

Cho Yong Mee

## The Secrets of Landscape

This title presupposes that readers know me as a poet to a certain degree. I hesitated for some time before using it, but could not relinquish the necessity of speaking on my own terms, and of my belated hopes; a poet's proper way of speaking may be the only stepping stone to new poetry readers. The private stories hidden behind my poems, the reasonable poetic transitions that occurred between each collection, and several ideas kept secret since the poems were written will be revealed.

My earliest volume of poetry was published six years after my debut; four years passed between that volume and the next; another four between the second and third volumes; and yet another three years between the third and fourth. I have continually made efforts to put my senses and thoughts on edge; to be awake to and not to lose the tension of living. Maybe I did this because I believed I needed to endlessly self-check the position and vector of my poems, needed to study them – I believed that these were a “must” in order to write a time- and rust-proof poem, and to show my poetic imagination, the “my own,” in each volume of poetry.

Changes between the first and fourth volumes are obvious to me – not changes in my poetic world, but of my definition of “poetic,” at least. After my debut, my belief toward poetic literature was very firm, but I suffered from a lot of confusion and experienced a grave identity crisis. I fell again into a swamp of questions about why and what I was writing, and spent a lot of time seeking an answer. After my first volume was published, my self-awareness as a poet grew more distinct, my questioning about life deeper, and my realization about where to go and what to write clearer.

The second collection was the result of a clear orientation, unlike the first. It was written in a period of greeting a new spiritual situation, and I kept holding fast to topics concerning soul, spirit, body, and mind. This collection may be described as an affidavit seeking existential depth in - or through - darkness or natural objects, reaching for and breaking the ciphers surrounding the secrets kept in the bosom of this world and so many landscapes.

Once, I tried to reach the secrets of this world through the vegetative. Through a sheet of leaves, a sheet of petals, I strove to read my destiny. My worship of trees, flowers, and grass is still the same. I'm a city-dweller but not an urbanite, and my orientation is toward nature. I think I belong to nature, and actually my dwelling is now located just below Bukhansan, a beautiful mountain and the largest in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea.

My third collection of poems, *Self-Portrait in Hemp Clothes*, was a very meaningful one in terms of my poetic process. I wished to define this world, in my own way, through keen soul-searching in order to express in a more direct tone the answers I gained after questioning life acutely. A desperate face-to-face confrontation with my inner self occurred during this process. Getting safely through that experience was perhaps the only reason that the “current me” exists.

Is it possible to write a poem without being seduced by the beauty of this world? Without sensitivity toward life's beauty, we can hardly say that we live a true life, it seems. Beauty outdoes the human world. Beauty comes before truth, and clears good and evil in one vault. Encountering a poem that pulses with such images still makes my heart beat stronger. A new image creates a new world. Only new images enable us to seize the moment and be. I think that beauty will empower us to endure this world, and will save us.

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Ghada Abdel Aal (Egypt), Alan Cherchesov (Russia)  
Cho Yong Mee, (South Korea), Kim Sa-In (South Korea)  
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Poetry writing makes me think more deeply about the relationship between nature and man. That relationship is equal to the relationship between being and language, and it's surely a stunning blessing that we can meet and converse with certain forces inherent to nature.

Nature is the ontological grounding of all things and the ethical basis of life at the same time. We can say that man came from nature, and civilization from the human race; thus, the destruction of nature is at once the destruction of the human race and civilization. Nature makes man endlessly question the why and where-to of life.

Surely it was the attraction to death, above all, that influenced my poetry writing. I don't know why death attracted me so powerfully, but like iron filings dragged to a magnet, landscapes of ruin and omens or patterns indicating extinction were shown to me. I have been comforted by relatives of death since I was a child. For I felt toward death not only awe and respect but also rare familiarity.

My first eye-opener about beauty, if that's what it was, came through death. As a child on vacation at my grandmother's country house, I witnessed the depthless blue reservoir near the bank of a rice paddy that led to a cemetery all kinds of ornamental flowers and birds on a colorfully decorated coffin, the fluttering of mourning flags and wailing cries, and I felt very attracted to these things and thought them beautiful. Sympathy with lone spirits first pushed me to write poetry, and the continuous reading of books concerning Eastern thought seems also to have influenced my poetry.

In my fourth collection, violent images or sudden flights of imagination are subdued. These poems aspire more to become one with the landscape, in contrast to the previous collection's wish to pry into the secrets of the landscape. This collection can be roughly said to be "sense-thinking," and my wish was to investigate each thing's mode of existence microcosmically and to understand this world more deeply.

Also involved in this volume is the inside-out concern for time and space, the cosmos, and the outer world surrounding me. My ceaseless themes were beauty and death. Formation and extinction, also. Without studying darkness and death, I don't know how to understand life. My ultimate dream for my poetry is existence mutation of existence through experiencing the world and encountering the other. Is not human existence in the end simply the immortal mind imprisoned in the mortal body? At a certain instant, I happened to understand the duality of the human mode of existence itself.

Maybe I have come to know and pity myself rather than torment myself; to investigate the disappearing place and time of desire in full detail rather than inspire the desire to spy into and disclose the secrets of the world. The long periods of time I spent feeling myself out as a poet were a great help to me.

I get great poetic inspiration from journeys, also. To me, journeying is a following up the space that unites a self's spirit and body. While journeying I happen to encounter certain special landscapes; the secret power emanating from them flows through my body and upon pouring out, happens to make a poem.

Journeying is said to be a migration in space, but to my surprise happens to be a migration through time. We meet the traces of a spirit that had once been. To me, time and space are confused everywhere. Some vague feelings about place-name make me, without knowing why, yearn for that place. Upon arriving there, I know the inevitable reason why. My inner self summons such landscapes. My serene inner self comes to meet serene landscapes; my violent inner self meets violent landscapes. Through such journeys, I come to understand the source of agony and guess the beauty of life. For quite a while, my heart was easiest on the road; my soul was always wandering on the road, no matter where I was.

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Fortunately, that time has passed. But I still think human beings are fundamentally nomadic.

Writing poetry and other literary deeds are some of the many methodological ways to try to live a life. Owing to loss and torment, I came to write poetry. Loss and torment awakened me to beauty and led me to poetry. Writing poetry can save a soul, can accommodate cosmic movements into the poet's bosom, but also originates from cool-headed self-awareness and self-introspection, I think.

At all times I have an aspiration to write short, deep, noble poems with descriptive, epic and vivid rhythms of language. I want poems that are faithful to aesthetic demands, but nowadays my poetry is inclined toward meaning instead.

Now and forever I shall ask the meaning of existence in which death and life are tangled and mixed. I am still groping about for one more step forward to a new world and still worrying about the contemporary, but also dreaming about the poetic world overcoming the contemporary; I wish to keep seeking out new answers.