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## Editor's Note

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## Editor's Note

The Korean peninsula is now in the midst of a series of remarkable and dramatic changes. People the world over are surprised, curious, and relieved, especially those who feared imminent war on the peninsula. In addition, the first female president of Korea is now in prison, and her predecessor was also arrested and soon will be tried. The current president, who has a very high approval rating, used the Winter Olympics as a stage for international diplomacy and led North Korea to the bargaining table. We do not know if Kim Jong Un will give up nuclear weapons, or if Trump will sign a peace treaty or pledge economic cooperation, but it is no exaggeration to say that these changes are seismic.

With the news that North Korea was developing nuclear weapons and conducting missile tests, and that evacuation drills were taking place in Japan and Hawaii, people with relatives in Korea would call them, worried about their safety. There was also contrasting news. Some foreign media were surprised to hear that nothing appeared to be happening in Seoul, and its inhabitants were going about their daily lives despite the threat of imminent war. In turbulent times, art enables us to grasp these apparent contradictions and complexities. Art can give us insight into the minds of Koreans who are experiencing and responding to events as they happen. This volume of *Azalea* presents outstanding work that illuminates the Korean spirit under conditions both ordinary and extraordinary.



The cover image was provided by the painter Lim Ok-sang. It is a detail from his work *Up, On the Square—Candlelight Revolution*, which depicts the candlelight protests that led to political change and is now on display at the Blue House. It is well known that the painter has portrayed and satirized important conflicts in Korean society over the past few decades. *Azalea* 11 presents more than thirty paintings selected by the painter himself. The entire trajectory of these conflicts cannot be fully portrayed in these images, but they enable readers to imagine how Koreans felt and responded during past conflicts.

The featured writer in this issue is Cheon Myeong-gwan, whose novels are famous for his rich and exuberant sense of humor. Humor, long a tradition in Korean literature—though it dwindled somewhat in the 20th century—is also a source of resilience within Korean culture. Readers will discover in his stories what is happening deep in the hearts of his characters, what Koreans have been losing in the 20th century, and what they wish to regain.

Bae Suah, Park Min-gyu, Kim Ae-ran, and Yun Ko Eun are young writers whose work exemplifies how the Korean novel is evolving. Their rejection of strict genre categories leads us to predict that the future of the Korean novel will be bounteous, exciting, and quite different from its past.

This issue is also rich in the poems of young poets. In that company, the poetry of Han Kang stands out. The fact that the novelist, now internationally renowned for winning the Man Booker International Prize in 2016, has already published two volumes of poetry seems to be little known. It is no coincidence that her novel is often praised as poetic. Readers who know that Korean fiction is full of poetic scenes are now finding new ways of thinking about Korean literature.

Seong-Kon Kim, who led the Korean Literature Translation Institute for the past eight years, summarizes the position of Korean literature in the global literary market and argues for

the vital importance of excellent translation. This essay will be followed in future issues by others expressing the mature insights of those who have been devoted for a long time to Korean literary translation.

Yi T'aejun's travelogue, written almost seventy years ago, provides a sharp contrast with the current situation on the Korean peninsula. As one of the "Gone North" writers who was politically "purged" in the North after the war, Yi has not been properly studied by either side. His descriptions of China and encounters with Mao Zedong and Pablo Neruda in the midst of the Korean War lead us to reflect upon the roles Korean literature and Korean writers are expected or forced to play in Korean society, especially during wartime.

*Azalea* has a new editorial board after the successful completion of its first decade. We look forward to some exciting changes in the near future.

April 2018  
Young-Jun Lee