

Let's begin with a story, or *muga*, from the lineage of *mudang*, or Korean shamans; one known as *Paridaegi* (Abandoned) or *Parigonju* (Princess Abandoned), also known as Bari Gongju. There are many versions of the story. 15 years after her birth, having been sent down the river by an incensed King & Queen who were finally expecting a son after six other daughters, Bari Gongju leaves the home of the elders who raised her from the jade cask on the river they found her inside to venture to the underworld to procure the holy water needed to save her now dying father, the King. She meets a Wizard who asks her in return to work for him for 9 years: collect firewood for 3, fetch water for 3, & tend to fires for 3.

By purifying sap from the tree of heaven in the underworld, the Wizard is able to render the holy water needed to cure the king. Moved by her steadfastness, & the fact that she looks like a woman in the front & a king in the back (?), the Wizard asks her to marry him. They have 7 sons. They go to the palace. The king is dead by now. Bari Gongju pours the water into to his desiccated mouth, he revives, thereby saving the state. But somehow, the marrying to the wizard is the sin, as explained by the servants to the King when he revives, & wonders why his daughter, who he abandoned, who saved his life from a death that already became him, is absconding from the palace as if she hasn't come into her own power to live her life as she sees fit. The King tries to excuse Bari Gongju's sin. He also tries to gift her half his kingdom, or any treasure in the city. She refuses both, not knowing what it's like to live by royal means, so they are meaningless to her.

Bari Gongju, instead, chooses to go back to the netherworld, & act as the intermediary between the worlds. From then forth, she is the goddess for all shamans who seek to do the same. They are, in a sense, branches of green bejeweled flower from the *aliantus*, the Tree of Heaven, even if the tradition itself is lopped off from its origins & fractured across time, it still has the means to grow on, for it is hardy. The tree of heaven, today, is largely regarded in the West as invasive species, lauded & reviled for their aptitude at survival despite any environmental difficulty. In those trees subsist lifecycles of *gonepteryx rhamni*, also known as the Common Brimstone, who travel to lower elevations to find plants & trees on which to breed & lay one generation worth of eggs a year. They also perch & breed in the altar-like stands prevalent in the cactuses or cacti (cactussies?) of the Bauhaus sculptor par excellence Marianne Brandt, who metabolized wide-ranging multicultural influences seamlessly towards utilitarian objects made for everyone. I think of the large replica metal cactus included in the show as having taken to the core an aspect of the tree of heaven's survivability.

The Brimstone, in its butterfly form, benefits from the natural genetic engineering we know as evolution: its wing color & patterning looks like that of a healthy leaf, perfect to blend in with arboreal surroundings to avoid predators. Ronaldo Perez, in a discussion of neobaroque artist Severo Sarduy & his regard for the genderqueer transvestite who simulates to capture the gaze of the other, also invokes the theorist Roger Callois: the human & the animal, or to put it into Deleuzian terms, the becoming-animal of humans, is not simply a metaphor, but an existential component of what it means to be

human. Hold on to that. In another way, the becoming-nature of the Brimstone as a means of protection reverberates in the same fashion.

Mira Mann (b. 1993) is a reverberating plenum of becoming's variable states, a generation of brimstone eggs in & of themselves, an exemplar of paridaegi spawn. All of them pulse with the rhythm of the rabbit, an evergreen trickster archetype for cultures across the earth. They draw from the cache of that plenum to exact the many characters that populate the resplendent tales from the Pansori tradition, innovated & preserved by the dissidents & dregs of society, fusing that with a hungry sensibility & verdant resourcefulness gained in a life of refining what we call an art practice. They have an instinct supplanted from an existence immersed in *mestizaje*, not just in terms of genetics, & the transcultural *weltschmerz* it defers onto us as "mixed-race" peoples, but in terms of evolved form of the globalized world fomenting since the 40s that we are inheritors of as travestis of history. Cultures meld together despite any external force to stop them. Art movements, like Bauhaus, or Surrealism, or CoBRA, become banners for the likeminded transculturally to band together. K-pop music & rap, under capitalism, of course, function similarly. It is what it is. We are forced to live with globalization, which has become a neo-colonialism in & of itself, as the ultimate injustice of our lives under racial capitalism that persists despite the decay of empires old & contemporary. We cross-pollinate from margin to center the potential for something else.

A bleeding example of the double-edge of global neocolonialism for Korea is the US-SK free trade agreement, finalized & contestably approved in 2007, a consequence of neo-liberalism (rising to prominence in SK since the 80s), where every country at best begrudgingly participates in the order at hand to raise all trade ships with a tide of marginal prosperity & influence. We haven't even talked about Germany. The World keeps on turning, its supplication spurred on at the cost of the planet's erosion with no movement towards the earth's renewal in a way where the common symbiosis between the lifosphere & humans is respected. What else are we to do, as 'artists', as 'cultural producers' but aid in creating microbes that expediate said decay of the World that makes life impossible for us all in greater & greater degree? How can we use this force for a better goal, such as reunification?

I used a 'they' pronoun for Mann because, as Kim Hyesoon says in her essay on Bari Gongju, *Princess Abandoned* (trans. Don Mee Choi), "the performer exists as a twin-like being, who is intertwined with death, the death she was able to name through her active participation in it, and she uses this ability to visit back and forth with the death everyone harbors. In other words, making contact with her own spirit allows her to communicate with other spirits through the bodies of the others and enables her to guide the spirits of the dead to a safe place (?) in the netherworld at the request of her regulars." There is a triangulation between the gendered surname Mann, the neutral they, & the feminized her. Mann draws back the nictitating membrane, the sheath between the shaman & the poet that Kim entertains the two occupations as distinct, a parallel. In pansori performances, Mann is a twin-like being of themselves, channeled to reach the plenum of her expanded

self, the cache of characters, & the variegation of ourselves in the space with them as witnesses.

They entangle family (a mother, an aunt, a cousin, a sister) in their work. She dances with a local K-pop style group Iridescent Wings, who use fans designed after the nyctograph & clothes designed by Mann to night write in the air with scintillating choreography. Hell, & they dance in front of Golden Tulip Hotel, a place recently scalped by a blaze & is under pernicious threat of structural collapse. It is telling that they can perform in the fountain space while the audience must stay behind a barrier. They perform in a space Kim derives from Buddhist Elysium (or nirvana), defines as *hyônbin*: "The place that Bari Gongju goes to, travelling through death, is an empty place because it is a feminine space. It is *hyônbin*. All things are alive and all relics exist because of this empty space. All the possibilities of life are contained in this dark uterus. Here, the androcentrism of patriarchy breaks, the identity of all things breaks." *Mercurial Operavision B*, that performance & its chronicle, as well as the larger show it belongs to, is an answer to the questions that I saw Mann ask of themselves, knowing racemes of it exist across history, but looking to add their own stem to the fractured bough of a history concealed or destroyed: what does a queer shamanism look like?

Because I have to take Judeo-Christian ideology seriously, as it is what a majority of this world believes is the narrative by which events are cast & contextualized, humor me for a second when I say this very boring, very unrevelatory thought: we, are humans are in, & have been, for hundreds of years, entangled in the rapture, or in a version of the Last Judgment. Me mentioning this will make more sense momentarily. Apocalypse, it seems, has become a fact of life to rival birth & death. Through this lens is the only way the wars, the cataclysms that are getting more & more rational, the climactic degradations to entire peoples, nevermind other species & depredations to the planet stretched over time by the prevailing orders make a sort of sense. We are fully immersed in what death metal band Cattle Decapitation calls *apex blasphemy*. We know that what makes the world happen is at odds with what, conceptually, God gave us: a planet once replete with everything we needed to subsist. We are, instead, supposed to pine for a world beyond closer to a God that is absent from our lives, to the disregard of this planet. I must tell you, reader, that there is no cease to that ideology, which garrotes the reality of what's possible for us. The order of things resists teleology, evades the 'goal' of 'accelerationism,' which is farcical at best: an intensification of the conservatism of how things are. The battle for the fate of humanity is between apocalypse & epochcalyce, to embrace the Anthropocene extinction, or break away from it. Wrong or right, we will have to live with the consequences.

That is one of the questions that linger in the Last Judgment's in-between space. We are between the times past & the present non-event of the second death in the site of resurrection. I can't imagine this resurrection being a miracle in anyway if all the extinct species do not make a return & are pardoned from Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. Instead, I guess the intention is to bring back just humanity, including all of the terrible people. Great.

But even that hasn't happened yet. Jesus has yet to reveal himself to judge the whole, nevermind God. We're just waiting. Life may as well just continue, people leave, go back to their business until the next dragon & mother harlot are thrown into the lake of fire. But many people remain.

We wait. & in the distance we see a humanoid figure, & the consensus of thought from the crowd makes me think of *Dictée* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: "From A Far / What nationality / or what kindred & relation / what blood relation / what blood ties of blood / what ancestry / what race generation / what house clan tribe stock strain / what lineage extraction / what breed sect gender denomination caste / what stray ejection misplaced / Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other / Tombe des nues de naturalized / what transplant to dispel upon." They try to descry who & what approaches. As the figure gets closer, it loses its human silhouette, gets smaller. We see a brimstone butterfly, a star to a young culture, bob into the makeshift stadium of surrounding people with the floating gait of a rabbit, on dragon-like wings. It says the following:

*Your judgment is a creation of categories, or categorical fixity, where I, we, even you fit or don't. & while there is a certain pleasure in fitting in, those who don't stay in the cracks between: struggle, mutate, bloom, decay, under the weight of all those frames. I am the rabbit on the moon, & the dragon underwater at once. My own donor & recipient, my own queen, princess, serf. Circulating the thrill, the drill, the vanity, the gambling of showing off. & no, I am not asking for freedom, just a way through. Right, left, wherever, I make no other demands. Just move on, & don't stand still with your arms raised, pressed against the wall, like those shapes & lines & surfaces supposed to burn into your retinas that state blankly, that say power, capital, recognition, systems of representations, collections of discourses, codes, conventions, practices, that are a mere joke compared to the infinite variety of existences beyond the human.*

*I here speak to you: the shifter, the chimera, the hybrid, the mongrel. My movement is love, my face is confession, my heart is a volcano which ejects spreading, fertile ashes. One is not simply given one face, rather slips into many. Like life, they lack interpretation. My movement is eruption, yet another cage, but one I choose.*

Becoming-human, becoming-animal, becoming-nature, becoming heaven, becoming-hell, becoming, becoming, always becoming something else, but the self, always shines through. The soul of the trickster. In assessing neobaroque poet Jose Lezama Lima's disappointment with Castro's revolution in Cuba framed by his Catholic faith & upbringing, Jaime Rodriguez Matos reflects on how to escape the farcicality of revolutions as we know them where the juntas are ill-prepared to provide for the collective will & fall short of their promises, living in an age where revolutions seem to be nothing more but as tools, deployed as initiatives from global superpowers to recuperate countries to clutches that go against the will of the people. The questions that peninsular & island nations share when it comes to identity & self-determination will have to wait for another time. Matos, however, concludes that "we need to come to terms with a politiccity with which

politics wants nothing to do, & a religiosity with which religion wants to dispense."

The earlier citation from their piece "Let me tell it to you en detail" delineates that with a practice like Mann's, that is how one buds a new Then worth nourishing from The Here & Now. That is how one answers up to the non-event of The Last Judgement. Mann foments a collective desire to organize the whole of life from perspectives that are largely trampled, disregarded, & exploited. Though I have not discussed Shim Cheong, the main character by which the pansori story of this exhibition is based upon, that character is one of the paridaegi, one of the abandoned. Born destitute to a deceased mother & a blind father, Shim Cheong was spawned from *hyônbin*, & embraces it in a similar method of self-abnegation, as Bari Gongju does, to save her father.

Surely, we all deserve better than self-sacrifice for the tacit hope of a resurrection that, by all metrics, may never occur, to neglect to live our best lives now, to live our lives in service to propping up dying & failed states, to settle for an eroding biosphere.

What do we do with the old stories?

We need art that creates conditions for a larger Will that affirms a break from the path we are on as a species. Mann's art is an example of how one eschews humanity as it was & evolves us towards the better.

Aristilde Kirby is a poet and artist based in New York.