

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/1

*Hee-June Choi*  
**Black Hole**

A massive star collapses, no one knows  
what's inside: hiding its face but peeking at us.  
A nurse fills out the time: 12:05 AM, my sister's death.  
I sign where her finger points. And my sister and I are alone  
in the darkest place in Madison, Wisconsin.

In the sixties, she, the bookish one, was leaving  
for the US in a blue two-piece suit.  
But now, what makes her rush to leave  
her house in white cotton pajamas?

Her eyes stare upward maybe defiant  
at what is happening, or recording  
the images of plants, books on the shelves,  
work plaques, and a brown water spot  
on the ceiling: too busy to fix it.

The collected data collapse into the inside,  
into the shrinking grids of the black hole.  
(Six months before, she told her psychiatrist, "My brother  
in California isn't coming. I'm dying alone.")

As I prepare for her journey, it's funny to have  
a hard time breathing since it's just me taking air.  
In this crumbling block of time, she takes my image  
with the others into singularity.

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### Bus Ride

"I am staying near West Portal," Teresa wrote,  
"and can meet you anywhere buses go."

This calls to mind my bus ride from Madison, Wisconsin,  
to L.A. in '73 to start a new life.

I met a retired lab technician in his sixties.

Each year, he renewed a yearly Greyhound pass.

He would go as the bus went

and eat his meal wherever the bus stopped.

When he finished the apple I gave him,

I saw the core axis bristling with black seeds ready to fall.

He'd last heard from his brother in New York

twenty years before. But he had insurance for his funeral

—he didn't need anybody.

That was my first full year in America.

Like Teresa he would go anywhere the bus goes.

All that afternoon, the bus passed through the empty

Western plains extending from the October sun.

Now and then, a passenger got up for the toilet

and went back to sleep.

Head slightly cocked but eyeing the window

for the crossing of old acquaintances,

he was heading home.

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### The Vietnam Vet

His bicycle pulls a trailer: four garbage bags  
and two car tires. His hair is long in the back,  
the US flag flies above his seat. Is he that grateful  
to his country? Bending his body halfway  
into a trashcan on the street, he suddenly swings  
his fist toward oncoming cars.

He sits in the shade of an underpass  
of the 87-freeway in downtown San Jose,  
a structure so enormous and empty  
it could be a stage for the rampart scene of Hamlet,  
and he the watchman. But he knows  
he's the reason people complain.

His face is blistered from raw weather;  
the city folks might think, "It's Ok, nothing can last  
long on the street."  
No welcoming parade for the losers,  
but it's not like he signed up.  
His return home was his exile.

At night, he finds a corner to sleep,  
his back against a hard wall;  
his flag is a warning sign for any invader  
of a soldier's campsite.

Occasionally he mutters in wrath,  
but that, too, will fade like the green  
of his jacket, his patches unrecognizable.  
Someday soon, he will become just like  
any other homeless man.