

The Rust Tree by the Road (1996)

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Translated from the Korean by Chae-Pyong Song and Anne Rashid

1

In front of the window of my house
A road stretches out;
by the road a rust tree
grows up every night.

2

Line

5 All the pedestrians
who can't remember the roads they have walked
become rusty. Don't we, the poor, witness this
down the roads we come and go upon daily?
The houses crumble down
10 and the roots of the rust tree move
freely,
punching big holes in the young one's lungs,
collapsing the building's scaffolding.

At first, the rust tree's root is
15 fatigue gathered on the pedestrian's soul,
dust descending on the bread crumbs of memory,
and paralysis and amnesia--
the whole picture of our love--
on the sky that we all possess
20 we make an open graveyard and lie crowded.

Already at the window
rust leaves touch the lips.
When one by one they cover the roof,
Children will become hags--
25 even your lover
will wither.
It's fatal for the big tree, producing
Rust bloom flowers.
Haven't we seen the houses on the road
30 and the earth with words
rusted away?
On every road we traverse
rust trees bloom like the dead of night--
even the birds of childhood
35 and people change.

3

Beside me, about my love and around my house,
blooming in a crowd, ah, the smell of rust.



Kut-byol Jung
born 1964



associated with life and
production



associated with protection
and sustenance



associated with roads and
travelling



associated with degradation
and decay