

Grasshoppers' Eyes

Poems

Ko Hyeong-Ryeol



Translated by
Brother Anthony of Taizé and Lee Hyung-Jin

Grasshoppers' Eyes

Grasshoppers' Eyes

Poems

Ko Hyeong-Ryeol

Translated by

Brother Anthony of Taizé and Lee Hyung-Jin

Parlor Press
Anderson, South Carolina
www.parlorpress.com

Parlor Press LLC, Anderson, South Carolina, 29621

© 2017 by Parlor Press

All rights reserved.

This book is published with the support of the Literature
Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea).

Printed in the United States of America

S A N: 2 5 4 - 8 8 7 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on File

978-1-60235-942-0 (paperback)

978-1-60235-943-7 (PDF)

978-1-60235-944-4 (epub)

1 2 3 4 5

Cover design by David Blakesley.

Cover Photo: © 2015 by Valentin Petkov at Unsplash. Used by
permission.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Parlor Press, LLC is an independent publisher of scholarly and trade titles in print and multimedia formats. This book is available in paperback and ebook formats from Parlor Press on the World Wide Web at <http://www.parlorpress.com> or through online and brick-and-mortar bookstores. For submission information or to find out about Parlor Press publications, write to Parlor Press, 3015 Brackenberry Drive, Anderson, South Carolina 29621, or email editor@parlorpress.com.

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Critical Introduction ix

Earlier Poems 3

Zhuangzi 5

Twilight 7

The Watermelon Patch at the Top of Daecheong Peak 8

The Seashore at Daybreak 10

Garbage Dump Fire 11

Poets Who Never Despair 12

Nightfall in Indonesia 13

Poem about Water's Experiences 14

Heavy Snow in Sajin-ri 15

Waterfall 17

Frost Flower Buddha 18

A Carpenter Bee in a Pumpkin Flower 19

Sweet Thoughts 20

My Dionysiuses 21

A Letter Sent to Nae-Rin Stream 22

Cranes 23

Leaves in the Wind 24

Spring 25

Apple Pip 26

Human Flower 27

Noise 28

A Blind Man 29

Bowing 30

Wife and Child 31

The Place Where a Flower Once Blossomed 32

A Flower Not Blooming 33

Poems from 2001 and Beyond	35
Unable to Go to Mt. Wolyu	37
Sinus Evening	39
Sorrow for What Is Not	40
Song of a Sad Source	41
An Arrow	42
Plane Trees in the Zoo	43
Celestial Jewel-Writing	44
So Many Stones Floating in the Sky	45
Fresh Pollock Noodle Soup	46
Where Grasshoppers Died	47
Mother's Milk	49
Downstream Poem	50
Looking in through a Front Door	51
Poem on a Line	52
April	53
Grasshopper's Eyes	54
One Frozen Tear	55
A Sleep of White Sand	56
My First Light	57
Run, Tiger!	58
Pollock, and Only This Poem Was Left	59
Misiryreong by Night	60
On Opening a Vertical Blind	61
Insect	62
Why, the First Ice Has Frozen!	63
Twilight Magnificent as an Aurora	64
The Street That Killed Music	65
Gazing	66
A Small Knife	67
Grass, Grass, Grass	68
Swan's Feet	69
A Speeding Word	70

Poems from 2010 71

- Poem of Moths and Dust 73
Strolling Eastward 74
Women Standing on Balconies 75
Have You Ever Been to a Spider's Life? 76
Poem of Green Forsythia 78
In that Deep Place, the Secret Department Store 79
Memories of a Corn Beard Cricket 80
Rose with a Transparent Glass 81
In a Dead Spot 82
From Below the Lowest Level of You and I 83
Bankruptcy 84
Silver Transparent Electric Ballpen 85
Poem of One Grain of Beijing Sand 86
I Stand on My Head 87
Spiderwort's Private Life 88
Before Dawn's Ludicrous Despair 89
Suddenly I Am Passing Through a Dead Body 90
Toward Bogor Botanical Garden 91
Piglets' Summer on the Hill Behind 92
Cancer: A Word 93
To a Definitely Not-Quiet Poem 94
Roman Morning in K Hotel 95
0.1 Millimeter Chain-of-Love 96
The Toilet in Cheonho Subway Station 97
Poet Outside the Frame 98
The Time of a Sharp Knife Blade 99
Voices Turned into Pottery 100
On a Branch 101
Flower Rising in Tree Rings 102
I Commemorate Devastation 103
Skyscraper Love Chain 104
Crazy About Mitochondria 105

Contents

A Camel in a Needle's Eye	106
Please Grow Old like the Roots of a Tree	107
Could You Step Aside a Little?	108
I Am Not in Erdene Zuu Monastery	109
Looking at the Deep Blue Sky	111
Blue Ice Fish	112
Black Death Suddenly Hurlled into a Labyrinth	113
Jaguar in the City Center One Clear Day	114
Grass and Apartments	115
A Counterfeit Banknote	116
Summer Devours Wife	117
My Momentary Toy	118
About the Author	119
About the Translators	121

Acknowledgments

Almost all the poems in this collection were originally published by Changbi Publishing Co. in the following volumes. The present publication of translations is made with the permission of the poet and publishers

성에꽃 눈부처 Seongekkot nunbucheo (“Frost Flowers Reflected in my Eyes,” 1998)

김포 운호가든집에서 Gimpo Unhogadeunjipeseo (“In Unho Garden at Gimpo,” 2001)

나는 에르덴조 사원에 없다 Naneun Ereudenjo sawone opda (“I am not in Erdene Zuu Temple,” 2010)

아무도 찾아오지 않는 거울이다 Amudo chajaoji anneun geourida (“I am a Mirror Nobody Visits,” 2015)

The few poems published in other places are translated and published with the permission of the poet.

This volume is a greatly expanded and radically revised version of a draft initially prepared by Meen-Heum Park.

Critical Introduction

The Korean poet Choi Seung-Ho writes: Ko Hyeong-Ryeol's poems explore the interstices of oppositions. They dream, for example, of the language of echoes born in the gulfs between such dualities as words and silence, civilization and nature, surface and depths, life and death, extinction and immortality, being and the void. Poetry dreams of the very first language, the very first expression that did not previously exist in the world and realizes that as materialized language. When we read his poems, we sense a masterly skill, a passion bringing into being new expressions by freely moulding such oppositions.

The Korean poet Kim Sa-In writes: Ko Hyeong-Ryeol's sentences are at times ungrammatical or appear awkward, giving a rough, uneven feeling. This in itself may not be seen as a virtue but once we read his poems carefully several times, the result is not at all "rough and careless." They are the words of one trying to see at the same moment the world's immensity and its minuteness, confronting that dread and that ecstasy. The apparently pointless, awkward grumbling tones he chooses to employ are deeply related to the fear and hesitation, depression and ecstasy of one who has truly seen and tried to see, which cannot be expressed clearly and eloquently.

The Australian poet Dan Disney writes: Ko Hyeong-Ryeol's poems are gently exploratory, generous interrogations; clearest among the speaking leaves, bright flowers, inquisitive children, the lost bees, mists, lovers and dust, a palpable sense of wonder suffuses this writing. In the same ways that cranes are characterized as a pair of humans –

flying through the sky.
Talking, listening, nodding heads,
looking at each other

these watchful poems – compelling portraits, really – point toward the innumerable instances of our strangeness. Sometimes eerie, often surreal, these sensuous texts probe amid contours for connections between people and their places. Indeed, training an open gaze across mountains and skies, forests and skyscrapers full of human and non-human dramas, Grasshoppers' Eyes apprehends and celebrates the world as sublime.

The translators write: When asked what constitutes the most characteristic feature of his work, Ko Hyeong-Ryeol tends to indicate the Buddhist influence underlying his vision of existence. His poems, he says, are located at the intersection of being and non-being, illusion and reality. In Buddhism, every moment constitutes a separate, distinct reality, unconnected with the moments that precede and follow. This sense of fractured reality might be thought to underlie the fractured coherence which characterizes the flow of many of Ko's poems. Familiar moments are made unfamiliar by the unexpected twists of what follows an initial image. Many of his works evoke the landscapes of his home region around Mount Seorak, but they do not stay fixed there. Personal memories, too, shift and blur. Another word that comes to mind in many cases is "surrealistic" since what is described is not a part of ordinary life, yet it feels plausible in poetry. Ko is essentially a poet whose lyricism is expressed in a way that seems to mock and refuse the conventional beauties of lyric verse. Some critics have called him "grumpy" but there is often humor beneath the growling. In the end, the challenge Ko Hyeong-Ryeol addresses to his readers is to let go of conventional expectations and let themselves be drawn into a world where moths are amazed, pollacks equipped with strong testicles escape to the distant sea whistling, and sunlight makes a whirring sound. Rooted in the world the poet knows, his lyrics are determined to defamiliarize the world we think we know.

Grasshoppers' Eyes