



Korea Lit

FALL EDITION 2016

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Korea Lit Publication
www.korealit.com

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Korea Lit

We are proud to publish the fiction of Korean writers and non-Korean writers who have lived in or experienced an aspect of Korea (even in countries other than North and South Korea). We seek to give new writers a voice and established writers another place to present their work. Our hope is that all the stories published on the pages of Korea Lit will give readers some glimpse of Korean culture, no matter how small. This may come in the form of mystery, romance or even alien invaders.

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Siheom
By Theo Volschenk

‘I’m not sure how else to say this, Mr...?’

‘Eight, eight, five, nine, oh, two, three, double seven.’

‘That’s right. Double eight for short?’

‘No, sir. Just Eight, eight, five, nine–’

‘That’s okay,’ the instructor waved a hand. ‘I got it the first time.’ The man smiled with the pencil between his teeth and looked down at the clipboard. The man felt the student’s eyes crawl over his bald patch, the boy’s ashen face shivering as his life flashed before his eyes.

The man could sense the thoughts: I can’t believe it would end in this gray block of a room with that fluorescent light flickering on this bald man’s head.

‘As I was saying, Mr. Eight, eight, five, nine, oh, three–’

‘Oh, *two*, three–’

‘Right, oh, *two*, three, double seven,’ the man tapped the rubber-end against his lower lip. ‘Quite an interesting name.’

‘Thank you,’ the student wormed in the plastic seat. ‘Named after my Father.’

The man could hear the capital F and it made his chest twist.

He's so young and innocent. And he can't help he failed the test, could he? Could he? But, this is how we do things, isn't it? Been doing it for decades, so the answers would be common knowledge by now. Won't they?

'Yes, well, back to the scores, my good sir,' the man scribbled onto the test results and waved over the student's head.

The room had a fourth wall made out of glass, which functioned as a two-way mirror for the assessors. Those who would fail caught on early and were terrified about what was on the other side. This student just gazed over the man's shoulder.

'I'm sure that you're aware of what happens when a student fails the standardised test.'

The student kept his green eyes on the air con as it hissed behind the man. The assessor sighed.

'Son, are you listening to me?'

The student looked into the man's eyes. A pang of pain fisted, twisted, and gutted what little empathy the case hardened teacher had. The green eye's cold-chill danced with the conditioned air, and goose pimples pricked his freckled skin. He never had sympathy for these fails.

But was this sympathy or empathy? He cussed himself for letting the feeling slither in like a snake in your bed.

‘Good,’ the man cleared his throat. He held a hand up towards the mirror and scribbled into the results. The pencils dragged and echoed into the silence and shook his head when he counted it up. He sighed again.

‘I mean, son, we briefed you about this. We briefed *all* of you about this. You had your *whole life* to dodge this bullet and still you landed up here. It’s a simple test. This is the most important test you’ll take. I mean *did* take. And we make sure, always very, very sure that we don’t allow imbeciles or mentally degenerate folks into the chambers where you are now. We can’t function as a society if we allow–’

The man wanted to say *retards* and pinched his lips. He knew political correctness has gone to hell inside these iron walls; no one would even flinch at the word. It was just him, the boy in front of him, and what was behind the glass wall. That’s it. This kid didn’t have anyone else. Well, his folks were waiting outside, hoping that he’d graduate into adulthood. They’ve probably bitten their nails right down into the white half-moons. That never bothered him before. Hell, he wasn’t just doing his job. That’s Eichmann’s defence and he never needed one. Society depended on him executing his duties, so why was he being sensitive? It didn’t make any sense.

He walked down those roads almost every day. Living in Jongno-gu, Seoul, he'd tread down Tongil-ro 8-gil, past the Presbyterian church, around the corner and right into Songwol-gil, through the large building's courtyard with the harmonica facade, the building where The Test happened every week. It was an easy walk, and he enjoyed the sun on his face before he entered the sterile building most citizens were terrified of.

He could imagine them now, outside in the sun, dancing on the balls of their feet, wringing their hands, waiting to see who came out, where the parents sobbed, cried, harangued, and dreaded the result, him just strutting and whistling past them like he was on a picnic trip.

But why this kid, why now?

'I know you're not stupid,' the man gave an uneasy smile, 'and I know you have folks out there waiting for you to join them. Maybe getting you a pizza or milkshake or something while they ruffle your hair in an "attaboy!"'

No response. Only the grove stared back, the eyes watering from the one-way Q and A.

'I mean don't you care? Everyone else back there,' he pointed to the door the boy came in, 'knew what waited for them. They knew. You knew. You wouldn't have written the test if you didn't know or understand—'

The glass wall tapped and the man jerked his head. His brow knitted and he waved a hand back, mouthing “wait.”

‘I know what’s going to happen, mister. I know what’s going to happen.’

It was a midsummer’s morning during fall and it was the best time to get the kids to ease into the unknown. Finches were singing, toddlers were rolling their red balls onto fresh-cut lawns, and sedans hooted their greetings outside the government building where The Test was done, giving encourage for those still in the dark.

It was also the best time to scramble a child’s brain with a black captive bolt pistol, the man reminded himself. With an air velocity of 340m/s, the Chinese Sprinter (as the folks around here cooed over it) had a strong grace which gave the man a shiver. He liked to think of it as the exit strategy for the current agency, the argument being it would decrease deviant rates, child mothers, general delinquency, and all the other unsociable behaviours, which is what The Test tested. But looking into those emerald eyes, he never asked himself if The Test was correct, up to date, even just on the right path. He looked down at the results and wondered himself who made the numbers next to the answers, the numbers that gave the final total to determine the child’s future delinquency behaviour. Could they predict the future?

‘So, if you know what’s going to happen—as a boy at

your level should—why did you fail?’

The man knew it was a stupid question to ask, but he was numbed as to how the boy could land here at age 17.

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

‘You’ve been doing The Test every year since you were 6 years old. You managed to make it all this way, jump every hurdle, and now’s the day you didn’t make it? Why? Why, Mr. Eight, eight, five, nine, oh, *two*, three, double seven?’ The words seethed through his teeth and the enamel went cold with the sound. The boy shrugged his shoulders again.

‘You understand *why* we do The Test, don’t you? Of course you do. You’ve been doing this for, what, ten, eleven years? You’ve made it nine out of ten times and today, for some reason unbeknownst to me, you decided to just write the worst possible results *I’ve* ever seen. And some of these kids are so jumped and scared that a sloshed crab has a better time of writing something eligible.’

The air con hissed as a finger tapped on the glass again. The man, face flushed and exhausted, waved the sound away. He mouthed “I said wait!” but a sliver of his voice escaped the parched throat. The man coughed, cleared his throat again, and took a sip from the lukewarm water. He swallowed it down and wiped the droplets from his chin. It must be five o’ clock, the man grumbled to himself.

‘Do you know what the Donohue-Levitt hypothesis is, son?’

The boy shook his head. It was the most mechanical ‘negative’ the man’s ever seen. Once to the left, then the right, left again, stopping in the middle.

‘Basically, if The Test removed those with a “crime friendly” disposition, then we’d be doing the future generations a service. Most kids that turned into deviants came from unwanted pregnancies. Some would say son-of-a-bitches and whores-for-a-mother, but I’m not going to do that.’

The man got up and walked over to the stainless steel trolley. ‘Would you like some water, son?’

The boy just shook his head again. Left, right, left again, dead centre. It gave the man the creeps.

‘As you wish,’ the man poured himself from the cracked jug and the glass clanged against the iron surface. The man wiped the bottom and sat back down. The bright grove eyes leered back and through the man’s own charcoal gaze.

‘Like they did in 2017 when the government legalised pregnancy terminations, you know? You know. When abortions go up, crime and civil irregularities goes down with it. That simple. That’s the DL theory, anyway. That’s what we tell you kids every single year. Instead of wasting millions on rehabilitation, crime prevention, and all that hoo-ha, the

administration thought: Why not pluck the root? Unwanted pregnancies. There's no use plucking the flower of the weeds if the roots are dark, damp, and untouched. Let's kill the mothers that make these bad decisions in the first place. Let's break the chain and choke that bitch out.'

The last part scared him a bit. Why was he justifying himself?

'I'm sorry, I didn't mean—'

'I know what's going to happen.'

The glass tapped for the third time. The assessor could see his bald head wobble in the mirror.

'Christ, all right! I said wait, didn't I! I'm not done!'

The man slammed the table on each sentence. It was an outburst and he'd never done that before. It was unprofessional. The boy, expected to shake in his boots, never kept his eyes off the freckled bald man. 'I think it's time for a glass of water, kiddo,' the man heaved and got up, waiting for some kind of response. Left, right, left again, dead centre.

The man slammed the table and flinched from the pain in his own hand. It was pink from the outburst. God damn this boy, the man thought. He must've gotten his head scrambled before he even walked into the examination room. Couldn't they pick up the kid wasn't... right? He had to have something wrong with

him. How else could he land up here this way? He hated all these fucking questions.

‘We’ll, you’ll get one in any case. Do with it what you want.’

The man walked over to the glistening trolley and shivered from the ice draft upper head. He closed his eyes and focused on the machine’s breath.

A red mist blew around the man’s neck and damped the steel tray. The glass jug, now pink from the mist’s film, slipped like condensation under the man’s hand. His brow folded and he wiped with the back of his hand the spray away. The boy’s head slammed against the table and the man flinched. He sighed and breathed out as loud as he could.

A bow of snot arced over the boy’s nose and mouth. The man crouched down to open the bottom drawer. The steel scraped and yelled from the jerk as the man rummaged to find the washed brown towel. His face itched and the bristles stood straight like a dog’s back. The cheap perfume of washing powder burnt his face. He breathed in the burn since he didn’t want to look at the mess.

It’s a boy, damn it, not a mess. It was a boy and you knew he shouldn’t have been here. Someone fucked up royally and I’ll get to the bottom of this. But not now. If I seem spooked, then my shit is cooked.

‘I know we can’t let them know when the shit hits the

fan, but do we need that stun gun? Christ, I feel baptized every time you use it.'

'Why did you take so long, Triple seven, one, two, four, nine, three, oh?'

'Jesus, Forty-Five, I know you like to keep things professional and all, but that's a bit stiff, ain't it? Let's keep it to Seven-Thirty, alright?'

'Why so long, Seven-Thirty?'

The man, known as 730 to his colleagues and family, rubbed the slick film of blood from his head and arms. The dog bristles made his skin pink and it looked strange with the blood red, ginger freckles, and pink skin. He never noticed the schema before and always tried to get the mist off him.

45 looked at him with his granite eyes and 730 was struck by the boy's emerald eyes in his memory. He never noticed their eyes, like you wouldn't notice certain cockroaches and their traits when you'd bring your boot down.

'I asked you to wait. Why couldn't you give me time? I had to make a thorough assessment.'

'You had plenty of time, Seven-Thirty,' the man's voice was like two concrete slab scraping. 'You never take this long with a failure. It's dangerous to get attached.'

'I wasn't getting attached,' 730 threw the stained

cloth over his seat. 'Don't tell me what happened, Forty-five. You had no right—'

'It's my job. I did what I had to do. The kid failed The Test, you need to check if he's healthy enough to've taken The Test; I come in and tick the last box. Done. You were dragging your feet.'

45 lowered the canister down and dropped the nozzle on the floor. It clanged and 730 yelped from the smack.

'Don't do that! It scares the shit out of me every time you do that.' 730 wiped his hands on his chest. 'And I didn't drag my feet!'

730 walked back to the trolley to see if the jug's contents was also tainted or just the outside. He was parched from all the talking. He jumped when the corpse slumped over and slapped the floor. Its head cracked on the surface and 730's eyes were wide-spread.

'What the hell did you do that for?' He swallowed down a yelp. He sounded scared and it would raise red flags if 45 heard it.

'The kid's big. They're heavy when they're dead, Seven-thirty. It makes it easier to drag them out if they're on the ground.'

'He's not that big,' 730 pointed as the scarlet speech bubble growing next to the boy's head. 'Barely one-

sixty. I've seen you carry twins over each shoulder without breaking a sweat!'

45's eyes contracted. 730 forgot that they we're only 6-years old at the time and scraped at 52-pounds each.

'They were chubby,' 730 grumbled. He felt his cheeks burn. 'Never mind that now. Warn me next time, alright? No use getting me all jumpy and I can't do my job,' he tried smiling, but it looked like rotten fruit sloshed under his tongue. He swallowed the attempt and waved the corpse away.

'Please take Mr. Eight, eight, five, nine, oh, three, double seven with you and send in Double-nine. She needs to get rid of this mess before we send in the last one for the day. I need to get home and... It doesn't matter.'

730 cut himself short as 45 ignored him. He dragged the body and the assessor flinched when the boy's head banged against the door's frame.

At that same moment, 99, with her red eyes and ashen face, stalked inside with a bucket in each hand. She dragged her left side heavier than the right, and 730 surmised it must be the water. He nodded in greeting, but the black-haired girl walked passed him and darted to the spot first. The two buckets, one empty and one filled, clanged as she lowered it. Moving to the trolley, she squatted and rummaged through the drawers, pulling out the supplies needed

to clean up the blood. Double-nine always cried when she hears the nozzle going off, 730 thought. It must be exhausting to cry for those who fail.

99 gripped the bleach and headed to the spill. She crouched down and pooled the crimson into the cloth. With the steel buckets next to her she wringed out the towel in the one, syrup that oozed into the steel, and drenched the other in the water. The liquid turned pink and she mopped the remaining pool with the wet towel. He forgot that he wanted to check if he could salvage some water, but left it. If he drank another glass now we would have to go to the toilet which seemed like too much effort now. He'd rather wait until the last one was done for the day.

The wooden scrub's yellow bristles scraped against the concrete floor and the sound made him nervous. He looked at the taut white dress covering the young buttocks and he felt shame creeping like a snake. He tried to focus on her motion, but the bleach-water-blood solution made tiny sprays. Just like the pink mist every time 45 fired the captive bolt.

45 stepped in and nodded to 99. She nodded back and 730's stomach turned.

'Came to fetch Chinese Sprinter.' The man chuckled under his breath and 730 resisted the urge to smack the boulder of a man.

'Don't laugh. Just take the thing, will ya? No need to scare the kids and make it impossible to talk to them.'

'Right,' 45 winked, 'No need to spoil the surprise.' He chuckled again and nodded to 99 as he left the room. The door, hidden in the glass wall, shut and the mirror wobbled. 730 looked like the world's biggest infant as his bald head grew and shrunk on the surface. He tried looking away, but the malleable image fascinated him.

99 worked fast and the soap layer was white again. The bleach striped the signs of any life taken between the iron walls. When she was done wiping the spot dry she gripped her supplies and returned them. The steel drawers open their mouths with pleasure, gulped the mechanical gulps, and stood in attention for the next customer.

The woman exited tapped on the glass wall and 45 opened from the outside. The mirror shook the man's image still inside as the door closed behind her, and the assessor sat down when a knock came from outside the test chamber.

'Just a minute!'

730 walked over to his seat and dragged the towel from his seat's backrest. He shoved the towel in the bottom drawer, careful to be as quiet as possible, and gripped the clipboard on the steel trolley. The pages screamed in the room as the assessor flipped it over to the last page. He shook his head at the results and sighed as he sat down on the plastic folding chair.

He saw the emerald eyes surrounded by red and

made a mental note. It was a pair of stunning eyes and now his folks, broken for the rest of their lives in about 30 minutes—*not a fail, a girl!*—would have no pizza or milkshake or something to cheer about while they ruffled their son's hair in an "attaboy!"

He would find out who did the sifting today. The boy should not have been here. Someone made a mistake and an innocent life was taken.

730 sighed and tapped the pencil's rubber-end against his lower lip. He was thirsty and wanted to get this one done. He had work to do. Work outside this building. He would start with the screeners and work his way, perhaps, back to himself. He hoped it would be an answer where *he* didn't make the mistake. He never made mistakes, but the first of every bad thing was usually the worst.

He sighed again. All that would have to wait. The assessor plastered a smile on his face and leered at the door, yelling 'Come on in! Don't be scared!'

THE END

As a barefoot rural kid from South Africa, Theo began writing stories using his favourite colour crayons, moved to H2 pencils, and ended on an old PC. If he does not try to scare people with his stories then he spends his time with his family and watching classic black and white movies.

Making Biscuits

By Ellen Lowry

He smelled like cats the first time I ran into him. I was carrying a box up the stairs when he brushed past me and my watch caught on his sweater. He could have quickly plucked the fabric lose, but he chose, instead, to remove the entire sweater as I watched in horrified silence. He then proceeded down the stairs without a word and left me on the landing, decorated with his feline scented sweater. I briefly wondered if I should have used a real estate agent rather than trusting a classifieds website.

I continued on with my box but stopped short of my apartment because my smelly neighbor had left his door standing wide open. It was a view I couldn't turn away from. There actually were cats. I counted 6 of them. They were of various sizes and colors and appeared to be having a tea party in the middle of the living room. It crossed my mind that maybe they were stuffed, but then one turned his whiskered head and looked at me. He held a tiny teacup in his paw and slowly blinked his eyes, the way cats do when they're indifferent to you.

The blinking cat was an orange tabby and was the largest of the six. He also sat at the head of the little table so I supposed this made him the leader of the strange group.

I stood there for at least a minute, just staring at the bizarre gathering. I didn't really have anything to say, and it didn't feel right to offer a "annyeong-haseyo" or "hi." They were tea drinking cats, after all. Meowing wouldn't have been right either.

I remembered that my neighbor's sweater was still hanging from my watch so I put my box down and pulled the sweater loose. I wasn't sure what protocol was in a situation like this, so I just tossed the sweater into the apartment, picked up my box and continued on to my apartment.

Then I heard it. "Well, that was rude."

"She just stood there, like an idiot."

"Maybe she's more of a dog person."

"I thought her sweatshirt was hideous."

"It was hideous."

I stopped in the hallway, and then slowly backed up until I was standing in front of the open door again.

"It was a gift from my grandmother," I said dryly.

"Your grandmother has terrible taste," remarked a white Persian who appeared to be eating a tiny strawberry scone.

“She’s dead.” Why did I tell these cats that my grandmother was dead? They probably never knew their grandmothers.

At this point, the large orange tabby slid out of his chair and sauntered across the room in my direction. He reached the sweater I had thrown on the floor and plopped his giant furry backside directly into the middle of it. He gave me a few lazy blinks and then lifted his paw and began picking at his teeth with his claws.

I pointed to the sweater. “That belongs to your owner.”

“He doesn’t own us. He’s our roommate,” replied the tabby, between his teeth picks. “We were here first, and then he moved in.”

“So you cats just lived in this apartment by yourselves, before he came?”

“No. We can’t clean our litter boxes on our own. We don’t have opposable thumbs. Did you fail biology?”

“Who lived here with you before?”

“Sujin. She brought Sparkle Pants with her.” The tabby nodded his head toward a skinny calico that was furiously licking her nether regions.

Sparkle Pants paused, mid lick, and glanced at me then returned to her duties.

“Where did Sujin go?”

“She got married.”

“Why didn’t she take Sparkle Pants with her?”

“Her husband was allergic.”

“Oh.” I glanced over at Sparkle Pants and felt a twinge of sadness.

“Don’t feel bad for Sparkle Pants. She’s not the saddest case here. Do you see the hairless wonder over there?”

I glanced over at the ugly hairless cat that the tabby motioned to. One of its ears was missing.

“That’s Ji Won. He came here all the way from Jeju. He was some fancy New Year’s present for a CEO’s daughter.”

“Why is he here?”

“It turns out the daughter would rather spend her time painting glitter on her nails than taking care of Ji Won, so she tossed him out the window of her car one day.”

At this, Ji Won limped over to me and rubbed his bony body against my calf.

“Ji Won lived on the streets for a few years,” continued the Tabby. “He hung out in the alley behind a Korean restaurant and ate their leftover Kimchi. But rotten Kimchi isn’t good for cats, so now he’s deaf. He can read lips though.”

I looked down at Ji Won and again felt a twinge of sadness. I turned back to the Tabby.

“What is your name?”

“Tabby. My owner wasn’t very creative.”

“How did you get here?”

“I moved in with Seonwoo about seven years ago. But then Seonwoo met Yerim. And Yerim had Snowflake. And Snowflake didn’t like me. And Snowflake was prettier. So Seonwoo left me here with Soyoona when he left.”

“And Soyoona is gone now too?”

“Yep. She brought Pickles.”

“I’m Pickles,” said a fat black cat that was systematically knocking things off the table. Spoon. Plunk. Cup. Plunk. Cookie. Plunk.

I turned back to Tabby. “So how did you come to live with the guy I met in the hallway?”

Tabby tucked his front legs under his chest and

lowered his furry body down until he resembled a neatly wrapped burrito.

“He moved in with Aaron Burr about a month ago.”

“Aaron Burr?”

“The skittish fellow that thinks he’s part human.”

“I glanced over at the table and saw the cat that Tabby was referring to. He was sitting on his rump, like a human would, with his legs out in front of his body. His eyes were wide and darting about the room.

I gave a quick wave. “Hi, Aaron Burr.”

No answer.

“Yeah, he doesn’t talk much,” continued Tabby, “on account of his owner being a pretentious schmuck.”

“He did seem kind of odd when we passed in the hall. And you’re sitting on his sweater right now. That means he’s running around outside with no top on.”

“Exactly. I don’t think he’s going to work out.”

At this, the white Persian left the table and approached the sweater. She placed her two front paws on the fabric and began kneading it like bread. She glanced up at me and spoke. “We thought he would be a good fit because he was a loner. But then we found out why. Because he’s a schmuck.”

“Why is he a schmuck?”

Tabby continued the explanation. “He’s a tortured artist. But not a real one. He writes experimental music but it’s all crap. It made Aaron Burr skittish. Ji Won is lucky he’s deaf.”

“Wow. It’s really that bad?”

“The music isn’t even the worst part. He writes a blog on existential literature but I’ve never seen him actually read a book. He mostly just watches reality TV and documentaries about unsolved murders. All of this while traveling the world on his parent’s dime.”

“He does eat organic though,” interjected the Persian, “so I guess that’s good.”

“Yes, organic is healthier,” I replied.

“Things would work better with a woman here,” said Tabby, stretching his front legs out and opening his mouth to a yawn. “It always works better with a woman. And your sweatshirt is hideous”

I glanced around the room at the whiskered faces.

“Okay. Let me talk to the landlady.”

THE END

Ellen Lowry lives in Busan, South Korea. She teaches English at a small private academy near the ocean. This is Ellen's first published story.

간식, Gan-sik, Snack

Paul Keelan

A Korean food delivery driver, Hye-Joon Lee, meanders the five lane streets around Jamsil's Lotte Tower. Lee darts across the traffic in a rare mission to deliver himself to food instead of food to others. Transporting neither pork cutlet nor fermented soybean

stew--the two dishes he just dropped off to some KB bankers staying after hours--he's now solely fixated on buying himself a warm *hotteok* from his favorite street stall. Hye-Joon drives recklessly, hell-bent on biting into the hot Korean pancake with savory peanuts and oozing brown sugar. Scarfed down and yet still hungry, Hye-Joon pulls out another blue *cheon-won* bill to buy a Dixie cup of *tteokbokki* which he stabs and gobbles with toothpicks. One of the jiggling rice cakes, doused in red sauce and buoyed amidst fish cakes, slips off the spearing tip of the toothpick and stains the toe of his new beige boot. Too cold to crouch and scrub the maculation, Hye-Joon merely kicks his foot into a mound of snow settled on nearby foliage, hoping the wet powder will do the trick.

The next delivery leads him to the Lotte Apartment complex, room 56, floor F. The F floor refers to the number 4: superstition though thwarts the inclusion of the number 4 in most of Seoul's sky-rises. Two teens, tired from English Academy, had ordered *cheese lobakki*, a dish with mozzarella melted on *ramyeon* and rice cakes stewed in *gochujang*. On the table behind the boy who

answered the door, he could see their textbooks and vocabulary sheets. The friend is very busy scribbling note while “Running Man,” a popular reality TV show, broadcasts on mute from the Samsung HD flat screen. The last stop on this outing is at the Tous Les Jours bakery. In the boxed container at the back of his motorcycle are imitation ceramic dishes of traditional Korean earthenware. They are also a collection of *panchan*, or Korean side dishes, *kimchi* and *danmuji* in saran wrap. The plastic faux ceramic bowls are topped with saran wrap too, to keep the two soup swishing contents—*sujebi*’s black sesame powder, wheat flour, noodle dumplings, anchovy stock, and carrots along with *kalguksu*’s knife cut noodle soup with shellfish and fried egg—from splattering out. The few slivers of zucchini squash ebb buoyantly as Hye-Joon speeds over bumps, toppings on both soups added as more of a tease and an insult to fiber and vegetable aficionados than actual ingredients. Dropping the soups off at Korea’s French appropriated bakery, Hye-Joon gathers the bakers' empty bowls from lunch and is gifted with twenty-four hour old green tea castella rolls, chestnut pastries, and mocha

bread to return to the chef perspiring over the kitchen's array of hot broth soups ever being whipped up at his *Gimbap Shop*.

The noraebangs flicker gaudily in Hye-Joon's peripheral view as the atonal drunken sounds of karaoke pour into the street. A thin sheet of black ice on Seoul's gelid streets adds a hazardous veneer to the asphalt. The odd-job motorcycle is melded with gargantuan leather gloves, permanently fixed upon the motorbike's handlebars. Even padded within layers of finger warming protection, frostbite threatens. Unglamorous as the gig seems, delivering for a local bourgeois *Gimbap Shop* exhibits upward mobility: Hye-Joon now works upscale Gangnam, not the thespian epicenter of adolescent Hyehwa. His prior Hyehwa job was as a deliverer for Lotteria, a spin-off on McDonald's, with mainly single parent or teenage customers phoning in *bulgogi burgers* to their study sessions or studio apartments. Now, representing a fancy version of a fundamental Korean menu, Hye-Joon caters almost solely to *salarymen* who tip in defiance of Korea's anti-gratuity norm.

In the summer, when business is low, Hye-Joon sits

at the plastic tables in front of GS-25 convenient shops with some other delivery boys from Domino's Pizza and a neighborhood fried chicken spot. Eating squid chips, shrimp crackers, and imbibing banana milk, they talk FC Seoul and the Doosan Bears: Seoul's professional soccer and baseball clubs. During winter downtime, they sneak into PC Bangs to slurp black *jajangmyeon* noodles and play World of Warcraft mid-shift. Today they convene for a cigarette break at the PC Bang near Sinsa-dong. Puffing nicotine warmth, the delivery boys share horror tales of the day: a crooked *ajusshi* drunk on Makkeolli refuting the bill, a swerving close call with a blue Hyundai truck hauling a crate of golden Korean canary melons called *chamwae*.

On Hye-Joon's cell phone he gets selfie texts from his girlfriend, Yujin, smiling beside simmering *dalkgalbi*, the BBQ chicken sizzling in pornographic close-up shots at some hip *sik dang* in Apgujeong. Accidentally hitting the back button with the Domino's delivery boy voyeuristically looking over his shoulder, Hye-Joon is teased for his secret stash of photos featuring Yujin: a collection of cute *kimchi* and *sarang*

signs in Myeongdong's shopping arcades, atop Namsan Tower, at Nami Island in autumn. Each snapshot is identical to the next: her peace fingers pressed against each cheek, the head cocked a few inches to the side. Yujin had recently started posing redundantly after learning that modeling techniques could parallel plastic surgery in making her chin appear pointed, her jaw line narrower.

They met a month or so before, on Halloween weekend in Hongdae, at the graffiti playground. Yujin was drunk off shots of *soju* and Hye-Joon was tipsy off *Cass*, Korea's cheapest booze. Stealing glances at the Ho-bar all evening, it wasn't until much later, after the drinking had ended, that fate intervened while Hye-Joon was sucking up his *sundubu jiggae* and waiting for the *jihacheul* to arrive. He had costumed as Iron Man from *The Avengers* and Yujin was T'ara from the Korean film *White: The Melody of the Curse*. Wearing all white make-up and bleeding red mascara from her eye, Yujin sat next to him and spooned rice from a small paper bowl into his spicy soft tofu stew and it splashed all over his battery-operated heart. "It looked like you needed a little

substance... and a little shower too..." she quipped flirtatiously after the mishap, still sipping the remnants of soup-softened rice. Yujin's impudent mettle was uncanny but attractive. Having missed the final night train Hye-Joon reciprocated Yujin's pluckiness by inviting her to Caffè Bene for a green tea latte. By 3:00 a.m. they were asleep, cuddled on the plush coffee shop booth, waiting for the 5 o'clock hour when public transportation commenced. When they woke up, at 7:00 a.m., Hye-Joon and Yujin half-consciously strode in somnambular hangovers, hand in hand, back to the *jihacheul*. The percussive rattle of the underground system lulled the two back to sleep in minutes and when they finally yawned groggily back to life it was 11:30 a.m. They had slept the duration of three full circulations of the green #3 subway line without stirring. After a soft serve ice cream from Mini-Stop Yujin pleaded Hye-Joon to accompany her to a showing of *The Thieves* at CGV, already well rested. In the movie theater, and smitten with endorphins released by the scent of sweet caramel popcorn, Hye-Joon doughtily kissed Yujin on the cheek and put his number into her LG phone. Yujin's adorable

lisp and defined cheekbones left him in a stupor for the next week and a half. By Pepper Day, a holiday on 11/11 to celebrate skinny chocolate wafer sticks, they wore matching cardigans and snacked on boxes of every flavor—from green tea to tiramisu to nude—of the holiday's staple treat, cuddling at the local DVD Bang. Just last night they ate grilled *samgyeopsal* before descending into a subterranean billiards and ping-pong hall in Cheonho. Afterwards, crossing the street, they throttled in nauseous gyrations on a Disco Bang Bang ride before winning a pink Doraemon wristwatch from a claw machine. During the entire date Hye-Joon toted Yujin's bag, chivalrously ceding to Korean etiquette as they scanned cosmetics at Aritaum and Etude House. To cap of the evening, Yujin successfully entreated to Hye-Joon to romantically squish into a photo booth and squiggle animations over their kitschy couple's mug shot, the smoky stench of pork belly ever clinging to their wool coats.

Two cigarettes and three saccharine red bean *bungeoppangs* later, Hye-Joon receives a text message hailing him back to the *Gimbap Shop* for another

delivery. Scarfing down the fourth and last gooey fish-shaped gooey waffle, Hye-Joon hops on his motorbike. Hye-Joon's route passes below the screams from Lotte World's theme park and he zooms under the Lotte World Tower, wistfully dreaming of taking Yujin on evening strolls under the cherry blossoms of Seokcheon Lake in late spring. At the *Gimbap Shop*, Hye-Joon shakes the snow from his jacket stumbling past the 24-hour sign atop its commonplace orange facade. Despite fancy organic ingredients, the decor resembles a typical *Gimbap Cheonguk*, dated and fusty. The inside walls are lined with cheap photo printed sketches of *patjuk* and *naengmyeon*: a seasonally iced broth and tangy cold noodles only served in summer, the latter dish is already a few months obsolete. Shivering from his outing Hye-Joon spoons some red bean porridge while sitting on the counter in the back kitchen and sings his tonsils in the process.

Hye-Joon's manager is a veritable *ajooma*, slang for a middle-aged Korea woman. Unlike Lotteria, where his pimply-faced chirpy boss fired him without a flinch for sneaking an extra cheese stick to eat on the fly, the

ajooma made him daily bowls of *bibimbap* with a side bowl of anchovy broth. Lectured each time about the benefits of sundried vegetables and fermented red pepper paste, he'd slurp down the last droplets of his steamy anchovy soup to tutorials of homemade *dotorimuk muchim*. Hye-Joon secretly found the jelly-textured acorn starch salad repulsive but kept obsequiously silent. More appealing was the *ajooma's* stories of *makkeoli* shenanigans on weekend mountain treks at Bukhansan, or her reminiscing about being launched from a seesaw playing Seollal's traditional *neolttwigi*. Sometimes on Saturday morning the *ajooma* would show up still in her hiking garb, a gaudy outfit of lurid yellows, reds, blues: primary colors boldly pronouncing her not so intrepid hobby. Unfiltered and voluble, the chubby oval-shaped manager rambles on about how a woman cut her inner thigh while shaving at the Garden-5 *jimjilbang* and blood got everywhere. She talks about how her cat won't eat fruit with the peels, picky like a good Korean about pesticides. "This weekend Haneul Park will have the Eulalia Festival," the *ajooma* tells him, "with night-lights shining over the *oksae*, a genus of silver grass symbolic

of flimsy femininity and marital indecision.” Stocked up with the final delivery of the night, Hye-Joon is out the door, abandoning the *ajooma* seated in the unoccupied restaurant and watching some Korean melodrama about Joseon-era court life on a flat screen LG TV.

Orange vapor sodium lights illuminate the underside of Japanese maple leaves, the few resilient ones clinging to boughs on the cusp of a blistering South Korean winter. Hye-Joon's final stop of the night is the *byeongwon* situated adjacent to the intersection of the Cheongnyesan Tributary and the Hanyang River. He arrives, parking under the sleek silver curvature of its modern design: the looming windows bulge outward like giant fish eyes concealing surgery chambers, CT scans, and other medical orbs within. Locating the electronic sliding glass door, Hye-Joon walks past *ajusshis*, Korean middle-aged men, smoking cigarettes while attired in the white hospital gown pajamas. With IV drips hooked up to their arms, the nicotine break seems absurdly deleterious. An elevator dings at the end of the hall, urging Hye-Joon into a sprint. With his forearm smashed, the closing doors retract to reveal an overstuffed

compartment, crammed with doctors assuaging a boy moaning in an oxygen mask. Guilty for stalling the elevator's ascent, Hye-Joon waits patiently in self-recrimination, softly whistling harmoniously with the sound of cables squealing in the shaft so as to erase the boy's sickly mien from his mind.

On the 2nd floor, near the radiology lab, Hye-Joon delivers a *doenjang jigga* and *kongkuksu* to an elder man with a likeness not too unlike his grandfather. The hoary man had slipped while hiking Ahasan and broke his femur bone. He thanks Hye-Joon profusely, shocked that *kongkuksu*--a summer fare made from ground soybeans--is still on the menu. Usually the *Gimbap Shop* stops making the cold soymilk broth at the end of summer so it was certainly a seasonal anomaly: like ginkgo nuts falling in spring, or Jeju mandarins peddled at a *shijang* produce stall in summer. It was November after all: on the fringe of fall, at the brink of winter. "It makes sense to me, you know, serving cold soups in winter. Why wouldn't it? Tradition says to eat *patjuk* during *Dongji*, but physiologically, *naengmyeon* seems the wiser choice. Hell, I've even enjoyed a *pat-bing-su*

during the winter solstice. The shaved ice nicely mirrored the arctic temperatures. Korean's have always said, *Yi yul chi yul!* Fight fire with fire! Why not combat cold with cold too? Us older Koreans, forever keen about attuning our *ki*, believe that the internal body should coincide with the external milieu. A stomach turned frigid by ice cream will be incinerated by the scorching humidity of monsoon season. Thus, scientifically, logically, it is smarter on sweltering days to consume spicy *kimchi stew* or a simmering broth that warms our organs, for these foods trigger the essential cooling mechanism of sweating to regulate the biological heat. Instead of eating cold food in summer to offset the weather, crotchety old folks like myself prefer to consume hot ginseng *samgyetang* during the sambok days." *Sambok* days, Hye-Joon knew, were the three hottest and longest days of summer: *chobok*, *jungbok*, and *malbok*. Hye-Joon wanted to joke that so long as the old folks don't have dog-eating days anymore it is no problem with him, but wisely, he bowed and left, letting his clever wisecrack linger within and unspoken.

Recently, Hye-Joon's *Gimbap Shop* somehow had

become a popular hangout and eatery for *waygookin*, foreign students who studied nearby at Sejong or Konkuk University. Princeton and Columbia both had budget friendly BA programs with satellite courses in English that compelled many expats to pursue higher education just across the Han River. Semi-fluent in English, Hye-Joon liked to snoop on their prattling. Today's group, a mixture of Americans and a New Zealander, were currently consulting each other about the pitfalls and pet peeves of eating out in Seoul. Hye-Joon monitored their complaints with a wry smile, knowing his own manager was culpable of nearly every single diatribe: the Korean presumption that their food is too spicy for nonnatives, the presumption that the Korean way of pairing food is the only proper combination, the presumption that condiments must unalterably correlate to specific dishes, and the presumptuous impromptu lectures of overweening waiters telling nonnatives how to eat dishes properly. The New Zealander, quiet hitherto on the enumerations, theorized that the motif in their collective rants about patronizing incidents in Korean dining clearly stemmed from a Confucian resistance toward

innovation or privation of taste. Hye-Joon thought the grad students sounded snobbish, presumptuous themselves; but their topical colloquy reminded him of the recent hit TV show, *Bijeongsang Hoedam*, in which a group of internationals—representing China, Belgium, Ghana, Australia, France, America, and Canada—chat at a conference table about various pop culture phenomena. Translated to “Abnormal Summit” or “Non-Summit,” the program received some of the highest primetime ratings of the year sparking a national curiosity in outsider perspectives.

Ameliorating tomorrow’s workload for his manager and cook, Hye-Joon prepares *gimbaps* for the next morning’s rush hour. First a square thin sheet of *nori* is laid out on the cutting board. Over this Hye-Joon spreads sticky rice so that only a few centimeters around the perimeter of the seaweed are uncovered. Before the cutting board are little metal cubbies filled with vegetables and meat fillings. Hye-Joon is only making *wonju gimbap*, the basic proletariat version sold for 1500 KRW to Seoul inhabitants hastily scurrying toward offices. Punctuality was a highly regarded facet of

professional life. The *wonju gimbap* is the most basic, filled with thin strips of carrot, bracken root, imitation crab, egg, spinach, and ham. Once the julienned strips are nicely compiled in the center Hye-Joon rolls the seaweed into a sushi roll, lathers the outside with a brush doused in sesame oil, cuts thin bites and rolls the thing in aluminum foil to put into an ice box near the door for easy distribution. Simultaneously, Hye-Joon debates dishing up some *chicken-mu* and *oi sabogi* from the self-serve *kimchi* bar for the group of *waygooks* before realizing that such a gesture would appear blasphemously presumptuous. Instead, embarrassed to see his manager gawking at the gimcrack fashion of the loudly smattering *waygooks*, Hye-Joon bashfully educates her that the skinny self-defined American had identified himself as *chaesik*, a diet that prohibits the customer from eating any ingredients associated with meat. “You must not serve *saengseon* or *mulgogi panchan* of any kind. Even fish stock or broth will disrespect his request for no animal products.” Confused at this reproof, the *ajooma* marches to the table and upbraids the American with a nutritional roast, chiding

with clichés about the need to put meat on bones.

Minutes later, Hye-Joon overhears a final complaint as he clocks out to return home. The self-proclaimed vegetarian is now admonishing the hypocrisy of eating out in a country where the friendly albeit latently xenophobic staff berate nonnatives' naivety in assimilating the Korean gastronomical proprieties and yet rudely scoff aloud in an equal breach of restaurant decorum. "I'm also tired of being reprimanded for clumsy chopstick skills and insultingly brought out western utensils, shamed with a fork and spoon." Hye-Joon loiters, redistributing glossy chopsticks into the wooden cubbies at the edge of tables just to eavesdrop more. He sympathizes with the grievances uttered in the expat echo chamber, but interprets their smarmy tone to be a bit uncouth and self-aggrandizing. Soon the shy boorish American interjects, joining the vociferant rally: "If I ask a question, even a question in rudimentary Korean, for a vendor to simplify an inquiry I'm consistently met with impatient resistance, the huffing and puffing of irascibility." The New Zealander, stuffy from all their equally xenophobic sermonizing, stands up

to compile a plate of *kkakdugi* and *danmuji* from the *kimchi* bar. Hye-Joon is thankful he didn't heed to his brazen instinct of politeness by officiously serving squared kimchi and oblong yellow radishes minutes before; it was this bumptious and overzealous Korean knack of deferential gentility that ironically appeared uncivilized and bothersome to the grad students. Conflicted, Hye-Joon deliberates how he will ever explain to his manager, regularly meddling with *waygookin*, that her intentions of gracious urbanity had an inverse effect of boorish invasiveness on some temperaments.

Whizzing beneath the brisk autumnal crescent moon to his ancestors' lush apartment in the Bangi-dong district, a blue haze tinges the black night sky over Parktel in Olympic Park. Neon Hangul signs for meat restaurants drip and ooze their florid inky greens. The moon slice is an orange crescent, rotund, multi-dimensional. Hye-Joon bikes quickly to meet his *halabuji*, his mother's father, for cross-generational bonding time: basically, to play X-box games, a recreation his grandfather picked up after reading articles

about the healthy neural effects of video games on old men. “It supposedly slows down Alzheimer's and memory loss, according to Korean news programs on SBS,” boasted the *halabuji*. Rumor also spread that elders who fiddled for two hours or more with cell phone games and text messages halted the brain's deterioration five years. To Hye-Joon, the tweeted reports seemed like calculated hearsay stirred up by SK Telecom, Olleh or LG's U+'s marketing campaigns to endorse products to the geriatric demographic. “Plus,” Hye-Joon cynically jibed, “what good is a flailing mind if not wasting its limited resources on Anipang?” Anipang, a social network game involving puzzles with maimed and candy-colored animal heads in columns and rows, had been the most downloaded video game app ever released by Naver for iOS or Android platforms.

Hye-Joon excitedly tells his *halabuji* that last month's viral Korean SNL sketch spoofed Grand Theft Auto by confabulating an imaginary Korean Edition, jokingly setting it in the early 20th century during a period of the Joseon dynasty when Japanese colonialism reigned. Hye-Joon tells his grandfather that in the skit the

first-person character, in the guise of a Korean traitor, hijacked rickshaws instead of sports cars and sparred with *ginger roots* instead of shooting guns. Gangsters strolled the dusty unpaved streets wearing *hanbok*, stealing rations of millet, and hitting on the pervasive Comfort Women bound to the Japanese Imperial Army. Currently immersed himself in the beloved underworld of Grand Theft Auto IV, the installation celebrated in Seoul for including the Korea-town section of Los Angeles, Hye-Joon's Samsung hand-phone buzzes on the counter, an incoming text from his girlfriend at a club in Gangnam. She wants to meet up later near Amsa station for *chimaek*, Korean slang hybridizing the terms for chicken and beer. Hye-Joon punches in a portmanteau of emoticons proclaiming his indolence with winsome snoozing kittens and slides his phone back on the counter. The slick surface almost barrels the phone off the opposite edge and into the apron of his mother, busy steaming *hobak* for a *juk* and sizzling fried *miyeok* with sesame oil, mussels, and *dashima myeolchi yuksu* in a hot pot. Though stoked for the pumpkin porridge, Hye-Joon proportionately fears the portent of his mom

nagging him to nibble at the sea vegetable soup with her maternal drivel about its high iodine and calcium content.

Years of smoking have caused Hye-Joon's *halabuji* to pharyngealize his haranguing words in a hoarse intonation. His teeth, blackened enamel backwardly pointed like the placoid dentin of a shark, spray spit whenever he gets particularly ruffled in a tirade. Inveighing about the exploits of South Korea's corporate oligarchy, particularly its *chaebol* conglomerations, the Korean elder inadvertently excoriates the entire milieu of commodities, technologies and appliances in their very household. Raspy, the *halabuji* croaks on about how a recent suicide in the royal family that owns Nongshim had blasphemed the CEO into a scapegoat and anathema of public denunciation. Hye-Joon's grandfather had been in his prime years during the "miracle of the Han River," the era of the 60's when Korea transmogrified from a penurious nation of rations, ravaged from the civil war that split the peninsula into two, into a bustling industrialized society. He'd seen firsthand the nepotism and untrammelled partisanship in the sectarian bubbles of

the upper corporate echelon of the nation and still feels aggrieved that the governing companies—the LG, Samsung, and Kia Motors of the country—could not be more fiscally empathetic and Confucian in their monetary relationship with the civilian Korean constituency.

Hye-Joon detested that his *halabuji* couldn't play X-Box without his adrenaline amplifying into a full-blown polemical philippic on the venality of hegemonic Korean powers. With the embittered *halabuji* splayed out on the warm *ondol* heated flooring, Hye-joon distances himself to the couch. Never daring to go outside when frost glossed the asphalt with a slippery varnish, the *halabuji* beseeches Hye-joon to extract some *kimchi* from their family onggi. Detesting the putrid smell that gushed out of the vat, Hye-Joon sallies that his grandfather should disentomb his *seolpi* snowshoes from the burrows of his antiques closet and venture himself. Bickering aside, it was clear that neither were going to stop the video game for long enough to wrest the lid off the ceramic pots storing fermented cabbage on the garden and rooftop.

Beside Hye-Joon's left foot a cold *goo goo ma*

Pizza School slice rests dormant in the box adjacent to a plastic packet of sweet pickles and silver metal chopsticks. Despite a preference for bronze, the *halabuji* mandated that the entire extended family only use argent silverware. His fiat was aligned with Joseon-era's folkloric paranoia that quislings could poison food, provoking royalty to privilege utensils with silver lusters that discolored instantaneously at the slightest touch of a toxin. Hye-Joon's stomach grumbles and he pauses the game to take a bite of the congealed sweet potato pizza, but it is so stale he snatches a *songpyeon* from the kitchen cupboard, the glutinous rice delicacy frozen since Chuseok but freshly thawed that morning. An incoming text message from Yujin beeps twice on his hand-phone. Hungry, cozy, and too slothful to sift emojis, he ignores responding and importunes his busybody *eomeoni* to pour some *hobak juk* in a clean *gamasot*. Nothing is craved more than hot calories on hypothermic fall nights in Seoul. With the pampering of his *eomma*, Hye-Joon restores some thermal ardor, slurping steamy gelatinous rice balls from her pumpkin stew into his glacially chilled esophagus: his sternum and intestines slowly

broiling up to weather the next day's toils as a Korean food courier on the concrete tundra.

END

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Sijo for Old Man Kim
By Allen Jones

He straddles the scroll with a brush the size of a broom.

Hold down the four corners!

With a single twisting stroke he rises up on his toes.

Set the final feather free!

Where a mess of stain should be, a perfect stork balancing.

Why You Should be Writing *Sijo* Rather than *Haiku*

Everyone knows the Japanese *haiku*. But what about the *sijo*, that improvised, witty, and yet deceptively melancholic poem born in Korea five hundred years ago. Imagine having no written language for the poems you wished to write. This was the case when the *sijo* first became popular. These poems began as songs in 14th century Korea, at a time when Chinese was the country's only written language; however, as soon as King Sejong gathered his advisors and invented the Korean alphabet, the governing scholar class (*yangban*) began composing thousands of *sijo*. Generals, prime ministers, kings, and

even *kisaeng* (geisha), wrote these short, surprising verses. And remember, this was a time when power was distributed through official government tests that included a measure of your literary abilities. Your choice of poetic form could mean your livelihood.

The *sijo* has remained popular for half a millennium. Even quite recently you could hear fieldworkers tapping out these rhythms on their breaks, and if you started to recite a famous *sijo*, people in the street would apparently finish it for you (see Russ and Sege). Popular wallpaper was printed in verse, which meant that people's houses were literally lined with the stuff. Even as recently as 2001, as a student of the language in Seogwipo, I was taught the basics of calligraphy through the daily chore of copying these short poems. My room was hung with thin rice-paper sheets stained with my imperfect brushstrokes. It was through this practice I met the master painter of my poem.

The form itself is simple and yet more flexible than the *haiku* with which America is so familiar. Here are the basics: three long lines (about fifteen syllables each) with a twist in the third line. What stands out to many readers is the way in which the long lines allow a more conversational and narrative approach than we associate with verse from "the East." Haiku often seems to consist of three static images set before us on the page. *Sijo* feels much more connected, its tone and wit opening us up to the emotional power underlying that seemingly light exterior.

The fragmented imagistic lines of Japanese *haiku* or *tanka* attempt to deliver us to a direct and visceral experience, a sense of immediacy: three images unmediated by story or explicit connection. There is the tree, the pond, the sage drinking great quantities of *sake* (there is, coincidentally, a tradition of drinking *sijo* as well). Conversely, the *sijo*'s immediateness stems from its improvisorial nature.

Originally, these verses were invented and riffed upon as they were sung, so a single *sijo* could have hundreds of variations. This meant that unlike classical Chinese poetry, traditional *sijo* cared little for how it appeared on the page. In fact, it didn't appear on the page at all. While today we present these texts in an orderly fashion, often to emphasize the central pause (as below), the oral nature of the verse has always lived only for the ear. The writing of Bob Dylan, recent winner of the Nobel, is perhaps a good example of the reduction an aural form faces when shorn of its music.

I outlined the form above, but the best way to get a sense of these poems, especially if you want to try your own, is to experience the turn in the third line. Ikwhan Choe provides us with this famous anonymous *sijo* as an example:

I thought about that fan
and why you sent it to me...
You must have meant
to puff out the flame in my heart.
But my tears cannot quench it.
So what use will a fan be?

Notice the pause at the center of each line, the way the second line mirrors the first structurally, and the witty finale. Rutt points out how, despite this wit, the intense emotional energy we find in *flamenco* or *fado* (called *duende* or *saudade* respectively) often presents itself in the tone and singing style of traditional *sijo*. This is effected by drawing out a syllable so long that it becomes hard to understand, a words meaning stretched into pure emotion. The words joke but, like the blues, wit is a cover for tears.

One question is why the Japanese *haiku* grew to such prominence in the U.S. Some argue it was part of the

post-WWII fascination with Japan: the tea ceremony, Zen Buddhism, etc. (see Serge). A few people have set about to change western ignorance of the *sijo*. Harvard professor David McCann recently organized a successful national competition and published an anthology of *sijo* in English. Regardless of whether or not *sijo* ends up on the next American Idol, these verses are fun, challenging, and very accessible when compared to other short forms. I recommend you write one immediately.

Note: some Koreans refer to this form as tanka (tan-ga).

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Long ago, Allen spent a year on Jeju island. One afternoon, trying ludicrously to hike the entire coast, he heard what seemed birdcalls out in the surf. He turned to see Henya surfacing and signaling their safety to each other. It was otherworldly. He is presently a literature professor in Norway.

Geonbae!
By Uri Park

I started life
As a green glass bottle
Passed around
From one tanned and weathered hand
To the next

Those hands tipped
And poured me over
And over

They emptied my insides
And placed me
In the growing party
Of other green glass bottles

We stood together
Empty and surrounded
By clouds of smoke

Minutes turned to hours
And soon our shiny
Fingerprinted bodies
Were layered in grease
And smoke

The excited
Rapid noises
Became a slow
Slurring melody

An unharmonious

Racket
Between grunts and sighs

I ended life
Bound tightly
In a claustrophobic cluster

My green glass body
Tucked snugly
Next to another
Placed
On a darkened street corner

Waiting

For the same tanned
And weathered hands
To journey me away

Photography by Henrik Johnson









