Once the ten years were over, he returned to teaching for another five years before spending another ten years living quietly in the countryside. He then returned to a much more socially active life in Seoul. He has been a member of the main opposition party in the Korean National Assembly since 2012, selected on the proportional representation system to represent the world of literature and the arts.

After the great success of Hollyhock You, Do went on to publish other very popular volumes: You Whom I Love (1988), Who Are You (1993), Flowers Wither in People’s Villages (1994), The Smooth Straight Line (1998), The Root of Sorrow (2002), and The Road to Haein (2006). His most recent volume was Between Three and Five O’clock (2011). He has received a number of major literary awards, including the 2009 Chong Chi-Yong Literature Prize, the 2010 Yun Dongju Literature Award, the 2011 Baek Seok Prize for Literature, and the 2012 Gong Cho Literature Award.

This bilingual collection of eighty poems by Do Jong-Hwan with English translations, selected from the whole of his career, offers a much wider access to his work. One overall theme which is repeated in multiple ways in one poem after another is “There is hope even on the brink of a precipice” (from “At Sangseon-am Hermitage”). He often expresses this theme in terms of springtime: “how good if we could brush off dejection and disappointment and wave our hands like the leaves of April, with fresh hearts, the heart of a leaf ever starting anew” (“A Dream of Leaves”), but for many of his readers Do Jong-Hwan is above all the poet of love and loss. He reminds himself, as he writes a “May Letter” to his dead wife, “To love one person among this world’s many and to have loved each other deeply for a long while is beautiful.” He finds a certain comfort in the world of nature: “When I return home at nightfall, the wind fills the emptiness in my aching heart.”

It is only natural that many of his poems remind one of the elegies that figure in world literature from centuries ago; mortality and transience can never fail to be challenges to any over-simplified expectation of human happiness: “It’s sad, but flowers fall. Days once beautiful go floating away on the stream, the wind blows and without a word our flesh cracks.” The final solution is a deeper wisdom, an acceptance: “wounds and pain too form part of a beautiful life.”

In the end, the poems of Do Jong-Hwan do not need much explanation or commentary. They are not difficult to understand. They offer fragments of wisdom, lessons learned from life’s joys and pains. That explains why so many people appreciate them for the courage they give when life is difficult, when joy seems far away. No doubt, there are more “artistic” poets with far more challenging poems and ideas, but Koreans love supremely the poets who encourage them to endure, to preserve a simple dignity in the midst of trials and hardship.

by Brother Anthony of Taizé
Translator and Chair Professor
Dankook University

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The 24th of January 2015 is a date I shall never forget. On this date the iconic Korean poet Ko Un and his celebrated translator Brother Anthony visited the book club I run in central Seoul. Famous writers had visited the book club before, but I was not prepared for the rapturous response which accompanied Ko Un’s appearance that day. As it got closer to 4:00 p.m. people were still pouring through the doors. By the time Ko Un took to the stage all 200 seats were filled. There were even people sitting on the floor and yet more lining the walls. If you have ever been lucky enough to meet Ko Un you will know that despite his towering reputation and frequently turbulent life he is as charming a man as you could ever hope to meet. But on stage he gave as fiery and as commanding a performance as I have ever seen. As he read a selection of poems the atmosphere in the room was electric. For days after the event I was still receiving messages from people who were in the audience telling me how much his reading meant to them. For many this was the closest they had been to one of their heroes. For me, feeling the atmosphere in the room that day as over 200 people were held in rapt attention by a twinkly-eyed eighty-year-old man reading his poems, was a potent reminder of the very power of literature itself. Literature has the uncanny ability to transport us, to give us access to the transcendent aspects of life. This is exactly what happened on the 24th of January 2015 as a roomful of people were transported by the power of one man’s voice.

Sadly it also reminded me of a very unfortunate fact; Korean literature is still nowhere near as well known as it should be. Brother Anthony suggests that Korea’s recent history exerts such a strong influence on the country’s literature that, if you don’t know the history, it can be difficult to understand the literature. There is a great deal of truth in this. One of the first translated Korean books I encountered was Three Generations by Yom Sang-seop. Three Generations is a great book which explores the consequences of modernism and colonialism on Korean family life but at the time I found it impenetrable and quickly gave up. However, in recent years several exciting Korean writers have begun to gain a following amongst international readers. This is a very positive development. If we accept that the best way to engage with the unique nature of another culture is through an appreciation of its literature then Korean writers can tell us all sorts of things about Korea. We can read Shin Kyung-sook to understand the role of mothers in Korean family life or to find out the significance of the 386 Generation. We can read Kim Young-ha to experience hyper-modern Seoul or Korean farm workers in Mexico starting an uprising. We can let Hwang Sok-yong show us the Vietnam War through the eyes of a young soldier. Park Min-gyu can fascinate with tales of contemporary life. Han Kang can shock and disturb with a story of a woman retreating from society in The Vegetarian, which has been a huge critical success in Britain. We were lucky to have Han Kang be a guest at the book club last year. After that event a young Canadian woman in the audience told me it was the best book club event yet. Korean literature is as rich, deep, strange, weird, troubling, and as fascinating a literature as a reader could hope to find. We just need to introduce more readers to it.

by Barry Welsh
Host, Seoul Book and Culture Club
English Instructor, Dongguk University
The Castle of the Baron de Curval

By Choi Jae-hoon
Translated by Josie Sohn
Chapter One:  
The Castle of the Baron de Curval  

9 June 1993.  
K University, Seoul, Korea.  
Paek Chŏngin, Lecturer.  
Course Title: Women in Cinema.

Okay, let’s get going. By the way, where is everyone? We have so many empty seats. It must be the gigs for extras. Well, I’ll let them be for today. You weren’t half bad in the acting lab. Let’s close the window over there. It’s rather loud outside. It’s not too hot, is it? …Why on earth are you putting on a jacket? And you go on about the heat.

Today, we’re going to discuss Edward Fischer’s 1953 film, The Castle of Baron Curval. The title’s got a nice and chilling gothic-horror feel to it, hasn’t it? The film is based on a 1932 novel of the same title by the French author Michel Perrault. The ending is, however, quite different. Fischer himself wrote the script, and it is, I think, his second or third feature film. Fischer was an unknown at the time, but the film itself became the talk of the town for casting Jessica Hayward, a Hollywood megastar of the 1950s. Who has seen the film? Let me have a show of hands. …A staggering three. How about anyone who’s read the novel? …Hmm, no one as expected. This is sad. There was no point in giving you the syllabus at the beginning of the semester. I repeat myself, but please do watch the films before coming to class. We’re supposed to be having a discussion, but I end up talking alone for two hours straight when none of you even have a clue about the plot. You all look as if that’s how it’s supposed to be. In the final exam, I’ll test you on the mise-en-scène. In The Castle of Baron Curval, how does the baron wear his hair? Number one, slicked back. Number two, bobbed… I kid you not.

At any rate, the baron’s castle in the film can be seen as a symbol of interiority where all kinds of human desires are housed. As a matter of fact, practically every narrative text, be it a film or a novel, deals with desire. The point in question is the ways in which desire develops in a work. This film is unlike any other that came before it in this regard, which makes it quite a significant piece in film history. Prior to this one—though nothing much has changed since then—the horror genre portrayed women generally in a couple of different ways. Any guesses? Forget the things like feminist film theory, and just think back on the movies you’ve seen. Like the Dracula series or Basic Instinct that opened last year. …Remember anything other than the leg crossing scene? Women are either the object of desire or the object of fear. The bloody victim is always a hottie, or you have the femme fatale, the dangerous woman. Consider Dracula, for instance. It’s always a beautiful woman with long locks of hair who sleeps with her white neck exposed. Then the vampire comes along, says thank you, and sinks his teeth in. As if the blood tastes better the better looking you are. Even your blood gets discriminated against when you’re not as pretty. Good grief. A woman like me won’t have anything happen to her even if she roomed and boarded in Dracula’s castle, except perhaps for mosquito bites. Ah, I saw you nodding over there. See when you get your grade.
Alternatively, when women are portrayed as evil or monstrous, we can say that it reveals men’s unconscious aversion to and fear of femininity. Julia Kristeva calls this abjection, the womb of horror that is cut off in order to enter the symbolic order. You don’t need to take notes on this. It’s probably all Greek to you, don’t bother. Sexuality, in any case, is equally important for the femmes fatale. Do you think you’d have the same story in Basic Instinct if Sharon Stone wasn’t sexy? She’s got to catch her prey before she can kill it or let it go. At the end of the day, the horror film objectifies woman as the Other, whether she is an object of desire or of fear. Laura Mulvey argues that the logic of the patriarchal unconscious in the male gaze is encoded into the language of classical Hollywood cinema itself as such. …Goodness, you gentlemen make a face the minute you hear the word patriarchy. Relax, it’s not about you.

Anyway, although The Castle of Baron Curval did not really attract much attention in its day, it is still worth thinking about the character of Camilla Harper, the female protagonist, in the context of the 1950s cinema. That is, she appears as an active subject in the narrative without conforming to the conventional image of the screaming damsels in distress in horror pictures. She’s like a foremother of Sigourney Weaver, the woman warrior in Alien, or Linda Hamilton in The Terminator. …You’re all spacing out. What a sight. What’s all this yakety-yak about? You don’t know because you haven’t watched the film. Oh well, let’s do a quick review of the plot. The Harpers who run a ranch in Texas have a hard time making ends meet and are about to go bankrupt. Then Camilla remembers her sister who married Baron Curval and moved to France ten years ago and sends her a letter to ask for help. Her brother-in-law is rolling in the dough, so why not borrow some? Camilla’s sister writes her back saying that she’d be more than happy to help and invites the Harpers to France. With a sigh of relief, Camilla and her husband take their daughter, Catherine, across the Atlantic Ocean to receive the money and, while they’re at it, take a vacation. After a long voyage, the Harpers finally arrive at the castle of Baron Curval in Creully, France.

The Writer Michel Perrault and His Editor

“Granny used to gather us children and tell us stories every evening. The rhythm of her creaky rocking chair, the flames swaying to and fro in the fireplace, and the slow and gentle cadence of her voice… We were always spellbound by her wonderland stories. The cat talked, the one-eyed giant lost his bag of gold, Bluebeard killed his wives, the fairy helped the knight marry the princess… Everything is still so vivid. The world created by Granny’s voice was more real and exciting than the one that I lived in. Actually, I borrowed a motif from one of her stories called ‘Courageous Jean and Baron Curval’ to write this novel.”

“Your grandmother left you a treasure for an inheritance.”

The editor nudged his plate of steak aside and ordered coffee.

“Without a doubt. The stories also came in handy for Mother. She had only to say, ‘Michel, be a good boy
or we’ll leave you alone in the castle of Baron Curval.’ And, lo and behold, I’ll be as meek as a lamb. Granny’s tales were much more than simple amusement for me. I believed in them, as if all of the creatures and characters were living their lives somewhere, as if I could go see them someday. Take Baron Curval, for instance. He simply leapt out of the story and has long been hovering about in my mind’s world. I wonder why. It’s only a short fairytale after all. I still see him every now and then in my dreams. His face is, however, always different. Anyone I dislike or fear never fails to appear as Baron Curval in a dream. I’ve, in fact, had the pleasure of seeing you as the baron a few times—you always asked for my manuscripts."

Perrault broke into a smile as he dabbed at his mouth with a napkin.

“I wrote this novel to give a shape to the baron, the ghost that roams about the cave of my unconscious. And, you know what, as I continued writing, the baron’s face gradually became that of mine. I was hardly surprised. He’d been feeding off all the dregs of emotions that I refuse to face myself. He must be more like me than I am—yes, more than myself... You know what I think? I wonder if Baron Curval had been around since long ago, somewhere far away, like in Granny’s stories and if I’m only a mirror that reflects a small part of the man... Look, are you listening?”

“What? Oh, yes, I am.”

“What are you looking at so intently?”

“Over there, in the churchyard. See that man grabbing someone by the collar at the soup kitchen line? His name is Wilson, used to be an up-and-coming stockbroker.

I’ve met the guy a few times at Buchanan’s parties. A bit cocky, but he was a lot of fun and everyone liked him all right. He used to be a smart dresser, too—had all his suits cut in London. Good heavens! He’s all rags and tatters now.”

“There is not a shortage of others like him. It must be a temporary thing.”

“Well, I hope so. The depression has been dragging on and on. Publishers are closing down all over the place.”

“Oh, stop it already. We’ve had a depression before. It’s only expected in a capitalist economy. Things will pick up soon. By the way, have you read the manuscript?"

“Of course, I’ve finished it already. It looks good. Adding elements of fantasy breathed new life into your writing. It’s good, but how about if you cut the beginning a little? The part where Camilla visits her sister and spends time at the baron’s castle reads a bit slowly. It lacks suspense compared to how the plot develops from there, and it makes the entire narrative rather unbalanced.”

Perrault sipped his coffee and stroked his beard thoughtfully. His burly eyebrows wiggled awkwardly like a couple of caterpillars fallen on a marble floor.

“Yes, quite so, quite so... But it is very important to describe Camilla’s psychology right early on. Readers will find the latter half of the story persuasive only if they can identify with her to begin with. Right from day one, Camilla feels distant from her sister even before she has a chance to enjoy the reunion. Her sister, for one thing, hasn’t changed a bit from ten years ago. She also sees herself in the mirror looking much more aged than her sister what with the rough ranch work and all that.
She begins to harbor fear beyond remorse before the existence called time. The noble and dignified bearing of Baron Curval, the rare dishes that she had never laid her eyes on before, and the servants who do everything for them so they can eat, drink and be merry... The story must show the stark contrast between the riches of the castle at her disposal and her inner world that only grows darker as time goes on. It is not simply what you would call jealousy or envy. It is rather that there is no sense of reality, as if her sister no longer belonged to this world in her mind.

Yet, one day, the situation turns upside down. Her sister promises a sum of money large enough to buy two or three ranches and proposes that she adopts Catherine. Guess what, it’s not so easy for her to turn this down. And, mind you, Catherine is the dearest thing in the world to her! She basically draws an ace in a game she almost gave up on. She can’t help but feel pleased, however secretly, at the sight of her childless sister who seemed to have it all. She no longer feels so distant from her sister and is now free to envy and feel jealous, and even admire her sister to her heart’s content. Don’t we all begin like this whether we mean well or ill? ‘I want to be like that, I can be like that.”


Interview with Filmmaker Nakazawa Satoshi, Kinema Junpō

Q: The Castle of Baron Tōsen, your last film before your move to Hollywood, is a remake of Edward Fischer’s The Castle of Baron Curval. This came as a bit of a surprise for many. Have the prospects of moving to Hollywood had any hand in making this decision?

S: Yes and no. If I had been preoccupied with moving to Hollywood, I would not have taken the pains to pick the least popular piece from Fischer’s extensive filmography. (Chuckles) The Castle of Baron Curval holds a special place in my heart. I began dreaming of becoming a filmmaker after watching it at fifteen. Working on the remake, like changing the setting to Japan and reinterpreting the original, reminded me of my humble beginnings. It is also a gift from me to my fans in Japan, a token of my appreciation for their faithful support. Please consider it a stamp of resolution that I will not lose my own filmmaking philosophy and touch as I continue making movies in Hollywood.

Q: Why were you so drawn to The Castle of Baron Curval?

S: I think I was rather fascinated by its ambiguity and lack of narrative balance, the very things that it is criticized for. And I find new things every time I watch it. It does a great job of detailing each character without conforming to genre conventions. I was also impressed by how it handles the psychology of fear that seeps in from such a bright and glamorous setting. It contrasts starkly with most of the popular vampire movies of the time that channeled fear by creating dark and sinister atmosphere throughout. The film also captures the subtle nuances of anxiety and obsession borne out of the encounter with an unfamiliar side of that which always has been familiar,
making one unable to tell reality from fantasy shaped by
one’s own desires. When, for instance, Camilla is troubled
after her sister offers to adopt Catherine, she senses a
glimpse of evil in her daughter’s eyes and strikes her for
no good reason. She also imagines the baron violating
her whenever she helps herself to the mysterious blue
drink and falls into a stupor at the baron’s parties.

Q: You always have ventured to go against and play
with classical film language ever since you directed
your first film. What kind of changes did you make in
The Castle of Baron Tōsen?

S: I kept my “destruction for the sake of creation” to
a minimum partly because I meant to pay homage to
Fischer. That said, however, I worked hard to incorporate
my own perspectives. The biggest difference would be the
ending though I shan’t tell you the particulars. If I did, I’d
lose the audience. (Laughs) In The Castle of Baron Tōsen,
I brought back the original’s original, namely, the ending
in the novel by Michel Perrault that Fischer had changed.
Fischer is considered the father of cult movies, but, in his
films, characters rise above rather than give in to their
desires even in the worst of situations. I think this is why
he changed the ending from the novel.

After watching the film, I went to great lengths to
find the book, which has a grotesque appeal that the
film more or less lacks. The novel was published in 1932
when the United States was caught in the maelstrom
of the Great Depression. To Michel Perrault, capitalism
presents capitalism, which must reproduce desire in
order to sustain itself, in the form of the castle of Baron
Curval. Fear has different faces, but, at its core, it varies
little. Is there anything more terrifying than the moment
when you realize that the shadowy figure that slowly
reaches for your neck is nothing but your own? The mute
girl with a sad face who roams about the outskirts of the
castle where extravagant banquets take place day after
day signifies the ragged spirit of the modern man who
has lost language. In this regard, the novel’s ending comes
across to me as more modern than that of the film.

Q: What are your plans in Hollywood?

S: I’m currently working on a scenario with Universal
Pictures. My first film will be a Japan-US co-production.
It’s about a Japanese exorcist who is rushed to New York
when a Japanese-speaking ghost turns up at a state-
of-the-art, high-rise building in the city. I plan to stage
a bout of wildness, mixing up time and space in the
film. It’s definitely going to be a lot of fun. Once casting
is completed in Japan, I’ll fly over to America and get
on with pre-production. This opportunity to work in
Hollywood has been made possible all thanks to my
loyal fans. Please look forward to my films with your
continued love and support.

Cult Girl (cult666)

The Castle of Baron Tōsen
Japanese Cult Film Festival, CineCube, Gwanghwamun
The Castle of Baron Tōsen is Nakazawa Satoshi’s Japanese-style remake of the 1953 film The Castle of Baron Curval. This is the one that was put in the spotlight out of the blue last year after the case of the psycho couple in Atlanta. Was it in 2002? I remembered watching The Castle of Baron Curval at an Edward Fischer retrospective and got a ticket right away. There were only eight people in the theater including me. (Two of them left, grumbling, in the middle of the film).

The original film is set against the backdrop of Neuschwanstein Castle, the one that is famous as the model of Disney’s Cinderella Castle. It looks like the film beat Disney to it since Disneyland opened in 1955. The castle was filmed, however, only from outside while the majority of the movie was shot at a studio in Hollywood (no wonder the interior looks really crappy).

The atmosphere of Neu Castle (I keep making typos) in the film is quite something that takes you right into the movie at first sight. It shows off its beauty, rather romantic like in a book of fairytales, especially when it glows under the daylight at the beginning of the film. The castle slowly turns dark and eerie, however, as the plot thickens.

One day, Camilla who is torn between money and her child happens to see one of the village women coming up to the castle, wailing loudly, to ask for her daughter back. Camilla slides quietly out of the castle and follows the woman and learns that the woman had recently sold her daughter to the baron as a maidservant. It is dusk by the time she returns to the castle after wandering around for hours trying to find her way out of the unfamiliar village.

The overbearing silhouette she sees above the bluff is, however, not of the same romantic castle that she had seen earlier in the day. The once-splendid spires now look as menacing as the horns of the devil, and the blazing torches at the watchtower glare at her as if to devour her. It is from this moment on that the castle reveals its grotesque face against the darkness of the night. A castle for Cinderella by day and for Frankenstein by night. I wonder if the director chose this castle in the remote highlands of Germany for its Janus-like face despite the fact that the film is set in France.

Ludwig II of Bavaria, the “Mad King Ludwig,” who built Neu Castle is well known for his keen artistic sensibilities as well as for his love of the arts and architecture. In fact, he loved the arts so much that he could not care any less about running the kingdom and was locked away for madness as he kept building ritzy castles here and there for a hobby. In the end, he was found dead in a lake, the cause of his death unknown, before he ever got to see the completion of Neu Castle that he was so fond of. After having spared no expense at the cost of bankrupting the Bavarian public funds over the span of seventeen years, he only got to spend a mere hundred days at the castle. It’s small wonder that the castle turned ghastly as if his ghost is lurking about. He is said to have asked the castle to be torn down after he died. He didn’t want his dear castle to be turned into a public spectacle. No one, of course, took this outrageous will seriously. Today, Neu Castle is responsible for most of the tourist income in the state of Bavaria. When all’s said and done, this extravagant hobby of the “mad king” is putting food on the tables of
his descendents to this day.

*The Castle of Baron Tōsen* is set against the backdrop of Okayama Castle in Japan. The way its roofs surround all four sides of the castle in layers of “^” lends it a delicate sort of beauty unlike the majestic castles in Europe. This film also has the same scene in which Kamiko (Camilla in the original) returns to the castle at night—same but different since this dainty castle cannot recreate the terror of Neu Castle. The elegant lines of Okayama Castle instead make one picture a mysterious woman beckoning with a smile. A simple glance in the direction of the castle alone will make you feel the urge to rush in and solve the mystery!

Okayama Castle is also called Crow Castle because of its black exterior. Himeji Castle, or Egret Castle, located in a neighboring prefecture is another one that is considered one of the most beautiful in Japan but is painted white, hence the name. Supposedly, the lord of Okayama Castle painted it black because he was so selfconscious about how his castle compared to the one next door. (Gimme a break). It is worth noting that Neuschwanstein Castle means a “new white swan castle,” which makes this film a transformation of a White Swan Castle into a Crow Castle. (Did Nakazawa Satoshi suffer the same inferiority complex?)

Both Neuschwanstein Castle and Okayama Castle play a hand in creating a unique atmosphere in each film. Personally, I would like to give more points to Neuschwanstein Castle in the original film for producing an extraordinary contrast in the setting between day and night. Cult movie fans will enjoy seeing how these films produced fifty years apart compare with the images of the castles from the East and the West.

**Jessica Hayward, an Actress,**  
**and Thomas Browning, a Film Producer**

...Yes, Tommy, I’m fine. You know what the audience wants. Of course, it would’ve been nice to have more viewers and better reviews, but I don’t really mind. What is important to me above all else is my performance in each film I act for. ...Yes, I want to remain in the minds of the audience as a true actress for a long time to come. You know very well that I can’t stand you-know-who, the upstart who is always on the look out for a rich man to marry. ...Yes, great. We have beautiful weather here. Well, it’s a bit warm even for Miami. ...The hotel is fine and I’m happy with my room. I just wish there weren’t so many reporters everywhere I go. ...I’m not sure. It’s scheduled for the 11th. What date is it today? ...Oh, is it already? I think I’ll stay for a few more days. ...Right, I don’t know when I’ll have another chance to get away like this. ...I received the script. ...Sure, I’ve finished reading. *The Baron of Castle Curval*—it’s a page turner. ...Hmm, it’s not bad at all. It’s got a strong, really absorbing narrative. ...Naturally, I, too, need to choose my next film carefully. You know how people love to gossip about an actress who fails at the box-office twice in a row. ...True, I do need fresh inspiration at this point though I feel rather uneasy about the young director. By the way, Tommy, what do you think about changing the script a bit? ...No, the story
itself is fine. It’s got a strong plot. But don’t you think the role of Camilla is too weak? ...No, I don’t think so. I rather think that it’d be much more natural for this film to have Camilla come to the fore and lead the story. For the film to work, we must play up the love of the mother who will do anything to protect her daughter. ...Tommy, listen to me first. Who did you say is the rookie who got the role of Bill, the husband? ...That’s right, Herbert. ...I know him all right! Robert or Herbert, the Texas hillbilly! Wait a sec, let me light my cigarette. Hooooo... Look here, Tomas. I have no intention of appearing as a half-witted woman screaming and shrieking next to that understudy. Absolutely not. I, too, am taking a big risk in working with a novice director and a novice actor. I need some motivation here. Besides, I’m speaking for the film as well. ...Tommy, what’s so difficult? I think we just have to change a few things from where Camilla returns from the village. Wait, where’s my script? ...That’s right. It is as simple as swapping the roles of the husband and the wife starting right here. Instead of bawling and telling her husband what she’d heard in the village, she can tackle the mystery of the baron herself. She will snatch the key to the secret chamber in the basement and find the baron’s portrait and his letters, and then she can follow a servant to a shed and dig up the ground there. ...I can practice shoveling. ...For goodness’ sake, it’s not going to take any time at all. We just have to change “Bill” to “Camilla” in the script. ...The duel scene? Why not? You don’t have to fist fight to have a duel. A woman can do it as thrillingly as a man. Haven’t I told you? I struck down a tosspot with a bottle of Wild Turkey when he tried to hit on me at a party. Ha, ha! Tommy, try to change your thinking. Just try. The audience wants new things. ...If I don’t get to play a larger role, I’m afraid I’d have to find another film.

9 June 1952. Los Angeles, California.
Actor Robert Hudson and His Girlfriend Elizabeth

“Camilla, pack your bags. We’ve got to get out of here. Catherine! Where is Catherine?”
“Bill, what’s the matter? What happened?”
“Oh, good God! This place is a devil’s den!”
“Calm down, honey. What on earth do you mean? Why, Bill! You’re bleeding!”
“I’m fine. This is Jacque’s blood. You know, one of the servants. We were fighting in the barn just now, and I killed him.”
“What do you mean, honey? You killed Jacque?”
“I had no choice. Jacque would’ve done me in if I hadn’t. Can you guess what I just found in the barn? Human bones! Children’s bones, and not just a few! They are all buried in the ground in the barn.”
“Children’s... bones?”
“The things that have been going on in this castle are simply unspeakable. Take a look at this. I found this in the secret chamber in the basement where the baron disappears from time to time.”
“It’s the baron’s portrait.”
“See the year it was painted. It’s 1697. That makes him more than two hundred years old now.”
“This can’t be... It must be an ancestor who looks like him.”
“His name is written on the back there. Donatien Alphonse François de Curval. It’s the baron’s name all right. There’s more. I found a terrifying secret of his in the chamber.”

“Bill, slow down. You’re not making any sense.”

“This is not the time for all this. I’ll tell you all about it as we get out of here. We must find Catherine first. Catherine! Catherine!”

“Wait, wait. Robbie, I think you got too excited with your lines there. Shouldn’t you control your emotions a bit more and look steady and dependable?”

“Should I?”

“Sure, I think the male lead should keep calm. How can he protect his family when he’s so worked up?”

Robert flung himself on the bed.

“Ah, how can I not get excited? I got the lead role. You know how long I’ve been waiting for this. I still can’t believe it.”

Elizabeth snuggled into his arm and stroked his whiskers with her fingers.

“You’re not by any chance excited because you’d be working with Jessica Hayward, are you?”

“Well, perhaps I am.”

Elizabeth pinched his nipple gently. Robert, all smiles, leaned over and planted a kiss on her forehead.

“Just wait, Mrs. Hudson. You’ll soon find yourself in a mansion in Beverly Hills with at least three maids in the house.”

The phone rang when Robert began unbuttoning her blouse with his face buried between the mounds of her breasts. He turned around immediately and picked up the telephone.

“Ah, Mr. Browning. I’ve been waiting for your call. ...Certainly, I already began rehearsing my lines. I’m practically Bill Harper now, ha-ha!”

Robert winked at Elizabeth. She undid his belt as she kissed his navel.

“When do we start filming? ...Hmm, is that so? So the script is going to be revised a trifle, right?”


MBC News Desk

Shocking news from Atlanta, Georgia. A couple in their fifties have been arrested for the kidnap and murder of their seven-year-old niece. The remains of the victim are also said to have been consumed by the couple who have confessed to having modeled their crime after a film they had watched at a local theater. MBC’s Kim Sŏkki reporting from Atlanta.

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The seven-year-old girl who was reported missing in Atlanta, Georgia, was found dead. The police charged the McCarthys, the uncle and the aunt of the victim, who reside in a neighboring town. The investigators discovered a part of the remains of the victim’s severed body in a heavy-duty refrigerator which was kept in their basement. The McCarthys confessed to having killed their niece in the basement after kidnapping her after school and taking her back to their home in their car on the day of her disappearance. Americans across the country are expressing shock and grief as they learn that the McCarthys have frozen and used the victim’s body for daily cooking.
Jonathan McClain (Atlanta Police)

This is the most horrendous crime I have ever come across in my twenty-eight years of service on the police force. We found the victim's body in a leftover stew, and the cooking utensils in the kitchen also tested positive for the victim’s blood. Much of the victim’s body seems to have been consumed already.

John Cooper (District Prosecutor, Fulton County)

I will charge the defendants with first-degree murder and see to it that they pay for this crime. Their attorney claims mental illness, but it is obvious that the defendants had a clear purpose and calculated their moves very carefully. This could very well have turned into a case of serial murders had the arrest not been made.

-----------The investigators have reported that the McCarthys committed the crime in order to consume human flesh after watching a recently released film. This film, a Japanese remake of a Hollywood classic, is about an aristocratic couple who purchase the children of tenant farmers as servants for their grand castle to be killed and dined on all in the pursuit of eternal youth. This atrocious crime similarly appears to have been motivated by a distorted desire for youth and beauty. The McCarthys have spared nothing in their efforts to stay young including using growth hormones and expensive cosmetics, visiting the doctor’s office, and even drinking their own urine. A number of child protective service agencies have requested an injunction to ban the film, re-sparking the age-old debate across America surrounding the issues of media influence on crime and the freedom of expression.

Rachel Flint (Atlanta Resident)

Movies, cartoons, and games that encourage extreme violence and sexual perversion are sickening our society. I fear for my children. Is it impossible to make movies without resorting to such extreme representations that promote crime? Think about the victim’s parents. Would anyone dare to talk to them about the freedom of expression?

Jake Powell (Atlanta Resident)

The whole controversy is most anachronistic, backward. Can you fire a gun just by pulling the trigger when it’s not loaded? It’s absurd to blame movies for depicting violence before even considering the violent tendencies in us. This reminds me of a line from a movie. If one walks on water but drowns and dies, is the Bible to blame?

-----------The film is gaining much attention amidst the controversy and is currently shown in more than three hundred theaters nationwide, a dramatic increase from the initial twenty five. Kim Sŏkki, MBC News, Atlanta, Georgia.
The Castle of the Baron de Curval

Choi Jae-hoon
ISBN 9788932020525

Visit www.list.or.kr to listen to a reading of the excerpt.
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Special Section
Korean Short Verse

Featured Writer
Hwang Sok-yong

Spotlight on Fiction
The Castle of the Baron de Curval
Choi Jae-hoon

Cover image by Kim Hyojin