

CHO YONG MEE
POEMS

Black Bile

There are times when bile is secreted from the heart. At those times, shoots of liquid emerge winding within the body. When the paths like the veins of a leaf collect into a black stream, a black river emerges.

The rivulets collect at the cliff and become a waterfall. They divide the depths of the heart and fall like ink onto muslin.

The waterfall is made of black bile.

Your offense was in trying to tame grief. Grief, which has not been tamed once in its entire life, releases a long, coarse sigh and lays still under the burnt sun.

That black bile can collect and divide life like a sword! Under the black waterfall, everything shatters and becomes foam. Can the deceptive beauty of drifting things become foam rescue you?

Grief will not be tamed.

Because your offense was in trying to tame grief, at the point where hallucination ends and destruction begins, life begins again. The black bile collecting and falling into a black river is beautiful. I will call this beauty the greatest lie on earth.

That which is the world's greatest lie, the name of this beauty is annihilation.

from *Cherry Trees Blossoming in My Cottage*
translated from the Korean by Krys Lee

The Solitude of the Dying

Over the reservoir, ice soars.
The water cannot accept the mountain's shadow.
Whenever the wind wildly sweeps the hail,
over the reservoir, a white road appears, disappears.
To calculate the wound's depth as deep as ice,
he walked across water.
The hand that fumbled near the heart, halted.

It couldn't reach the water.
In the water from where I guessed
was the middle, a wound that wouldn't close suddenly soared.
From outside the water, he became part of the reservoir.
He became the water's surface.
Inside the water, his face with an unreadable expression was there.
He couldn't go back into the water;
he couldn't walk on the water.

At night, there is a reservoir that releases cries.
He is on the reservoir.
Over the reservoir, his body cools down.
Slowly, he becomes the reservoir.
The reservoir becomes a part of him.
The reservoir that cries when it's night
isn't far from my house.

Where Does Wind Come From?

A typhoon is approaching.

When I was at peace,
Where was the wind?

A living tree branch breaks into white.
The sycamore tree's broad leaves fall violently.
In front of Gaetae Temple a juniper tree has
fallen, roots and all.
In the yard, roof tiles are scattered.

What is the wind
and where does it come from?

Large pine trees fall violently and enter.
Even the trees that can't know which way the
wind is blowing corner me.

At these times, a typhoon is a tree's ally.
The trees borrow the typhoon's strength and try
to invade me.

Inside, I heave.
If the souls of those trees enter me,
what will I be?

The wind is torn into pieces by my hair.
Between my hairs,
the wind rushes,
trying to find the souls of me and the weak trees.

The forest is palpitating like a heart.

from *Self Portrait in Hempen Mourning Clothes*
(translated by Krys Lee)

The Fish Soaring Up the Mountain

A mountain soars from a fish's back.

The fish with a mountain soaring from its back is in a painting. In the ancient tomb murals of Goguryeo, the fish had wings.

I couldn't see fish inside the paintings of Buddha, but to me it seemed as if it once carried a mountain on its back as it floated in the water. Even if its eyes weren't open night and day, the weight of sins arising from its back must not have been light.

If you go to Fish Soaring Up the Mountain, can the traces of fish that flew about be seen?

I delay going to the mountain. I see the Buddha's relics boring through the fish's back. The fish digests the bones and thrusts out a mountain from its body.

It became a flying fish and wandered the world.

When it rained, ten thousand fish splashed from the top of the mountain, making the sound of gold and jade. They were seeking Ten Thousand Mountain and the temple in the valley.

On the day a school of ten thousand fish rained violently down to death, when listening to the majestic spectacle the fish suspended in the sky made, I probably heard Ten Thousand Temple's monk from the past entering nirvana.

The fish inside the painting of Buddha, Fish Soaring Up the Mountain, and Ten Thousand Temple, connect an upside-down triangle inside my archaic map.

Its back begins to hurt and somewhere south is overwhelmed by hard rains. Ten Thousand Boulder quivers and the raindrops hotter than tears become fossils.

from Ten Thousand Fish Fly up a Mountain
(translated by Krys Lee)

Pine Tree

The tree ate the thunder.

The tree that ate the thunder stands lonely
on the boulder facing the hermitage's shrine.

The hermitage stands on a cloud.

The tree that eats the thunder is a pine tree.

Though thunder twists the pine tree and strikes it,
instead of breaking,

the tree swallows the thunder.

Like a knife mark across a swordsman's face,
obliquely

a scar is left across the pine tree's body.

The pine tree fiercely grips its scar.

The scar can't flee or disappear.

The scar is bluer.

The larynx that swallowed the lightning
protruding out, that crooked
pine tree.

from *Cherry Trees Blossoming in My Cottage*
(translated by Krys Lee)

The Afternoon World

I cut the tomato gently.
One side of the tomato's skin is huddled up,
blue seeds tangled together, stuck to
a red lump.

On a dish, chunks of tomato
lean obliquely to one side.

In the afternoon, leaves overturn the wind
this way and that, then set it upright.

Where the knife passes, the tomato is even.
The tomato's red innards finely drop
downward like leaves.

The tomato, its cold heart blue and lying flat,
is fresh.
Its blue seeds crammed in its mouth, it quietly runs.

Wildly tangled in the deep green leaves,
the wind's air bladder swims
from stem to stem, glittering.

The thread-like white blood vessels that connect
The tomato's red-blue skin and bones
serenely extend out like a tree's heart.

The leaves at the tops of the trees bend
as if about to break.
Thousands of strands of wind are overturned
and all together, flutter.
The pulp chopped obliquely and running,
the tomato begins to gently rot.

Forthcoming in 2011
(translated by Krys Lee)

In the Darkness

Where is the darkness coming from?
I used to try and peer into all the secret dreams that the things in darkness dreamt.

The landscapes and silent beings that you end up caressing
in the darkness--
these memories that darkness has carved in
leaves burn marks and has you uncovering them for a long time.
The dusk and the long night hours engraved into my body--
if I just try to draw them out to
the harmony of light,

between light and dark
our anxieties waver.

The world that darkness has released is so blinding that if
I want to reduce that light even just a little,
suddenly approaching my eyes,
a flame-scarred Buddha's twisted face or
a three-story street-side pagoda and a reservoir
that won't reveal itself.

And what about a person's inner world that recalls life
as a burning pain? How could I not look inside it where
the water falling echoes loudly like in a cave?
The light has arrived. The disappearing day.
The hour that slowly reveals the overturned zelkova tree.
When I mix the dark and light and caress it,
the memories that swell up with my deep breath.

Rising diffused from my body,
this darkness encroaching in a brief moment.

from *Ten Thousand Fish Fly up a Mountain*
(translated by Krys Lee)

The Wind's Path

The storm is passing.
It stands vacantly between the fallen trees ,
unable to overcome the wind.

The wind's path that the trees verify,
that their upright roots
with their life completed only
bend once.

Out of a desire to survive,
the kapok tree that constructed ruins by growing over the temple
drives its toe into the roof
even after the temple has been made ruins.

The desire of the tree seizing the pagoda
props up the temple.

Like Sanskrit script engraved on broken
stones,
the new ruins whose every door yet another world
like a distant historical site, I mumble.

There is no true need for
the Tripitaka Koreana and 1700 lines
to awaken from life's illusions.

The storm has passed.
The leaves on the fallen tree are withering.
Munch, munch. within the forest,
goats are looking for food.

from *Cherry Trees Blossoming in My Cottage*
(translated by Krys Lee)

Thoughts on the Sound of Water

The sound of the water is tall, short, bright, dark, rich, light, deep, shallow, thick, thin, coarse, soft, dense, sparse, serene, noisy, clear, cozy...

I like serene and clear the most.

Even when seeing the regular rhythm vary and the repeating water's chords, that are heard, that I hear, that I will probably see,

I can't place those notes one by one on my palm.

The flow of my body's cells is no different from the rhythms of the cosmos; I should listen carefully to my body again.

Now beyond the body, I no longer ask myself what I can do or what I can know.

When the sound of water was at its brightest, my ears began to hear.

When I realized that sound also has light, darkness, and shadows, at the point where light and darkness cross,

the sound of water enters the body's capillaries and shifts minutely to a different rhythm and timbre.

When my lazy ponderings finally grasp the water's chiaroscuro...

Elsewhere, Somewhere Else

At this time finally someone, not me, finally finds answers to age-old philosophical questions.

At this time, elsewhere, somewhere else, when thunder strikes and in the blue night sky, white capillaries burst, rain like thumb tacks smelling like iron falls to the ground here.

The new theory that the cause of this place is elsewhere has become old within a day, and only reference books with accompanying long footnotes stand in a continuous row.

Someone gives birth to an upside-down baby and loses vast quantities of blood. Elsewhere, somewhere else, at this time half is in shadows and half, on a sunny day, meets an unpeaceful death.

At this time, not me but someone else moves their joints of cast iron and sways while dancing.

The feeling that I am being made elsewhere, somewhere else...the feeling that reference books about me are being completed somewhere else...

Since the question of how can you understand man without being prejudiced against the body is so age-old,

somewhere else, someone is tirelessly.

Forthcoming in 2011
(translated by Krys Lee)

The Old House

The old house whose umbilical cord my sister and I had cut then abandoned for twenty years;

if you walk up to it through a foggy morning,
weeds and cockleburr grip your clothes, and from
the yard's entrance, your ankle gets caught.

I try to enter the ruins of the castle that stubbornly resists all efforts.
Gazing at crock pots scattered on the platform,
I realized the house and I were growing up
on opposite sites.

To reach the guest room's doorframe
where soybean malt was hung to get rid of the constant mustiness,
do I only have to pull the weeds reaching my waist?

Between me and the weeds, a path of less than an inch is a border as distant as a mountain range.

If I want to grope the old house,
I can touch every corner of my body.

My younger sister is standing with
a sparrow's leg between her teeth. My younger uncle is typing. My grandmother
is steaming

a young pumpkin. I don't see my aunt.
Near the crocks a tiger lily blooms. In the back yard, a sandbur ripens to black.
I tap, tap until it blows up. The old house is crowded for a moment.

The front yard's dead persimmon tree is leisurely.
When the old house and I part, I don't know where we will race.
The old house walks at a camel's gait toward time.

from *Ten Thousand Fish Fly up a Mountain*
(translated by Krys Lee)

Thorn Lotus

A typhoon passes and a thorn lotus shoots a bud to the surface of the water
piercing the flesh of the big leaves that are the body of its mother
A flower splits the thorny bud like a sea urchin as hard as a kernel
And slowly sticks out its black-purple tongue
That extraordinary property of plants,
Looking too much like a flower not to call it a flower
Because I want to pull out all of the thorns of the thorn lotus and look inside
I pace back and forth on the bank for a long time
After extracting and drinking all of the wild blood flowing through the leaf veins
The flower blooms like a scream
The bank at the very edge of the marsh is preparing to be destroyed gradually
The cracking sound that no one can hear
They alone hear
The black-purple tongues of the thorn lotus

I Slept Soundly at the Water's Edge

I slept soundly at the water's edge
Following the course of the water the willow branches swayed gently
And migrating birds passed above a far-off field
Fishy smelling water weeds made a hissing sound as they grew through my hair
The water lapped at a bridge's columns and swelled to the point of overflowing
It was a burning drought
In three dead trees in front of a shrine until spring was gone
A single blossom of a black bird bloomed
Among the dead trees red flowers sprouted in a flash
I walked among them slowly like a sleepwalker
Dreaming a long dream
As the last night of the lunar month drew near
Fish nibbled at the yellow moon under the bridge
A fishy water smell came under the dead trees in front of the shrine
That night I slept soundly at the water's edge
Spring days have gone
It was a burning drought

from *Self Portrait in Hempen Mourning Clothes*
(Translated by Hong Euntaek)
