

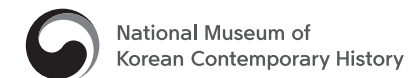
Bestselling
& Beloved:

Korean
Literary
Treasures

Korean Cultural Centre UK

Bestselling & Beloved: Korean Literary Treasures

Korean Cultural Centre UK



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새로운 미래의 사랑을 받는 말과 글

주영한국문화원장
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영국에서 한국문학 전시를 개최하기로 결심한 날은 2023년 한영수교 140주년 국빈 방문 때, 국빈 만찬에서 찰스 왕이 윤동주의 시를 언급한 순간이다. 찰스 왕은 특유의 저음으로, 굵게 흐르듯 천천히 말했다.

“어지러운 변화 속에서도 한국이 자아의 정체성을 지켜온 것은, 어쩌면 시인 윤동주가 한국의 해방 직전 비극적으로 옥중에서 생을 마감하기 전에 예견했던 것일지도 모릅니다.”

“바람이 자꾸 부는데, 내 발이 반석 위에 섰다.

강물이 자꾸 흐르는데, 내 발이 언덕 위에 섰다.”

이 시는 윤동주의 ‘바람이 불어’로, 이 시의 앞부분은 다음과 같다.

“바람이 부는데 내 괴로움에는 이유가 없다. 내 괴로움에 이유가 없을까, 단 한 여자를 사랑한 일도 없다. 시대를 슬퍼한 일도 없다.” 바람이 불어도 괴로워한 적도, 슬퍼한 적도 없다는 듯 담담히 반석과 언덕 위에 서 있는 힘은 바로 한국인의 정체성이라는 말은, 오히려 시를 통해 자신이 견뎌낸 인내심을 표현하는 듯했다.

인간의 글은 범속의 구원이다. 한국문학은 우여곡절의 역사 속에서 한글의 말과 글로 기쁠 때나 슬플 때나 저마다 가슴속의 토로를 드러낸 흔적이다. 깊은 숨을 허공에 내뿜는 말처럼, 고단한 순간들을 잘 살아냈다는 안도감이며, 작은 공책에 적어보는 추억이다. 이제는 노트북과 디지털 데이터로 글을 적어가는 순간이 더 많을지도 모른다.

각 시대마다 가장 많은 사랑을 받은 글에는 이유가 있을까? 아마도 삶의 사연이 다르듯, 사랑받는 이유 역시 저마다의 사연을 담고 있을 것이다. 어떤 글이 사랑받을까? 자신의 수첩에 적어둔 독백이 아니라, 글모음이 책이 되어 여러 사람에게 보여지고 읽힌다. 소수의 덕후들이 아닌, 책으로 베스트셀러가 된다는 것은 갈급했던 심정과 연결되었기 때문일 것이다. 한국의 베스트셀러는 그 시절을 풍미한 정서를 대변한다. 내 마음을 대신 말해주듯 한 글을 사랑하지 않을 수 없다. 책은 소액으로 내 것이 되어, 그 글이 내 것이 되는 듯한 기분을 준다. 저마다 그런 위로를 받는다.

Bestselling and Beloved, Toward a New Future

Dr. Seunghye SUN, FRSA
Director, Korean Cultural Centre UK

I remember the moment I decided to host a Korean literature exhibition at the Korean Cultural Centre UK. My heart was moved during King Charles III's speech at the state banquet when His Majesty mentioned the poetry beloved by all Koreans.

“Korea's preservation of its sense of self, amid bewildering change, was perhaps what the poet Yoon Dongju, who so tragically died in captivity on the very eve of Korea's liberation, anticipated when he wrote:

“While the wind keeps blowing, My feet stand upon a rock.

While the river keeps flowing, My feet stand upon a hill.”

The poem, The Wind Blows by Yoon Dongju, begins with the lines: *The wind blows, But there is no reason for my sorrow. / Could it be that my sorrow has no reason? I have never loved even a single woman. / I have never grieved for the times.* The strength to stand calmly upon a rock and a hill, as if never having suffered sorrow or grief despite the blowing wind, embodies the identity of the Korean people. Yet, this sentiment seems, in a way, to reflect the poet's own resilience, intimately woven into his verses.

Writing is a moment of salvation in everyday life. Korean literature, expressed through Hangeul, has allowed individuals to share their deepest sentiments, undeterred by the twists and turns of historic trauma. Beautiful lines in poetry and compelling stories in novels show us how we have endured our hardest moments. They are like sighs released into the air, bringing gentle nostalgia, like words jotted down in a small notebook or on a smartphone.

Is there a reason why certain writings from each era are loved the most? Perhaps, just as every life has its own story, the reasons for loving a piece of writing are equally personal and varied. What kind of writing earns such affection? It is not merely a private monologue jotted down in one's notebook; it is a collection of words that transforms into a book, shared with and read by many. Becoming a bestseller, not just adored by a niche group of enthusiasts, means it has resonated with some deeply felt longing.

Korea's bestsellers often serve as a mirror of the emotional yearnings of their time. They speak for our hearts, as if voicing what we cannot articulate ourselves, making it impossible not to love them. A book, acquired for a modest price, feels as though its words become our own. Each of us finds solace in them, a connection that soothes and strengthens us in ways only great writing can.

런던에서 사랑받는 글을 떠올리며, 영국에서 한국문학 전시를 해내고 싶다는 열망이 있었고, 어떻게 해 낼 것이라는 낙관적인 신념으로 여러 차례 시도와 좌절을 반복했다. 그러던 중 한강의 노벨문학상 수상이라는 기쁜 소식이 들려왔다. 한강의 수상 소식은 나의 일처럼 기뻐다. 한국문화를 위해 일하다 보면, 재능의 특이점을 가진 사람들이 꾸준히 노력해 예술작품이라는 꽃을 피운 순간만큼 아름다운 것은 없다.

한국 최초이자 아시아 최초 여성 작가로서 한강이 노벨문학상을 수상한 덕분에, 나는 많은 분들의 도움을 받아 한국문학 전시를 영국에서 개최할 수 있었다. 우여곡절 끝에 연말연시 성탄절 선물처럼, 새해의 복주머니처럼 뜻깊은 성취를 이루게 도와 주신 여러 기관 관계자 여러분께 진심으로 감사를 드린다.

Reflecting on the beloved writings cherished here in London, I envisioned hosting a Korean literature exhibition in the UK—a daunting yet hopeful aspiration, pursued with unwavering optimism through repeated trials and setbacks. It was amidst these efforts that the joyous news of Han Kang’s Nobel Prize in Literature arrived, resonating like a personal triumph.

Working for Korean culture, there are few moments more beautiful than witnessing a masterpiece born from the persistent dedication of uniquely talented individuals blossom like a flower. As the first Korean and the first Asian female writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, Han Kang’s achievement made it possible for me to realise this exhibition in the UK, with the generous support of many.

Through countless challenges, a Korean literature exhibition in the UK has finally come to fruition, unfolding at the turn of the year like a cherished Christmas gift or a New Year’s lucky pouch. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the numerous organisations and individuals who made this meaningful accomplishment possible.

텍스트 힙의 미학: ‘가장 많이 팔리고, 사랑을 받는다’는 의미

주영한국문화원장
선승혜

베스트셀러와 텍스트 힙

‘글자’를 뜻하는 ‘텍스트’와 ‘멋있다, 개성 있다’라는 뜻의 은어 ‘힙하다’를 합성한 신조어로, 독서를 하는 것이 멋지다는 의미에서 등장한 말이다. (출처: 네이버 상식사전)

글은 저마다의 말이다. 어떤 글들은 셀 수 없이 많은 사람들의 사랑을 받는다. 그렇다면, 가장 많은 사람이 사서 가장 많은 사랑을 받는 글이란 도대체 어떤 의미를 지닐까?

한국문학에서 의미를 가지지 않은 작가는 없다. 그러나 관점을 바꾸어, 가장 많이 읽힌 작품이 무엇인가를 생각해 보는 일은 세상에 가장 많은 데이터가 공유된 이유를 탐구하게 한다. 글이 아름다웠거나, 출판사의 역량이 뛰어났거나, 시대적 상황이 맞았거나, 단순히 운이 좋았을 수도 있다. 이런 여러 문맥을 상정하며, 한국에서 베스트셀러가 과연 어떤 의미를 지니는지 탐구해 본다.

글의 탐색자를 독서가 멋스럽다는 의미로 연결하면서 ‘텍스트 힙’이라는 단어가 신조어로 유행하게 되었다. 인스타그램에서 트렌드를 주도하는 계층이 독서에 관심을 가지기 시작했을 가능성도 있다. *Book*이라는 단어 대신 *Text*라는 말을 사용하는 이유는 스마트폰 등 글을 전달하는 매체가 다양해졌기 때문이다. 혼자서 쓰고, 혼자서 읽는 독백의 글보다, 많은 이들에게 읽히는 글과 나는 어떤 관계를 맺고 있을까. 나는 기억을 거슬러 내 인생의 베스트셀러를 생각해 보기로 했다.

내가 사랑하는 글

나는 글, 그림, 소리를 좋아한다. 글 중에서는 특히 시를 사랑한다. 시는 눈 덮인 풍경 속 드문드문 보이는 상징과 같다. 속세의 번잡함을 덮어버리고 떠오르는 크고 작은 이미지들은 아름답다.

시어와 시어 사이의 간격은 시인의 호흡이자, 나의 호흡이다. 들숨과 날숨 사이에서 작은 안식을 느낄 수 있다. 시와 그림은 몇 개의 제한된 상징으로 이미지를 만들어내며, 긴 이야기를 하나의 화면에 응축한다. 이 응축력은 창작자와 감상자 모두를 몰입하게 만드는 흡인력이 있다. 특히 빠른 것을 좋아하는 나에게 시는 직관적이라 더욱 매력적이다. 내가 그림을 좋아하는 이유와 시를 좋아하는 이유는 크게 다르지 않다.

시보다 더 긴 글들은 참을성을 요구한다. 어떤 글에서 매력을 느끼면, 나는 그 작가의 전집을 살살이 읽어낸다. 그 작가의 생각과 감정을 온전히 이해하려는 노력은 마치 귀를 기울여 대화를 듣는 것과 같다.

내가 타인을 온전히 포용하려고 노력하는 순간, 그것이 아름다운 일임을 느낀다.

말과 글을 주고받는 서정적인 감정은 나에게 더없는 기쁨을 준다. 이것이 내가 문학을 사랑하는 이유다.

The Aesthetics of ‘Text Hip’: The Meaning of ‘Bestselling and Beloved’

Dr. Seunghye SUN, FRSA
Director, Korean Cultural Centre UK

Bestsellers and Text Hip

The term ‘Text Hip’ is a neologism created by combining ‘text’, meaning written words, and ‘hip’, a slang term for something stylish and unique. It emerged with the idea that reading itself has become a chic and desirable activity. (Naver Knowledge Dictionary)

Every piece of writing carries its own voice. Some works capture the hearts of countless readers, but what does it mean for a text to sell the most copies and be the most loved?

In Korean literature, there are no authors without meaning. However, rethinking the question to ask which work has been read the most arouses curiosity about why such texts have been widely shared. Was it because the writing was beautiful, the publisher was exceptionally skilled, the timing was right, or simply luck? Exploring these contexts, one begins to wonder what bestsellers signify in Korea.

The phrase ‘Text Hip’, which suggests that reading is stylish, has become a trendy neologism. Perhaps this reflects Instagram and social media trendsetters entering the realm of reading. The term ‘Text’ is used instead of ‘Book’ because of the proliferation of mediums, such as smartphones, that carry written words. Compared to solitary writing and reading, what relationship do widely read texts have with us? Reflecting on this, I decided to revisit the bestsellers of my life.

The Writings I Love

I adore words, images, and sounds. Among them, I have a special affection for poetry. Poetry is like symbols sparsely scattered across a snow-covered landscape. After silencing the noise of the mundane world, the large and small images that arise are beautiful. The spaces between poetic words reflect the poet’s breath and, as I read, these intervals become my own offering a brief moment of rest between inhaling and exhaling.

The concentrated power of poetry and painting, where a few selected symbols create an entire image or story within a single frame, captivates both creators and audiences. Their compact intensity demands attention. For someone like me, who enjoys speed and clarity, this intuitive quality is especially appealing. My reasons for loving painting and poetry are, at their core, much the same.

Longer texts, in contrast, require patience. When I find myself drawn to a certain idea or work, I often explore the author’s entire body of work. This effort to fully understand another person’s thoughts and emo-

타임캡슐: 시간을 거슬러 올라가는 고전문학

나의 첫 번째 베스트셀러는 오래된 한국의 시(詩)다. 특별한 이유는 알 수 없지만, 한국 고전문학에 대한 사랑은 고등학교 시절로 돌아간다. 그 두껍던 고전문학 참고서를 흥미진진하게 독파하던 시간은 무어라 형언할 수 없는 기쁨이었다. 한국어가 시간에 따라 변한다는 사실이 신기했다. 누가 썼는지도, 만날 수도 없는 천 년 전의 글을 내가 지금 여기서 읽고 있다는 것보다 더 놀라운 일은 없다고 생각했다.

인간은 왜 글로 생각과 감정을 남기려고 할까? 왜 인간은 남겨진 글을 읽으려 할까? 어떤 글들은 남기고 싶을 만큼 아름다울까? 이런 미학적 질문은 언젠가 나 자신의 대답을 해내고 싶은 화두다.

최초의 한시(漢詩)로 거슬러 올라가 보면, 「황조가(黃鳥歌)」가 있다. 고구려 유리왕(瑠璃王, 재위: 기원전 19년~기원전 18년)은 두 마리의 펄펄 나는 새가 부럽다고 읊었다. 왕이든 누구든 외로울 때 시를 쓴다고 생각했다. 아무래도 말로 심정을 토로한 것이 문학이 된다는 단순하지만 근원적인 생각이 시의 존재 이유일지 모른다.

고등학교 시절 교과서에서 황조가의 ‘노란 새’를 문자 그대로 번역하지 않고 왜 꼬꼬리로 번역했는지의 아했다. 꼬꼬리는 노란색도 아니고, 노랫소리가 화려한 새가 아닌가? 노란 새가 드물어 상상 속의 새일지도 모른다고 생각해 보았다. 노란 옷을 입은 황족을 비유한 것일 수도 있다. 혹시 노란 새가 꼬꼬리처럼 소리가 곱지 않다면 어떨까?

이런 다양한 질문들을 품고 인터넷으로 꼬꼬리를 검색해 보니, 꼬꼬리는 노란색일 뿐만 아니라 소리도 곱고 자태도 아름다웠다. 이렇게 글과 그림의 연상을 마음속에서 자문자답하며 이어가는 것이 나의 큰 즐거움이며, 나만의 시 감상법이다.

내가 좋아하는 향가는 ‘찬기파랑가’다. 아이돌 같은 기파랑을 상상하는 것보다 더 즐거운 일은 없다. 창백하게 잘생긴 화랑이 달빛 아래 서 있다는 상상만으로도 두근거린다. 훈민정음이 창제되기 전에 한국어 기록하려면 한자를 빌려야 했기 때문에, 한자 음차로 표기된 한국 노래인 향가는 수수께끼 같다.

알 수 없는 한자 문치로 한국어를 기록하려 한 시도는 이집트 상형문자를 해독하는 것보다 어려워 보인다. 나는 언젠가 향가를 해독해 보고 싶다는 무모한 욕망을 품기도 한다. 지금 시간이 된다면, 인공지능의 거대 언어 모델을 사용해 향가를 해독해 보고 싶다. 그러면 신라의 금관 주인이 누구인지, 수수께끼가 술술 풀리지는 않을까 상상해 본다. 짧은 구절을 명탐정처럼 추리해 가는 시간은 무엇보다 즐겁다.

내가 가장 좋아하는 고려가요는 ‘가시리’다. 분명히 ‘잘 가라’는 내용인데, 운율이 딱딱 맞는 점이 재미있고, 후렴구와 본문이 독특하게 연결되어 웃음을 자아내는 표현법이 좋다. “가시리 가시리 잇고, 위증즐가

tions feels akin to truly listening to someone. It is a moment where I find beauty in striving to embrace another person’s mind in its entirety. The lyrical exchange of words and ideas brings me unparalleled joy. This is why I love literature.

Time Capsule: Retelling Korean Classical Literature

My very first encounter with a bestseller was an old Korean poem. Although I cannot pinpoint the exact reason, my love for classical Korean literature dates back to my high school years. Immersing myself in the thick reference books on Korean classical literature was an indescribable joy. The idea that the Korean language evolves over time fascinated me. The thought that I could read words written a thousand years ago by someone I could never meet seemed extraordinary.

Why do humans record their thoughts and emotions in writing? Why do we feel compelled to read what others have left behind? What makes certain texts so beautiful that they demand preservation? These aesthetic questions are profound themes I hope to answer someday.

Looking back, the earliest Korean poem I encountered was *Hwangjoga* (*Yellow Birds Song*), attributed to King Yuri of Koguryo (reigned 19 BCE–18 BCE). In this poem, he envies two birds fluttering freely, suggesting that even kings write poetry when loneliness strikes. This simple yet fundamental notion—that human emotions expressed in words can become literature—seems to resonate with the essence of writing.

In high school, I found it curious that ‘yellow birds’ in the poem were translated as orioles, rather than taken literally as yellow birds. Orioles are not yellow, after all; they are known for their vibrant songs and striking appearance. Could it be that yellow birds were rare or imaginary? Or perhaps they symbolised the royal family, dressed in yellow robes? This ambiguity led me to search for orioles online, only to discover they are indeed yellow and beautiful, with both melodious voices and graceful forms. This interplay of words and imagery—questioning and answering myself in an endless chain of associations—is my greatest pleasure and the method by which I appreciate poetry.

Among *hyangga* (vernacular Korean songs), my favourite is *Changi Parangga* (*Song in Praise of Kiparang*). Imagining Kiparang as an idol-like figure brings me endless joy. Just the thought of a pale, handsome hwarang standing under the moonlight quickens my heart. Before the invention of Hangul, Korean was

태평성대”라는 구절은 후렴구가 의미 없는 장식이라는 이론이 맞는 것일까?님은 떠났지만, 태평성대를 노래하는 심정은 상실의 슬픔이 지나고 나면 태평성대라는 말을 믿는 것처럼 들린다. 서정적이지만 묘하게 웃음이 나온다. 고려가요에 이어 조선의 시조는 요즘 내가 사용하는 말과 가까워서 3·4·3·4 운율을 좋아한다. 나만의 장르인 ‘뽕긋시조’를 개척해 유머로 마무리하는 글을 쓰기도 한다.

한글 소설로는 홍길동전을 좋아한다. 영국의 로빈 후드와도 같고, 모험과 정의로 가득한 협객의 이야기가 어찌 재미없을 수 있을까. 한국에서 가장 유명한 사람, 누구나 이름을 아는 사람은 누구일까? 나는 주저 없이 답한다. 바로 홍길동이다. 왜인지 알 수 없지만, 한국의 관공서나 문서에서 예시 이름으로 항상 등장하는 사람이 바로 홍길동이다. 홍길동전은 허균(1569~1618)이 쓴 최초의 한글 소설이다. 또한, 1889년 호러스 알렌(Horace Allen)이 영어로 번역한 *Hong Kil Tong, Or, The Adventures of an Abused Boy*로 서구에 소개되었다.

한국근대라는 역사적 트라우마: 시의 분열과 서정

나의 심리적 시계는 순차적으로 흐르지 않는다. 한국의 근대, 20세기 초는 나에게 가족의 트라우마 시기다. 아마 대부분의 한국 사람들은 식민지라는 집단 트라우마를 경험했고, 그 트라우마는 여전히 개인의 삶에서 현재진행형일지 모른다. 나는 30대가 훌쩍 넘어 국립중앙박물관에 근무하면서 겨우 한국 근대를 마주할 용기가 생겼다.

20세기 초는 세기의 전환기이기도 하지만, 인류에게는 식민지와 세계 1, 2차 대전이라는 집단적 트라우마 시기였다. 이러한 시대를 견뎌 내려는 사람들의 노력은 불안한 실존에 대한 글들로 이어졌다. 나에게 20세기 초는 할머니, 할아버지가 젊었던 시절이다. 친할아버지와 외할아버지는 혼란 속에서 돌아가셨고, 부모님은 모두 홀어머니 밑에서 많은 형제들과 함께 살아남아야 했던 트라우마의 시절을 겪었다. 그래서인지, 당시 어떤 일이 일어났는지 집안에서 묻는 사람도, 말하는 사람도 없었다. 그저 막연히 추측할 뿐이다.

한국 근대는 식민지라는 집단 트라우마의 시기다. 대부분의 한국 사람들은 저마다의 가족 역사 속에서 그 트라우마의 증상들에 영향을 받으며 살아가고 있다. 나의 심리적 상황에서 정서적으로 다가오는 시대적 이해는 시인 이상(1910-1937)과 윤동주(1917-1945)에게서 온다. 이상은 트라우마적 시기에 분열된 정신세계를 특유의 시로 치환했다. 지금 읽어도 포스트모던하게 느껴지는 까닭은 그가 이미 모더니즘의 합리주의에 대한 분열을 스스로 경험하고 표현했기 때문이다.

recorded using Chinese characters in a phonetic transcription system. Hyangga, written in this way, are like enigmatic puzzles. The attempt to capture Korean sounds using clusters of Chinese characters seems even more challenging than deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs.

I harbour an ambitious desire to decode hyangga myself someday. If only I had the time, I would love to use artificial intelligence and large language models to interpret these songs. Would that not unravel the mysteries of Silla’s golden crowns and their unknown owners? Imagining myself solving such riddles, like a detective piecing together clues, brings an unparalleled thrill.

Among Goryeo *gayo* (*songs of the Goryeo period*), my favourite is “*Gashiri*” (*Will You Go?*). Although ostensibly a farewell song, its rhythm and structure are captivating. The peculiar connection between the refrain and the main text often evokes laughter. “*Gashiri gashiri itgo, wijeungjeulga taepyeongseongdae*” (*Will you go? Will you leave me? Peaceful and serene are the days ahead*)—can the theory that this refrain is meaningless be truly correct? Despite the sorrow of parting, the refrain suggests a paradoxical hope for peace, creating a lyrical yet oddly humorous tone.

Moving on to Joseon-era *sijo* (Korean verse), I find its 3-4-3-4 rhythm appealing, as it feels closer to the language I use today. I have even coined a genre I call “*smiling sijo*”, where I end poems with humour.

As for Korean novels, my favourite is *Hong Gildong*. Its adventurous and justice-driven narrative reminds me of Robin Hood—how could such a story not be entertaining? When asked who the most famous person in Korea is, I immediately answer: *Hong Gildong*. Somehow, this name has become the default placeholder in documents and forms, though its origin remains unclear.

Written by Heo Kyun (1569–1618), *The Story of Hong Gildong* is the first Korean novel written in Hangul. Interestingly, it was translated into English as *Hong Kil Tong, or The Adventures of an Abused Boy* in 1889 by Horace Allen, who served as the first American Minister to Korea from 1897 to 1905.

The Historical Trauma of Korean Modernity: Fragmented Poetry and Lyricism

My psychological clock does not flow sequentially. For me, the early 20th century—the period of Korea’s modernity—represents a familial trauma. Most Koreans likely experienced the collective trauma of col-

반면 윤동주는 트라우마의 시절을 가장 섬세한 서정적 감수성으로 승화시켜 나갔다. 우리 역시 시대적 트라우마를 겪어낼 때마다 분열과 서정이라는 두 가지 대응 방식 속에서 각자의 방식을 찾고 있다는 생각이 든다.

저마다의 베스트셀러: 나는 전해린에서 한강으로

나는 성인이 된 이후 폭넓은 독서를 하기보다는, 좋아하는 책을 여러 번 읽는 덕후의 기질이 다분하다. 청소년기에는 세계문학전집을 사는 재미로 모두 읽어내면서도, 왜 이런 이야기들이 나왔는지, 혹은 그중에서 한국문학은 왜 없었는지는 알지 못했다. 책을 읽는 재미보다 책을 사는 재미가 더 컸다. 용돈을 모아 책을 사고, 책장을 확확 넘기며 나는 어느새 세계적 문호의 반열에 선 듯한 착각에 빠져 뿌듯해하곤 했다. 돌이켜보면, 내가 읽어낸 세계명작 중에서 여성 작가의 책은 펄 벅의 ‘대지(The Good Earth)’가 유일했을지도 모른다. 나중에서야 펄 벅이 여성 작가라는 사실을 알고 놀랐던 기억이 생생하다. 펄이라는 이름에서 딱히 젠더를 떠올리지는 못했다. 그 연속선상에 있다고 생각되는 박경리의 ‘토지’는 분명한 걸작이다. ‘대지’든 ‘토지’든, 땅에 관한 이야기다. 박경리의 ‘토지’는 권수가 많아서 아직 손이 잘 가지 않지만, 20세기 여성 문호의 걸작이라는 점에는 의심의 여지가 없다. 나에게 ‘토지’와 비슷한 맥락으로 다가오는 조정래의 ‘태백산맥’은 내 할머니 집 근처에서 벌어진 일들과 크게 다르지 않아서 소설이라는 픽션으로 생각해 본 적이 없다. 그래서인지 여전히 탐독하기 어려운 심리적 저항감이 있다.

13살 사춘기 시절에 가장 탐독했던 책은 전해린의 ‘그리고 아무 말도 하지 않았다’이다. 올해 나는 40여 년 만에 그 책을 다시 읽으며, 그 시절의 나와 조우하게 되었다. 당시 소녀였던 나는 작가가 여성인지 남성인지 묻는 것조차 의미가 없을 만큼 불후의 문호들은 모두 남성이라는 전제를 의심 없이 받아들였다. 6대 종손의 큰딸로 자라며, 대를 이을 아들이 아니라는 말을 자주 들은 나였기에, 그런 질문을 성숙하게 했을지도 모른다. 그래서인지 지금도 나는 여성이 쓴 문학에 관심이 많다. 여성이 쓴 베스트셀러란 부러움과 존경의 대상이다. 내가 여성이기 때문에, 내가 ‘쓴다면’, 혹은 내가 ‘썼다면’이라는 상상을 더 쉽게 하는 듯하다. 가장 많이 읽었던, 나에게 죽음을 서둘러 맞이한 여성 작가들은 좋으면서도 트라우마적 존재다. 나에게는 한국의 전해린, 영국의 버지니아 울프가 그러했다.

한강의 노벨문학상: 나의 해방감

나의 불편한 트라우마를 극복하게 된 일이 있었다. 바로 한강이 노벨 문학상을 수상한 기쁜 소식이다. 마

onisation, and this trauma may still manifest in the lives of individuals today. It wasn’t until I was in my thirties, working at the National Museum of Korea, that I finally mustered the courage to face Korea’s modern history. The early 20th century was not only a time of global transformation but also a period marked by collective trauma for humanity, with colonisation and the First and Second World Wars. The efforts of individuals to endure such times were expressed in writings reflecting their anxious existence. For me, this era represents the youth of my grandparents. Both of my grandfathers passed away amidst the chaos, leaving my parents to grow up under single mothers, struggling to survive with many siblings. Perhaps this explains why no one in my family ever asked or spoke about what happened during that time. All we can do is speculate vaguely.

Korean modernity is very much a period defined by the collective trauma of colonisation. For me, the poets Yi Sang (1910–1937) and Yoon Dongju (1917–1945) embody an emotional understanding of this era. Yi Sang transformed his fragmented mental world during this traumatic period into unique poetry. Even now, his works feel postmodern, as he personally experienced and expressed the breakdown of modern rationality. In contrast, Yoon Dongju sublimated the traumas of his time with the most delicate lyrical sensibility, elevating himself until the end. I believe that whenever we endure societal traumas, we find ourselves navigating a spectrum between fragmentation and lyricism, searching for our unique ways to cope.

Personal Bestsellers: From Jeon Hye-rin to Han Kang

As an adult, I find myself less inclined to read widely and more drawn to repeatedly revisiting books I love. During my adolescence, I devoured a complete collection of world literature, enjoying the thrill of buying books rather than understanding why such stories were written or why Korean literature was absent among them. Collecting books gave me greater joy than reading them. Saving up my pocket money to buy books and flipping through their pages made me feel as if I had joined the ranks of the world’s literary greats, filling me with pride.

Looking back, among the masterpieces I read, the only work by a female author was Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth*. I still vividly remember my surprise upon learning later that Pearl Buck was a woman. The name “Pearl” had not led me to associate the author with any gender. In the continuum of literature about the land, I would later discover Park Kyong-ni’s *Land* (*Toji*). Both works—*The Good Earth* and *Land*—are stories about the earth. Although the sheer number of volumes in *Land* makes it daunting to approach, there

치 내가 상을 받은 것처럼 기뻐다. 한국 최초, 아시아 여성 최초라는 수식어 자체가 카타르시스였다. 묵은 체증이 씻은 듯 내려갔다.

지금은 한강을 읽는다. 나에게 ‘채식주의자’는 여전히 읽기 어렵다. 한강의 말처럼 그것이 그 책의 운명일지도 모른다. ‘소년이 온다(Human Acts)’는 한강의 대표작이지만, 나에게는 외갓집 주변에서 일어난 일이라서 다큐멘터리처럼 느껴진다.

개인적으로는 ‘희랍어 시간’이 나의 취향에 더 가깝다. 인간은 서로 대화가 가능할까? 서로 다른 감각을 가지고도 사랑할 수 있을까? 이 질문들을 오로지 글로만 섬세하게 풀어낸다는 점에서 경탄을 금할 수 없다. 한강의 노벨 문학상 수상 연설에서 사랑이라는 단어가 여전히 껏가에 남아 있다. 그 고통스러운 이야기 속에서 글로 쓰려던 마음이 결국 사랑이었다는 사실을 깨닫는다.

데이터로서의 베스트셀러: 20-21세기 텍스트 힙

개인 취향을 서술하다가 대오각성을 한 것은 20세기 한국의 베스트셀러다. 전시를 준비하면서 내가 읽지 않은 책이 더 많다는 사실이 부끄럽기도 했다. 20세기는 천만 부, 육백만 부, 오백만 부, 이백만 부 등으로 베스트셀러가 되었던 책들이 있다. 이 데이터의 이면에는 어떤 한국 사회의 맥락과 시대적 정서가 있었을지 추론해 본다.

20세기 한국에서 최초의 베스트셀러는 ‘자유부인’이고, 최다 베스트셀러는 천만 부를 넘긴 이문열의 ‘삼국지’다. 영국 중세문학을 전공하고 서강대 영문과에서 한국문학을 번역하며 가르치신 안선재(Brother Anthony) 명예교수님이 추천하는 20세기 베스트셀러는 김지하의 ‘타는 목마름으로’이다.

내 분야에서 베스트셀러는 유흥준의 ‘나의 문화유산 답사기’다. 이 책은 현대자동차가 상징하는 포니와 같은 자가용의 보급으로 가족여행이 본격화된 시기에, 전국 방방곡곡을 여행하며 한국 문화에 대한 자긍심을 고취시키는 데 중요한 역할을 했다고 평가할 수 있다. 아직도 작가들은 활발하게 활동 중이고, 베스트셀러가 사회적·제도적 맥락을 서술할 수도 있겠지만, 각자가 책을 읽으며 느꼈던 개인화된 정서적 경험을 더 탐구해 보고 싶다.

문학의 나라 영국에서는 최근 빠른 속도로 한국의 차세대 문학이 영어로 번역되어 출간되고 있다. 흥미로운 점은 영국식 영어 번역은 영연방 국가들에서 주로 읽히고, 미국 번역은 미국 내에서 소비된다는 것이다. 같은 영어지만, 지역적 특성이 반영된 언어이기도 하다. K-POP 팬들이 한국문학으로 관심을 확대 가는 흐름도 흥미롭다.

is no doubt that this 20th-century masterpiece by a female author stands as a monumental work about our homeland. Similarly, Jo Jung-rae’s *The Taebaek Mountains* (*Taebaek Sanmaek*) felt less like fiction and more like a factual narrative, as its events were closely tied to those that occurred near my grandmother’s home. Perhaps this proximity to family trauma explains why I still find it psychologically challenging to delve into such stories.

At the age of 13, the book I read most passionately was Jeon Hye-rin’s *And Said Nothing*. This year, I revisited the book for the first time in over 40 years, reuniting with my younger self. As a girl at that time, I began questioning why all the immortal literary figures seemed to be men. Growing up as the eldest daughter in a family that constantly reminded me I was not the son meant to carry on the family name, I matured into such questions. Perhaps this is why I remain deeply interested in literature written by women. Female-authored bestsellers are objects of admiration and respect for me. It’s not that women’s writing is inherently superior or uniquely emotional. Rather, being a woman myself, I find it easier to imagine “what I would write” or “what I could have written.” For me, female authors who embraced death early are both beloved and traumatic figures. Jeon Hye-rin of Korea and Virginia Woolf of England are two such figures.

A significant moment in overcoming my own uneasy trauma came with the joyous news of Han Kang’s Nobel Prize win. It felt as if I had received the award myself. The fact that she was Korea’s first and Asia’s first female laureate brought catharsis. My long-standing sense of oppression melted away. These days, I read Han Kang. *The Vegetarian* remains difficult for me, as Han herself has suggested that this might be its fate. Her representative work, *Human Acts*, feels like a documentary rather than fiction, as it recounts events that occurred near my maternal family’s home. Personally, I am most drawn to *Greek Lessons*. The book’s questions about whether humans can truly communicate or love one another despite their different senses are so delicately expressed in writing that I find it miraculous. Han’s Nobel acceptance speech, in which she spoke of “love”, still lingers in my mind like an echo. The love that motivated her to write such painful stories resonates deeply within me.

Best Sellers as Data: 20th- and 21st-Century Text Hip

Reflecting on my personal preferences led me to a moment of reckoning with Korea’s 20th-century best-sellers. While preparing an exhibition, I was embarrassed to realise how many of these books I had yet to read. During the 20th century, books sold in the millions—ten million, six million, five million, and so on. What societal contexts and emotions of the times might lie behind these data points?

‘죽고 싶지만 떡볶이는 먹고 싶어’는 정부의 지원 없이 영국 출판사가 자체적으로 기획·출판해 20만 부 이상의 베스트셀러가 되었다. 이는 정신분석이 발달한 영국 문화와 한국 분식 떡볶이가 결합된 점, 그리고 저자가 출판계에 종사한 여성 출판인이라는 삼박자가 영국 독자들의 선택을 받았기 때문이라고 현장의 분위기를 전한다.

나는 한강의 노벨문학상 수상을 축하하며, 한국문학 특별전을 개최한 것만으로도 최선을 다했다고 느낀다. 한국문학을 영국에 소개하는 일이 단번에 이루어질지, 혹은 여러 해가 걸릴지 알 수 없으나, 한국문학의 베스트셀러라는 데이터가 보여주는 한국의 압축 성장과 역동적으로 변화해온 정서를 탐구할 계기를 영국에서 마련한 것만으로도 충분히 만족한다.

나는 오랜 시간 한국미학이 무엇인지 묻고 있었다. 속 시원히 누군가 나에게 답을 주길 바랐다. 그러나 이제는 방법을 바꾸려 한다. 바로 베스트셀러를 읽는 ‘텍스트 힙’한 사람이 되겠다. 그 속에서 내가 좋아하는 문장에 동그라미를 치는 것만으로도 나의 미학은 이미 완성되었다고 믿는다.

The first bestseller in 20th-century Korea was *Madame Freedom*, while the highest-selling book, exceeding ten million copies, was The Romance of the Three Kingdoms. A notable recommendation from Brother Anthony (An Sonjae), an eminent scholar of English medieval literature who taught Korean literature in translation at Sogang University, was Kim Ji-ha’s *With a Burning Thirst*. In my field, Yu Hong-jun’s *My Cultural Heritage Discoveries* played a significant role in inspiring national pride in Korean culture as families began travelling across the country during the era of private cars.

Although many of these authors remain active today, and bestsellers can reveal the institutional and societal contexts of their times, I am more interested in exploring the personalised emotional experiences of individual readers. How did readers engage with these texts, and what did they feel?

In the literary nation of Britain, Korean literature is now being translated and published in English at a rapid pace. Interestingly, British translations are read across Commonwealth countries, while American translations are consumed primarily in the United States. Though both are in English, they reflect regional linguistic nuances. Fans of K-pop are expanding their interests into Korean literature. For instance, *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki*, published by a British publisher, became a bestseller exceeding 200,000 copies. This success may stem from the unique combination of British cultural interest in psychoanalysis, Korean street food, and the author’s background as a female publisher.

I am deeply grateful to have been able to celebrate Han Kang’s Nobel Prize win by organising a special exhibition on Korean literature. Introducing Korean literature in Britain is a gradual process; it is uncertain whether it will take years or happen all at once. Yet, the opportunity to explore the emotional dynamism and aesthetics of Korea, as reflected in its bestsellers amidst the nation’s compressed growth, feels like a significant achievement.

For years, I have been asking myself what defines Korean aesthetics. I longed for someone to provide a clear answer, but now I intend to change my approach. I will become a “text hip” reader of bestsellers, marking my favourite sentences. I believe that this simple act will bring me closer to realising my own aesthetics.

Literary Traditions, Modern Developments, and Korean Literature in the United Kingdom

Grace Koh
Lecturer, SOAS University of London

Ten years ago, South Korea was the Market Focus country for the 2014 London Book Fair (LBF) and I was asked to write a short piece to introduce Korean literature for the brochure. For reasons unclear to me at the time, I found this to be a rather difficult and uneasy task. Similarly, every time I was introduced to someone new who asked me what I did, nine out of ten times they would say “I’m sorry, I know nothing about Korean literature” followed by the question I always dreaded, “What is Korean literature like?”. I have taught Korean literature since 2002 at SOAS, so it was not to do with a lack of knowledge or experience talking about Korean literature – I could have easily said a few words about language, prominent genres and famous authors in its literary history as I did in my introductory lectures or when Koreans ask me about English or French literature, or that contemporary Korean literature is like any other except written in Korean by Korean writers reflecting Korean society, etc. But somehow, I found myself feeling reticent when asked what Korean literature is like on the spot or to offer a brief overview in a page or two for a general audience.

With the success and increasing visibility of contemporary Korean fiction in English translation over the past decade, I have come to realise more recently why the question, ‘What is Korean literature like?’ had given me pause or made me feel reluctant to summarise briefly some ten years ago. The main reason had to do with the expectations of the audience or readers in context. It was a time when Korean literature was largely unknown in the United Kingdom, and the underlying assumption was that Korean literature is foreign and people wanted to know how and why it is different. Whatever answer I provided could unwittingly shape and define Korean literature and its significance in simplistic terms to someone unfamiliar with Korean history, culture and literature, so it was not a simple question to answer as it seemed. Interestingly, I no longer get asked that question and I believe it has to do with the growing popularity of Korean culture and literature in translation which have attracted more readers worldwide since then. And for readers who have some knowledge and understanding of Korean literature by reading it themselves and wish to learn more about its history, I feel more at ease with providing a brief overview of Korean literary history for context.

In the end, I could not complete the piece for the 2014 LBF Korea Market Focus brochure due to other commitments but participated in the Cultural Programme events as a consultant, speaker, moderator and interpreter instead. But I share what was included in my original draft regarding the literary traditions of Korea and modern Korean literature, and recent reflections on how Korean literature joined the Korean Wave to reach the British shores in earnest over the past decade.

Korean Literary Traditions – A Very Brief Overview

Korea has a rich literary history, ranging from orally transmitted treasures to diverse genres of poetry and prose in literary Sinitic and vernacular Korean. Records of Korea’s literary culture extend back to the Korean Three Kingdoms period, though the earliest surviving texts are from the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392). Works from different eras reflect not only the lived realities of their authors in their different sociopolitical contexts, but also the ways in which literary language and conventions developed and evolved over time.

Prior to the 20th century, written texts were in hanmun (literary Sinitic or Classical Chinese) and in Korean, known today as Hangeul. The Korean script was created and promulgated in the mid-15th century by King Sejong the Great, the fourth monarch of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), but hanmun continued to be used by the Korean court and literati for scholarly, literary and official purposes until the 20th century in a similar way that Latin was once used across Europe. The Korean script was sidelined as unrefined by many scholar officials who called it ‘eonmun’, which means ‘vernacular script’ but with derogatory connotations in the vein of ‘vulgar writing’. Nevertheless, literary works in Korean by male and female authors of different social backgrounds flourished from the mid-Joseon period alongside hanmun literature. The very first work composed using the Korean script was Yongbiocheonga (Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven, 1445-1447), a rare epic verse of 125 cantos that proclaim and celebrate the foundation of the Joseon dynasty and the heroic achievements of the six immediate ancestors of King Sejong. Commissioned by the king, it was written in Korean with the corresponding hanmun with full glosses and detailed annotations by a group of scholar officials around the same time as the promulgation of the Korean script which was originally known as Hunminjeongeum (Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People). While written literature in Korean date from this time, vernacular traditions such as the Korean verse forms sijo, gasa and sogyo can be traced back to the Goryeo period when they were recited or sung – records of which survived through historical texts, musical notation books and literary anthologies. Other oral traditions include folktales that were later written down and compiled in literary collections in the modern era for posterity, and some became popular as pansori – a traditional Korean genre of musical storytelling designated as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage – that thrived in the late Joseon period.

In addition to oral traditions and lyrical forms including vernacular songs and poetry, there are also wide-ranging genres of Korean prose literature. Literary narratives of foundation myths, legends and biographies have survived through official and unofficial histories since the Goryeo period, and personal jottings commonly known as japki (literary miscellany) or supil (essay) have a longstanding tradition

in East Asian literary history. Fiction emerged relatively late, in the Joseon period, and though it was marginalised in official discourses it became a popular genre from the 17th century onwards. Works of classical fiction known today as gojeon soseol were written in both hanmun and Korean by authors known and unknown from different social backgrounds. Historical documents and private records attest to the rising popularity of fiction from the 17th century, with the emergence of circulating libraries in the 18th century catering to a diverse range of readers including women who were among the primary audience of vernacular fiction.

Korean Literature in the Modern Era

With modernisation and new conceptions of Korean nationalism that developed in the late 19th century, more widespread usage of Korean in print culture was advocated which changed the Korean literary landscape in significant ways in the 20th century. New literary forms such as the short story, novel and modern poetry were introduced from the West via Japan during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) and became established as mainstream literature in Korea as they did in many parts of the world with the rise of Western imperialism. Realist modes of writing were and have been predominant, though different styles of experimental or genre-bending literature were also produced and developed at different junctures in time since the early 20th century. Literary fiction (short stories and novels), non-fiction (prose essays) and poetry have continued to be the main forms of Korean literature, while genre fiction (crime, mystery, science fiction, fantasy, etc.), hybrid and electronic or digital literature (including web novels and webtoons) have gained currency more recently in the 21st century. Historically, including the 20th century, men were the primary authors and participants in the Korean literary field, but this has changed since the 1990s in South Korea with the surge of acclaimed women writers.

As Dr Seunghye Sun, Director of the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC) UK mentions in her essay in this catalogue, the modern period for Korea, and by extension Korean modernity, is defined by the collective trauma of colonisation. Division and civil war that followed immediately after Korea's liberation from Japanese annexation also changed the modern landscape of Korea considerably. The trauma of colonisation for Koreans was intensified by the fact that Korea was annexed not by a geographically and culturally distant European nation, but by a neighbouring country, with which Korea had had cultural exchange and shared traditions, who chose to get ahead of the curve and align with Western powers to avoid what they believed was necessary to fight against Western imperialism. Japan's annexation of Korea, supported by Western nations, brought about major

changes to a country that had its own monarchy system with long successive dynasties and a distinctive cultural identity for centuries. Not long after liberation in 1945, the division of Korea into North and South and the civil war further exacerbated Koreans' collective trauma in an era when the world was changing rapidly with new technological advancements and globalisation.

It is not surprising that modern Korean literature has been commonly discussed in relation to Korea's socio-political history, from the Japanese colonial period, Korean civil war (1950-1953) and division, to (in the case of South Korea) socio-economic developments, military rule (1960s-1980s) and democratisation (1990s onwards). The weighty emphasis on historical contextualisation, though, inadvertently prioritises socio-historical relevance above literary aesthetics and value, and this tendency limited Korean literature's accessibility and appeal to a wider readership outside of Korea before South Korea became a globally recognised powerhouse of K-Culture in more recent times. While many works of modern Korean literature have dealt with the turbulent history of 20th century Korea and culture-specific themes, socio-historical dimensions and reflection are not the only features that define them. As my students over the years have discovered for themselves, the thematic and stylistic scope of modern Korean literature is much more extensive and diverse than meets the eye. For example, Hwang Sok-yong's *The Guest*, Ch'oe Yun's *There a Petal Silently Falls*, and Han Kang's *Human Acts* can be read and appreciated through both the lens of modern Korean history (the legacy of the Korean civil war and the Gwangju uprising of May 1980) as well as their compelling narrative strategies that eloquently convey themes of memory, trauma and the human condition in universal terms. Yi Mun-yol's *The Poet* could be read as a fictionalised biography of the nineteenth century poet Kim Pyong-yon (Kim Sakkat) and to some extent the author himself based on historical events involving sedition by family members, but also as a thought-provoking exploration of artistic creation, survival and freedom. The poetry of Ko Un and Kim Chi-ha (Jiha), former dissidents under the military regime, are impressively diverse and broad-ranging in form and content above and beyond political context.

Following prolific output and developments throughout the last century, Korean writers continue to engage with diverse themes and literary innovations in the 21st century. Works by established as well as newly emerging writers question and deliberate on 'reality' in one of the most dynamic and fast-progressing countries in the world today, and they collectively give voice to evolving ideas of self-identity and Korean identity rooted in historical reflection and cultural tradition.

Korean Literature in the United Kingdom

When we talk about introducing and promoting Korean literature abroad, we are essentially talking about a system of literary production and circulation, for which translation and publication have key roles. There is also the question of reception and representativity that relate to preconceptions or expectations of the reader and what they might find significant or relatable in Korean literature. Before Korean literature in English translation began to be picked up by mainstream (commercial or independent, but non-academic) publishers and more widely distributed and available in bookshops across the country, Korean literary works were not widely read or known in the United Kingdom.

The 2014 London Book Fair (LBF) Korea Market Focus programme played an important role in establishing connections between the British and Korean publishing industry and literary community to help promote Korean literature in the United Kingdom and British literature in Korea. The Professional Programme, in partnership with the British Publishers Association (PA) and the Korean Publishers Association (KPA), offered a forum for those in the trade to learn more about the Korean publishing industry, which also included sessions on translation, publication and globalisation of Korean literature. The Cultural Programme was curated by the British Council and the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea), with additional support from the Arts Council Korea and collaboration with KCCUK and SOAS. This programme involved ten prominent Korean writers, including Nobel Laureate Han Kang, and over 35 panellists of British writers, translators and editors in more than 20 events at 12 venues (including the KCCUK) across four UK cities. There were also talks and events in the year leading up to and after the 2014 LBF with additional Korean authors. All events were well attended with a diverse range of audience members, and a great deal of planning went in to ensure that the Korea Market Focus Programme would serve as a significant foundation from which new opportunities and relationships could be forged and develop between the British and Korean literary industry.

It was also at this time when Deborah Smith, during her postgraduate studies at SOAS, was translating Han Kang's novel, *The Vegetarian*, which was due to be published in January 2015 by Portobello Books and which later went on to win the 2016 Man Booker International Prize. As a passionate and voracious reader of literature and a gifted writer in her own right, Deborah Smith was a significant contributor in putting contemporary Korean fiction on the map in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world where Korean literature had been previously unknown. She continued

to translate works by Han Kang and others Korean authors including Bae Suah, and went on to found Tilted Axis Press, a non-profit publishing house devoted to books that, in her own words, “might not otherwise make it into English.” Along with Deborah Smith, there have been many other talented literary translators in recent years who have actively contributed to introducing Korean literature to the world through their commendable translations in English and many other languages.

Jaemin Cha, the curator of the KCCUK exhibition *Bestselling and Beloved: Korean Literary Treasures* concludes her introduction in this catalogue: “following the global wave of K-pop and film, the next chapter for Korea may lay in literature and art—or perhaps in the hybridisation of the two.” *Bestselling and Beloved* is successful in bringing together these two art forms in an engaging and thoughtful manner, and I applaud the curator and the KCC Director for delivering this wonderful exhibition. Jaemin Cha's concluding line in her piece reminded me of what I wrote down ten years ago in my report on the 2014 LBF Korea Market Focus programme for the LTI Korea's quarterly magazine, *_list: Books from Korea* (Volume 24, Summer 2014). I concluded my report with the following remarks:

While K-pop, film and other cultural forms of the ‘Korean wave’ have enjoyed growing popularity and recognition, Korean literature has been relatively unknown on British shores. Thus, the advent of this year's London Book Fair Korea Market Focus has been timely, and those of us passionate about Korean literature in the UK feel hopeful that new initiatives have started in earnest to encourage future prospects for Korean literature to reach a wider audience in the English-language speaking world.

I am happy to see that my hope has become a reality and remain hopeful that Korean literature and art – and perhaps the hybridisation of the two – will continue to thrive, move and inspire readers, viewers, writers, artists, and translators around the world.

The Hybridisation of Korean Literature and Art

Jaemin Cha

Curator, Korean Cultural Centre UK

The Korean Cultural Centre UK’s *Bestselling and Beloved: Korean Literary Treasures* is the first exhibition in the UK solely dedicated to the theme of Korean literature. Following Han Kang’s 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature her works have been showcased in various places across the world, however this one is particularly distinctive as it presents Korean literature in an exhibition format that envelops the viewer.

This exhibition was originally inspired by the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History’s 2022 exhibition, *A Korean Self-Portrait Read through Best Sellers*, which explored societal reflections through bestsellers of their time. While “bestsellers” served as both the keyword and central motif for *Bestselling and Beloved*, curating such an exhibition for a non-Korean audience presented unusual challenges, particularly due to the limited availability of English translations for Korean literature. Hence, this exhibition has been re-designed and recontextualised, through additional research, to create narratives that are universally engaging, showcasing key literary milestones that have shaped Korean literature’s identity while remaining relatable and intriguing for international audiences.

Structuring Narratives

The exhibition unfolds across five chapters: *Timeless Masterpieces*, *The First Bestseller*, *A Mirror of the Times*, *The Future of Korean Books*, and *Nobel Laureate Han Kang*. Though loosely chronological, the framework is firmly rooted in the thematic emphasis on “bestsellers.” However, due to the constraints of limited time and available information, identifying the trajectory of early Korean literature proved to be a considerable challenge. Furthermore, the use of the term “bestseller” was problematic for the period prior to the publication of sales figures by publishers. So based on consultations with Professor An Sonjae from Sogang University (Brother Anthony of Taizé), the literary works before the 20th century when books couldn’t be easily consumed, were selected for being highly influential or critically acclaimed by critics.

The first English translations of Korean literature include *Korean Folk Tales* (1913) and *The Cloud Dream of the Nine* (1922), translated by James Scarth Gale. Taking Kim Manjung’s *The Cloud Dream of the Nine* as a starting point, highlights in *Timeless Masterpieces* include Korean classics such as *The Tale of Hong Gildong* and *The Story of Chunhyang*. These works not only epitomise Korea’s literary heritage but also showcase their enduring influence through adaptations into films, dramas,

and animations. Furthermore, the section on modernist poet Yi Sang reflects his avant-garde impact on Korean literature and his perpetual legacy in various artistic domains. As one of the most beloved and cherished poets, Yoon Dongju and his selected works are also featured in this exhibition, brought to life through animation and virtual reality (VR).

The exhibition further delves into societal transformations through Jeong Bi-seok’s *Madame Freedom* (1954), which exemplifies the socio-cultural tensions of its era while becoming Korea’s first bestseller to surpass 100,000 copies. Other featured works include Kim Chan-sam’s *The Record of Traveling around the World without Money* (1962), Korea’s first travelogue bestseller, with its resemblance to *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which potentially captures the tastes of British audiences.

Subsequent bestsellers of the 20th century were selected based on a recommended reading list from Professor An Sonjae, and a list from Han Ki-ho’s *Bestsellers of 30 Years* (2011) and the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. This section of the exhibition offers visitors an opportunity to reflect on the social conditions of the era through the books beloved by many, by juxtaposing the societal landscapes of Korea from the 1960s to the 1990s. This part was designed to allow viewers to have a comparative experience of the books and the social contexts that shaped them.

The Future of Korean Books explores the globalisation of Korean literature, marked by the establishment of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea in 1995 and the Korean Wave’s proliferation since the 2000s. The exhibition features recent English translations curated in collaboration with Foyles, a leading UK bookstore, to reflect local readership trends. Visitors are also invited to recommend Korean books they love, leaving the exhibition as open-ended for its duration.

The final and most celebrated section of the exhibition, *Nobel Laureate Han Kang*, spotlights the author whose works have garnered global acclaim. After witnessing Han Kang’s composed and humane demeanour following the announcement of her award, using her own writing seemed far more appropriate than relying on elaborate critiques or the voice of an institution. English translations of her books are displayed alongside their original Korean texts, allowing visitors to explore the linguistic nuances and poetic depth of her prose. At the same time, Han Kang’s evocative words projected on the exhibition wall emerge and dissipate like winter snow, creating a multisensory literary experience.

Literature, Text-based Work in the Exhibition Space

The pivotal moment while preparing the Han Kang section was determining how to visually transform the essence of literature—words or the text. Typically, as a curator, it is common to present an exhibition and then unpack it through words of text. However, this exhibition required the reverse process: taking the text, in the form of books, and visualising it as an exhibit.

Unlike traditional curatorial practices that prioritise visual or material artifacts, this exhibition reimagines text itself as an object of artistic contemplation. Hence, the text enveloping the exhibition space not only serves as being *audience friendly* explanatory descriptions, but also as a central element of the exhibition - a work of art in itself, akin to installation art. For example, in *Timeless Masterpieces*, the texts of *Goryeo songs* (classical Korean poetry) are displayed alongside other literature works, transcending temporal boundaries to illustrate literature’s universality.

Visitors to the exhibition will see how the Han Kang section utilised text as a primary visual medium for conveying ideas, much like conceptual art practices. By focusing on the essence of literature—the author’s books and its passages—the exhibition aimed to create storytelling through the display of these texts. While successfully generating visual representations of Han Kang’s poetic language, this approach allowed the text to be experienced not just as something to be read, but as something to be seen and felt, offering the audience a new interpretative experience and an opportunity for further engagement.

An exhibition where the writers and the readers coexist

At its heart, this exhibition is a dialogue between writers, translators, their works, and their audiences. The exhibition space is designed to resemble an actual book: the inner area of the exhibition space, painted in cream colour, represents the white pages of a book, while the outer section, like a book’s front and back covers, serves as an introduction that is typically browsed before reading. Also, for the exhibition with a theme of literature, this interactive element between books and readers seemed to be particularly significant. Visitors to the exhibition can choose the amount of time they spend with the books and how they engage with them beyond observation - by allowing the audience to touch the books, sit on the chairs at exhibition tables, and read at leisure. This immersive aesthetic experience of Korean literature transforms passive spectatorship into more active and autonomous participation.

Conclusion

Although they are different genres, both art and literature share the commonality of decoding the phenomena of their time. The works included in this exhibition, totalling around 60 pieces, could never fully represent the universality nor encapsulate the vast trajectory of Korean literature. However, the exhibition aims to bridge the common ground between literature and art, connecting two distinct languages—Korean and English—and providing an opportunity to introduce Korean identity, the sensitivity of being Korean, and the essence of Korean culture through visual, auditory, and tactile experiences to audiences in the UK.



Bestselling and Beloved (2024), Courtesy the Korean Cultural Centre UK. Photo Credit: Applecrumble Studio

Another significant insight and achievement from organising this exhibition was the discovery of the close and collaborative relationship between the art and literature world. This became evident through the generous support of various art galleries, museums, libraries, and publishing companies who contributed to the project. While curating this exhibition, I realised that art and literature are not just distinct disciplines but deeply interconnected and mutually supportive collaborators. As Han Kang expressed, “Language is the thread that connects us.” The linguistic language of literature and the visual language of art are all interconnected, serving as the ultimate medium that links people—whether in Korea, the UK, or across the globe.

Approximately two weeks after preparations for this exhibition began in earnest, Han Kang was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature—a historic and transformative event. What could have remained merely an idea was brought to fruition alongside this remarkable news. This extraordinary coincidence illuminates a very interesting revelation: following the global wave of K-pop and film, the next chapter for Korea may lay in literature and art—or perhaps in the hybridisation of the two.





Part 1. Timeless Masterpieces

Before the invention of Hangeul, Koreans used Chinese characters to express their ideas and emotions in written form. After the creation of Hangeul, women and lower-middle-class men, who had been largely excluded from classical literature, learned Hangeul and began participating in literature as both readers and creators. By the mid-to-late Joseon Dynasty, even the nobility had begun producing outstanding literary works in Hangeul. With the transition to the modern era, creating and enjoying literature in Hangeul became the norm.

Korean literature developed and advanced not only in universal genres such as classical Chinese poetry and novels but also in uniquely Korean forms such as *Hyangga* (vernacular poems), *Goryeo gayo* (Goryeo-era songs), *Sijo* and *Gasa* (traditional Korean verse), and *Pansori* (epic storytelling through song). This literature predominantly reflects themes rooted in folk humour, the emotion of *han* (a profound sense of sorrow and resentment), shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, often exploring topics of moral retribution and the principle of cause and effect.

During the Japanese colonial period, Korean literature evolved to incorporate elements of resistance, and emotions like *han* were expressed in a sensory and unique Korean style. In particular, the 1930s and 1940s saw the introduction of new trends in Korean literature, with realism and modernism becoming prominent. Notable works from this period include *Takryu* (*Turbid Rivers*) by Chae Man-sik, *Wings* by Yi Sang, and *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* by Park Tae-won. After liberation in 1945, the primary focus of post-war literature was on the theme of ‘the nation.’ Following the Korean War, literature began addressing the wounds of recent decades, whilst also exposing political corruption and the resistance to it.

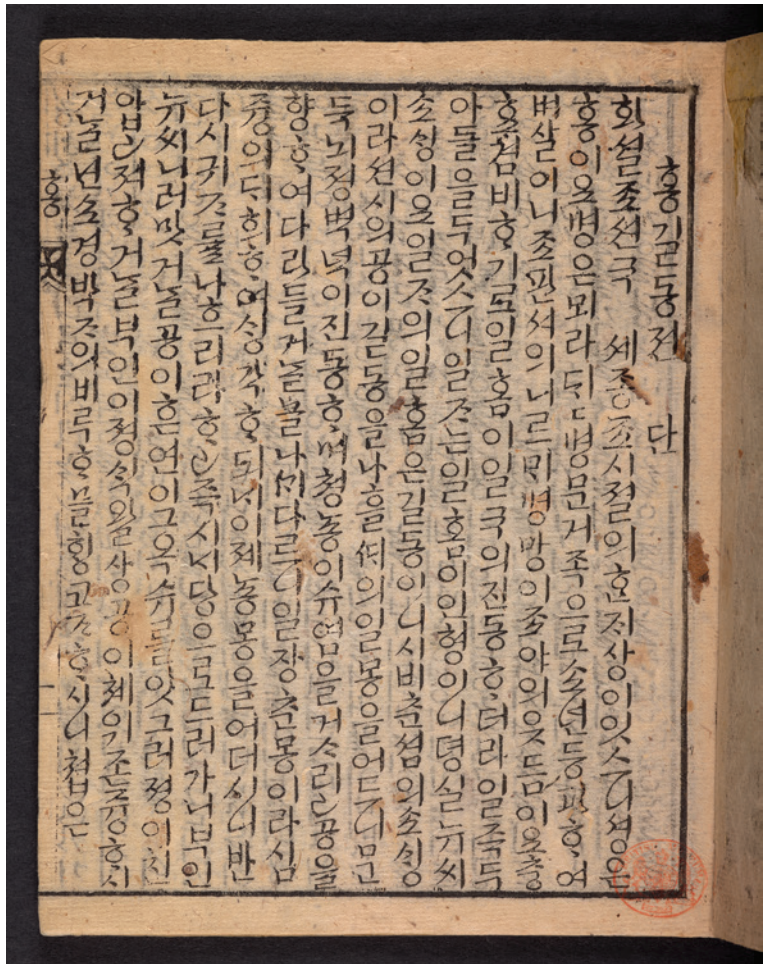


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A Digital Copy of *The Tale of Hong Gildong*, Heo Gyun, 1571
 Courtesy of the British Library Board (15260.c.11)

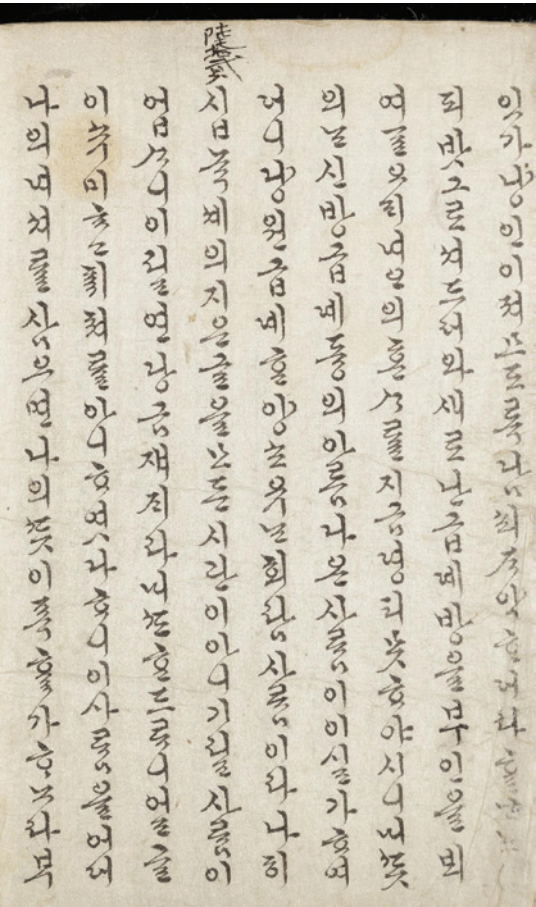
Foundations of Korean Literature: Iconic Works and Their Cultural Significance

The Tale of Hong Gildong (홍길동전) holds a significant place in literary history as the first Korean-language novel. In terms of narrative, it follows the ‘life story of a hero’ structure. Unlike most classical hero novels, which convey conservative and ideological themes, *The Tale of Hong Gildong* is primarily notable for its spirit of resistance against discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate sons, as well as against corrupt officials.

The protagonist, Hong Gildong, is born as the illegitimate son of Minister Hong in a society with strict discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children. He harbours deep resentment over not being able to call his father ‘father’ or his older brother ‘brother.’ Additionally, because his mother belongs to the *nobi* class (servile class in the Joseon Dynasty), he is barred from taking the civil service exam, no matter how much he studies. Feeling the injustices of society, Gildong becomes the leader of a band of thieves. He names his group *Hwalbindang* (The League of Those Who Help the Needy) and punishes corrupt officials while aiding the common people, be a righteous outlaw. The government attempts to capture him, but Gildong eludes them with his remarkable, almost supernatural abilities.

Eventually, the court persuades his father and brother to appeal to Gildong, and he promises never to set foot in Joseon again if he is granted the position of *Byeongjo Panseo* (equivalent to the present-day Minister of Defence). Leaving Joseon, Gildong and his followers establish an ideal kingdom called *Yuldoguk*.

The Cloud Dream of the Nine (구운몽) by Kim Man-jung follows the story of Seongjin, a young Buddhist monk who encounters eight celestial maidens and goes on to enjoy worldly wealth and splendour—only to awaken and realise it was all a dream. This classic tale embodies a Buddhist view of life, emphasising the fleeting nature of human glory and success. Structured as a ‘reality-dream-reality’ narrative, it reflects the illusory nature of worldly desires.



The Cloud Dream of the Nine (구운몽), Kim Man-jung, 1687
 Courtesy of Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies



Bestselling and Beloved (2024), Courtesy the Korean Cultural Centre UK. Photo Credit: Applecrumble Studio

In the 18th century, *pansori* (판소리계 소설, *Pansori* Novels) emerged as a form of popular literature for the people. *Pansori* is an oral narrative art form, performed by a vocalist (gwangdae) and a drummer (gosu), bridging the worlds of oral literature, performance, and music. By the early 18th century, the verses sung in *pansori* began to be transcribed, giving rise to the genre known as *pansori* novels.

Ch'unhyangjeon (춘향전) is a quintessential *pansori* novel, with a story on the surface that portrays a woman's steadfast loyalty in love. Beneath this, however, lies a satire of societal injustices and a call for human liberation, subtly challenging the social structures of the time.

Yi Sang: A Pioneer of Surrealism and Self-Conscious Literature in Korea



Yi Sang: Selected Works (Eng), Yi Sang / Jack Jung, Don Mee Choi, Sawako Nakayasu, Joyelle McSweeney, 1930s / 2020, Courtesy of Wave Books. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

Yi Sang was a poet and novelist who authored works such as *Crow's-Eye View*, *The Wings* and *Mirror* during the Japanese colonial period. Born in 1910 and passing away in 1937, Yi Sang, as well as being a surrealist poet is recognised as a pioneer of self-conscious literature in Korea during the 1930s era of global literary introspection.

Yi Sang's literature is imbued with elements of sensory confusion and objective chance, characteristics that lend his poetry a certain complexity. This quality is influenced by his personal temperament, environment, and autobiographical experiences, reflecting his tragic and intellectual response to reality. His work initiated a significant shift in Korean poetry, opening up new realms in modern verse.

Yi Sang's intellectual approach delves into the inner consciousness and introduces mechanisms of the unconscious into poetry, thereby expanding the territory of poetic themes. His work exhibits

a strong surrealist tone, driven by a desire to escape repressive reality and frustration, and often presents a powerless self-struggling to transcend logical thought. His works *Mirror* and *The Wings* are exemplary of this tendency.

Mirror is a work that embodies surrealist characteristics, such as the fragmentation of consciousness and automatic writing. Yi Sang, with his distinctive observational power, employs the symmetrical quality of the mirror to represent the experience of self-division faced by modern individuals. This poem thus portrays the process of self-fragmentation and the perception of it, symbolising the paradoxical essence of existence.

Crow's-Eye View is a series of enigmatic poems by the Korean poet Yi Sang, serialised in *Jo-seon Chungang Ilbo* from 24 July to 8 August, 1934. Originally planned to be in 30 parts, it was abruptly cut short after 15 parts due to reader complaints, as they found the content incomprehensible.

Poem No. 1 is the first poem of *Crow's-Eye View* and is known for its difficulty and diverse interpretations. According to Professor Kwon Young-min, by using the perspective of a crow flying in the sky, the core theme of the poem is to point out the corruption and contradictions in human society that cause humankind to inevitably perceive others as objects of fear.



Yoon Dongju is a poet whose verses are cherished by Koreans, remembered by East Asians, and resonate universally. Despite the harsh realities of colonial rule, Yoon was a young poet who sought direction for his era and life through literature. Arrested under charges of independence activism, he passed away at the young age of 27 in Fukuoka Prison, Japan, on 26 February 1945. Yet, he endures in our hearts as one of the most beautiful poets and idealistic young souls. Through poems like *Foreword*, *The Cross*, and *Night of Counting the Stars*, he revealed the presence of a pure and clear spirit in this world. Even in a period when Japan's colonial rule was intensifying and the Korean language was strictly forbidden, Yoon resolutely wrote in Korean with a heart that "loved all things that were dying". Yoon Dongju's poetry, grounded in self-reflection and a commitment to conviction, has been a source of inspiration for generations. His life and work continue to serve as both a wellspring and mirror, reflecting the soul of our society.



Yoon Dongju (1910-1945)
A young poet who sought direction for his era and life through literature.



서서
죽는 날까지 하늘을 우러러
한 점 부끄럼에도 없기를,
일본에 사는 아랍인도
나는 괴로워한다.
별을 노래하는 마음으로
모든 죽어 가는 것을 사랑하며,
그래도 나한테 주어진 길을
걸어가야겠다.
오늘 밤에도 잠이 파랗게 스며들곤
한다.

Foreword
Writing not to have
so much as a speck of shame
toward heaven until the day I die,
I offend, even when the wind stings the beam.
With my heart singing to the stars,
I shall love all things that are dying.
And I must walk the road
that has been given to me.
Tonight, again the stars are
breathed by the wind.

Yoon Dongju (1910-1945)
A young poet who sought direction for his era and life through literature.



Yoon Dongju (1910-1945)
A young poet who sought direction for his era and life through literature.

Park Mok and Yoon Dongju were members of Chongsong-ga (청송가, the Blue Cross School), a group of poets, including Cho Joon and Park Dae-gi, around whom the 1940s generation in which they were formed, through each poet had a distinct style, their work was grounded in social awareness and humanism. Early in his career, Park Mok wrote poetry as a new trend in Korean literature by expanding literary boundaries and wonder through folk songs and dialectal language.

After his experiences during the Korean War, Park Mok's style evolved. He delved away from sentimental and lyrical tones, instead incorporating the pain, death, and awareness of everyday life into his poetry (the collection *Sandwich*) (1958, *Walt Whitman* and *New City* (1964 *Outside and Other Poems*), where he aimed to portray the shifting human responses to both the joys and sorrows of life.

In his later work, Park returned to vivid, colloquial language, using it to express the richness and vitality of local culture. Park's poetry, particularly in his later work, reveals a profound love for the land, proven through his recognition of the ever-present threat of death.

Source: *Yoon Dongju: A Poet's Journey*



Yoon Dongju and Park Mok-wol: Poetic Voices of Resistance, Reflection, and the Human Spirit



Foreword, Yoon Dongju, 1948. Photo Credit: Applecrumble Studio



One Night I Count the Stars (Media), Yoon Dongju, 1948 / 2023, Courtesy of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

Yoon Dongju is a poet whose verses are cherished by Koreans, remembered by East Asians, and resonate universally. Despite the harsh realities of colonial rule, Yoon was a young poet who sought direction for his era and life through literature. Arrested under charges of independence activism, he passed away at the young age of 27 in Fukuoka Prison, Japan, on 26 February 1945. Yet, he endures in our hearts as one of the most beautiful poets and idealistic young souls. Through poems like *Foreword*, *The Cross*, and *Night of*

Counting the Stars, he revealed the presence of a pure and clear spirit in this world. Even in a period when Japan’s colonial rule was intensifying and the Korean language was strictly forbidden, Yoon resolutely wrote in Korean with a heart that “loved all things that were dying”. Yoon Dongju’s poetry, grounded in self-reflection and a commitment to conviction, has been a source of inspiration for generations. His life and work continue to serve as both a wellspring and mirror, reflecting the soul of our society.

Foreword is a work that embodies a pure heart’s quest for a beautiful and peaceful world, conveyed in concise and evocative language. The poem is spatially divided into celestial and earthly realms. In terms of conflict, it depicts the separation and unification of the self, torn between the suffering reality-bound self and the essential self, yearning for a serene and beautiful celestial world. The realistic self struggles with the disparity between ideals and reality, but through its orientation toward the celestial realm, it regains the essential self, pursuing the world of peace and purity that it has always longed for.

One Night I Count the Stars is a poem that was written during the Japanese colonial era, when Japan was insisting that Korean people change their names to Japanese. Therefore, the word ‘name’ written eight times in this poem has a deep political connotation, specifically to resist Japan’s colonial policy. The innate pain and suffering during this era made the poet examine his own existence and origins.

Park Mok-wol began his career as a member of *Cheongrok-pa* (청록파, the Blue Deer School), a group of three poets, including Cho Jihoon and Park Dujin, named after the 1946 anthology in which they were featured. Though each poet had a distinct style, their work was grounded in natural description and human aspiration. Early in his career, Park Mok-wol’s poetry set a new trend in Korean literature by expressing childlike innocence and wonder through folk songs and dialectal language.

After his experiences during the Korean War, Park’s style evolved. He shifted away from sentimental and lyrical tones, instead incorporating the pain, death, and monotony of everyday life into his poetry. His collections *Sandohwa* (산도화, Wild Peach Blossoms) and *Nan, Gita* (난, 기타 Orchids and Other Poems) reflect his artistic aim to portray the shifting human responses to both the joys and sorrows of life.

In his later work, Park returned to vivid, colloquial language, using it to express the richness and vitality of local culture. Park’s poetry, particularly in his later works, reveals a profound love for life that persists despite his recognition of the ever-present threat of death.

(Source: Literature Translation Institute of Korea)



A collection of Park Mok-wol’s unpublished poems, Park Mok-wol, 1939-1970s, Courtesy of Professor Park Mok-wol. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

Part 2. The First Bestseller

Madame Freedom, written by Jeong Bi-seok, was first serialised in the Seoul Shinmun newspaper on 1 January 1954. The novel, both in its themes and widespread popularity, came to represent Korea in the 1950s. Even before the newspaper serialisation was completed, Volume One was published and sold 3,000 copies on its release day. Volume Two was released after the serialisation had ended, becoming the first book in post-Liberation Korea to surpass 100,000 copies in sales.

The novel’s immense success led to multiple film adaptations, with the first, released in 1956, becoming the highest-grossing film of the year. *Madame Freedom* captures a pivotal moment in Korean society, portraying the tensions between traditional values and the growing influence of Western culture. The controversy it sparked reflects the shifting social landscape of the era, making it a striking mirror of its time.

(Source: National Museum of Korean Contemporary History)



Madame Freedom, Jeong Bi-seok, First edition 1954 / 2013, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

The First Bestseller

Part 2. The First Bestseller

Madame Freedom, authored by Jeong Bi-seok, was serialised by the Seoul Shinmun newspaper starting from 1 January 1954. The novel, in terms of content and popularity, symbolised Korea in the 1950s. Volume One was published before the newspaper serial was completed, and the first edition sold 3,000 copies on its first day of release. Volume Two came out after the run in the newspaper was over, and it became the first book in Korea post Liberation to sell more than 100,000 copies. The popularity of the novel led to a series of movies, the first of which was produced in 1956 and was that year's biggest box office hit.

The story offers a glimpse of Korean society in the 1950s, as traditional values and Western lifestyles were jumbled together and at odds with one another. The fact that the novel created a great stir in Korean society offers a clue as to the social atmosphere of the era, while making this book truly a self-portrait of its time.



Part 3. A Mirror of the Times

1960s: Criticism and Resistance

One of the important aspects in the development of Korea’s reading culture is the production and reading of books that promote citizens’ critical mindedness. This is borne out by the inextricable link between *Sasanggye* (World of Thought) magazine and the April 19 Revolution in 1960 as well as by numerous history and social science publications put out in the 1970s and 80s.

1970s: In the shadow of Industrialisation and Urbanisation

Korea in the 1970s differed from the previous period in many ways. Firstly, a new youth culture emerged, symbolised by “blue jeans, acoustic guitars, and draft beer”. The “Hangeul (Korean alphabet) generation” became the mainstream in the book market. With economic growth being accelerated by industrialisation, certain literary works were able to capture the public sentiment amidst these changes.

It is hard to refer to some books as ‘bestsellers’ during this era because Korean publishers didn’t announce accurate sales figures, however some works portraying the realities of the marginalised were critically acclaimed and highly influential.

1980s: Time of Political Turmoil

After the Gwangju Democratic Movement in May 1980 and the political instability of Korea’s Fifth Republic (1981-1988), Korean citizens became increasingly politically aware. This can be seen in the popularity of books such as *Human Market* (Kim Hong-shin) or *Five Thieves* (Kim Ji-ha). By 1988, the government also allowed the publication of literary works written before the Liberation by authors who had either been abducted by or had defected to North Korea.

Late 1980s: The Arrival of a New Era

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, ideological conflicts started to wane while support for capitalism grew stronger. The concern of the general population also began to move away from issues of ethnicity, nation, ideology, and society, turning instead toward individual concerns. Books on economics and practical self-improvement gained popularity, becoming mainstays in reading trends.

Furthermore, Epic novels such as *Jang Gil-san* or *The Taebaek Mountains* gained their popularity during the 1980s. People welcomed the blurred boundaries between historical fact and literary fiction.

1990s: The Wave of Globalisation

With the 1990s ideological debates in Korea began to subside, and the social climate shifted to focus more on individual concerns. In this environment economics and practical learning books became a firmly established reading genre. With the rise of ‘globalisation’ and the ‘cyber era’ marked by rapid information flow, some of these economics and self-help books rapidly rose up the bestseller lists.

In 1997, Korea faced a financial crisis that stretched over several years, forcing the country to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. Many people were suddenly left unemployed due to the severely weakened national economy. This shifting environment also influenced the publishing industry, with a surge in books on economics, business management, personal conduct, and practical skills quickly emerging.

(Source: National Museum of Korean Contemporary History)



Voices of Change: Korean Literature through times of Struggle and Transformation

In 1962, Kim Chan-sam published *The Record of Traveling around the World without Money*, Korea’s first bestselling travel book. Between 1958 and 1961, he journeyed through 59 countries across Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East. Following his travels, he contributed a series of articles accompanied by photographs to a daily newspaper. These articles were well received by readers, which led to their compilation into a book after the serialisation ended.



Yeong-Ja’s Heydays, Cho Sun-jak, 1974, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Non Possession, Monk Beopjeong, 1976, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

At a time when Koreans had limited opportunities to travel abroad, this travelogue ignited the public’s curiosity about the world beyond their borders. For its time, the book held a significance comparable to Marco Polo’s accounts of his voyages to the East.

A few years later, in 1966, Jeon Hye-rin published *And Said Nothing*, an essay that captured her internal struggles and resistance to the constraints of everyday life. Widely read throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, the work became a voice for those grappling with the limits imposed by society, reflecting a time of growing tension and change

In 1974, Cho Sun-jak’s *Yeong-Ja’s Heydays* offered a stark portrayal of a young woman from the countryside who moves to Seoul in search of a better life. She begins as a domestic servant, then becomes a bus conductress, but after a tragic accident leaves her without an arm, she ends up in a red-light district, where her life takes a tragic turn. Through this novel, Cho paints a vivid picture of the marginalised lives of individuals caught in the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of Korea during the 1970s.

A couple of years later, in 1976, the Buddhist monk Beopjeong published *Non Possession*, an essay that went on to become both a bestseller and a long-standing favourite, selling over three million copies before being withdrawn from print in 2010, in accordance with his final wishes. In this work, Beopjeong reflects on the frantic pace of modern civilisation, the absence of true refinement, and



The Record of Traveling around the World without Money, Kim Chan-sam, 1962, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



And Said Nothing, Jeon Hye-rin, 1966, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Five Thieves, Kim Ji-ha, 1985, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Dawn of Labour, Park No-hae, 1984, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



With a Burning Thirst, Kim Ji-ha, 1982, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

the relentless pursuit of wealth. *Non Possession* resonated deeply with Koreans, particularly during the economic crisis of the late 1990s, a period marked by instability. The book remained on the bestseller list for five consecutive years, from 1996 to 2000, highlighting its lasting impact.

In the realm of poetry, the 1970s saw the rise of Kim Ji-ha’s *Five Thieves*, first published in 1970 in a literary magazine that played a significant role in the South Korean literary scene during the 1970s and 1980s. This poem, known for its sharp social critique, was a bold departure from traditional forms and opened new horizons in the realm of social commentary. Kim Ji-ha’s *With a Burning Thirst*, which was also written during this period, echoed the disillusionment of the time and resonated with students and intellectuals who longed for democracy amidst political oppression.

Similarly, Park No-hae’s *Dawn of Labour*, the title poem of his first poetry collection published in 1984, became a milestone in the literary landscape. With a poignant critique of the harsh labour conditions in the Guro Industrial Complex, Park No-hae’s work voiced the aspirations and frustrations of the working class. The poem expressed a desire for a humane and dignified life, even while acknowledging the painful realities of industrial labour. *Dawn of Labour* went on to sell nearly a million copies, marking a significant turning point in 1980s popular literature and playing a key role in shaping social change during that time.

Pen and Power: The Transformative Impact of Korean Literature



Human Market 1-10, Kim Hong-shin, First edition 1981-1985 / 1983-1985, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Applecrumble Studio

In 1980, *The Human Market* by Kim Hong-shin was serialised in *Weekly Hankook* before being published as a book the following year. The novel quickly became a bestseller, selling over a million copies. Spanning two parts and a total of twenty volumes, its popularity was immediate—the first volume alone sold 100,000 copies upon release. By 1984, when Volume 7 of Part 1 was published, cumulative sales had already surpassed one million. Ultimately, the complete twenty-volume series sold more than 5.6 million copies, making the promotional claim that it was “*the best-selling book since the creation of the Korean alphabet*” an undeniable fact. Its widespread appeal also led to adaptations for film, television, and theatre.

The extraordinary success of *The Human Market* was a testament to its status as a true bestseller, striking a chord with readers by reflecting the

social realities and collective aspirations of the time. The protagonist, Jang Chong-chan, took a stand against corruption and lawlessness, resonating deeply with a public disillusioned by injustice. Some even likened him to a “*modern-day Hong Gildong*”, a Robin Hood-like folk hero, while others saw him as a Messianic figure.

This intersection of history, fiction, and social commentary is also evident in Lee Mun-yol’s *Samgukji*, a faithful reinterpretation of Luo Guanzhong’s *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Luo’s work itself was an adaptation of Chen Shou’s *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, which evolved over time through oral storytelling, poetry, and folklore. Integrating various sources, Luo refined discrepancies and toned-down deified portrayals, balancing historical accuracy with narrative appeal.

In the same vein, *Samgukji* carefully examines deviations from official histories, offering an annotated interpretation (*pyeongyeok*) rather than a simple retelling. This approach not only preserves the essence of the classic but also allows contemporary readers to engage with its insights in a modern context.

A similar fusion of history and fiction defines Jin Yong’s celebrated martial arts novels. His *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, and *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre* were published in Korea under the collective title *Yeongungmun*, quickly earning a place as cherished classics. Seamlessly blending historical events with vivid storytelling, these novels showcase Jin Yong’s distinctive style through dynamic martial arts scenes and memorable characters.

Set against the backdrop of the Song, Jin, and Yuan dynasties, these works explore the essence of loyalty (yi) and virtue (dao), as exemplified

by heroes devoted to a greater cause. Much like *Samgukji*, they reflect on the struggles between power and morality, offering timeless themes that continue to captivate readers across generations.



Samgukji (Lee Mun-yol’s Romance of the Three Kingdoms), Lee Mun-yol, 1988, Minumsa, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



The Legend of the Condor Heroes, Jin Yong, 1986, Goryeowon, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

The Evolution of Korean Literature: Reading and Culture in an Era of Change

In the 1990s, the rapid expansion of computer use and the rise of PC communication marked the dawn of the “cyber era.” With this shift came a transformation in how books were produced and consumed. One notable example is *A Record of Exorcism* by engineer Lee Woo-hyeok, which was first serialised as an internet novel through the PC communication service Hi-Tel in 1993. Its enormous success led to a book publication in 1994, selling over ten million copies. This was considered a groundbreaking moment that changed the landscape of literary publishing in Korea.



A Record of Exorcism, Lee Woo-hyeok, 1994, Dulnyouk, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

This transformation in how literature was consumed paralleled the rise of *My Cultural Heritage Discoveries* by Yu Hong-jun, published in 1993. The book’s unprecedented success marked a milestone, as it became the first work in the Humanities and Liberal Arts category to sell over one million copies. With the growing interest in cultural enrichment throughout the 1990s, the book inspired a fresh appreciation for Korea’s historical sites and traditions. This cultural shift also impacted the way Koreans approached travel, encouraging a deeper exploration of the nation’s heritage rather than just leisure tourism. The book coined phrases like “The entire country is a museum” and “You only see what you know about,” which left a lasting impression on the public.



My Cultural Heritage Discoveries, Yu Hong-jun, 1993, 1994, Changbi Publishers, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

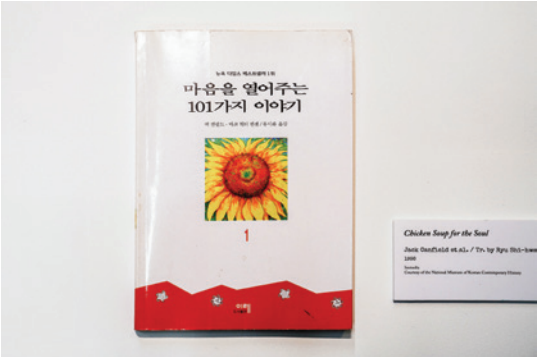
The year 1993 also saw the release of *The Rose of Sharon Bloomed* by Kim Jin-myung, a bestseller inspired by the issue of nuclear proliferation and the themes of national sovereignty, technology,



The Rose of Sharon Bloomed, Kim Jin-myung, 1993, Hainaim, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Seopyeonje, Lee Cheong-jun, 1993, Yolimwon, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



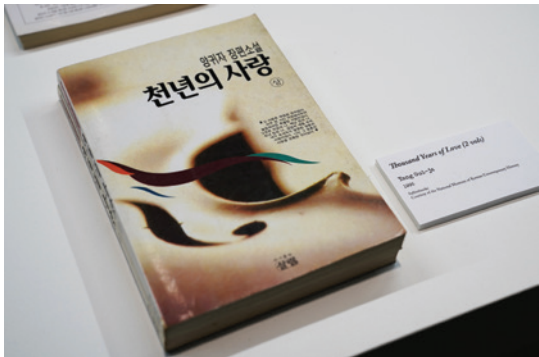
Chicken Soup for the Soul, Jack Canfield et al. / Tr. by Ryu Shi-hwa, 1998, Iremedia, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Donguibogam (3 vols), Lee Eun-seong, First edition 1990 / 1991, Changbi Publishers, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Jang Gil-san, Hwang Sok-yong, First edition 1983-1984 / 1985-1987, Changbi Publishers (Hyeonamsa), Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



Thousand Years of Love, Yang Gui-ja, 1995, Sallimbooks, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park



The Taebaek Mountains (10 vols), Jo Jung-rae, First edition 1986-1989/ 1995, Hangilsa Publishing Co., Ltd, Courtesy of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Photo Credit: Dohee Park

and power. Named after South Korea’s national flower, the novel captured the national imagination, selling over four million copies in its first year and later being adapted into a film.

Similarly, *Seopyeonje* became a cultural touchstone, expressing the universal sentiment of *han* (한) through the lives of a wandering pansori singer and his children. The novel portrayed the deep-rooted emotional and artistic aspirations of Koreans, encapsulating the ethos of the time through the lens of this ancient art form.

Other works, such as *Donguibogam* (Principles and Practice of Eastern Medicine), *Tojong Bigyeol* (The Secrets of Tojong), and *Mokminsimseo* (Admonitions on Governing the People), were seen as practical guides for readers. These texts, often considered self-help books, provided valuable life lessons. For instance, *Donguibogam* recounts the story of Heo Jun, a Joseon Dynasty official who rose from humble beginnings as the son of a concubine, illustrating the potential for personal success through determination.

In the realm of gender and literature, the 1990s marked a significant turning point for female writers. Traditionally, Korean women writers had been categorised separately with the term *yeoryu*, meaning “of the female persuasion,” which undermined the recognition of their work. However, by the 1980s, greater access to higher education for women paved the way for more female voices in the literary and publishing worlds. By the 1990s, writers such as Yang Gui-ja and Kim Yoon-hee

gained prominence, and female readers became a powerful force in the market. As discussions around “women’s liberation” and “feminism” gained traction in the media, the term “woman author” gradually faded, with “author” becoming the standard designation for all writers.

The 1997 financial crisis had a profound effect on reading habits in Korea. In response to the economic downturn, there was an increased demand for books on economics, finance, and personal development as people sought practical knowledge to navigate the crisis. At the same time, many readers turned to books like *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (1996) by Jack Canfield, which provided emotional comfort during uncertain times. These works of reassurance offered a much-needed escape for individuals worn down by the stresses of daily life, reflecting the resilience of the Korean people in a time of hardship.

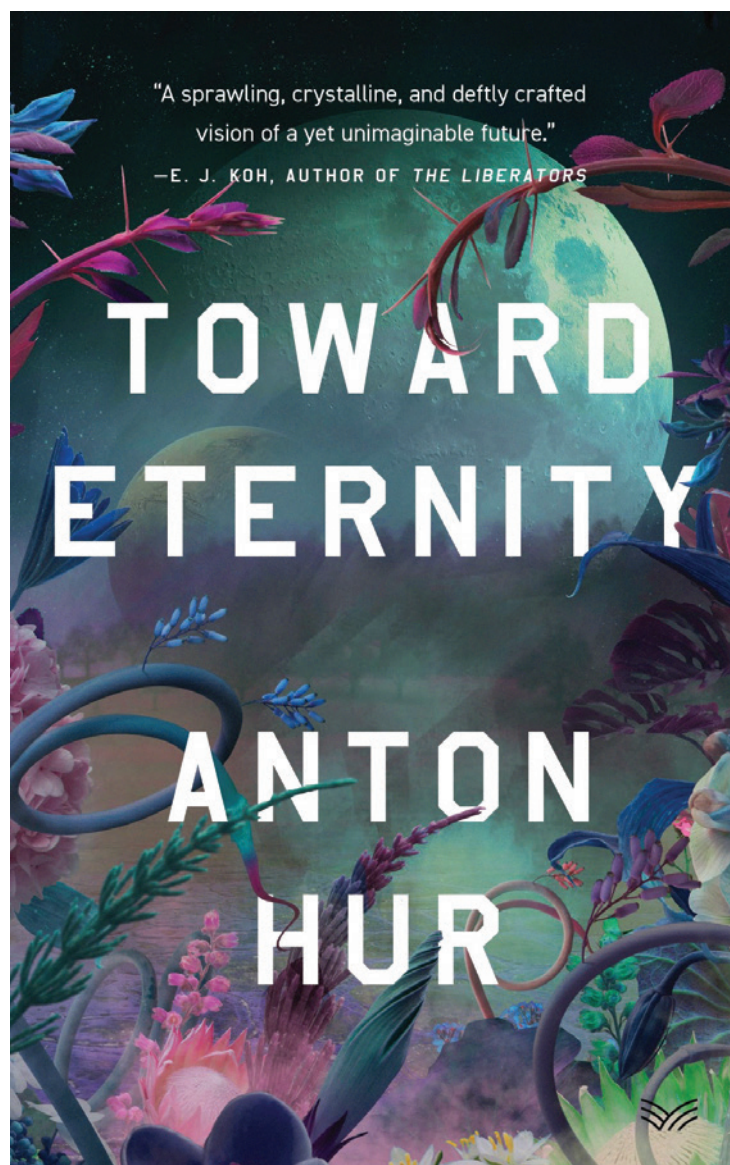


Part 4. The Future of Korean Books

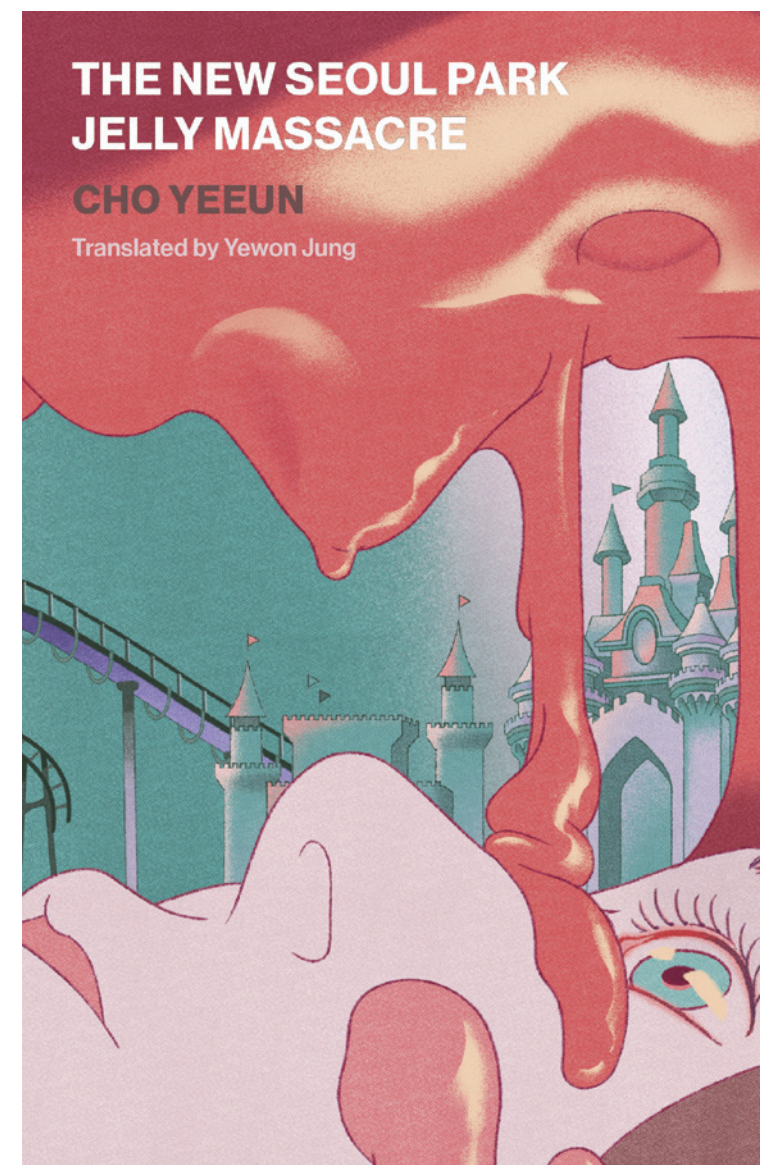
With the 21st century, Korean literature has seen greater diversification in genres and themes. The popularity of genre literature such as science fiction, fantasy, thrillers, and romance are continuing to expand among the public, reflecting a broader trend beyond the established themes of division, democracy, and capitalism. At the same time, as Korean literature actively expands overseas, we are entering an era of globalisation for Korean literature. Prior to 1980, the overseas presence of Korean literature was minimal. While some literary works, such as *The Tale of Hong Gildong* and *The Tale of Shim Cheong*, were translated, the overall output was limited. The establishment of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 1995 marked a turning point, and after 2010, with the Korean Wave in music, film, and drama the overseas publication of Korean literature exploded. Furthermore, the awarding of the Man Booker International Prize to Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* in 2016 brought significant awareness to Korean literature. According to the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, over 200 works were published overseas in 2023 alone. Korean literary works continue to steadily receive or are nominated for major literary awards abroad and now it is now not uncommon to find translations of Korean literature in bookstores across the UK.



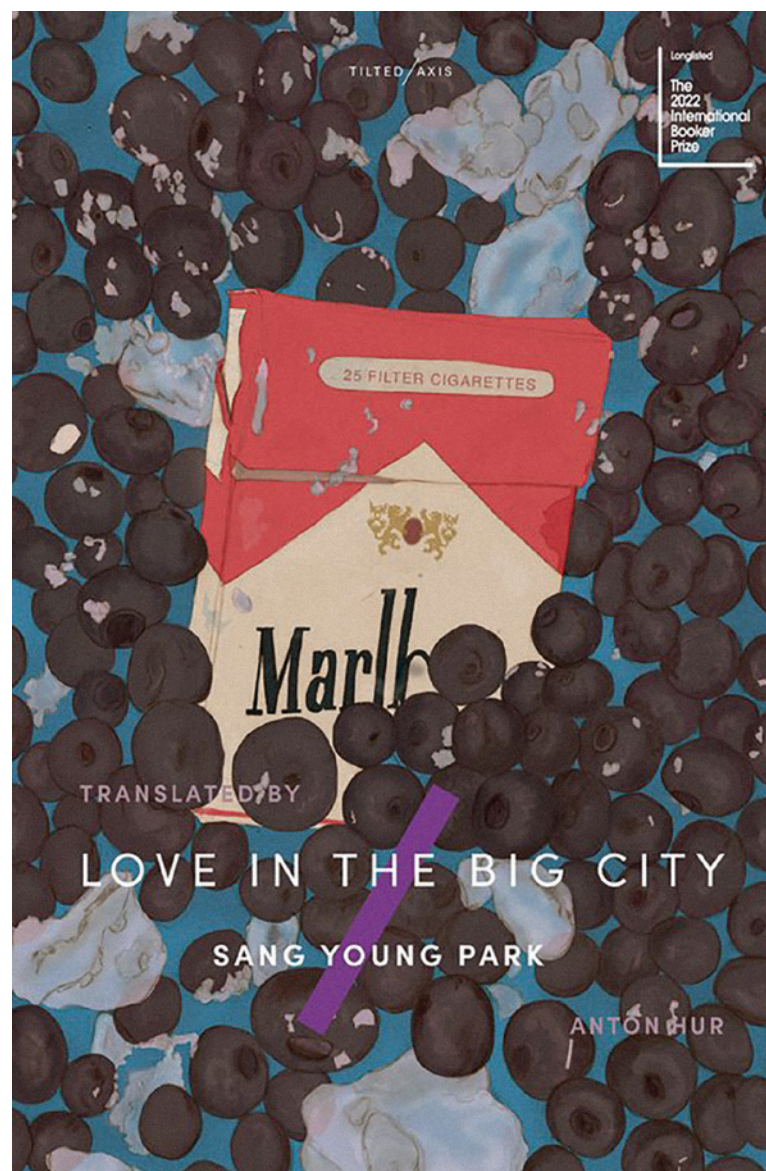
Tower, Bae Myung-hoon, 2021, Honford Star



Toward Eternity, Anton Hur, 2024, HarperVia



The New Seoul Park Jelly Massacre, Cho Yeeun, 2024, Honford Star



Love in the Big City, Park Sang Young, 2021, Tilted Axis Press



Cursed Bunny, Bora Chung, 2021, Honford Star



Whale, Cheon Myeong-kwan, 2024, EUROPA EDITIONS



Almond, Sohn Won-Pyung, 2021, Harper Via

Part 5. Nobel Laureate Han Kang

Han Kang is the recipient of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature. Han Kang was born in Gwangju, South Korea. In 1994 she began her career as a novelist by winning the Seoul Shinmun Spring Literary Contest. *The Vegetarian*, her first novel to be translated into English, won the 2016 International Booker Prize. Her following novel, *Human Acts* won Korea's *Manhae Prize* for Literature and the 2017 *Malaparte Prize* in Italy. *The White Book* was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2018. Han Kang has also received the *Yi Sang Literary Prize*, the Today's Young Artist Award, the 25th Korean Novel Award, the Hwang Sun-won Literary Award and the Dongri Literary Award. *Greek Lessons* was published widely in 2023/2024 alongside her most recent novel, *We Do Not Part*, which was published in Korea in 2021 to great critical acclaim and won the Daesan Foundation Prize and the *Prix Médicis Étranger* 2023. She also took part in the Future Library project in Norway in 2018. Han Kang worked as a professor in the Department of Creative Writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts until 2018 and is now dedicating herself entirely to her writing. Han Kang's works have been published in more than fifty languages.



DallerGut Dream Department Store, Miye Lee, 2024, Wildfire, Headline Publishing Group



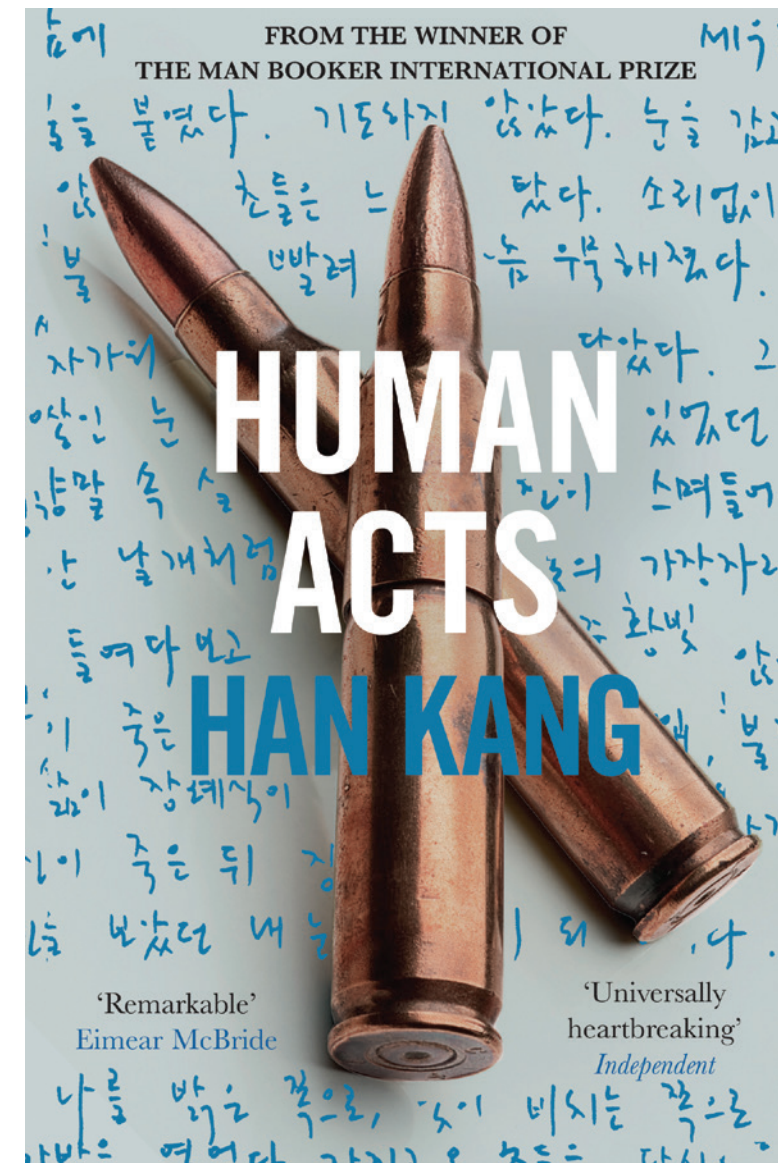
채식주의자, 한강, 2007, 창작과비평사



The Vegetarian, Han Kang, 2015, Granta Books



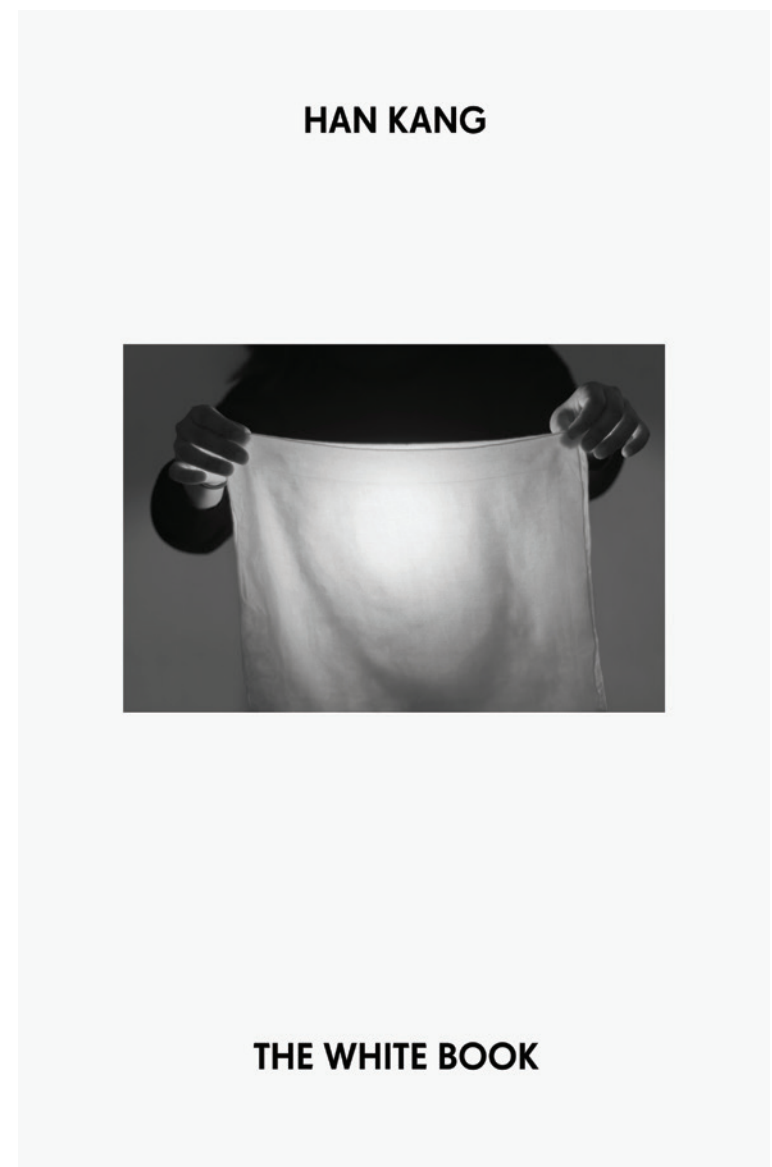
소년이 온다, 한강, 2014, 창작과비평사



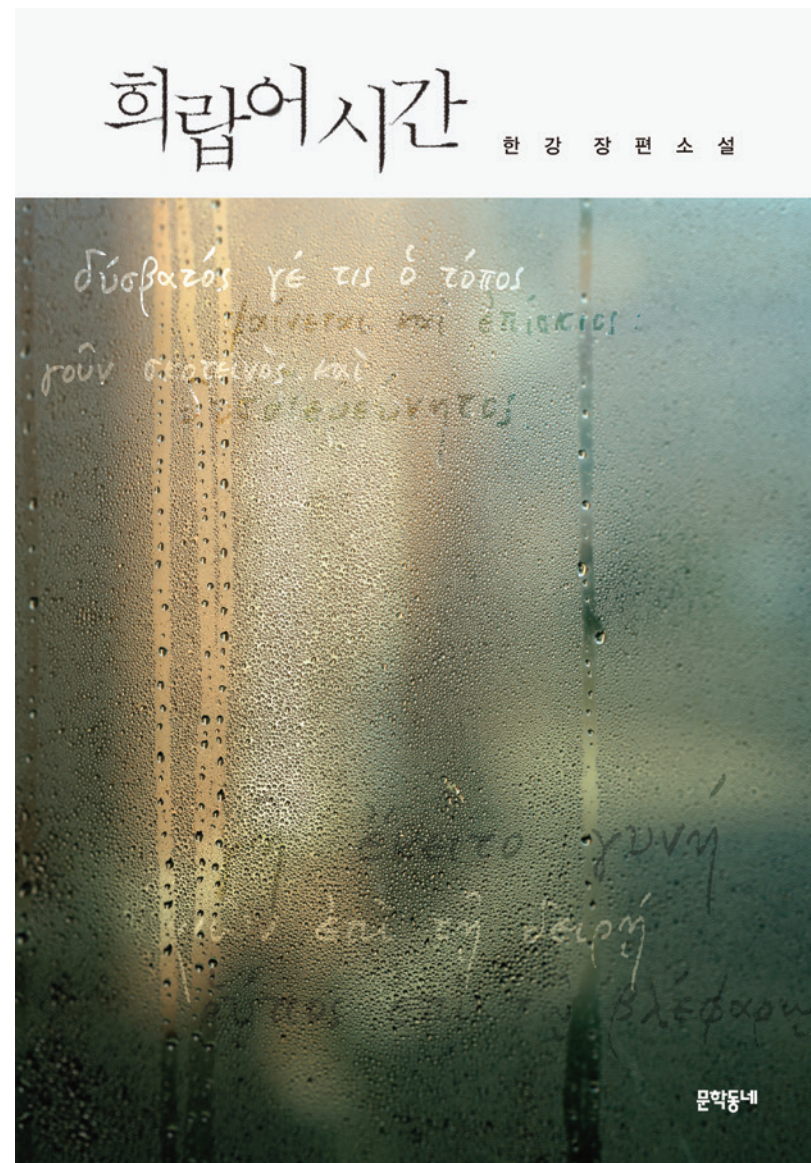
Human Acts, Han Kang, 2016, Granta Books



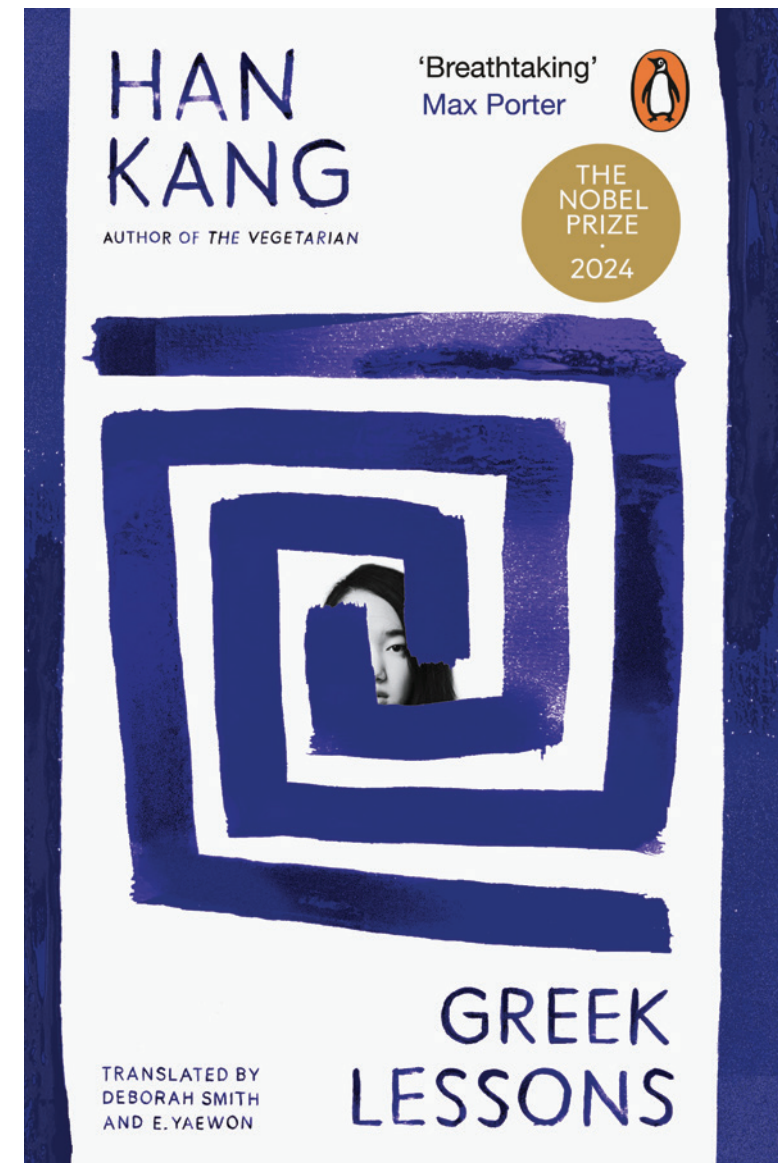
환, 한강, First edition 2016, 2018, 문학동네



The White Book, Han Kang, 2018, Granta Books



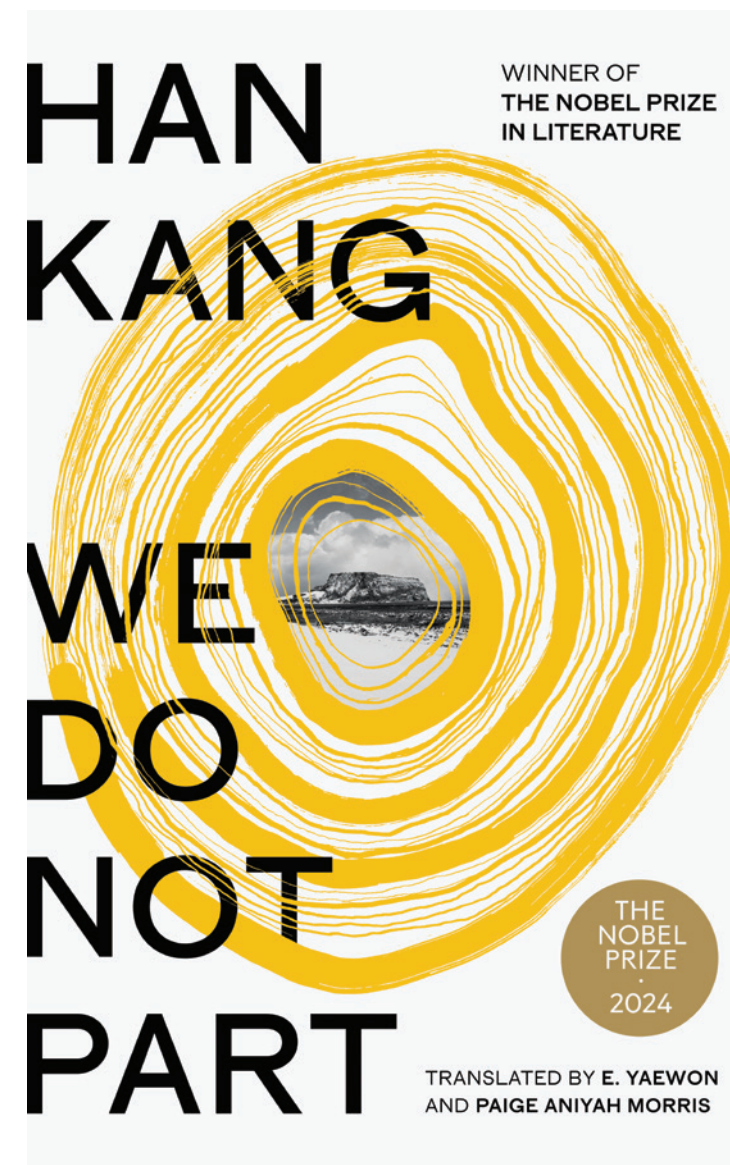
희랍어 시간, 한강, 2011, 문학동네



Greek Lessons, Han Kang, 2024, Penguin Books Ltd



작별하지 않는다, 한강, 2021, 문학동네



We Do Not Part, Han Kang, 2025, Penguin Books Ltd

Part 6. Special Section

Beloved by An Seonjae (Brother Anthony of Taizé)

Brother Anthony of Taizé was born in Cornwall in 1942. A member of the Community of Taizé since 1969, he has been living in Korea since 1980. A prolific translator, since 1990 he has published well over forty volumes of translations of Korean literature, mostly contemporary and modern poetry, including work by Ko Un, Jeong Ho-Seung, Shim Bo-Seon, Do Jong-Hwan, Oh Sae-Young, Kim Seung-Hee, Cheon Sang-Byeong, etc. as well as fiction by Yi Mun-yol and many others. In this section, 15 Poems of famous Korean poets of the earlier 20th century, selected and translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé, (also published in “Korean Poems Printed by Letterpress” by Asia Publishing, 2016.), were showcased, along with the literary works kindly donated by former UK Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Warwick Morris OBE.





Bestselling & Beloved: Korean Literary Treasures

28 November 2024 –
31 January 2025



Korean Cultural Center



National Museum of
Korean Contemporary History

The Korean Cultural Centre UK is pleased to present 'Bestselling and Beloved', a special exhibition that delves into the heart of Korean literature, showcasing both its enduring classics and its dynamic contemporary scene, with a spotlight on Nobel Laureate Han Kang.

Exploring beloved Korean literature and contemporary classics, the exhibition illuminates the broader contours of each generation—its politics, economy, society, culture, social systems, ideologies, and people's daily life. Each one serves not only as a narrative but as a cultural artifact, offering insights into the collective psyche and societal shifts within Korea.

Structured around five thematic sections, the journey begins with 'Timeless Masterpieces' exploring Korea's literary roots in the late 17th century. Then it progresses from 'The First Bestseller' to 'A Mirror of the Times' exploring how literature followed societal changes during the post-liberation, economic booms, and globalisation eras. 'The Future of Korean Books' looks ahead at the direction literature may take and finally 'Nobel Laureate Han Kang'.

The exhibition celebrates the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Korean author Han Kang. The 'Nobel Laureate Han Kang' section highlights the significant cultural exchange her works have had between Korea and the UK through her collaboration with translator Deborah Smith and more.

Exhibition Partners

National Museum of Korean Contemporary History
Korea Heritage Service & Korea Heritage Agency
Literature Translation Institute of Korea, National Han
SOAS University of London, Yoon Dongju Memorial
Foyles, Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute
National Museum of Korea, Korean Film Archive, the
National Folk Museum of Korea, and the Academy of



Exhibition View



Bestselling and Beloved Korean Literary Treasures

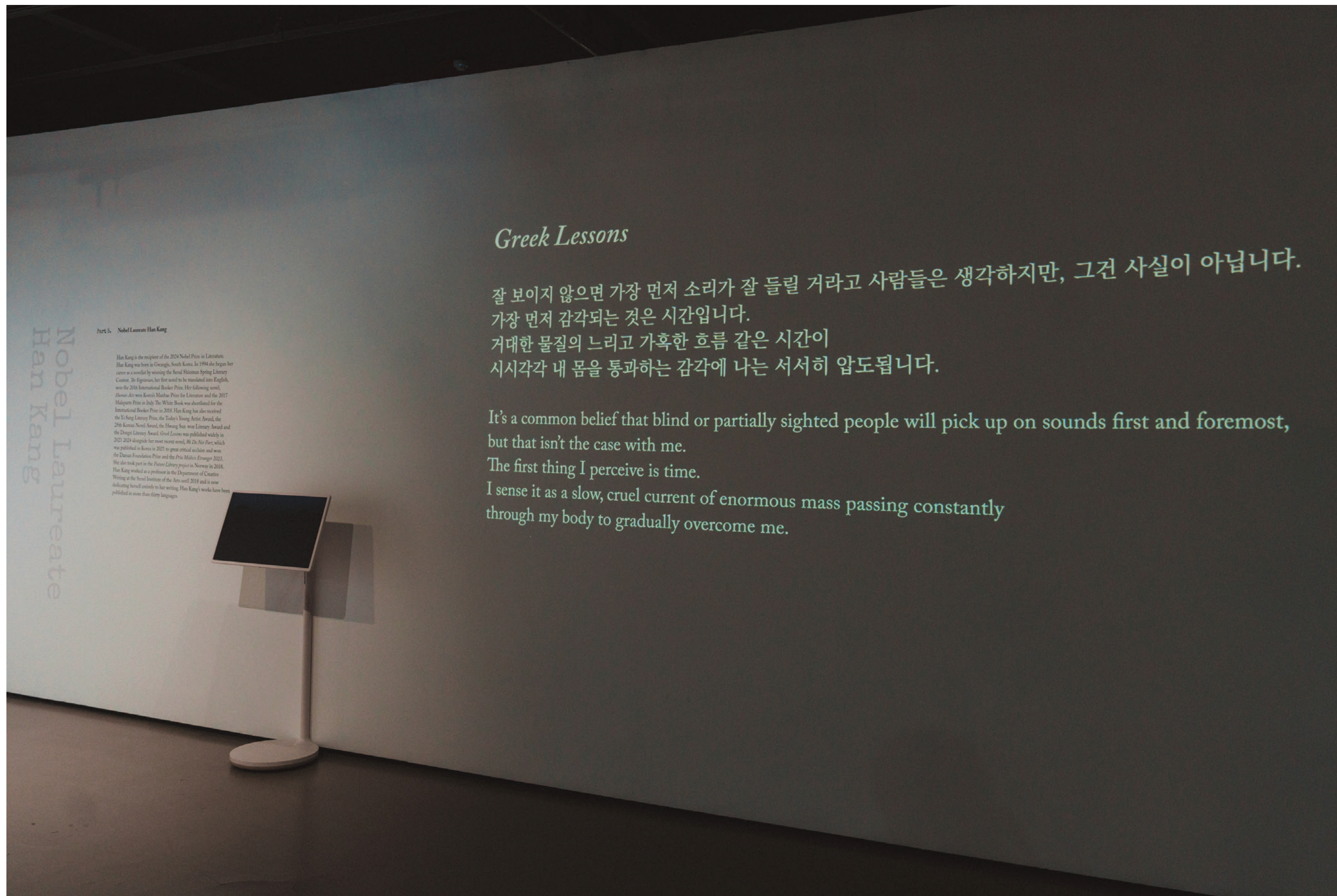




Part 4. The Future of Korean books

With the 21st century, Korean literature has seen greater diversification in genres and themes. The popularity of genre literature such as science fiction, fantasy, thrillers, and romance are continuing to expand among the public, reflecting a broader trend beyond the established themes of division, democracy, and capitalism. At the same time, as Korean literature actively expands overseas, we are entering an era of globalisation for Korean literature. Prior to 1980, the overseas presence of Korean literature was minimal. While some literary works, such as *The Tale of Hong Gildong* and *The Tale of Shim Cheong*, were translated, the overall output was limited. The establishment of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 1995 marked a turning point, and after 2010, with the Korean Wave in music, film, and drama the overseas publication of Korean literature exploded. Furthermore, the awarding of the Man Booker International Prize to Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* in 2016 brought significant awareness to Korean literature. According to the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, over 200 works were published overseas in 2023 alone. Korean literary works continue to steadily receive or are nominated for major literary awards abroad and now it is now not uncommon to find translations of Korean literature in bookstores across the UK.





Part 5 Nobel Laureate Han Kang

Han Kang is the recipient of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature. Han Kang was born in Oeangju, South Korea. In 1994 she began her career as a novelist by winning the Seoul Shinmun Spring Literary Contest. *The Vegetarian*, her first novel to be translated into English, won the 2016 International Booker Prize. Her following novel, *Hunger*, won Korea's Manhae Prize for Literature and the 2017 Malaparte Prize in Italy. *The White Book* was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2018. Han Kang has also received the Yi Sang Literary Prize, the Today's Young Artist Award, the 25th Korean Novel Award, the Hwang Sun-won Literary Award and the Donggi Literary Award. *Good Lessons* was published widely in 2021 alongside her most recent novel, *82 Do Not Flirt*, which was published in Korea in 2021 to great critical acclaim and won the Daesan Foundation Prize and the Prix Média d'Europe 2021. She also took part in the *Future Library* project in Norway in 2018. Han Kang worked as a professor in the Department of Creative Writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts until 2018 and is now dedicating herself entirely to her writing. Han Kang's works have been published in more than thirty languages.

Greek Lessons

잘 보이지 않으면 가장 먼저 소리가 잘 들릴 거라고 사람들은 생각하지만, 그건 사실이 아닙니다.
가장 먼저 감각되는 것은 시간입니다.
거대한 물질의 느리고 가혹한 흐름 같은 시간이
시시각각 내 몸을 통과하는 감각에 나는 서서히 압도됩니다.

It's a common belief that blind or partially sighted people will pick up on sounds first and foremost, but that isn't the case with me.
The first thing I perceive is time.
I sense it as a slow, cruel current of enormous mass passing constantly through my body to gradually overcome me.

Human Acts

군인들이 압도적으로 강하다는 걸 모르지 않았습니다.
다만 이상한 건, 그들의 힘만큼이나 강렬한 무언가가 나를 압도하고 있었다는 겁니다.
양심.
그래요, 양심.

세상에서 제일 무서운게 그겁니다.

It wasn't as though we didn't know how overwhelmingly the

R... the strange thing was, it didn't matter.

nce the uprising began, I'd felt something coursing

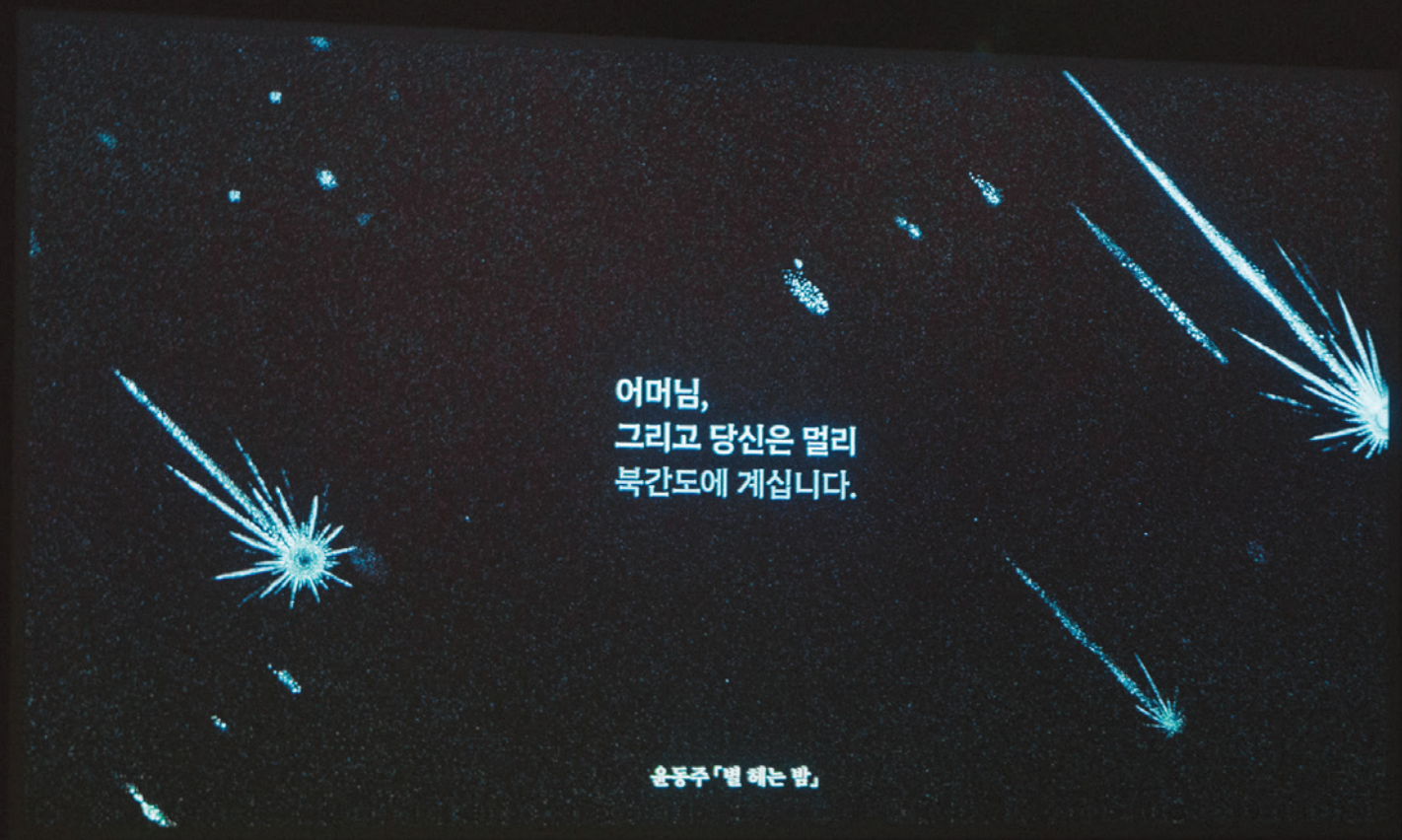
nce.

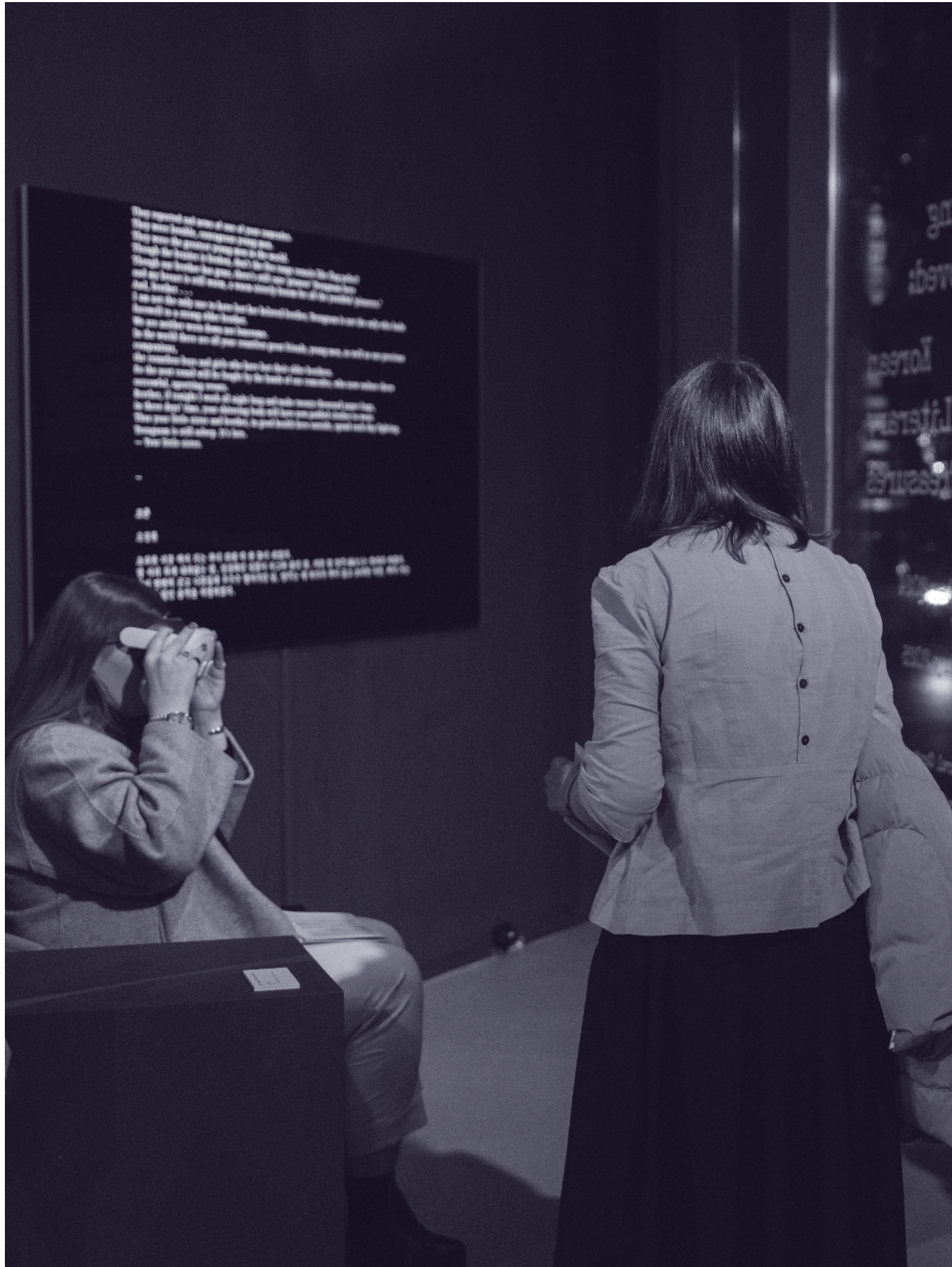
ence, the most terrifying thing in the world.











Exhibited List of Books and Materials

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
1	Yellow Birds Song (Hwangjoga) 황조가	King Yuri of Koguryo 유리왕	-
2	Are you leaving, Are you truly leaving? 가시리	Unknown 미상	-
3	I wish I could cut out the waist of this deep mid-winter night 동짓달 기나긴 밤을	Hwang Jini 황진이	-
4	The Story of Hong Gildong (Eng) 홍길동전	Heo Kyun / tr. Minsoo Kang 허균 / 강민수 번역	Penguin Books Ltd, Donated by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea
5	A Digital Copy of The Tale of Hong Gildong 홍길동전	Heo Kyun 허균	Courtesy of the British Library Board (15260.c.11)
6	The Story of Hong Gildong (Hong Gildongjeon) 홍길동전	Myungwoo Lee 이명우	Courtesy of Korean Film Archive
7	A Story of Hong Gildong (Hong Gildongjeon) 홍길동전	Donghun Shin 신동훈	Courtesy of Korean Film Archive
8	The Cloud Dream of the Nine 구운몽	Kim Man-jung 김만중	Penguin Books Ltd, Donated by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea
9	The Song of Ch'unhyang: Musical Text as Compiled by Master Singer Kim Yŏn-su (Eng) 춘향전	Ah-jeong Kim / tr. R. B. Graves 김아정 / R. B. Graves 번역	E-book, Donated by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea
10	Songs of the Kisaeng: Courtesan poetry of the last Korean Dynasty 기생 시조선	Hwang Jini / tr. Choe Wol- Hee 황진이 / 최윤희 번역	Courtesy of the Literature Translation Instiution of Korea
11	The Fisherman's Calendar 어부사시사	Yun Sondo / tr. Kevin O'Rourke 윤선도 / Kevin O'Rourke 번역	Courtesy of the Literature Translation Instiution of Korea

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
12	Yi Sang: Selected Works (Eng) 이상 작품선	Yi Sang / tr. Jack Jung, Don Mee Choi, Sawako Nakayasu, Joyelle McSweeney 이상/ Jack Jung, Don Mee Choi, Sawako Nakayasu, Joyelle McSweeney 번역	Wave Books
13	A first copy of Sky, Wind, Star and Poem (Digital Image) 하늘과 바람과 별과 시	Yoon Dongju 윤동주	Courtesy of National Hanguel Museum
14	Prelude, One Night I Count the Stars, and A Poem Easily Written by Yoon Dongju, Recited in Korean, English, Japanese, and Chinese 윤동주 시 세편의 시낭송 영상	-	Courtesy of Yoon Dongju Memorial Museum
15	Poet's Room (VR Interactive Film) 시인의 방 (VR 영상)	Bryan Ku	Courtesy of Korean Heritage Service and Korean Heritage Agency
16	One Night I Count the Stars (Media) 별 헤는 밤 (미디어)	-	Courtesy of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea
17	A collection of Park Mok-wol's unpublished works 박목월 미발표 작품 모음집	Park Mok-wol 박목월	-
18	Madame Freedom 자유부인	Jeong Bi-seok 정비석	Zmanz classic
19	Sasanggye 사상계	Chang Chun-ha 장준하	Literary Magazine
20	The Record of Traveling around the World without Money 세계일주무전여행기	Kim Chan-sam 김찬삼	Eomungak
21	And Said Nothing 그리고 아무말도 하지 않았다	Jeon Hye-rin 전혜린	Dong-A PR Institute

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
22	Yeong-Ja's Heydays 영자의 전성시대	Cho Sun-jak 조선작	Minumsa Publishing Group
23	Five Thieves 오적	Kim Ji-ha 김지하	Dongkwang Publishing
24	Non Possession 무소유	Monk Beopjeong 법정스님	Bumwoosa
25	With a Burning Thirst 타는 목마름으로	Kim Ji-ha 김지하	Changbi Publishers
26	Dawn of Labour 노동의 새벽	Park No-hae 박노해	Slow-walk-book
27	Samgukji (Lee Mun-yol's Romance of the Three Kingdoms) (10 vols) 삼국지 (전 10권)	Lee Mun-yol 이문열	Minumsa Publishing Group
28	Yeongungmun 소설 영웅문	Jin Yong 김용	Koreaonebooks
29	Toemarak (15 vols) 퇴마록 (전 15권)	Lee Woo-hyeok 이우혁	Dulnyouk
30	The Art of War 소설 손자병법	Jeong Bi-seok 정비석	Koreaonebooks
31	The Taebaek Mountains (10 vols) 태백산맥 (전 10권)	Jo Jung-rae 조정래	Hangilsa Publishing Co., Ltd
32	Jang Gil-san (10 vols) 장길산 (전 10권)	Hwang Sok-yong 황석영	Changbi Publishers (Hyunamsa)
33	The Rose of Sharon Bloomed (3 vols) 무궁화 꽃이 피었습니다 (전 3권)	Kim Jin-myung 김진명	Hainaim

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
34	Donguibogam (3 vols) 소설 동의보감 (전 3권)	Lee Eun-seong 이은성	Changbi Publishers
35	Land (16 vols) 토지 (전 16권)	Pak Kyong-ni 박경리	JISIK SANUP PUBLICATIONS CO., LTD.
36	Human Market (20 vols) 인간시장 (전 20권)	Kim Hong-shin 김홍신	Haenglim Publishing
37	Holloseogi (5 vols) 홀로서기 (전 5권)	Seo Jung-yoon 서정운	Moonhaksoochup (chungha)
38	Bangapda, Nonriya (3 vols) 반갑다, 논리야 (전 3권)	Wi Kichul 위기철	Sakyejul publishing
39	Tojeong Bigyeol (Novel) (3 vols) 소설 토정비결 (전 3권)	Lee Jae-woon 이재운	Hainaim
40	Arirang (12 vols) 아리랑 (전 12권)	Jo Jeong-rae 조정래	Hainaim
41	The Art of Worldly Wisdom (3 vols) 세상을 보는 지혜 (전 3권)	Baltasar Gracian y Morales at el. 발타자르 그라시안 외	Achimnara(Dungji)
42	Chicken Soup for the Soul (3 vols) 마음을 열어주는 101가지 이야기 (전 3권)	Jack Canfield et al. 잭 캔필드 외	Iremedia
43	Mokminsimseo (Novel) (5 vols) 소설 목민심서 (전 5권)	Hwang Inkyung 황인경	Samjin Planning
44	My Cultural Heritage Discoveries (3 vols) 나의 문화유산 답사기 (전 3권)	Yu Hongjun 유홍준	Changbi Publishers
45	Ireobeorin Neo (3 vols) 잃어버린 너 (전 3권)	Kim Yoon-hee 김윤희	Chungrim Publishing

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
46	Thousand Years of Love (2 vols) 천년의 사랑 (전 2권)	Yang Gui-ja 양귀자	Sallimbooks
47	Seopyeonje 서편제	Lee Cheong-jun 이청준	Yolimwon
48	The Vegetarian 채식주의자	Han Kang / tr. Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith 번역	Changbi Publishers / Granta Books
49	Human Acts 소년이 온다	Han Kang / tr. Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith 번역	Changbi Publishers / Granta Books
50	The White Book 흰	Han Kang / tr. Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith 번역	Munhakdongnae / Granta Books
51	Greek Lessons 희랍어 시간	Han Kang / tr. Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith 번역	Munhakdongnae / Penguin Books Ltd
52	We Do Not Part 작별하지 않는다	Han Kang / tr. Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith 번역	Munhakdongnae / Penguin Books Ltd
53	Man Booker International winners Han Kang & Deborah Smith on The Vegetarian (Interview video) 맨부커 인터내셔널 수상자 한강 & 데보라 스미스, 『채식주의자』에 대해 말하다 (인터뷰 영상)	Han Kang / Deborah Smith 한강 / Deborah Smith	Courtesy of Foyles
54	Love in the Big City 대도시의 사랑법	Park Sang Young / tr. Anton Hur 박상영 / Anton Hur 번역	Tilted Axis Press
55	Cursed Bunny 저주토키	Bora Chung / tr. Anton Hur 정보라 / Anton Hur 번역	Honford Star
56	Almond 아몬드	Sohn Won-Pyung / tr. Sandy Joosun Lee 손원평 / Sandy Joosun Lee 번역	HarperVia

List	Title	Author	Publisher / Source
57	Your Utopia 너의 유토피아	Bora Chung / tr. Anton Hur 정보라 / Anton Hur 번역	Honford Star
58	Tower 타워	Bae Myung-hoon / tr. Sung Ryu 배명훈 / Sung Ryu 번역	Honford Star
59	The New Seoul Park Jelly Massacre 뉴서울파크 젤리장수 대학살	Cho Yeeun / tr. Yewon Jung 조예은 / Yewon Jung 번역	Honford Star
60	DallerGut Dream Department Store 달러구트 꿈 백화점	Miye Lee / tr. Sandy Joosun Lee 이미예 / Sandy Joosun Lee 번역	Wildfire, Headline Publishing Group
61	Toward Eternity 투워드 이터니티	Anton Hur 안톤 허	HarperVia
62	A Magical Girl Retires 마법소녀 은퇴합니다	Park Seolyeon / tr. Anton Hur 박서련 / Anton Hur 번역	HarperVia
63	I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki 죽고 싶지만 떡볶이는 먹고 싶어	Baek Sehee / tr. Anton Hur 백세희 / Anton Hur 번역	Bloomsbury Publishing PLC
64	Whale 고래	Cheon Myeong-kwan / tr. Chi-Young Kim 천명관 / Chi-Young Kim 번역	EUROPA EDITIONS

About the Korean Cultural Centre UK

The Korean Cultural Centre UK (KCCUK) opened under the aegis of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea aims to enhance friendship, amity and understanding between Korea and the UK through cultural and educational activities. From the KCCUK's central London location, near Trafalgar Square, its dedicated cultural team work to further develop cultural projects, introduce new opportunities to expand their Korean events programme in the UK, and encourage cultural exchange.

The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History (MUCH) showcases Korea's most recent history, from the end of the 19th century until today. The museum was opened in 2012 on Gwanghwamun Street in the centre of Seoul. The museum, through exhibitions on a vast array of topics, aims to delve into the multifaceted aspects of everyday life in Korea, highlighting the pivotal role played by the ordinary individuals who have shaped Korea's history.

This is the catalogue for the exhibition which was staged at the Korean Cultural Centre between 28th November 2024 and 21st March 2025, organised by the Korean cultural Centre UK.

This edition first published in 2025 by the Korean Cultural Centre UK and National Museum of Korean Contemporary History.

For this exhibition, the works by Park Mok-wol were generously provided by Professor Park Dong-kyu.

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This exhibition was conceived based on A Korean Self-Portrait Read through Best sellers exhibition at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History in 2022. Parts 2 and 3 in this exhibition present a reinterpretation of the original exhibition, A Korean Self-Portrait Read through Best sellers, while the remaining sections have been independently curated and produced by the Korean Cultural Centre UK. We are deeply grateful to the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, Brother Anthony of Taizé, and Professor Grace Koh for their expert guidance and insightful contributions to the development of this exhibition.

Partners & Special Thanks

Korea Heritage Service & Korean Heritage Agency
National Museum of Korea
National Folk Museum of Korea
Literature Translation Institute of Korea
National Hangeul Museum
Yonsei University Yoon Dongju Memorial Museum
Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies
Korean Film Archive
British Library Board
Foyles

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EUROPA EDITIONS
HarperVia
Honford Star
Munhakdongne Publishing Corporation
Professor Park Dong-gyu
RCW Literary Agency
Tilted Axis Press
Wave Books
Wildfire, Headline Publishing Group

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Korean Cultural Centre UK, Grand Buildings, 1-3 Strand, London
WC2N 5BW



Korean Cultural Centre



National Museum of
Korean Contemporary History