



All the Garbage of the World, Unite!
By Kim Hyesoon

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Reviewed by Lisa A. Flowers

Translated from the Korean by poet Don Mee Choi, (and perhaps gleaning some of its brilliantly effective childish cadences through loss in translation), Kim Hyesoon's *All the Garbage of the World, Unite!* comes on like a menstrual-blood filled water balloon exploding in Roy Lichstenstein's face. Combining the reproductive and bodily horrors of

"Eraserhead" with a birds & bees educational filmstrip directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis, the second collection by the noted South Korean poet is a pop art nursery, a feminist Kindergarten avant-garde warzone where a shrapnel sheared-off leg with painted toenails is as apt to land beside you as an angry pink Fisher Price toy box spouting womanly fluids. If white eyeballs bulging out of bogs, lit stethoscopes moving through pipes, lips hanging from tenements, and 500- watt light bulbs inside screams are all playfields in a variation of "Sesame Street's iconic '12' pinball machine, the reader is the ball launched into it. Childhood, adolescence, old age, and death close—to borrow Hart Crane's phrase—"round one instant in one floating flower": a Venus Flytrap ravenous for hamburgers, tornados, marshmallows, the flesh of its own children, and any number of other odds and ends. Conception—the giving of life—contrasted with hypochondria—the placebo sensation of the breaking down of the body—all zoom into the reverse POV of a ghost looking back in on itself, longing to become a part of the process that systematically destroyed it in the first place.

Yet these identities are not grounded in solid emergence, but fluid, peripatetic. If, in the words of Zuzu, "every time a bell rings an angel gets its wings", Hyesoon's seraphim are a melee of Poe's bells: a scaturient, hellish din of overlap that runs out of the palm of God like sands, the same "hand that [bunches] up the faces that glimmer before [its] eyes". Replacements rematerialize upon erasure, like clever pop-up ad designed to bypass filters. The voices are frequently self-deprecating and always bizarrely comic; ghosts plotting out Poltergeist escapades-to-come even before their souls have stopped boring through Hades on Mister Rogers' trolley:

**My face that has been copied onto thin paper
Sits on the long seat of the subway train, line number 4
And falls into light for the millionth time
My face doesn't even know where its original is
I have already become as faint as faint can be
I draw the route of my next commute
When I return home, I wash my face with a soap named Despise
And erase my face with a face cream called Deface**

"Who says that one person leaves and the other arrives?" Hyesoon asks; and, explicating the hell of depersonalization: "I paid a visit to my fever during my break...a message intermittently arrived saying that my suffering was boiling in that place." "I myself am hell/Nobody's here", Robert Lowell wrote (or recapitulated)—and might have retorted. Yet Hyesoon's work weighs as lightly on the spirit as a Disney song with notes buoyed aloft by bluebirds. In a [May 2012 piece](#) in Jacket magazine, she's quoted as saying:

“Without merriment, poetry remains on a singular plane. In order to achieve polyphonic planes, my poetry needs to be merry—inside things, between things, inside the multiple ‘I’s’ and between the multiple ‘I’s’ ... it's this ‘merriment’ that brings

together the twin connotations of freedom and loss in Surrealism's notion of 'mental liberation.'"

Sure enough, crises and union are always outside the lines (a natural enough state for crises—but certainly not one characteristic of harmony). Cutlery falls in love with cutlery:

Knife loves a knife

It loves in the air like something without feet

The knife that has fallen in love is not a knife but a magnet...

It looks as if two knives are going to lie down for a bit with their bodies

Crossed in the air, but their glittering eyes stare out in the same direction,

Somewhere remote

In "Ghostmarriage", the ceremonial wedding night disrobing of the bride is "the whitestwhite naked body [unraveling] itself and [turning] on the spinning wheel endlessly," while "the nuptial song inside the body [has] to be taken out by emphatic sign language". Nothing is seamless. In "Why Are all Mermaids Female?" the division of human function and the intellect is explicated through Tibetan Buddhist philosophy:

A camel-like person who has never bathed once

Hides in my upper body

A black shark-like person who

Pulls me into the deep sea and roams about

Hides in my lower body...

Therefore, on my tired face

A camel's eye stays open, bulging out

Gazing blankly at the body of my next life...

Menstrual cramps fiercely engulf my lower body...

Half of it trapped in the desert

And the rest in the ocean

A blood-jetting glee, an abstract, exuberant verbiage—messy with finger and splatter paints—churns out remarkable images like a prodigious child rotating on a sprinkler system. Hyesoon is particularly adept in evoking the incomprehensible processes of the body through the lens of childhood, as in "A Christmas Morning's Trumpet":

The naked angels took a foam bath inside the clouds

God lay down next to them wearing a feminine napkin

The eagles that fed on human flesh dripped down like a dirty tattoo

Sticking onto the backs of men

They wanted to become angels, but they were so strong

That they became scary animals instead

Or "The Hidden Drowned Body":

**I feel as if I'm inside a uterus when I ride in his car
That taste of having a hamburger and beer inside the uterus!**

...

**The taste of when someone asks, Are you asleep?
No! I reply as I toss
And turn and reach for the umbilical cord
Then I devour his hands on the steering wheel and call his hands
Mommy! Mommy! Inside myself.**

It would perhaps be too easy—and tawdry—to assume an auto-erotic connotation here, but if there is one, it's rated G; the scene is kinetic, bustling, and urban, like a merry romp through Chinatown neon or a rainy night in Soho, as if teeming with pop culture waiting to pop, like a weasel or a Jack-in-the-Box, after a nine month gestation. The peculiar synesthesia that informs the language and perception of children is explored in poems like "Hum Hum," in which a church confessional's window

**Looks like a beehive
The holes in the priest's mic also look like a beehive, they are all
hexagonal
Every time the priest says blahblahblah
A swarm of bees falls out of his mouth...my mommy's voice is heard
intermittently
Between the swarms of bees pouring out of the receiver**

This somehow recalls Plath's "Arrival of the Bee Box", in which the line "I lay my ear to furious Latin/I am not a Caesar/I have simply ordered a box of maniacs" evokes apiary as confessional booth through which we peer through "a little grid" with "no exit." As in childhood, similes and metaphors are not comparative—in spite of themselves—but onomatopoeic, exact. Hyesoon's buzzing drones may be likened to the revving of an engine—"I wonder how many bees live inside the motorcycle"—but the language manages, ingeniously, to appear unaware even of its own connections.

Teens at the onset of puberty are awed by the burgeoning possibilities of their bodies in "Pinkbox":

**Pinkbox that has just arrived. Pinkbox that waits to be opened... Pinkbox,
my first baby. Hello, pinkbox. I want to rock pinkbox in a cradle. (For
your information, God doesn't know how to make anything rectangular)
... Pinkbox has two hidden breasts that pull on the chest painfully. Blood
streamed down pinkbox. This box is smaller than me. It's unbearably
tight...**

Dented pinkbox. Love has been a prisoner inside me since I was born.

Such lines are echoed in 'When Petals Bloom and Fade', a beautifully demented image of the awakening of love:

**Between your knock knees/between your puckered lips the leaves are
budding through the holes/all the holes in the world, what do I do? ...the
dark eyes are about to open all over my body**

Garbage is obsessed with body parts, severed-and-un, particularly countenances, whether it's "a dog, its whole body [swelling] out of Buddha's face" or the "Videodrome"-esque screen-trapped ingénue of "Lady Cine":

**What will happen to the actress
If she's left behind all by herself inside the film...
She gets up from her bed and smokes
Searing the screen with her cigarette...
In the end she scorches her own face**

Or the "Suicide Club"/"964 Pinocchio" urban-ghastly imagery in "To Bake a Star":

**Got off line 4 at the Sadang subway station to change to Line 2
Got on the escalator, turned around and came upon a crowd of faces
They were all like red clay masks
How many kilns must have baked all those faces?**

When a corpse is pulled out from the sand, "not a single strand of her hair decomposed ... her eyes stayed closed even when a knife blade went busily in and out of her." There are noisy wraiths who "always gripegripe"; whose idiosyncrasies are determined by the manner of their deaths:

**The women who met an undeserved death are the noisiest among them
A crazy ghost comes unexpectedly to dripdrip quietly...
Have you ever had a bad encounter with a ghost that died in the forest?
The ghost pulls out from its mouth vines that stretch endlessly**

What Hyesoon has done is succeeded where Wonka failed in his creation of Everlasting Gobstoppers; savoring the Kodachrome candies of her images, we find ourselves consuming first, second, and third courses that quickly segue into civilizations, encompassing the tastes of cities, lovers, cigarettes, bubble tea, and Durian melons exuding their nausea in strange synthetic perfumes. An after-dinner fortune cookie opens into a scroll, turning the old gag "That wasn't chicken..." into a thoroughly jubilant question of what is, then, running barking mad through the market squares of Candyland with its head cut off, its intellect nonetheless vibrantly and imperatively intact.