

From the forthcoming book, *Songs of Tomorrow* (Green Integer, 2008) translated from Korean by Brother Anthony, Young-moo Kim and Gary Gach

Ch'on-un Temple

They live in a world all their own

Their spirits float below the valleys and up on high Echoes of wind

They are a sound of night wind in pines

Bare mountain slopes Boulders

Autumn is coming

As the sound of the wind-bells drops weeping from the rock-perched eaves to temple courtyards

they live in a world all their own

Now, back in the world, all that forgotten, they long to return to the slopes swept by the spirit wind

where they live

Resting

The era when you galloped on horseback is past, but not gone. Another era for galloping on horseback is here. Earn what you need for each day Then take it easy, eating and resting. Azaleas still blossom all round you. Sighing is not sorrow. When you stop to sigh, kites in the sky seem to pause as well.

True rest should be the mind's highest state.





Ko Un, SSN,* is Korea's foremost living writer. After immense suffering during the Korean War, he became a Buddhist monk. His first poems were published in 1958, then a few years later he returned to the secular world. He has published more than 120 volumes of poems, essays, and fiction and has been nominated for a Nobel Prize several times.

*SSN, or Soen Sunim, is the Korean equivalent in Buddhism of Master or Venerable.

they live

Grave Memories

In my youth I was quite fascinated by graves, especially the 680 graves in Hwangdung Public Cemetery. On my way home at night, I used to pass out in the Sarabong Cemetery on Cheju Island. I made quite a habit of sleeping beside graves. Word spread. Folks started calling me the Sarabong Ghost.

After someone died and a new grave appeared, I used to be so glad. "You've come at last! Welcome, friend! You're nowhere as well off as here," I'd say. I was so glad.

When night fell, I'd drink and drink until utterly intoxicated. As I passed the new grave, I'd pass out and snooze. Once, at dawn a centipede bit me. For a whole week, one side of my face Was aching and swollen the size of a pumpkin.

Once, as a novice monk on my way to nearby Mirae Temple in T'ongyong I spent half a day in a cemetery. I'd completely forgotten the errand I was on. Later, the head monk would give me hell.

Decades have since floated by And now I've finally realized: animals don't make graves. Thus animals are better than people, since they leave behind no tomb. Thus animals are better than God, a hundred times better than me.

Is that why I used to be so fond of graves? So I could realize that one thing? Is that why I used to cry and cry?



Sorrow

In my native village, two baby fawns died, shot in the same moment by hunters' arrows. Their mother came galloping up, circled the spot, out of her mind, then fell down dead. No arrow touched her, she just fell down dead.

When that mother deer was cut open, they found her twenty-yard-long gut ripped apart by the sorrow of losing her fawns.

In this world, everything that exists must experience sorrow, it's true, but can hers be called mere sorrow? Real sorrow has always been heart-rending Tonight, I'll bury my own little snack of sorrow quietly in a hole in the ground.

Next year, or the year after, fragrant mugwort might come sprouting from the secretly buried sorrow, but how could that equal the death of the mother deer?

To bring birth and the beginning of a new world with imperishable sorrow, the crimson sun of dawning day hastens far away.



In the House of Prabbutaratna

In notes to the Lotus Sutra it is reported that Shakyamuni Buddha, after spending eighty years traveling bare-footed throughout the Ganges Valley, left the earth, went up to heaven, and visited Prabhutaratna Buddha in his abode. The two of them set up house together. Prabhutaratna's face grew brighter than before while the face of his guest Sakyamuni also shone exceedingly bright. The two got on well together. Then a bodhisattva declared Prabhutaratna was the Sakyamuni of the past while Sakyamuni was the Prabhutaratna of this present age, so the two became completely one. The house of Prabhutaratna Buddha, all this time ringing with talk, grew very quiet. Being one Buddha can be very boring, it seems. So he went around sleeping with various stars, one tonight, another tomorrow, another the night after. A penniless child down on earth gazed up every night at the stars roaming around the sky.

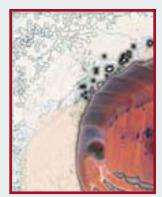
Translators' notes : Shakyamuni ("Sage from the Shakya Clan") is an epithet applied to Siddharta Gautama, also known as the Buddha ("Awakened"). According to some schools of Buddhism, there have been numerous other Buddhas throughout time, who've attained nirvana, ultimate enlightenment. One such ancient Buddha is known as Prabhutaratna ("Myriad Jewels"). While some schools teach that one who has attained nirvana ceases entirely to exist after physical death, the Buddhist scripture entitled The Lotus Sutra teaches that nirvana is not annihilation. As a sign of this, it tells that when Shakyamuni Buddha was preaching its contents, Prabhutaratna appeared in his abode to hear him. A bodhisattva is a person who is ready for or who has even attained enlightenment but has also vowed to help all beings become enlightened.

Drawing Maps

I was drawing maps again today. I drew the North Sea between England and Norway and the shores of the Gulf of Pohai in the East, then I tore up all my maps. This was not it, I felt. This really wasn't it. Just then the wind spoke, knocking at my window. "Poor little guy. You should draw a new world, not the usual modern map." Not only wind, but wind and rain spoke together, knocking at my window. Trying to ignore my growling stomach, I started drawing maps again. Not like before, but tomorrow's maps, with no America... no Asia

East Sea Lotus Flowers

A mighty babe arose threw a stone at the sky beyond the hills and the stone that one stone showered down as an avalanche for decades after. One stone landed in the East Sea at dawn just in front of Naksan Temple and blossomed into so many dazzling bright lotus flowers! They still float there, dazzlingly bright.



Translators' notes: The East Sea lies between Korea and Japan. Naksan Temple rises on the edge of the sea, south of the city of Sokch'o. The sea in front of it is studded with rocks.

Brother Anthony of Taizé

Born in Truro, in Great Britain, Bother Anthony is one of the foremost living translators of contemporary Korean poetry, with over 26 titles to his credit. He is currently Emeritus Professor, Department of English Language and Literature at Sogang Univesity, Seoul, where he has taught since 1980.

Young-moo Kim

(1944–2001, Korea) was Professor at Seoul National University, and is well-known in Korea as a literary critic and poet. He published three volumes of poetry and together with Brother Anthony, he translated and published poems by many of the most respected and appreciated Korean poets of the 20th century, including Ko Un.

Gary Gach

Gary Gach is editor of What Book?-Buddha Poems from Beat to Hiphop (Parallax Press; American Book Award) and author of Preparing the Ground: Poems 1960-1970 (Heirs, International) and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism (Alpha Books). His poems and translations have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies.