AMERICAN SIJO

It's the hottest time of year. Pre-deluge. Landlocked-in, 충북/is a vessel for stagnant air. My cousins keep telling/me how sorry they are. I have to spend all my time in 한국/apart from the sea./I keep saying/I'm here for family./I'll see the ocean/next time./Last time/I was here, two nukes/were parked in the ocean,/round the bend./I wasn't looking/for nukes. I was looking/for you. Up-down/the palace-ridden boul/–evard, sun-drenched/in my suit, sweating/like the monsoon, begging/for your approval./Smoking in a shack by my hotel, I made/shisha from everyone's miserable fucking face, watching each bowl-necked/아저씨 craning to duck the next guy's puff;/in the smoke,/swear I spotted you/rushing these 명동 streets/–young, steel-lipped,/wearing your suit./When you were young,/you believed we still had a shot./How long did it take/to feel how weak we are?/All your heroes/are dead./Your brothers-in-law butchered./I felt my bones melting

sick. Quasi-tropic haze. Had been living off plums.

I was nervous.

The conference had asked before I left the states: "Would you like to deliver opening remarks?"

All night, letting the faucet

run, I stood naked/outside the shower/writing./All I don't know/is what I have./Last I spoke with Liz,/she told me life,/with its naked,/blatant truth, constitutes a song's/greatest source./All I knew was /that those two nukes/were only supposed to be the/threat, not the promise./From the conference room,/I could see/mountains you used to hike. Even with your bad leg, you could leap/from a two story building/just to beat a man. I omit/this detail in my remarks./I fear we share as much as Eomma/says. I say to the room how you were shot at 낙동, how you/refused amputation. When I finish, some stand for Q & A./How to answer questions about questions? One person, mic shaking/in hand, says she's a delegate from the Philippines./She sobs./Her jaw arcs back,/as if a howl./Her grandfather/also fought the war./Her grandfather,/shot in the leg, too./They never got to meet,/either. My cousins never got to meet/you, either./Closest we all came/was when we were kids. Rolling/around the grass/by your grave./My father was being inducted/into the family./Eomma's brothers/sharing a smoke with pops,/saving the last puff/for you,/my father cradling the dart/in his hand,/leaving it to roost/on your grave./Wind taking your drag.

Been twenty years.
Your grandkids, now in one place.

Wind still howling.

AMERICAN SIJO

It's our first night in 한국./Neither eomma nor I could sleep./Like dogs to our own vomit,/we chop through our cigs while/our hosts try for shut-eye./The neighbor's dog pokes her head

over 삼촌's fence./She must be a jindo,/by the slope/of her brow./Before he had hit the hay,/삼촌 called her/by a name. *Melancholy*./Eomma stares at the dog, the bent

ears and white-fur-dyed-pink

by last month's rains. "Such a sad dog,"

Eomma says.
"This dog is lonely.

Mel an cho 이

the dog."

I move toward the jindo, offering

my hand up for her

to sniff, my other hand nursing

my smoke. "I'm like the dog," Eomma says.

We ash in time.

"Melancholy must be my name."

Eomma walks to the jindo.

Pats her snout. It feels dry.

"mm, 잘 자."