

Four Korean *Sijo*
Translated by Graeme Wilson

Birds

Falcon on the swaying pine-tree,
Pheasant crouched against the ground,
Egrets peering after fishes
In the paddies that surround
My farm-dwelling, should you ever
Leave your haunts and fly away,
How could I endure the burden
Of the birdlessness of day?

Anonymous (16th century)

Washing the World Away

I could not sluice my cares away,
I could not scour them free,
Not though I scooped ten thousand sandy
Gallons from the sea.

Yet just one little jar of wine
Not fourteen fingers deep
Can sink the world and all its cares
In mellow waves of sleep.

Li Po, the poet, taught this truth
Wise in his drunken day,
He poured pure slumber down his throat
And washed the world away.

Anonymous (17th century)

Realist

If everyone were noble,
 Who would grub the ground?
 And if doctors cured all sicknesses,
 Where would room be found
 For those whose graves lacked tenants?

The world's the way it is.
 Come, lad, fill this flagon up
 With reassurances.

Kim Chang-op (1658-1722)

Magnet

It seems that I'm a magnet,
 It seems that girls are pins,

For when I sit, girls follow me;
 And when my sleep begins,
 Girls follow me; and when I jump
 To make off on my own,
 Girls follow me. Girls follow me
 As bitches will a bone.

Spatting married couples,
 Hear me and obey:
 Boil this magnet, drain the liquid,
 Take it twice a day.

Kim Su-jan (1682-1765)