

1976

In Praise of a Peaceful Reign

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John Batki

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shrunken, salivaless,
is whipped & nagged
by sodas & magnesias.

So I panic
like any driven mule
& because I have children
this is serious.

Rattled finally, fireless,
making errors from the cradle to the grave
I'm kept going & get up daily
sustained only by these errors.

Translated by Maureen Ahern

HWANG DONG-KYU / KOREA

In Praise of a Peaceful Reign

We are a lesser race, they told me.
The doors locked shut even in the daytime,
bathing our eyes with lotion,
we read essays, hugging the coal fire.

O, you of the lesser race,
travel the country from Kimhae to Hwachon,
winter fatigues loosely hanging on you,
one or two chevrons hashed on your arms,
and a canteen flapping at your waist.

Wherever you turn, there is barbed wire;
wherever you turn, there are checkpoints.
I do not understand this love,
this smothering over-jealous love.

I spread my gloved hands, palms up;

snow has been falling from the lowered sky,
a snow colder than snow.

Translated by the author with John Batki

ANADAD ELDON / ISRAEL

When You Gave Light to Israel

When you gave light to the sun
and sun to the morning,
I went to you, your only child.

The trees screened the flowing water,
on their branches you hung white birds;
and on me, pupils, dark as my shoes.

Bare-footed, the trees are rooted
upright, making God's years green.

Give my legs back those years my father spent by the swamps
that ran here from hillock to hillock—
whistling, hanging his clothes out to dry.

He built a channel for tears; for pain
shelter in my eyes.

When I see white birds, resting
on the tops of trees, it seems
God or his angels are about.

Translated by Bat-Sheva Sheriff and Jon Silkin