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**Selected Translations from the Poetry of Kim Iryop**

**by Sang Ran Lee and S.E. Solberg**

**1. A LEAF**

A frail leaf falls

in the middle of the rapids;

battered there, and torn,

still,

its spirit

reaches out for the great sea.

**2. A LITTLE POEM**

Things have shadows and

sounds reveal my beloved;

peach blossoms laugh soundlessly, and,

plums flower in the winter mountain.

Who’s to deny that

Spring, Winter are all the same?

Pulgi 2962(1932)

To Mangong Great Master

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**3. WHAT ARE YOU TO ME?**

After all,

what are you to me that

I should want to offer up to you

while I live, this my body,

once I die, even my soul?

Why should I yield every choice thing I see,

hear, think, all to you?

There’s no way to tell what’s yours, what mine.

Is there a moment to tally terms and returns?

Souls come together in one body, but still ... Still, still

nothing more

than a sense of something wanting.…

After all, what are you to me?

**4. TO YOU**

My fragile soul

believes what you say, and

knows not where to go

except as my weary, leaden steps

lead me—

When will I see you?

Your call for me,

a thousand? ten thousand years ago?

The instant I sense your words

it is as if I saw you.

Even in the transport of my play,

when I look back, I am there.

1932/4,Samch’olli

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**5. YOUR HANDS**

Everything between heaven and earth

is in your hands.

“Take them, take them,”

you shouted, but,

blinded and deafened, human kind

only pawed the air.

**6. FALLING LEAVES**

1.

The fruit is finely shaped

and hidden deep among the leaves;

cut free from your old home,

you, pretty flower,

flew round, and yet again, around—

to me you seemed a butterfly.

1932/6 Pulgyo

2.

As you flew round and round, you seemed a butterfly, but

you were the petal at the very tip of the branch cradling

your infant against the tug of wind that,

circling round the sky, took your modest leave.

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**7. UNTITLED**

When I consider things of the world

they are only idle dreams.

This life’s breath of me, dream of a dream—

how much of that must I believe?

To master the great truth

mind only springs alone.

1932/11/12 Pulgyo

**8. WHILE LOOKING UP AT THE PENDULUM**

Night, day, invariably back and forth,

always that only, always repeating, pendulum life

just so far, then back, back just so far, then the same spot and yet,

in spite of all still thinks it goes all on its own

keeping up that stern front, no rest through life;

Dare I mock this pendulum huffing and puffing its way through life?

Am I not always merely going, coming in that time too,

yet sensing that time passes? Setting past apart from present

I grow older each day,

grow old, die, and die to be born only to grow old again:

am I not the eternal wanderer?

1933/7 Pulgyo

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**9. PLEASE SMILE AT ME**

1.

Your body crushed next to my heart,

your lips taking my heart’s breath away.

Weren’t these all within the narrow confines

of my breast?

And yet, and yet

I didn’t even know

The heavens had watched Time enfolding your beautiful shapes

climb the clay back wall and leave.

Wasn’t it Time that came and suddenly snatched away

your soul and mine as well?

Time that snatches away now this, now that

from any and everyone throughout eternity,

yet never even once appears to human eyes.

Even so, please smile at me

and I too will try to keep on smiling.

(Upon departing from one I met)

2.

Within the narrow confines of my breast,

Your body crushed next to my heart,

Your eyes and gaze that take my breath away,

and yet no part of you conquered.

And yet, and yet, when was it?

Even the chair where you sat,

the place where you worked,

your scent, your footprint,

all vanished from sight.

Embracing the package of your many shapes

wrapped with empty space,

the shape of disappearing Time’s back [page 36]

truly cannot be seen.

Even so people

from far in the past

say the thing they have never seen

is the substance of time.

Then isn’t it

that before long

in one way or the other

your body and mine

will be taken away by Time?

At that moment, please smile at me.

**10. I**

Since I am not all existence

then who are the others (are not me)?

When I claim that I am I

everyone else also claims to be “I.”

Although you and I are not two

When I call there is an answer.

**11. I ALONE**

Since the four seasons were all the same that year

the thought came of itself

New Years, make a New Year’s offering.

Even though it was I alone

it was empty freedom.

(Scolding for the speech, “this is me, is that you?”)

1967/12/27

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**12. THREE MEDITATION POEMS**

1. Self

I have given my self away

and wandered doing only what others say.

People and their words,

As if we do not see each other

And while there are no shapes to be seen,

Firmly stand still.

(10th anniversary of Meditation)

2. Discard the Old and Meet the New

Since time doesn’t exist,

how can we say “new year,” “old year”?

Thought moves,

coming and going

Only in me is there time or space.

Know yourself.

(Outside the Meditation Hall gate: who has made the big leap?)

(Welcoming the year 1957)

3. Single Thought

That times of a thousand kalpas ago and

things of ten thousand kalpas to follow

are set in order by a single thought

makes the whole universe me.

Nature of itself was born

to accept me.

(on my birthday, 1957)

At the Abbey in Ch’ungnam, Kyongsung

Kim-Iryop

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**13. IN THE MEDITATION HALL**

Awakened from slumber by the clap of the master,

novices fill the hall; the master descends from the altar.

On the three-tiered altar, candle lights flutter.

Flowers break out in laughter and incense fills the hall.

Laws of mind and mind, thing and thing,

the master’s sermon is over.

Why does the master push us into

further confusion?

Storm, pound his fist, thunder, awaken us?

―Novice 49th Day Master’s Preaching.

**14. SONG FOR FORGETTING MEMORY**

Time goes and comes or itself.

Space likewise turns by itself.

Time and space together are within my ambit,

Humbly deferring to propriety.

Nevertheless this harmonious laughter

sounds from eterrnity.

**15. COLOR OF SOUND**

from my sickbed

In the sound of water there is a river,

in the sight of blue, waves.

Sound of water, color of waves

are one—who doesn’t know that?

Since the sound of water is like that,

how can sound and color be two?

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**16. THE DAY THAT NEVER RETURNS**

—on my 75th birthday

Today will never return in my life.

Eternity will never yield back this body of mine.

From birth to now I clambered rough mountains.

Today suddenly, I can forget old cares.

(1970) 4th month, 28th day