



# MIRRORED MINDS:

## A THOUSAND YEARS OF KOREAN VERSE

CH'OE CH'IWON et al.

Translated by KEVIN O'ROURKE

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*For Owen*

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## Translator's Note

Korea boasts two poetry traditions, one in Chinese and the other in the vernacular. This little book tries to give the reader the flavor of both traditions: it ranges from the vernacular *hyangga* and Koryo *kayo* of Shilla and Koryo, to the Chinese *hanshi* and the vernacular *shijo* of Koryo and Choson, and concludes with a selection of modern Korean poems. The poems are presented in chronological order so that the reader can see the two traditions side by side. This book makes no claim to being a comprehensive anthology; it is aimed at the general reader rather than at the scholar. The objective is to give the general reader the flavor of a vast tradition in two languages, to entice him or her to dig into the unplumbed depths of Korea's rich poetry tradition.



*Mirrored Minds:  
A Thousand Years  
Of Korean Verse*

## Ch'oe Ch'iwon (857~?)

Ch'oe Ch'iwon was the first Korean poet to achieve an international reputation for his Chinese verse.

- Autumn Night in the Rain (*hanshi*)

## Autumn Night in the Rain

Autumn winds are blowing; I sing a plaintive song.  
So few people in this world understand me.  
It is the Third Watch; rain splatters the window.  
I sit in front of the lamp, my spirit ten thousand *li* away.

\* The Third Watch was the hour immediately before and after midnight.

## **Ch'ungdam, a Shilla monk (869~940)**

- In Praise of Lord Kip'a (*hyangga*)

## **In Praise of Lord Kip'a**

I'm worn out by tears.

The dew-sparkling moon

chases away

white clouds.

Your face shines

in the blue of the Milky Way;

I seek your mirrored mind

among the pebbles lining the stream.

You are like the top branches of the pine,

never cowed by winter snow.

## Yongjae, a Shilla monk

- Meeting with Bandits (*hyangga*)

## Meeting with Bandits

Ignorant of my true self,  
I wandered in the depths;  
now I break like a bird from the net,  
searching for the world of Bodhi.  
Confronted by my bandit lord,  
am I to turn aside in fear?  
Death by the sword  
means the bright land for me;  
not much of a merit hill  
to erect a mansion on.

## **Anonymous(hyangga)**

- Ch'oyong's Song (*hyangga*)



## Ch'oyong's Song

I revelled all night  
in the moonlit capital,  
came home and discovered  
four legs in my bed!  
Two are mine;  
whose are the other two?  
Legs once mine, now purloined,  
what am I to do?

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