

SIN YONG-MOK

I Wanted to Sing a Song from Which the Voice Had Vanished

—Translated from the Korean
by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Sin Yong-Mok has published four collections of poetry and a volume of prose essays. Born in Geochang, South Gyeongsang Province, Korea, in 1974, he received a new writers award in 2000. He is currently editor of a major Korean literary magazine and lectures about poetry in a variety of institutions. This poem is from the volume *When Someone Called Someone I Looked Back* (Seoul: Changbi, 2017), which received the 2018 Baek Seok Literary Award

Brother Anthony has lived in Korea since 1980 and has published over forty volumes of English translations of contemporary Korean poetry in addition to a number of translations of fiction, and other books related to Korea.

I wanted to vanish like a voice. Since the air, too, has its valleys, I wanted to go to a place nobody knew about and vanish in whiteness once snow had fallen.

Once snow has drifted high,
for some four days,

then the snowdrifts go flowing away like voices. Since there is open space there, wearing a fur hat I'll sweep enough room for at least one person to pass, of course. Once voices have piled up white, I'll sweep away just enough so that someone coming from the opposite direction can make way and smile

then even if it's so cold it hurts, we can enjoy throwing voice-balls at one another. If we roll voices into a voice-man will he be warm or cold?

But it will vanish, anyway. When I believe I'm walking among voices, the voices have already gone; when I believe I'm making way, when I believe I'm smiling brightly, the broom sweeps up empty air, scattering it far and wide like fur falling helplessly from a fur hat. When I believe there's someone rolling voices into a voice-man . . .

I'll end up flopping down, for sure. Looking around like a snowman.

No crying, please! Your tears make time pass. Make them branch into two streams.

Turn them into cheeks.

Days when your words were so cold that they hurt were good.

Spring comes,

like a voice I longed to vanish. Every season's valley bears affectionate songs

and the songs, like voices burning white eager to erase the singer,

remain until about four days later.

I wanted to go flowing away to a place nobody knew about, of course,

like snowflakes briefly fluttering through the air's empty valleys from silence to silence,

like a snowman slowly drowning in its own first-melted body on the morning's empty space.

But it's really far away, like the clouds of steam billowing up, then just coming to a halt, above the great chimney of Dangin-ri power station if I lift my head, like a song where the voice has vanished.

GARY RUDELL

Calling Your Name, 2014
Oil on panel, 52 x 52 in



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