

Author, *Lee Hyoseok*
and
「*When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*」
「메밀꽃 필 무렵」



Author at his garden, 1936



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About the Author

Lee Hyoseok (李孝石, 1907-1942), Gasan as Pen name

Lee Hyoseok, an exceptional author in modern Korean literature history, was born in the county of Pyeongchang, Gangwon Province, in 1907. He studied English Literature at the Kyoungsung Imperial University, the predecessor of the present Seoul National University.

He began writing poetry and short stories in both Korean and Japanese while he was a student at the University. The years between 1925 through early 1930's was marked in Korean literary history the high tide of socialistic ideological coercion began to be applied to literature. He also came under its strong influence, for during this period, he wrote many short stories which were mostly in line with his literary tendency.

In 1928, before he graduates from the University, he made the literary debut with the title short story named 「The City and Specter 都市와幽靈」 that depicts the social unjust. In 1930, he graduates and receives a degree in English Literature from Kyoungsung Imperial University.

At the beginning of his career, he wrote stories on the theme of social commitment and drew attention as the “Dong-Ban-Jagga 同伴作家” <Fellow traveler author>. Pro-lefties tendency, he wrote 「The March」 (1929), 「The Landing」(1930), 「Personal Letters from the Northern Country 北國私信」(1930), 「Along the Russian Coast 露領近海」(1931).

As Lee's graduation thesis (The Plays of J. M. Synge) indicates, he also wrote the scenario's for the screenplay and joined Kim Yu-yeong, Seo Gwang-je, Ahn Sukyoung and other colleagues formed <The Chosun Scenario Writers association> in 1930. 「Wheel of the Fire 火輪」(1930), 「Times for the Launching 出帆時代」(1931), and 「The Praise for Longing 愛戀頌」(1938).

Soon after he wrote 「Orion and Apple」(1932) there was the belles lettres movement by the prominent writers and the 'Proletarian' literature was gradually vanished. He also abandoned his early pro-leftist tendency and entered 'the nostalgic aestheticism' world. He joined as a founding member of the modernist "Guinhue 九人會" <The Circle of Nine> in 1933 and began writing stories with more sincere and aestheticism underlying his art at its best. 「The Pigs 豚」(1933), 「Rooster」(1933), 「Monologue 獨白」(1933), 「The Sacred Painting 聖畫」(1935), 「In the Mountain 山」(1936), 「The Field」(1936).

He moved to Pyungyang in 1934 and worked as a professor at Soongsil Professional College in 1936.

He wrote the most prized Short story titled as 「Memilggot Pilmuryop」 which is widely read of all short story in Korea and abroad. It opens up new possibilities of Korean prose style writings. English translation as 「When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom」. It was this work that he established himself as a writer of the first rank, also this masterpiece is regarded by most critics as one of the scarce work. Lyrical depictions of natural beauties rich in local flavor, particularly those of its neighboring villages and his birthplace, are one of the most distinct traits observed in his works.

He had succeeded in creating a lasting impressions upon the readers of his days as were as of today with his short stories. Throughout authors career, he also wrote as many essays on literature as short stories in which he described 'the nostalgic aestheticism' underlying his artistic works. And, he attempted to write novels, but failed to produce any as successful as his short stories before death overtook him at his early age.

『Pollen 花粉』(1939), 『Boundless Blue Sky 碧空無限』(1940), and an unfinished manuscripts, intended for a full-length novel at his last-days bedside.

He enjoyed a relatively short span of life. He died of tubercular meningitis in May of 1942 at the age of just thirty-five, a brief life in this world was his portion.

Introductory Description of Short Story 「*When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*」 「메밀꽃 필 무렵」

「*When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*」(1936) is the most prized short story ever wrote in modern Korean literature history which is widely read of all short story in the home and abroad. Lyrical depictions of the picturesque scene in the buckwheat flowers fields. It's a literary work of Lee's period of full maturity.

It is the tale of an itinerant trader whose life has filled with sadness, wandering from market to market in the neighboring village of Bongpyeong for not only peddling wares for living but also searching for hope of finding his very first and only woman in his life. Depictions of the hills and fords around the village he once lived, particularly those of the twenty-eight kilometers (seventy-ri) moonlit night road from Bongpyeong to Daehwa are like as panoramic view as a fine piece of poetry.

● Characters Sketch

Heo Saengwon: Left handed drapery peddler with the pockmarked face. Alienated from society as an outcast, having sorrowful life in certain aspects.

Dong-i: In this story, he has been suggested as the son between Heo Saengwon and Seong Seobang's daughter who has an old head on young shoulders, simple and very honest by nature.

Jo Seondal: Heo Saengwon's friend, also an itinerant peddler who has a dream of settling down himself at a small shop.

Donkey: The animal had been Heo Saengwon's companion throughout half of his drudgery life, for some twenty years, sleeping at the same Inns, bathing in the same light of the moon, and aging in the same manner as his master.

● The Time and Space

- Time:**
- The early after noon through the night, and Day break.
 - Beautiful moonlit night. The land was silent and still.
 - The steady breathing of the moon mimicked that of a living beast. (the moment of a love making).
 - Burgeoning buckwheat flowers growing thick in the surrounding hillside, looked to be a profusion sprinkled white salt on the terrain.
- Space:**
- Traders Open market; the basis of peddlers livelihood.
 - The Water mill; Love making.
 - The Road; Sign of all living beings.

● Excerpt From 「When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom」

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It might have been past midnight.

The land was silent and still,

but the steady breathing of the moon mimicked that of a living beast,
one that could possibly be within reach.

In the rays of the moonlight,

bean stalks and corn blades sparkled a painted blue.

The burgeoning flowers of the buckwheat,
growing thick in the surrounding fields,

looked to be a profusion of sprinkled white salt on the terrain.

These surroundings under the warm moonlight
felt extremely gratifying and suffocating.

The reddish stalks of buckwheat were as frail as scent and
even the steps of the donkeys
seemed reverently light as the three men
atop their animals stretched out
in a single file on the narrow path.

.....

jingle-jangle of the donkeys' bells diffused pleasantly
over the buckwheat fields.

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