



KOREAN WRITERS

Yong-Mee Cho



Arts Council Korea, 640 Bitgaram-ro, Naju-si, Jeollanam-do, Republic of Korea
Tel. +82-61-900-2100, 2200



Yong-Mee Cho
treepoem@hanmail.net

About the Poet

조용미 Yong-Mee Cho

Yong-Mee Cho started her literary career by publishing her poems in *Han-gil Literature* in 1990. She has published collections of poems, including *Anxiety Encroaches upon a Soul*(1996), *Ten Thousand Fish Fly up a Mountain*(2000), *Self Portrait in Sackcloth*(2004), *Cherry Blossom in My Cottage*(2007), *Planet of Memories*(2011), *My Other Names*(2016), and a collection of prose, *One Hundred Years Staying at an Island*(2007). She received Kim Daljin Literary Award(2005) and Kim Junseong Literary Award(2012).

CONTENTS

About the Poet	01
Planet of Memories	03
Translator's Note	46

KOREAN WRITERS Yong-Mee Cho

Planet of Memories

Translated by Euntaek Hong & Sam HJ Kim

My Other Names

나의 다른 이름들

Fernando Pessoa is Albert Caeiro, Ricardo Lage, and Alvar de Campos.

His dozens of names, they are not only a person with an alias but aliases of aliases.

To what point am I me?

How could I prove I'm me, and at what point should I not reveal my other face?

How could I realize the possibility of this concentrated truth that I could not be me?

Is there a way to deny that what I was a moment ago is not what I am the moment after?

It is an incredibly lonely endeavor to thoroughly actualize that I am not me.

Returning to my alternate life in the midst of my life is an effort that needs ornate imagination.

Witnessing my other death before I die is an effort that needs attentive allocation of time.

Why do I have to be merely my own self from start to finish?

Still today, hidden adequately within myself, I rigidly glance at the possibility that I could not be me.

Was I truly him, and him, another me?

How could I turn an eye from the possibility of this concentrated truth that I could not be me?

All the Light and Colors We Know

우리가 아는 모든 빛과 색

All the colors we see must not all be fantasy.

How can we believe that colors of that water, cloud, and tree are all fantasy?

If so, what are those outside Earth, what is this universe lengthily connected like steel chains via luminous gamma rays, and what are those smoldering energy and light spewing from the roots of massive stars?

Here are my preferred lights and colors:

Indigo, prussian blue, cobalt blue, cerulean blue, peacock blue, ultramarine and infrared, UV, and gamma rays.

Things that are said to exist outside red; things that are said to exist outside violet:

What unknown light and colors exist as many as the stars far beyond the sea?

If we can detect and sense speck by speck a certain wavelength and its particular freckles of light and color beyond that faraway universe with a large dish antenna, would that be fantasy, too?

Outside this world—the countless lights hidden by the blue, night air—

All the lights and color we see—this world that transforms with each dusk and every dawn—

Zone de Silence

침묵지대

The sign on the entrance to a Carthusian monastery:

Zone de Silence.

A tapestry of stone walls enclose the monastery.

Why do travelers attempt to glimpse at silence?

Are they attempting to covet the monks' silence and solitude?

Do they desire to steal the white Carthusian language?

Talks praising silence become chatter.

Talks of silence as calmness

Instantly become trapped in the language's double entendre.

Are landscapes of silence as cold as the tundra?

Do the low-settling lights simmer?

Can silence be regulated?

The cult of silence, the sound of silence, the great silence, the world of silence:

Everything is talking about silence.

Are all those conversations about silence necessary?

Can silence hear? Can

Silence feel? Silence can...silence—Let's let it be.

Let's just leave silence to be silence.

If we put up a sign that says "Zone de Silence", would silence

Form like a spring? Would silence be able to reside for a good while?

Would it be able to bar non-silent things?

Would silence sober up?

Would the chatty silence become rock calm?

Regardless, it's unanimously agreed that a Zone de Silence is necessary.

When I Wasn't Human

내가 사람이 아니었을 때

Far beyond where Pluto is, where the Oort cloud begins,
How does sunlight reach such a place?

From a while back, I've been thinking of a special place where the midday sun isn't
blinding, a beautiful place where I can directly look at the sun.
It's not the Jupiter's sea.

The far distance in space, several light-years beyond Pluto, at the unreached edge of
the Solar System, when I wasn't human
Is definitely where I've acquired solitude.

There's no saying what initially began from the dust and ice belt. You are coming here
from the Oort cloud.
Something must have materialized from that round belt.

It's still a little bit further to reach Pluto.
Let's promptly take it steady. A blue star with a desert is next. The only thing left is to
go to Earth when I've become human.

Mirror 거울

The glass cup suddenly, but slowly, falls from the windowsill.
There was no intervention to its appetite for the sweet taste of destruction.

The end is utterly short relative to the lengthy sadness.

The glass is now incapable of reflecting anything.
The cup is gone and only its shards
Are newly present.

Let's not clean up the beautiful, broken things.

No one can save you;
You'll always fall despite getting back up.

The mirror in which I move, despite my stillness;
The mirror in which I'm still, despite my movements:
I stare at it all day.

You'll probably keep falling over.

The blood clots too readily compared to the prolonged bleeding.
I can't clean up the fracture and further fractured sadnesses.

The mirror occupies several dishonest hearts.

Cat on the Bridge

다리 위의 고양이

As this city's singular cat, you
Put on a bit of weight.
Your whiskers grew to be scary.
I don't know how I've come to stroll this far from my home, but
I'll tell you my story tonight.
I came from a country far away.
I have much nostalgia, like a pagoda in a Buddhist ruin, and even more sorrow.
I have a lot of scars; you don't have any.

Did you wait for me underneath the wooden bridge?
Do you know that my favorite place is
Cross this bridge, down that alley, and a turn to the left?
You're not afraid of me.
You saw something similar in me as you.
So why are you blocking my way?
I really don't know what your stare is saying.

You're the first cat in this city.
Even the dead have a heart,
And can you feel them assuredly provoking you and me
Afar from that cemetery of the sea?
Why am I telling you these at midnight
On the old wooden bridge?
I'm a foreigner from a faraway country.

We can't reveal the secret to anyone.
You are a cat on a bridge,
I am a stroller quietly crossing the bridge.
Today, I stayed around longer
Because you requested a story.
Do you even understand what I'm saying?
Tonight we shared some intimate secrets
On the bridge.

Ten Suns

열 개의 태양

I think of the solitude
Of dandelion seed-like dust particles
Balled up in the furthest corners beneath the bed.

What kind of place is a universe
Remembered by ten suns?

What I perceive of me are individual universes
Remembered by ten suns,
The poles of perception are cool and hot places
That willingly seal the senses.

It is a place where my body and mind fit perfectly.

Let's go, to restore the memory of the universe.
Let's take the body into
The dense forest of memories.

To peer at the lights emanating from a star
At a singular point in the far and away universe

For the stars and I live in one enormous house,
For the stars and I are to be the universe,

There are no evenings in which I leer into your fate with an infrared telescope.
Memories—that are 2.5 million light years away—closest to me
Let me listen to your blue rays for a long while.

Red Rectangle

붉은 사각형

There are dozens of shades of delicate colors in that rectangle. If you only seek red, you'll only see red. The icy red in which you are trapped won't say anything.

Two rectangles, as attached or detached, above and below: no rectangle won't be as meditative.

It's either orange red or black or dark green or the spreading yellow or purple or deep blue. At times it seems like several rectangles are overlapped front to back or tied to some invisible string.

The red rectangles, like a reservoir during a monsoon, absorbed multiple colors. Equal parts of other colors scrunched up in that redness. The things shimmering in the red rectangle are.

What are the genuine origins of all the colors?

If you skim off all the calm, relaxed sounds of the bright colors slowly oozing out of a deeper color, it is the silent or noisy or hostile or hospitable or the holy one and only roundish red rectangle.

A Stroll on the Sound of Rain

빗소리 위의 산책

The sound of raindrops melts the room.

The room, once-tough in spite of the heat, melts from the sound.

The sound of rain covers the pages.

There are granules of well-behaved and organized sand hidden somewhere in this air.

The acacia flower is slowly soaking.

The sky blue window amplifies the sound of rain.

The color of the acacia flower is darkening.

The window becomes a gateway to the rain.

The sounds folded between the pages of a book dry flat.

The letters surround the scent of sounds.

The stroll that stamps its footprint above the sound of rain.

The room melted by the sound is wrapped in a scent.

The sound of raindrops melts the room.

The soaked acacia flowers leave the windows open.

All the sounds of this air carry gateways.

West of Clouds

구름의 서쪽

You approached death and returned without my knowing. What will become of me if you disappear? Because you have always been an absent existence to me, perhaps nothing may change. However, I won't be me from before.

I won't say how I overcome that fact—whenever something disappears. I must relive this beautiful, pitiful, abrasive, magical life over again. Autumn, like a subtle language, has returned in front of me again.

I decided to miss you with a new method. It's better that I don't further tell you why it can't be not new. As for you, there would've been a beauty particular to you, a love I couldn't have fathomed. There would've been your one, exclusive love in this world.

Now, this sorrow has become entirely my own thing. At one point we shared this sorrow even without having met. Even though Spring, bearing your news, may never come, I have a long-cherished heart. I'm satisfied with that. With Spring, the old heart becomes a new heart.

Scar

흉터

There is a path on the bodily scar.

There is a walking path into that person,

If one touches the scar.

At times, the scar hides beneath clothes or

Conceals itself under a watch,

When someone says to touch the bodily scar.

The scar and the scripture share the same language.

It grows like a plant,

Though it can't be explained occasionally.

A person with a scar walks across

An apartment complex with a flowerbed

Of beheaded sunflowers.

People carry them around

Without knowing that they're sunflower heads.

The sunflowers wholly reveal their scars,

But no one approaches to read them

Nor touch them.

Light in Water

물속의 빛

The water is rising,
And I don't see your face.
I assume that all the lights will slowly subside.

The calmness of the water is truly strange:
Rays of blue, green, chilly white, yellow
And black.

What's black is not light,
So I'll just call it darkness.
What we saw when the water took a full breath was
A warm shade of pink.

I never knew
That so many rays of light lived in water.
The notes in my song will be dark for a long while.

If there is a tranquil place
Where everything is connected,
It'll probably be in water.

Now I look at the sky from within the water.
Ah, the sky's the color of water.
I won't close my eyes for the time being.

The shade of water is darkening, though
I don't see your face.
The calmness of the water is truly strange.

The Red Blade

붉은 검

The dirt ate the metal.

The metal became the dirt.

No, the dirt became the metal.

The clothes penetrated the skin and became the body.

The metal that became the dirt is

Iron from the united Shilla Dynasty.

The iron blade inside the thick glass,

Covered in red rust,

Time

That confidently ascertains the blade, despite the rust—

What fearsome decline has it endured?

No one can say that

That piece of rust is not a blade.

The blade disappears, and what isn't a blade forms a blade.

Chrysanthemum Pillow

국화잎 베개

When I laid down on a pillow of chrysanthemum leaves,

A momentary scent of wild chrysanthemum emanates from my body.

Someone picked for me a wild yellow chrysanthemum

That blossomed from the energy of the wind and sunlight of some ancient ruin on
Jirisan.

I wanted to sleep the sweetest sleep

During the few days they're gently laid out to dry in the shade.

I lay my aching head on the pillow,

Made by wrapping that white fill,

And sleep a chrysanthemum-leaf sleep whenever a thought happens.

Another thought arises upon killing a thought,

So I place the scent of a dried wild chrysanthemum

On that thought once more.

My body continues to smell of wild chrysanthemum.

I embrace a thought.

This Burning Sword in My Heart

내 가슴속에는 불타는 칼이

The floating houses built by birds on top of the silver poplar trees
Seem precarious.
That precariousness will keep the birds safe.

If I open the doors to my heart to somewhere remote,
Would I be able to scrap this confusion?
Would the doors to my heart extend
To somewhere remote?

This burning sword in my heart,

Being trapped by the neural cilia of the Venus flytrap,
The fly trapped inside
Melts gradually
To become the body of the flytrap.

We call what the ground exhales wind,
And without it blowing, things are calm without incident, but
When it does blow, countless holes produce all sorts of sounds.*

This burning sword in my heart—

*Quoted from *Chuang-tzu*

Blue Windows

푸른 창문들

Dense night fog crosses the field.
Below, telephone poles stand like trees, dipping their feet.

I should re-study how to control my greed, so I will rescue myself from this defiled world.

On that stormy day
Those many windows,
At an unfamiliar place,
Wherein from its silence, blue beams of light leaked.
I rose slowly from the dark
To confront the winds
And walked outside of the blue and chilly window to
Where images of martyrs are engraved.

Would god know the mortal sorrow of possessing a body?
Life is as lively
And pain is as lively:
Unaware of such
Is god's pitiful existence.

Desperate, but enough to survive,
Humans in pain
Scream.

Life—solitary as the moon on the third of the month,
As wild geese flying over winter fields,
As unplayable guitar strings,
Is solitary life.

I Speak of Green

초록을 말하다

When was it that I realized that green is essentially the same color as black?

That one time when the profoundness of the color black captured me to wander for its namesake, green was merely either the brighter side of dusk or another name for joy to me.

How I've come to settle on green, through the shadow delineated by a single tree, the flow of light, and the particular shade of a tree leaf varying each half-lunar cycle, came after exploring the color black. Perhaps it's another room I've entered through the color black. The reason I was able to separate the many greens without a green dye in that room was that the pain subsided gradually.

As I discovered the multiple layers of green, the body slowly recovered, and if the exploration slowed, it hurt again.

When new, other greens appear with each extraction, like the Russian matryoshka dolls,

Happiness is encountering the finest color of green.

Because green has too many entrances, in order to time and again access its quad-structure, at times, one needs to close one's eyes and distinguish it not by the contrast or brightness of the color, but by its very fine sound.

If black sent me green, which door leading to what color will green discreetly open once more?

Like recognition of delayed love, is an entangled downpour of green and black rushing all at once to an early monsoon morning.

Which storage space in my body should I store

Each chemical composition of green I tasted, the charts that I constructed from a long period of pain?

Death of a Small Bird

작은 새의 죽음

There is a dead sparrow on the ground:

The carcass of the bird,

Flattened, and a few days old,

Beneath a magnolia tree.

I leave alone that little thing lying on top

Of a plantain

To look at the death of the sleeping bird beneath the magnolia

As a falling flower or

The drying grass;

To just look at the calm times.

The bird's death,

Paler than funeral attire;

I could remember the entirety of spring

Just from that tiny bird's death.

Red flowers,

That momentarily blossomed in a vacuum:

Dead things do not bleed anymore.

Whooper Swan 큰고니

It only seems that crows would have white-colored blood.

What could I write with white-colored blood from the crows?

What words, redder than blood, could I put on black paper?

Something must have entered my body again.

I can't get upright.

The willows along the channel are glowing from the moonlight.

I'd like a small room in which

The moonlight comes flooding in.

It'd be good to move the study, Ancient and Solitary, there.

The whooper swan with a blindingly long neck

Is floating still on water with its head set on its neck.

Wonder if its neck grows longer from sadness.

My eyes deepened and neck lengthened from

Looking at the whooper swan afar for a good while.

What if my neck lengthens in a day, and continues all winter long?

Could I bear the weight of

The wings of a flightless bird?

There's a sadness that can not be escaped.

Door



The refrigerator is ruthlessly the same color
To hide the rot that may be exposed
Upon opening the door.

It's clenching its teeth.
The door
Does not open easily.

Closed doors
Attract people with
Its scent of rot emanating from inside.

The door of Cheongsu carpenter's shop beside the elderly center
Is always closed.

A few logs and
A sideling wooden ladder
Keep guard of the door.

This spring
A wild Korean lettuce bloomed its flowers
In front of the door.

Closed doors
Draw people to its entrance, then
Firmly keep their mouths closed.

Closed doors are sealed walls.

One of a Kind View

단 한 번의 풍경

What must I do to
Not return to this world?

I am afraid of
The familiar life returning
Upon seeing the utmost beauty and ugliness simultaneously.

I've gone blind from
An excess of beautiful views.

It's morbid.
What,
To never return to this world.

The will to live continues
Without dissipating into death.

An excess of beautiful
Views

Death of a Star

별의 죽음

Stars, like humans, experience the circle of life: they evolve.

They emanate the brightest light as they die.

It's a supernova explosion.

It meets its gallant death,

Illuminating the night sky with its giant explosion.

Earth will also die in 5 billion years.

Even if a new star takes its place,

The last step of evolution

Is still death.

Busy is the universe: with its deaths, it doesn't have a moment of calm.

Fierce is the universe.

Within the one breath—between inhalation and exhalation—

Exist stars, trees, and whales.

Every inch of every planet is inundated with death.

We're long into evolution.

Planet of Memories

기억의 행성

Do you know that the name memory, sometimes called remembrance, is like granite and as solid as the cliffside? Memory is as hard as diamonds. Was it that all that was hard dissipated in the atmosphere, and everything sacred was sullied? Memories became water to become lakes to become oceans, and all the stars we reared eventually crumbled.

Memories have filled up over half of the Earth. Earth is a blue star in which memories slosh around, Earth is a planet in which memories crash as waves, and the identity of Earth is that of human memories. Each year, glaciers melt to raise the memory levels. Ice, frozen-over rivers, prevent memories from jumping about and overflowing.

What causes the retention of Earth's memories despite vapor endlessly escaping the atmosphere? Memories evaporated from landmass or the ocean become clouds to precipitate as rain and snow to again become clouds to return to the ocean to seep, again, into the surface as rainwater. What great number of memories flows within the atmosphere.

Memories are heaviest at 4 degrees above freezing, so various components of memories, without freezing, can live on swimming beneath the frozen surface. Memories are Earth's most abundant resource. Therefore, they call Earth the planet of memories.

However, we must acknowledge the fact that usable memories are rather limited despite the vast entirety of Earth's memories. The fact is that Earth, planet of memories, doesn't have many memories remaining. Even the solid memories have dissipated into the atmosphere, and the days, in which even the holy Earth will remain as the universe's memory, are limited. We may even want to deny that Earth will remain as an altered memory.

Spot

얼룩

What color is our blood?

There's death claiming to have spout white blood from the neck and rained flowers from a dark world, but

Somehow, you seemed to have once possessed warm, green blood.

Despite your limited study on color, you keep prompting me, "shouldn't blood be red?"

The memory of the potent blood I tasted is definitely black.

Those things trapped beneath ice-like flesh pooled for while in the body and were steadily cooling when they suddenly regurgitated

Those black masses heaving up in succession.

Those hidden red spots turned black into memory.

Why do all hurt become internal trauma? That red and black abysses are either deaths or sadnesses are due to spots.

Either raindrops or teardrops fall to become spots, and universal law forms transparent fossils.

Raindrops carve the field green as water carves through boulders.

Your blood is unchangingly cold and dark red, and therefore, safe, but

My body is slowly darkening because of the large spot.

I, too, have been hurt by another color at one point.

The Darkening Forest

어두워지는 숲

The darkness of the forest is a touch sweet.

The trail through the Korean Pine forest borrows my face to thoroughly imbibe all the droplets from the evening's watering can.

Even though darkness undulates between the tree leaves, one side of a trail, protruding from the forest, is still lit. Surrounded by the disturbance of the delicate darkness, I slowly wrap bandages around my body.

You, too, must have come to this forest at some point.

The forest is vacillating on the storm's premonition.

You, too, must have grasped your heart in this forest.

The wind must have blown away the red flower petals from the palm.

I won't say that the darkening forest is due to the darkness of my body. Time, trickling into darkness, as diffusing water color.

You won't know that the forest, due to its old intense emotions, used to summon darkness even during mid-day.

The Darkening Forest

어두워지는 숲

You, too, must have stood here before.

Like a whale that caught hemophilia, you must have bled uncontrollably for a long time from a singular wound, coloring the white bandage red.

The red forest whirling with darkness is—

Tunnel

터널

There's a moment when the landscape outside the window disappears, and I suddenly have to stare at my face.

The train passes through a tunnel.

I investigate a singular expression floating on the black window.

With an unidentifiable bundle of sorrow and

A handful of humiliation and

A single ton of unspeakable woe,

The train passes through a tunnel, again and again.

This tunnel is a long one.

I question that expression staring this way with a blank face.

The struggle granted by time becomes foam.

There is a tree of unspeakable pain;

The train continues to pass tunnels. Someone on the opposite end peers at my many faces.

There are unidentified sceneries lined outside the window.

Cypress

사이프러스

Trees tame landscape.

—Jean Grenier

When Gogh said that cypresses, much like Egyptian obelisks, were beautiful, well-balanced trees, was he interpreting through his senses light and color simultaneously as the balance of that tree? That tree, with its branches headed straight up like a candle flame, has decided its existence to be about depth, not breadth.

The cypress is perpetually burning in blackish green.

At a far away rest stop, tranquil, where cypresses line either sides of the road, my spirit was wholly overwhelmed by the trees to freely enter into that odd landscape, so it loitered for a while and walked in like an old camel slipping into the desert.

What dominant hand of the wind twisted the tree in such a way?

Between wild poppies, like crimson watercolor spread across a field, and a dark green cypress piercing the sky like a spire, my anguish deepened.

The wheat field seemingly beginning to catch fire and the storming dusk sky is all due to that cypress.

There is a stubborn anxiety of beauty calmly hidden like sadness amongst the cypress landscape. The blackish green tower that the cypress piled in layers is taller than the obelisk.

Solar Eclipse Cycle

일식의 주기

The moon circles the Earth precisely 223 times as the Earth circles the Sun 19 times. At this point, the Sun and the moon coincide in the sky, a phenomenon that happens on the 18th year of the 11th day of the 8th hour.

The meeting between you and me is similar to the Saros Cycle, so it's unlikely it'll happen again in our lifetime: a grazing of a moment as an encounter in a faraway universe; to receive purposely that token of life; to brand our bodies and peer into them.

You've endured so well through the uncertainty of an irreversible fate overlap. A physically far distance can be psychologically close at times.

The moon, circling the Earth, observed to see what would happen to them. Though nothing happened, their efforts to ensure nothing happened was somewhat beautiful.

The darkness that swallowed the sun was brief, but is it true that nothing happened? When I had to turn away from the fierce sandstorm a few times, crossing the Taklamakan, on the way from the oriental clinic to the subway. When I realized that there is no such place as a non-desert.

The same wind must be blowing in that forest. It's not my parched fate with you, but this sorrow hidden within me like a charcoal vein, that suffocates me. It's almost time for the moon to erase you. I still know that it is you behind the round, black hook.

Peacock

공작

The peacock, trapped in its own extravagance,
Couldn't be more elegant.
And it looked sad.

That bird, like a queen wearing a red crown and a wedding gown,
Sitting on a perch,
Seems to understand the ponderous grief of wingless things.

As if that's how sadness grows,
It stands down its
Long, brilliantly colorful feathers.

It spreads its tail feathers wide
To open a thousand eyes.

Your heart into its head
Your head into its heart

The peacock, with its thousand beaks,
Pecks at and eats
My heart.

Peacock

공작

The peacock, trapped in its extravagance,
Couldn't be crueler.
And still beautiful. It can't fly.

A Chronicle of Sadness

슬픔의 연대기

Oh, what to do! I blanked to finally rid of my journal. A sticky substance is dripping from my head. My neck is probably contorted already. What am I to do? That I happen to suddenly recall these recent documents I have yet to expunge?

No one must read them. If only I can swiftly turn the display back and fly up there. I'd be able to take clean care of it. Either way, what if someone all of a sudden discovers me?

Are the dead people that I saw really dead? Why do they seek me only to loiter without a word for a while then go back? I just want to quietly disappear without a trace.

Oh, someone just burn my journal! I realize there is no flawless death. Only deficient death seems like death. Oh, what to do! I've yet to say that I love you. I've been saving that phrase for too long.

I can finally understand myself, who loved you so long. I can finally forgive. I had decided to love you even before I knew who you were. Life, I'm gone now. Therefore...

Translator's Note

Framing a Daydream

Perhaps art becomes exceedingly complicated once we begin to work on it ourselves. Art is a seemingly simple form of communicating human existence—it is a conduit for our identities to be sent and received. And in order for it to be understood, art must be somewhat digestible, simplified. Yet, art becomes intricate and difficult when we begin making it ourselves or taking it apart to understand it profoundly. More so, the perceived simplicity/complexity is merely one aspect of whether the art feels approachable. How far do we need to stretch ourselves to enter the artist's universe, or did the artist assimilate to our world? The meta-sensical decision where to land in simplification and approachability is a choice made by the artist and becomes part of the art.

No translation work is ever simple because we have to make conscious what may have been subconscious, purely emotional, or seemingly irrational decisions by the artist. And we need to clarify and ascertain the conscious ones as to not misrepresent the artist's intent, while leaving enough room for audience participation. Cho's selection of poems were enjoyable and challenging in all these areas, and her topics ranged from "out there" to the neighborhood cat to the existence of the universe. It was honest and reflective of the range of thoughts that pass through our own minds. Cats challenged the existence of our identities, and universes quelled our existential anxieties.

What was immediately apparent as we began translating her poems was that she was re-living as an old European soul thinking about existence through quotidian experiences, but through the Korean language.

Language violates cultural barriers. Language affects how we experience life, and this is apparent in her poem "Mirror". In English, clear drinking vessels are typically referred to as "glass", and though "glass cups" are technically usable, it is overkill. And in Korean, "잔" is a naturally overkill word that is also used everyday colloquially. They appear in history books when kings had a "잔" of wine, and they're also used at the local coffee shop as a unit of order. In English, we don't have glasses of coffee or tequila. We have a cup of coffee, a mug of tea, a shot of tequila, and the contextual meaning shifts considerably from chilly morning to party in Mexico. So how do we interpret the intent behind "유리잔", which directly translates into "glass cup"(which we used in the translation)? We read the other poems in the bundle to understand Cho's atmospheric temperature: again, it felt like old European soul contemplating life. Yet, the very nature of just this poem was incredibly clinical. Glass, mirrors, breakage, clean ups, blood—it can be interpreted warmly, but it felt cold to us.

Much like her thoughts into broken glass, working with parts and pieces of things is a reoccurring theme with many of her poems. This theme translates into many aspects of the physical world: lights and color, composition and structure of the planetary universe, and the natural world. Cho expresses her interpretation of these world by challenging the syntax of the Korean language by largely foregoing most punctuations and even line breaks in some of her poems. It reads smoothly, but only because the reader can judge for him/herself on the structure of the thought. However, for translators, it is an absolutely confusing nightmare where the artform begins to get complex and the work becomes totally enjoyable. It really made us think, "who did she write these poems for?" Cho's poems read like as if they were notes she wrote for herself, as in many cases, as long as we can keep track of our own thoughts, we don't punctuate notes we scribble to ourselves. It is truthful existentially; it is highly interpretative artistically.

In previous translation work, we have been fascinated by the topic matters of the

poems. Gods versus humans, planets, the sea were some of the few topics that we translated, and “what” we’re infatuated with can be a contextually important theme to investigate. However, Cho’s topic matters, which despite spanning many things, go so deep into their own selves that they beg the question of “why?” To extract other shades of color from black or to find universes in droplets of water is the very definition of studying humanity. And one might wonder what is the point of writing a poem about discovering colors in a red rectangle. We think Cho may be investigating relationships not just between her and an object, but also between an object and another object. It’s so respectful and non-judgemental to be curious about how things outside of oneself relate to each other. It feels almost daydream-like, and Cho’s poems carry a profound, meditative quality that comes from daydreaming. Our work as translators was not to look for the conclusion, message, or the end-point of her poems. One way of approaching her was to be as curious as she, but naturally, that was making us more human and less translator.

When we work on poems like this, we wonder if language prohibits effective human communication rather than allowing it. Words and their definitions become shackles to our understanding of the human condition, and we can only understand ourselves as much as the aptitude of a language. Cho’s poems and her artistry challenge that frontier. Sometimes silence is as profound as active communication, and if we think about it, the majority of things, alive and (seemingly) inanimate, in the physical universe do not speak the same language. Even people who speak the same language, in most cases, do not speak the same language due to individual cultural differences. So why should we assume that we are so knowledgeable and understanding of the world?

We hope you enjoy Cho’s poems with an open mind.