



Maninbo: Peace & War

By Ko Un

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Maninbo: Peace & War By Ko Un

?Ko Un has long been a living legend in Korea, both as a poet and as a person. Allen Ginsberg once wrote, 'Ko Un is a magnificent poet, combination of Buddhist cognoscente, passionate political libertarian, and naturalist historian.' Maninbo (Ten Thousand Lives) is the title of a remarkable collection of poems by Ko Un, filling thirty volumes, a total of 4001 poems containing the names of 5600 people, which took 30 years to complete. Ko Un first conceived the idea while confined in a solitary cell upon his arrest in May 1980, the first volumes appeared in 1986, and the project was completed 25 years after publication began, in 2010. Unsure whether he might be executed or not, he found his mind filling with memories of the people he had met or heard of during his life. Finally, he made a vow that, if he were released from prison, he would write poems about each of them. In part this would be a means of rescuing from oblivion countless lives that would otherwise be lost, and also it would serve to offer a vision of the history of Korea as it has been lived by its entire population through the centuries. A selection from the first 10 volumes of Maninbo relating to Ko Un's village childhood was published in the US in 2006 by Green Integer under the title Ten Thousand Lives. This edition is a selection from volumes 11 to 20, with the last half of the book focused on the sufferings of the Korean people during the Korean War. Essentially narrative, each poem offers a brief glimpse of an individual's life. Some span an entire existence, some relate a brief moment. Some are celebrations of remarkable lives, others recall terrible events and inhuman beings. Some poems are humorous, others are dark commemorations of unthinkable incidents. They span the whole of Korean history, from earliest pre-history to the present time. Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation.

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Editorial Review

Review

This volume serves as a testimony, a monumental feat of remembrance memorializing the lives of ordinary people interrupted by extraordinary events. --World Literature Today

About the Author

Born in 1933 in Gunsan, North Jeolla Province, Korea, Ko Un is Korea's foremost living writer. After immense suffering during the Korean War, he became a Buddhist monk. A few years later he returned to the world. After years of dark nihilism, he became a leading spokesman in the struggle for freedom and democracy during the 1970s and 1980s, when he was often arrested and imprisoned. He has published more than 150 volumes of poems, essays, and fiction, including the monumental seven-volume epic Mount Paekdu and the 30-volume Maninbo (Ten Thousand Lives) series. Bloodaxe published a selection of his recent poetry, *First Person Sorrowful*, in 2012. He has appeared at numerous festivals, and was given the Golden Wreath, one of the world's most prestigious awards for poetry, during the international poetry festival Struga Poetry Evenings in Macedonia in August 2014.

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Tara Carlson:

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