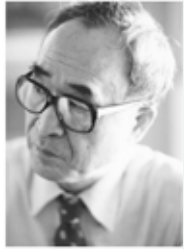


# POETRY



**KO UN**

Ko Un 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 world. He has published more than 120 volumes of poems, essays, and fiction and has been nominated for a Nobel Prize several times.

## *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

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.



## *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.

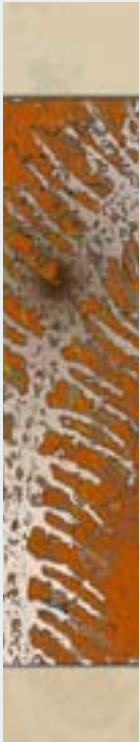
Next year, or the year after,  
fragrant mugwort might come sprouting  
from the secretly buried sorrow, but how  
could that  
equal the death of the mother deer?

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 Prabhutaratna*

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.



## *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, Brother 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 University, 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 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Ko Un.

### **Gary Gach**

Gary Gach is editor of *What Book!?!—Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-hop* (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.