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Writing Herself: Resistance, Rebellion, and Revolution in Korean Women's Lyric Poetry, 1925—2012

A dissertation presented

by

Jung Ja Choi

to

The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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in the subject of

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Writing Herself: Resistance, Rebellion, and Revolution

in Korean Women's Lyric Poetry, 1925—2012

Abstract

Despite a recent global surge in the reception and translation of Korean women poets, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on this topic. This dissertation aims to expand the focus of Western scholarship beyond the Korean male canon by providing the first in-depth analysis of the works of Korean women poets in the 20th and 21st centuries. The poets I chose to examine for this study played a critical role in revolutionizing traditional verse patterns and in integrating global socio-political commentary into modern Korean poetry. In particular, by experimenting widely with forms from epic narrative, memoir in verse, and shamanic narration to epistolary verse and avant-garde styles, they opened up new possibilities for Korean women's lyric poetry. In addition, they challenged the traditional notion of lyric poetry as simply confessional, emotional, passive, or feminine. Their poetry went beyond the commonplace themes of nature, love, and longing, engaging with socio-political concerns such as racial, class, and gender discrimination, human rights issues, and the ramifications of the greatest calamities of the 20th century, including the Holocaust, the Korean War, and the Kwangju Uprising. Unlike the dominant scholarship that tends to highlight the victimization of women and their role as passive observers, this project shows Korean women poets as active chroniclers of

public memory and vital participants in global politics and literature. The multifaceted and detailed reading of their work in this dissertation facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of 20th-and 21st-century women's lives in Korea.

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CHAPTER I

An End to the Death of Poetry: The Film Poetry, Mija, and Three Women Poets

In 2010, when I began to do research for my dissertation on modern Korean women poets, novelist-turned-cineaste[1] Lee Chang-dong's[2] film Poetry (Si) came out. Since its premiere in South Korea on May 13, 2010, it has quickly come to be seen as his masterpiece, garnering a number of awards around the world.[3] Despite Lee's reputation and the film's critical acclaim, however, I was hesitant about seeing the film, mainly because of his preference for gruesome tales and traumatic events as his subject matter. As he revealed in a media interview, the main motive for making Poetry was also a disturbing incident: "a sexual assault case that had actually happened in a small town in South Korea, which was committed by a group of juveniles."[4] I wondered, then, how he could possibly relate this distressing event to the genre of poetry in yet another medium: film. I therefore chose to watch the

[1] Lee Chang-dong (Yi Ch'ang-dong), born in 1954, was a high school teacher and was involved in theatre prior to becoming a novelist in the 1980s and a filmmaker in the 1990s. He has made five films so far: Green Fish (Ch'orok mulgogi, 1996); Peppermint Candy (Pakha sat'ang, 1999); Oasis (Oasisŭ, 2002); Secret Sunshine (Miryang, 2007); and Poetry (Si, 2010). For biography and interviews, as well as commentaries on the first three films, see Kim Yŏng-jin, Lee Chang-dong, trans. Park Sang-hee (Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2007).

[2] Korean names are written in the conventional order: family name followed by given name, except for those writing in English who use the Western order. Also, Korean terms have been transliterated according to the McCune-Reischauer Romanization system, except for words with commonly accepted alternative spellings, e.g., Lee Chang-dong.

[3] Most notably, the Best Screenplay Award at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival in France and the Regard d'Or Award at the 2011 Fribourg International Film Festival in Switzerland.

[4] Sarah Cronin, "Poetry: Interview with Lee Chang-dong," Electric Sheep Magazine: A Deviant View of Cinema 27 July 2011.

film more out of duty and curiosity (being a student of poetry and film), than out of love for the director or his style.

Much to my astonishment, though, I discovered more than a close relationship between the two mediums: Lee provided me with food for thought through his own reflections about ethics and aesthetics in general, and poetry, women, death, violence, and voice in particular. The film is not just a representation of the death of a young girl from sexual violence, but a declaration of the death, or, in fact, an end to the death, of poetry, illustrated in the life of an aging woman who comes to terms with the suffering of others, as well as her own impending death, by learning how to write a poem.

Poetry has since been a film I return to each time I feel stuck in writing my dissertation and it has in turn inspired me to tackle the questions of women and poetry, gender and identity, sisterhood and individual change, forgetting and remembering, and death and mourning in my exploration of three Korean women poets—Kim Myŏng-sun (1896-ca.1953), Ko Chŏng-hŭi (1948-1991), and Kim Sŭng-hŭi (1952-). It is in this context that I have decided to offer an in-depth analysis of the film as an introduction to the four large themes that underlie the works of these women poets. The first theme concerns the power of lyric poetry, in particular, its confessional and private voice. The second theme concerns the power of female bonding, especially between "mothers and daughters" as well as among "sisters," whether real or imagined. The third theme concerns the power of female sexuality and physical and rhetorical violence against women. The fourth theme concerns death, mourning, and remembering of the marginalized Other. In what follows, I will

first demonstrate how these four themes run through the film and then show in what ways they integrate with the works of the three women poets.

THEME I: The film Poetry, first and foremost, concerns the resuscitation of lyric poetry in the ethical and aesthetic mode of confession or autobiography. Lee has revealed that because he did not want to depict the tragic event in a "conventional" manner, such as having "the victim fight for justice with difficulty," or portraying "a journalist or a police detective . . . [in their] search for the hidden truth,"[5] he eventually chose poetry to represent its violence and horror. In this way, he also said, he wanted to seek an answer to his own long-standing inquiry on how art, "a pursuit for beauty," is "related to the filth and vice of the world"; an inquiry which he claims is "similar to what Theodor Adorno had asked: is it possible to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz?"[6] In the film, Lee chooses as his philosophical alter ego an aging woman, who discovers the art and practice of poetry while learning about a young girl's death and her grandson's involvement in it, and encountering the violation of her own sexuality. Through her, he explores the question of balance between the aesthetic and the ethical, as well as that of representing the unrepresentable all the while avoiding aestheticizing the atrocity.

Mija (played by actress Yun Jung-Hee [Yun Chŏng-hŭi]), in her mid-60s, works part-time as a caregiver to a disabled man while raising a grandson on her own; she learns that she is in the first stage of Alzheimer's disease, and that her grandson Wook [Uk] is implicated in a sexual crime which has led to a girl's death.

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[5] Cronin, "Poetry."

[6] Cronin, "Poetry."

Her entry into the world of poetry coincides with these tragic events. For the viewer, it thus seems inconceivable that she would be able to turn to writing poetry in the face of such adversity. However, it is precisely the possibility of writing out of impossibility to do so that Lee tackles, and the figure of Mija is carefully chosen, reflecting the director's sensitivity to Adorno's critique of art—that it does an injustice to victims of violence by making the unthinkable thinkable with "something of its horror removed."[7] In other words, as his response to Adorno, Lee makes a poet out of an ordinary woman whose "abundance of real suffering permits no forgetting,"[8] but who comes to terms with the suffering of others, as well as her own, by learning how to write a poem. It is through poetry that she mourns her own impending death as well as that of the young girl, Heejin [Hŭi-jin], who is otherwise consigned to oblivion under the phallocentric order of society. Despite the impossible premise of poetry according to Adorno, the film suggests that it is lyric imagination that offers women the power to escape the patriarchal imposition of silence and preserve a story/ history of their own.

In addition, it is worth noting that by making Mija a poet to conjure up the dead and speak for the marginalized and silenced woman, Lee, whether consciously or not, also empowers the protagonist to challenge the gender hierarchy in Korean society which insists on a secondary role for women, thereby inviting a feminist reading of the film. By placing her in the male-dominated realm of Korean literature,

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[7] Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003) 252.

[8] Adorno, "Commitment" 252.

the film moreover engages in a "feminist aesthetic" that "promote[s] women as producers of art."[9] As the film unfurls, we observe that there is no easy way to reveal the story of the crime because people do not listen; criminals dismiss their sins; and authorities try to cover up the wrong. Yet, the suppression of the story occurs while Mija is developing a keen interest in another mode of storytelling: poetry. On the day she encounters Heejin's corpse, Mija also sees a Community Center poster which reads: "Literary Class for the Public: You Too Can Be A Poet." Though she is not yet aware that poetry will be the medium through which she commemorates the dead, the poster rekindles her childhood wish to be a poet and she signs up for the class without delay.

The first lesson she learns in the class is that seeing well is important to writing poetry. Her teacher (played by the contemporary poet Kim Yong-tak [Kim Yŏng-t'ak]) takes an apple out of his pocket and asks his students, "How many times have you seen an apple? A thousand? Ten thousand? A million?"[10] While the camera cuts to Mija sliding into her seat, he continues:

> Until now, you haven't seen an apple for real. To really know what an apple is is to be interested in it, to understand it, to converse with it. [. . .] Gazing at it for a while, observing its shadow, feeling its every curve, turning it around, taking a bite out of it, imagining the sunlight absorbed in it, that is really seeing it.

While his emphasis is on seeing things in a thorough and novel way, his lecture also reveals the importance of establishing relationships with the objects one looks at. It

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[9] Maggie Humm, Feminism and Film (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 1997) 9.

[10] All quotes are from the English subtitles released on the film's DVD, except the poem translation provided later in this chapter. See Poetry [Si]. Dir. Lee Chang-Dong. Perf. Yun Jung-Hee and Lee David. Kino International, 2011. DVD.

is what Tom Conley would call having "a tactile eye," an eye with a snail's sense,[11] because to touch something with a gaze is a way of situating oneself in relation to it. Further, the film places accountability on Mija's eye, and by extension, the director's camera-eye, both of which will bring the crime and justice to light against the backdrop of patriarchal blindness and corruption.

Mija's discovery of the haptic eye, though, requires a long journey. As instructed, she attempts to carefully gaze at everything she sees: following her eyes, the camera settles on dirty dishes in the sink and magnets on the refrigerator, in a way that calls to mind Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa's In Vanda's Room and Jacques Rancière's reflection upon "the tensions between the settings of a miserable life and its inherent aesthetic possibilities."[12] While the camera pans, Mija even brings comedy to the film by holding her right hand to her forehead as she surveys her tiny living room cluttered with bric-a-brac—as if she were Keats' stout Cortez staring with eagle eyes at the Pacific[13]—until she spots an apple on the table, picks it up, caresses it with her eyes and hands, and takes a bite. She becomes intoxicated by this new activity of seeing. Yet, apparently, she is merely looking at the outer appearance of things without understanding the relationship between perception,

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[11] Conley, An Errant Eye: Poetry and Topography in Early Modern France (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011) 201-202. In addition, one can extend a poet's relationships with his or her space to film and spectatorship. Conley states that "A film, like a topographic projection, can be understood as an image that locates and patterns the imagination of its spectators. When it takes hold, a film encourages its public to think of the world in concert with its own articulation of space." See Cartographic Cinema (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007) 1.

[12] Volker Pantenburg, "Realism, Not Reality: Pedro Costa's Digital Testimonies," Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry 24 (2010): 55. Also see Jacques Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator (London: Verso, 2009) 80-81.

[13] John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," The Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and Their Contemporaries, ed. David Damrosch (New York: Longman, 1999) 748.

poetic inspiration, and composition. Though earnest and passionate, her practice of beholding often provokes derision rather than admiration from others. When she is sitting under a tree on a sidewalk bench outside of her apartment complex and looking up with her body swaying gently to and fro, an elderly neighbor walks past her, turns back with a curious look, and asks her, "What are you looking at?" "The Tree," Mija replies. The elderly woman then says, "Why are you looking up at the tree?" Mija responds, dreamingly, "To see the tree well. To feel it, to understand its thoughts, and to listen to what it says to me." At this, the neighbor walks away, casting a worried glance over one shoulder a few times, as if doubting Mija's sanity. She is seen as a daydreaming psychotic rather than an aspiring poet.

The scene, nevertheless, forces one to take the psychoanalytic perspective of viewing artists as being in the state of dreaming. As explicated in Sigmund Freud's essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," writers exist between neurotics and "normal" adults, and creativity in proximity to madness is thought to occur when reason ceases to police the imagination.[14] In the same vein, one can see that Mija's fanciful look and her fondness for, what she calls, "odd things," a floppy hat, a fancy scarf, and a floral dress, as well as her childlike demeanor—she talks and walks, in a lively, cheerful, and girlish way, sometimes as if she is oblivious to reality—put her close to "the child at play,"[15] analogous to literary creativity. Certainly, at first, the portrayal of her girlishness and naiveté appears unsettling, and it has provoked the

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[14] Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995) 438; 440-43.

[15] Freud, "Creative Writers" 437.

critic Kenneth Turan to view her as "a self-absorbed aging beauty [. . .] who is too flirty and flighty to totally live in the real world."[16] However, one can argue that her idiosyncrasies allow her to get closer to the world of the dead and transmit the lived experience of the young girl, Heejin, as we will see later in this essay. Because Mija has been imbued with traits of an "innocent and naïve" child who "wonders about everything,"[17] she can "[look] at life in a very fresh way."[18] In the following examples I will typify the ways in which she recast what we think of as familiar in a new light.

When Mija becomes uncomfortable and feels unable to remain in the group of fathers whose sons are implicated in the incident during their first meeting, she excuses herself and steps outside the restaurant. While they are discussing the compensation money for the girl's mother and revealing the school's and the police's inclination for hushing up the crime, the camera, in a long shot, shows Mija outside the large window of the room. She stops in front of a cockscomb, admires the flower, and starts to write on her notepad. The fathers immediately utter their dismay: "What a clueless old lady. What's she doing at a moment like this?" One father is more sympathetic than the others. After telling the rest of them that she lives off welfare and a job as a maid in order to raise the grandson her daughter left behind after a divorce, he goes outside and asks her what she has written down. She says, smiling faintly, "Blood." She has written the word because the cockscomb she is looking at is "as red as blood." It appears that simple. Yet, when one considers the

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[16] Kenneth Turan, "Movie Review: 'Poetry,'" Los Angeles Times 6 May 2011.

[17] Turan, "Movie Review."

[18] Christopher Bell, "Interview: Lee Chang-dong Talks 'Poetry,' How 'Avatar' Affected Him, An 'Oasis' Remake & More," IndieWire. 8 Feb. 2011.

crushing blow—the news about her grandson and the crime—that has just been dealt, the one word, "blood," seems quite complicated. "Blood," one can argue, symbolizes Mija's heart that is bleeding at that moment, as well as the wounds of the pubescent girl Heejin and the physical and psychological pain she suffered when alive. The flower is one of the things that Mija loves because of its beauty, but here the same beautiful object turns into an image of horror. Mija is not simply sentimental, though. She promptly confronts the father: "Do you know what the cockscomb symbolizes? It's a shield. Actually it looks like a shield. A shield that protects us." He regards her remarks with scorn. He looks at her just as her elderly neighbor did: as if she were crazy. As the camera zooms in on her, she squints her eyes to see the cockscomb more closely. She indeed appears to be daydreaming, as if seeing something reflected in the shield. Though we cannot see what she sees in the shield-shaped flower, we can imagine that she is searching for a shield, to protect her from falling into the patriarchal trap that protects only sons, a shield that can grant her the power to bring persecutors to justice and to do right by the voiceless victim.[19] Along with Elaine Scarry, who defends beauty against the accusation that it "distracts attention from wrong social arrangements,"[20] the film seems to stress that beauty "ignites the desire for truth"[21] and "assists us in the work of addressing injustice."[22]

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[19] On Lee's blending of beauty and ethics, see An Si-hwan, "Yi Ch'ang-dong ŭi mijŏk yongmang kwa todŏkchŏk ŭimu" [The Aesthetic Desire and Ethical Obligation of Lee Chang-dong], Ssine 21 27 May 2010; Song Kyŏng-wŏn, "Arŭmdaum ŭi ŭiminŭn muŏtin'ji tchotnŭn yŏnghwa 'Si'" [Poetry, A Film Seeking the Meaning of Beauty], Ssine 21 12 May 2010.

[20] Elaine Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 58.

[21] Scarry 52.

Just like the cockscomb, some apricots attract Mija's attention on her way to meet Heejin's mother. Before reaching the farm fields where Heejin's mother is working, Mija is drawn to the apricots which have fallen to the ground. She picks one up, gazes at it, takes a bite, and writes down her reflections on her notepad. She "[feels] so blessed to walk in such beauty" that she seems to have forgotten her mission, which is to meet and appease the victim's mother, a mission devised by the boys' fathers. When she sees and approaches the mother, instead of staging the melodrama scripted by the fathers—pleading through her pathetic tale and "shedding a few tears"—Mija talks about the apricots and the wonders of nature. Evoking what she wrote in her notepad, she says: "When I saw the apricots on the ground, I thought they were full of yearning. Throwing themselves to the ground, being crushed and trampled on, they prepare for their next life." The kind-looking mother patiently listens but politely turns around to hide her puzzlement. To her, Mija also appears to be daydreaming. Poetry seems out of place to the mother, whose poverty will eventually drive her to comply with the fathers, the school officers, and the police. Yet, Mija, absorbed in her poetic moment, reiterates her admiration for natural beauty and takes her leave without telling the mother who she is or why she is there. Maybe it is in part because of her dementia. However, even if she remembered the woman-to-woman talk scenario the fathers conceived, could it bring a better consolation than a story of apricots? Her comments about the apricots seem delusional at first, but they can also be seen as deeply related to the story of Heejin: the young woman is crushed and trampled by men and society but

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[22] Scarry 62.

her fall does not result in complete disappearance. It foreshadows her eventual regeneration through poetry. One can argue that this poetic discourse on apricots, an object with which both women are familiar, is an attempt at consolation and a gesture of healing.

Through the practice of seeing well as in the scene above, Mija takes an ordinary object and endows it with a touching immediacy and charm, while revealing snippets of information about Heejin. However, despite her progress in looking at everyday life in a new light and making visible the invisible, she complains about the impossibility of writing the one poem due by the end of the month-long course. A couple of problems emerge. First, she blindly adheres to the formula that poetry equals beauty. When she attends the 'Friday Poetry Recital,' she feels offended by Mr. Park, a police officer by profession, who cracks lewd jokes after reciting a poem. With a scowl on her face, she says to a poet sitting next to her, "To love poetry is to seek beauty, right? But he is always talking dirty like that. It's like he is insulting poetry." She cannot imagine a place for the evil, the ugly, or the vulgar in her poetic world, though these are precisely the things she faces in reality. Enchanted by the seemingly lofty profession of the poet, she is oblivious to creativity's proximity to horror: she is unaware how closely she has been pursuing the ghost of the dead girl and how close she has come to reaching the unapproachable interior life of the silenced woman.

The second problem is the conflict between her childlike innocence and her adult experiences. Like a child, she is often enchanted by external beauty and pursues what pleases her sight, but like an experienced adult, the way she sees

things is also affected by what she knows or what she believes.[23] Because she believes that obscenity is the opposing force to beauty and knows that dirty jokes are regarded as offensive by accepted norms of morality, she sees the policeman only as distasteful and displeasing. He is the one to whom she will eventually disclose the sexual crime against Heejin and he is the one who will bring about justice. However, at the poetry recital, Mija has difficulty accepting that the repulsive officer could have "a good heart" or the fact that he "used to work at the Seoul Police Station but after reporting internal corruption, he was demoted to the country police station." With her skepticism, Mija reveals her disbelief at the unsettling relationship between what she believes and what really is. To write poetry, then, she needs to question her knowledge to some extent and make a room for ugliness in her world of beauty. This is also precisely what the filmmaker aims to bring to light in his work.

As noted previously, Lee is obsessed with the question of beauty and its place in the world of vice. "To discover hidden beauty and meaning in small and trivial things is the fundamental element, not only for film, but also all art genres,"[24] he claims. Yet, what troubles him is that "beauty doesn't exist per se . . . but co-exists with pain, filth, and ugliness."[25] In other words, without vice, without suffering, there is no art, no poetry. And, it is this "irony"[26] that he tries to capture in Poetry,

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[23] John Berger shows that "[the] way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe." See Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972) 8.

[24] Sarah Cronin, "Poetry: Interview with Lee Chang-dong."

[25] Cronin, "Poetry."

[26] Cronin, "Poetry."

just as Charles Baudelaire did in Les Fleurs du mal. This is why the filmmaker creates the figure of Mija who has to deal with beauty and horror, while at the same time perceiving the world from a fresh, childlike perspective. It is important to note that Lee treats childlike qualities as a sign of innocence, a state he claims is vital to a poet, but he does not naïvely believe that it can exist alone, impervious to the corrupted world.

On the contrary, he seems more interested in the coexistence of innocence and experience, the conflicting "modes of perception"[27] that are masterfully manifested in William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul. Blake, though fascinated by the innocent vitality of imagination, associates innocence with "dangerous ignorance and vulnerability to oppression," and also shows that it is susceptible to the fallen world which "becomes known through 'experience.'"[28] In the same way, Lee tries to capture the contradictory possibilities in the story of Mija, whose job as a maid constantly threatens the sacred boundary of her fantasy world. In sum, on the one hand he is eager to show Mija's pursuit of aesthetic pleasure, as an aspiring lyric poet, in objects such as flowers and fruits, and her attempt at mimetic representation. On the other hand, he is also anxious to capture the moments at which the beauty she sees as absolute is actually false recognition, when the dark world of desire and violence—which she thinks should not exist next to art—in fact encircles it endlessly.

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[27] David Damrosch, ed., The Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and Their Contemporaries (New York: Longman, 1999) 110.

[28] Damrosch 110.

The correlation between the film and the works of the three poets I will be examining in the subsequent chapters allows us to discover that the issues treated in this section—the power of the lyric mode, the matrix of perception, poetic inspiration, creativity and madness, and art, truth, and mimesis—are also the ones which concern them to a certain extent. The lyric mode of poetry, which is "often spoken in the first person" and "usually taken to convey the intimate thoughts of the speaker about his or her object,"[29] is especially important to the women poets Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi because of its relation to life writing. It is worth mentioning, though, that the lyric's apparent mode of the "self-absorption" has drawn much criticism, the confessional mode with "a high emotional content" has attained a pejorative connotation,[30] and the attention to "women poets' evocation of the private, introspective or local" is seen as acknowledging "masculine critical tradition which has argued that the private sphere is women's proper and only concern."[31]

Despite these pitfalls, however, I think women's lyrical, confessional, and private voice is critical because it tells us "the story of the aspects of women's lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned, mystified and even idealized in the

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[29] Jo Gill, Women's Poetry (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 2007) 84.

[30] Joan Aleshire, "Staying News: A Defense of the Lyric," After Confession: Poetry As Autobiography, eds. Kate Sontag and David Graham (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2001) 25.

[31] Jo Gill, Women's Poetry 79. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, for example, claim that: "It may appear that all lyric poetry is life writing in that the speaker of the lyric inscribes a subjective self as he or she explores emotions, vision, and intellectual states. We need, however, to distinguish certain kinds of lyrics that announce themselves as 'autobiography' from *lyric* as an umbrella term for many forms of poetic self-inscription." See Smith and Watson, Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001) 277.

majority of traditional texts."[32] Just as Mija's lyrical "I" (also "eye") rescues the story of Heejin, as well as of her own, from oblivion, writing her way through illness and violence, Kim Myŏng-sun, the first modern Korean woman writer as well as the first professional woman poet of Korea, preserved the story of her life, which was distorted, degraded, and disregarded by her contemporary male writers, in her autobiographical poetry. The first self-proclaimed feminist of Korea, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, although not ostensibly lyrical or confessional, chose the epistolary verse form, "a site of the personal and the private,"[33] and by donning the mask of other women, rescued the stories of lesser-known woman heroes and revised women's history from their perspectives. Kim Sŭng-hŭi, one of the first woman scholar-poets in Korea, who attempted to blend the philosophical with the lyrical and the political with the personal, has consciously employed the confessional as a mode to rebel against the patriarchal society's oppression of women, interweaving her personal stories with those of other women, both mythical and historical, both from the East and the West. For these women poets, the lyrical and the confessional are not the modes of being narcissistic, self-serving, or apolitical, but the modes to assert their agency and subjectivity and break the silence after centuries of the loss and suppression of their voice, as well as to face our society's "Alzheimer's disease" that spurs us to forget those who are on the margin.

THEME II: The film Poetry is also an expression of the power of female bonding. In what follows, I will look at the ways in which female bonding is

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[32] Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) 60.

[33] Margaretta Jolly, ed., Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001) 303.

established in the filmic frame. The film opens with a striking image of rushing water and the corpse of a young girl floating in a river, who we later learn committed suicide by jumping off of a bridge. The two elements that haunt the film, water and the female body, are introduced in this extended shot. Both are important symbols denoting the ways in which Mija embodies Heejin's suffering and the horrific details of this outrageous crime. Throughout the film, it is Mija's body that becomes the object of male desire and the focus of the camera, rather than the body of the young victim who has been sexually harassed by her school friends. There is no flashback that shows the crime scene, yet the sexual tension created around Mija in her workplace reminds viewers early on of the physical terror lurking around the female body, revealing a subtextual connection between the two women as victims of Korea's patriarchal culture.

The film further cements this female bonding by inscribing the written word "poetry (si)" on the bodies of the two women, albeit metaphorically. The word first appears when the film's title "시 (poetry)" in Korean is superimposed on the corpse of Heejin who is floating face down, specifically on the left side of the frame that shows the back of her head and upper back in close-up. It comes up again on the first day of Mija's poetry class. Next to the word "詩 (poetry)"[34] written in Chinese on the whiteboard, her instructor writes in Korean "본다 (to see)," while explaining that, "To write poetry, you must see well. The most important thing in life is seeing."

[34] It is interesting to note that the Korean word "si" could mean 詩(poetry), 視(to see), and 屍 (dead body) in Chinese. I thank Professor Sun Joo Kim for making this point. Lee Chang-dong might have had this in mind when he superimposed the title "si" on the corpse of Heejin, although there is no evidence of this in his interview materials.

The first appearance of the word signals that it is poetry that will give voice to the dead girl's story and embody her feelings. The word's second appearance introduces us to the agent of this poetry: a poet with "a tactile eye," to borrow Tom Conley's term.[35] When, at the end of the film, Mija finally produces a poem and disappears, Heejin reappears in a close-up; this time, however, she faces the camera and the audience head-on, with a smile on her face. The two women become one.

Their bond becomes even more consolidated, as the silencing of the girl's story and the elderly woman's desperate search for narration occur simultaneously. Two events bracket Mija's visit to a doctor who suspects she has a memory disorder. The first is an event she sees on a TV news program in the waiting room: a Palestinian woman crying over her son's dead body. The second she sees upon stepping out of the hospital: a peasant woman wailing over her daughter's body, which has just been discovered. On the surface, the juxtaposition of the two events establishes a female community that shares in grief and compassion. Despite their physical distance, the Palestinian woman and the Korean woman are connected by their loss. Mija is also linked to them through her compassion, which is evidenced by her distress, as she regards their suffering. On a deeper level, though, one can see this juxtaposition as a political move, challenging gender inequality by suggesting that the young girl's death should be treated as importantly as the boy's. Whether due to sexual crime or to war, loss affects us to the same degree. However, as Judith

[35] Tom Conley, An Errant Eye: Poetry and Topography in Early Modern France (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011) 201. One could argue that the poet, who will mediate Heejin's experience, needs to be able see with a sense of touch. In other words, as Conley illustrates in another context, she needs to be the one who can "look at the world from the topographer's point of view: from a position that is both of the sentient body and detached from it, that needs to displace itself to obtain its bearings" (3).

Butler illustrates in Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence, "certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable."[36] While the Palestinian boy's death[37] is recognized globally, the girl's, as we shall see, is repeatedly suppressed even regionally. In this context, it is critical to notice that Lee assigns Mija the role of active storyteller rather than passive observer. Even if few people, and fewer men in particular, pay attention to her narrative in the scenes we will examine below, her endeavor to recount Heejin's story is vital to cementing the bond between the two marginalized women and eventually challenging the gender hierarchy that dictates female silence.

Though Mija is just one of many bystanders at the hospital who sees Heejin's corpse and her mother's breakdown, she is the first person in the film who verbalizes the girl's suicide. After finishing her work as caregiver to Mr. Kang, an infirm and half-paralyzed man, she goes down to a convenience store on the first floor run by Mr. Kang's daughter-in-law and starts to recount what she saw at the hospital that day, but no one listens. Her words—"a local school girl," "a dead body," "a suicide"—do not stir up interest from anyone in the store. They seem to treat her as a babbling elderly woman. The situation relegates Mija to the role of Other, condemning her to silence throughout the film. Moreover, the scene is arranged in a

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[36] Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London: Verso, 2004) xiv.

[37] Of course, as Judith Butler argues in Precarious Life, it is true that "a hierarchy of grief" exists and thousands of Palestinians who have died at the hands of the military do not even appear in obituaries and their "names and faces, personal histories, family, favorite hobbies" are not recorded, marking their deaths as ungrievable (32). However, it could also be argued that historically, violence against the female body in a sexual crime has been even less recognized than violence against the male body in war.

triangular composition that intensifies her isolation: Mija alone at the center, facing the camera; the daughter-in-law on the left side; the customers on the right edge looking at and talking to one another. Though the shot may be intended to underscore the fact that the targeted audience of her speech is the film's spectators rather than the people in the store, it reveals at the same time that even as Mija emerges as a narrator, her voice is muffled and that from the outset Heejin's story is disregarded.

The sense of Mija's alienation deepens when she brings up the story again at the dinner table. She questions her grandson, who is in the same grade, about who Heejin was and why she killed herself. However, just like the daughter-in-law and the customers, Wook seems unconcerned and unemotional. Without looking at his grandmother, he curtly murmurs, "I didn't know her that well." After his grumpy response, he asks her back rhetorically, "Why do you need her name?" insinuating it is not her business. Moreover, he says this while devouring his meal and watching TV, without even making eye contact with his grandmother. In an interview, the filmmaker says that the scene represents "the generation gap," set in a "triangular composition where the television is in the centre" with "the grandson wholly focused on watching TV, and Mija looking at the back of his head from a distance."[38] While representing generational communication problems, though, this composition also adds to the feeling that Mija's voice is being muted. And Heejin's story is ignored once again—this time, by her perpetrator.

[38] David Jenkins, "The 'Poetry' of Lee Chang-Dong," Time Out London n. d.

Ultimately her story is unveiled, but only to be veiled again. The fathers of Wook's five friends contact Mija and ask her to come to a meeting where they disclose theirs sons' atrocious sexual assaults on Heejin in turn. Each father, with a seemingly guilty look, tells his son's role in the crime. However, it turns out that what concerns the troubled-looking fathers is not Heejin, the victim, but their sons, the victimizers. What the fathers, the school authorities, and the police want is a "joint action" to guard the secret of the scandal lest it "destroy the boys' future and the school." They propose giving a large sum of money to Heejin's mother to keep it secret, thus covering up the crime. Mija seems to be at a loss whenever she meets with them, both because she cannot afford to contribute to the payoff money, and because a terrible feeling of guilt plagues her. However, no one else shares in this feeling. Instead they rebuke her, asking, "Don't you understand the situation?" Blinded by their desire to maintain the phallocentric order of social institutions like family and school, they censor her speech. As David Edelstein writes in New York Magazine, Mija is again "muted by the condescension of Korea's legally and economically privileged males" and "treated with smug disdain by the fathers of the boys."[39]

In this way, the film exposes traditional patriarchal values that protect boys and men and marginalize girls and women. It also shows the pervasive commodification of women and the materialization of the female body; Heejin's body, though muted and mutilated, becomes a site of negotiation and control for the fathers. In addition, by juxtaposing Mija, whose voice is checked and whose story is

[39] David Edelstein, "Two Places, World Apart," New York Magazine 6 Feb. 2011.

threatened by her dementia, with Heejin, whose voice is silenced by death and whose story is about to pass into oblivion, the film reinforces their proximity to each other and shows the urgency of rescuing their narratives despite the difficulty of having them come to light. Just as Adorno acknowledged in his later career that silence is not an answer to the artistic injustice done to victims[40] and that it is in fact "in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it,"[41] Lee reveals the necessity of narration, both filmic and poetic, despite the impossibility of narrating. To a large extent, one can argue that the filmmaker's urge to give voice to the women also coincides with global feminist efforts to promote sisterhood.

Just as in the film, in the works of Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi the theme of female-female bonds is of great importance. In the case of Kim Myŏng-sun, it is the mother-daughter relationship that preoccupied her. Being the daughter of a secondary wife and a former courtesan marked and marred her life, as her critics attacked her moral character, claiming that her "impure" bloodline appeared as decadent and immoral characteristics in her work. She responded to their condemnation by remembering and writing about her mother as the origin of her creativity and imagination. As for Ko Chŏng-hŭi and Kim Sŭng-hŭi, awakened to feminism in the 1980s with their acquaintance with the "second wave" of feminism

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[40] Theodor W. Adorno states that "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage [. . .]. Not even silence gets out of the circle. In silence we simply use the state of the objective truth to rationalize our subjective incapacity, once more degrading truth into a lie." See Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973) 367.

[41] Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003) 188.

from the West, the slogan "sisterhood is powerful"[42] was not mere rhetoric, but real and vital, although their poetic responses were distinct from one another. Ko responded to the slogan by revising the history of her literary and intellectual foremothers as well as inserting the stories of her contemporary female political activists into history from a woman-centered perspective. Kim reacted by forming a sisterly bond with the historical and imaginary madwoman figures, who serve as her doubles, expressing for her frustration, anger, madness and violence caused by the repressive society.

THEME III: The film Poetry also concerns female sexuality and violence against the female body. As stated previously, it is the lurking violence against the body of Mija, the grandmother of the accused, rather than the shocking horror that was committed against Heejin's body, that dominates the film. In what follows, I therefore look closely at Mija's actions and her experiences with her employer Mr. Kang. In doing so, I aim to show how the sexual tension between them, especially in his bathroom, evokes the crime against Heejin, thereby making the elderly woman the mediator of the dead girl's experience. Mija's main tasks as a maid to the old man who had a stroke are cleaning his home and bathing his body. When she arrives

[42] Gayle Graham Yates elucidates the origin of the slogan as follows: "[It] first appeared in a leaflet written by Kathie Amatniek of the New York Radical Women and distributed at the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, an antiwar demonstration made up of a coalition of women's peace groups which took place at the opening of Congress in January 1968. The slogan 'Sisterhood is powerful' has both personal and collective meaning. Women individually or in groups have again and again had flashes of insight that their experience of being a woman is not their sole, lonely province but the common lot and bond of women, the potential unifying force for solidarity and support among half of humankind. Historically, with the impetus of the Women's liberation movement, thousands of women—many of them organized into groups called Women's Liberation or simply in meetings set up by and for women, and many more not formally collected into groups—began to reassess what being a woman means in relation to other women. This led them to take themselves seriously, perhaps for the first time, and to take other women seriously as persons and as allies, 'sisters.' Sisterhood means female solidarity, respect for women as women, support for all women by women." See What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975) 101-02.

in his apartment, she undresses him and proceeds to wet his body with the showerhead and scrub it with the washcloth in the bathtub. Mr. Kang, unable to sit still and control his body, acts like a baby boy helplessly depending on his mother. However, despite his disability and infirmity, the juxtaposition of the sluggish naked male body and the fully dressed active female body creates an eerie tension. The close-up of his naked body in repeated bathroom scenes emphasizes their physical proximity and its sexual implications, accentuating the vulnerability of Mija's body. As the camera follows his glazed eyes, which roll around and gaze at her, viewers can see that what he desires is not simply a motherly touch but an erotic sensation. The recurrent bathroom scenes recreate Heejin's experience with their atmosphere of sexual volatility and reference the boys' horrific deeds.

The irony, though, is that Mr. Kang's bathroom also serves as a place for Mija to free herself from the repressive forces of guilt, shame, and resentment that block her full compassion for the girl. After following Mija to the requiem mass for Heejin, where she steals a small-framed photo of the girl and runs away guiltily, the camera cuts to Mr. Kang's bathtub. Though a bit shorter than their first bathroom scene, in this sequence Mija repeats her daily task of bathing Mr. Kang. What is different, though, is that after helping him get dressed and cleaning up the bathroom, she then occupies the space alone. She first looks at herself. She appears weary and droopy, and with seemingly angry eyes, stares at herself in the mirror. Dejectedly she closes the bathroom door and takes off her clothes and underwear. The camera pans slightly to follow her to the bathtub. She turns on the showerhead, increases the water pressure, and steps under the stream of water. When the camera zooms in, a

spray rains down on her and she starts to cry. Her tears mingle with the water that runs down her cheeks from her dripping hair, but the sound of the shower does not drown out her cries. On the surface, this long take shows that she finally exudes the emotions she has been suppressing since she learned about the boys' crime and the girl's suicide. It shows that even though she acts cheerful in public, as if unconcerned about what is happening, in private she comes into contact with the reality of violence, calamity, and mortality. She is distressed at her family and financial obligations: she feels both disturbed by the boys' wrongs, and grieves for the girl's tragedy. On a deeper level, though, the sequence presents a number of complicated aspects of this reality using a variety of filmic techniques.

As noted earlier, the film employs the image of water to suggest the unity of Mija and Heejin. The scene of Mija's body under the shower conjures up the image of Heejin's corpse in the river, foreshadowing parallels between the two women as sexual objects subject to physical violence. However, despite the film's innovative structure of revealing Heejin's pain through Mija's howl of anguish, the scene nonetheless embodies the "normal narrative film" in which the masculine camera shows women's exhibitionist role "with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."[43] Although at first glance she seems to have invaded a place reserved for her male counterpart, she does not dominate the space but is incarcerated by it. Two scenes that involve Mr. Kang frame this mise-en-scène. Before her use of the bathroom, noticing her unusual silence and depressed look, Mr. Kang teases her and asks her to

[43] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," ed. Sue Thornham Feminist Film Theory: A Reader. (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 1999) 62-63.

smile. Though she says she must not, she also reveals: "Men used to tell me not to smile because it made them fall for me. . . . You will do the same if I smile." She says this to avoid telling him the real reason she refrains from smiling: because she is in mourning for Heejin. But his bright smile provoked by her coquettish quip implies an erotic facet to their relationship. This view is supported by the end of her crying sequence: the camera cuts to Mr. Kang sitting outside the bathroom, leaning against its door, listening to the sound of water and her weeping, and rolling his eyes toward the door while his body twitches slightly. Because of his enforced immobility he cannot act as a spectator, watching her naked body, but the flirtatious conversation they had before seems to enable him to imagine what there is to see in the bathroom, arousing his sexual desire. On the one hand, the two scenes mirror the dominant masculine cinema by placing Mija's naked body in a site that signifies patriarchal imprisonment, oppression, and sexual threat. On the other, however, they show and reinforce that she is a double for the dead girl who was confined in her school science lab, the scene of the crime, where the boys dragged her and violated her repeatedly.

Viewed in this way, it is not so surprising that the scene of Mija's visit to her grandson's school takes place before the next bathroom scene, in which she is sexually assaulted by Mr. Kang. Walking through the school corridor by herself, she stops outside the science lab. No flashbacks. No sound effects except for the noise of summer cicadas coming from the playground. She looks through the window at the lab that seems too quiet, clean, and orderly to reveal any traces of the violence. Yet, she lingers as the camera scans the space horizontally, until her breath mists up the

windowpane. The lab seen through the dirty glass appears surreal. We cannot see what goes on in her mind, but her eyes, which become wide as she presses her nose against the window, seem to tell us that she is recollecting what the boys' fathers said is written in Heejin's diary: a story of sexual abuse. Is the lab haunted? One is not sure. Yet, the sequence below in which Mr. Kang's molestation reenacts the violence suggests that the specter of the crime is still present.

As soon as Mija comes into Mr. Kang's room, he hands her a blister pack of medicine and asks her to peel off the foil and help him take the pill without telling her what it is for. She follows his order and proceeds to do her usual duty without much suspicion. She washes him in a nonchalant manner, but his breathing becomes louder, his dopey eyes seem even more lethargic and his half-closed eyelids start to flutter as her hand rubs his face, arms, chest, and back. When she gets closer to scrub his lower body and legs, she detects something odd. When startled, she tries to break away from him, he grabs her arm and stutters, with his eyes uncontrollably rolling upward, "Please. Before I die, I want to do it just once. Just once I want to be a man. That's my wish." It is obvious that he wants to exert his power not only economically but also sexually. By paying for her labor, he tries to construct her as a loyal worker, mother, and lover who can clean up his bodily waste, caress his body and cater to his sexual needs. However, the camera angle shows otherwise. As the camera looks down on the pathetic man (shot from a high angle) who is looking up at her (portrayed from a low angle) and imploring her to stay, he seems small and powerless. Disgusted, Mija shouts back at him, "What was that pill you took? Is it that thing you call Viagra? Who do you think I am?" She throws his clothes at him in

the half-filled bathtub and leaves the place. His desire is not fulfilled because of his physical incapacity, but his forceful effort to cling to and grab Mija, making her vulnerable to sexual assault, is strong enough to suggest the enactment of male violence done to Heejin's body.

Given Mija's mediation of Heejin's lived experience through her contact with Mr. Kang, the next bathroom scene, in which she returns to work to fulfill his desire, not only comes as a surprise but emerges as the biggest enigma of the film. In a resigned yet determined manner, she enters his apartment, looks for the Viagra, and asks him to take a pill. The camera then cuts to the bathtub where Mr. Kang sits naked, shot from behind the fully opened bathroom door. Mija starts to undress before the camera and her lustful employer's gaze. The long shot from a slightly high angle, which captures Mr. Kang looking up at her with a beaming smile, epitomizes a classic shot that displays how "pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/ female."[44] His fetishistic perversion and scopophilia seem satisfied. However, the love making between the libidinous yet debilitated employer and the disinterested and grieving caregiver is not something tender or joyful. She does not flinch at the pain but looks like an automata enduring inscrutable commerce with the body of another. Why does she decide to perform this seemingly sadomasochistic act?

Multiple interpretations are possible. Her act could be mimetic in the sense employed by Luce Irigaray. In other words, Mija deliberately takes on the sexualized feminine posture attributed to her within patriarchal discourse in order to reveal

[44] Mulvey 62.

the mechanism of her exploitation.[45] Though Judith Butler, in another context, "calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them,"[46] the simulacrum can nonetheless draw people's attention. Mija's reasoning could also be seen as monetary. She is obliged to contribute to the compensation money, but being unable to obtain it anywhere else, she eventually goes to Mr. Kang and asks for 5 million won. One can interpret that the economics of sexual exchange is on display here. This act recreates the capitalist enterprise of the patriarchs' purchasing the girl's corpse in exchange for their sons' future. However, the speculation that her act is entirely mercenary is not completely satisfying. In fact, she never mentions it to Mr. Kang until toward the end of the film when she is so harassed by the boys' fathers that she feels compelled to procure the money.

The reason for her masochistic role-playing may then lie elsewhere, and a couple of significant events that take place right before the final bathroom scene could offer some clues. In one of her poetry sessions that deals with the topic of "the most beautiful moment in life," while her classmates talk about the happiness and beauty they find in the present, Mija takes viewers and listeners back to her childhood. She sits facing her classmates and the camera. In a freeze-frame shot, she looks sad. Somberly she starts to recount her very first memory, the love of her older sister. "I guess my mom was sick, so my sister was taking care of me. We are seven years apart. . . . Although I was so little, I knew my sister loved me. As she told me to come to her, I felt so good and so happy. 'I am really pretty' was how I felt."

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[45] Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 220.

[46] Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," ed. Sue Thornham Feminist Film Theory: A Reader. (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 1999) 338.

Saying these words, she breaks down in tears. No details are revealed here. However, one can speculate that the suffering she experiences while evoking sisterhood is in part related to Heejin, as the camera next cuts to the bridge from which she jumped to her death.

Getting off the bus, Mija approaches the bridge and looks down on the sparkling river running quietly below, until the wind blows her hat off her head. Her white hat flies down into the river and floats there, reminding the viewers of Heejin's body floating into the frame in the opening shot. When Mija then walks down to the riverbank, finds a seat on a rock, and opens her notepad to write down her thoughts, it suddenly begins to rain. Raindrops, not ink, then fill the pages of her writing pad. The close-up of her sitting in the downpour along with the intensifying sounds of rainfall evokes her shower scene in Mr. Kang's bathroom. Heejin's suicide is temporarily and symbolically recreated first through Mija's white hat and then through her rain-soaked-body. Yet the unity of the two women is still shaky because of the dilemma Mija faces: should she continue to look after her grandson, an act which would make her participate in what the reviewer Steven Rea calls, "South Korea's patriarchal culture of men protecting their boys with no real regret for the brutal theft of a girl's life"[47]? Or, should Mija, like a protective older sister, make public the story of Heejin, who was "badly used in life and so cruelly dismissed by the boys' fathers in death," to borrow the critic Michael Phillips's words[48]? Perhaps it is this conflict between her familial duty and her ethical duty that drives Mija,

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[47] Steven Rea, "'Poetry': Film from South Korea is Poetry Itself," Philadelphia Inquirer 4 Mar. 2011.

[48] Michael Phillips, "The Language to Convey an Unspeakable Reality: 'Poetry,'" Chicago Tribune 24 Feb. 2011.

soaked to the skin and shivering, to go to Mr. Kang's, where she endures the infliction of pain on her own body. By having a sexual relationship with him, she enacts the pain and suffering of Heejin. By simulating the suffering of a victim of sexual assault, she expresses remorse for her inability to rectify the injustice. In sum, it can be interpreted as a private act of penitence.

Lastly, it is important to note that despite its spiritual and moral implications, the final bathroom scene also denotes the carnal and the sensual. At one moment during her sexual intercourse with Mr. Kang, Mija cups his face in her hands and gazes at him in a sympathetic way. What is she seeing? It could be that she is looking at her own reflection, her own sexual desire, in addition to being faced with Mr. Kang's lust, the boys' violence, and the girl's suffering. As she reveals her subjectivity and complexity, the scene provides an image at once poignant and powerful. In other words, by initiating a sexual act, she challenges the male representation of the female body as passive and powerless. By showing the combined images of the self-sacrificing and the perverse, the good and the macabre, the sacred and the sensual woman, she shakes up the dichotomy like Baudelaire's Fleurs du mal. Therefore, the film shows the power of female sexuality albeit subtly, while calling wider attention to violence against women.

In a similar vein, we can find that the theme of women's sexuality, as well as physical and rhetorical violence against women and the psychological damage done to them, runs through the works of the three poets. In the poetry of Kim Myŏng-sun, we can see that the poet tries to reverse the sexual power dynamics between men and women by explicitly displaying self-awareness of her own sexuality. At the same

time, many of her poems also reveal the social discrimination against the so-called New Women of the early twentieth century who championed "free love," by channeling the pain the poet felt about her own experience of violence. Ko Chŏng-hŭi, on the other hand, draws on the stories of historical women to show how women have historically been subject to sexual violence and abuse on the pretext of nationalism. By rereading and rewriting the texts by women who are often regarded as sexually passive, and recasting them as woman warriors who fight against inherent oppression and gender inequality, she also simultaneously proposes advancing the sexual revolution. Kim Sŭng-hŭi takes yet another approach to the subject and writes about the possibility of androgyny. Through her construction of androgynous identity—male and female; masculine and feminine—, the poet deconstructs and overcomes gender boundaries, consequently highlighting sexual undecidability.

THEME IV: Finally, the film Poetry is also largely about death, mourning, and remembering of the Other—here not only women but also poetry itself. The film portrays this as the camera follows the steps Mija takes in order to apprehend her poetry teacher's aphorism: "Every single one of you carries poetry in your heart. But you've imprisoned it. It's time to free your poetry. The poetry trapped inside you must be given wings to take flight." Despite its artistic appeal, she found his statement enigmatic for a long time, but the moment of epiphany finally comes to her during the after party for a poetry recital. Shortly after questioning her teacher, who had also joined the party, about how she could ever free her poetry and write it, Mija is seen outside bent over and weeping. Mr. Park, the policeman, who had

earlier apologized for his insensitivity and offered her a drink, comes outside and sees her. He gently asks her whether she is drunk or if she is crying because she cannot write poetry. She reveals nothing yet but expresses her distress for the first time in public, sobbing like a child. Though it is not clear whether it is because of the effects of the alcohol or because of her teacher's proclamation that "poetry is dying," she seems to finally comprehend what has been suppressed: the story of Heejin's death. As the camera cuts to her dark apartment, we see her come in, turn on the light, take the framed photo of Heejin out of her bag, and put it on the dinner table. Apparently Mija has carried it with her since she took it from the requiem service, but could not look at it. After having a good cry, she seems ready to face the death of the girl, that is the poetry trapped inside her. As we will see in what follows, by lifting the veil drawn over Heejin's story and freeing her from patriarchal oppression, Mija can also free her poetry and allow it to take flight.

After being castigated by the boys' fathers, who have berated her about the delay, she brings them her portion of the compensation money. However, Mija still seems unconvinced that the incident could end this way, and asks the fathers who are self-congratulatorily enjoying a celebratory drink: "so, is it all over now? For good?" Without understanding the meaning of her concerned look, an overjoyed father says: "It's hard to say if it's over for good. If the victim is an adult, a settlement is enough. But in the case of a minor if someone informs the police, an investigation is required. . . . But we cleaned up everything with the school and the press and reached a settlement with the girl's mom. So there's nothing to worry about anymore." With this, Mija learns how she can prevent the case from being buried for

good. She picks up her grandson who is loitering around the video arcade with some other boys, takes him home to wash up, almost as if preparing him a departure. While she plays badminton with him outside her apartment that evening, Mr. Park and another police officer show up and suddenly take him away. In the following shot, bent over a desk, she then completes her writing assignment.

Though Mija does not show up to the final class, her teacher finds a poem left on his podium. As soon as he reads the title of her poem, "Agnes' Song,"[49] though, her voice takes over:

> How is it over there? How lonely is it?
> Is it still glowing red at sunset?
> Are the songs of the birds flying to the forest still heard?
> Can you receive this letter I dared not send?
> Can I convey the confession I dared not make?
> Will time pass and roses fade?
>
> Now it's time to say good-bye,
> like the wind and shadows that linger and then go,
> to the promises that never came; the love kept secret till the end;
> to the single blade of grass kissing my weary ankles;
> to the tiny footprints that have followed me;
> it's time to say good-bye.
>
> Now as darkness falls, will a candle be lit again?
> I pray
> that nobody shall cry;
> that you know how deeply I loved you;
> that you know how deeply I loved the long wait of a summer's day,
> an old alley resembling my father's face,
> and even the lonesome wild flower shyly turning away,
> and that you know how I fell into a flutter at your humming little song.
>
> I bless you.
> Before crossing the black river, with my soul's last breath
> I begin to dream that
> I will awake in the glare of a bright sunny morning
> and meet you standing at my bedside.

[49] The translation of the poem is mine.

It is a poem of mourning, tout court. As is clear from the title with Heejin's Christian name, "Agnes," the poem conjures up and commemorates the dead. In the first stanza the poet asks a series of questions about the next world, questions which could be seen as gestures of greeting and hospitality. Then in the subsequent stanzas the poet makes the dead speak: the figure of Heejin bids her farewell, says her prayers and gives her forgiveness. As the filmmaker reveals in an interview, Mija has written the poem "on behalf of the girl" and "speaks out with the voice that the girl would have wanted to leave behind."[50] In fact, it is Heejin's voice that takes over Mija's narration from the middle of the second stanza. Simultaneously, the camera, which pans around Mija's apartment, cuts to a figure of Heejin from the back, looking and walking toward her school, then to the classroom, her home, and the river. Along with the poem, the montage of images pays homage to the dead by marking the traces of Heejin. As if returning the honor, the girl, after reaching the bridge and looking down at the river, slowly turns back to look at the camera. The frame freezes as she smiles gently. The camera then pans down to the river and the film ends where it started, but this time with a portrait of the girl beaming broadly, not an image of the corpse floating face down. The forgiving tone of this resolution would probably have irked Adorno, since it could be seen as justifying and condoning the crime and violence. However, the filmmaker complicates this denouement by overlaying Mija's disappearance and Heejin's replacement of her.

[50] Sarah Cronin, "Poetry: Interview with Lee Chang-dong," Electric Sheep Magazine: A Deviant View of Cinema 27 July 2011.

The film does not show where Mija has gone, but because the long-shot sequence ends with a close-up of Heejin on the bridge and the flowing river, one can speculate that the older woman might have chosen to end her life in the same way the girl did. In this sense, "Agnes' Song" is also a poem of self-mourning. One can view the poetic persona as the poet herself and read the poem as Mija's song of valediction and her anticipation of her impending encounter with the dead. Whether her disappearance signifies a suicide or not, the arrival of death has loomed large since her diagnosis of Alzheimer's, her doctor's pronouncement that "At first [she] won't recall nouns and then verbs." Mija's complaint of the impossibility of writing one single poem throughout the film can then be read as a deferral or refusal to accept the coming of her own death. Yet, it is through speaking about the death of Heejin that Mija ultimately faces her own impending death, as Freud tells us that remembering is not "something belonging to the past" but repeating "the repressed material as a contemporary experience."[51] Using this interpretation, we can see that in the first stanza Mija asks Heejin about the unknown world she will soon be entering; in the second stanza she says her final farewells; in the third stanza she addresses those she is leaving behind and expresses her undying love for them; and in the fourth stanza, she anticipates her meeting with the girl in death. Finally, in the end, she becomes the absent addressee, Agnes, herself. By merging the voice, pain, and death of the two women, that is, blurring the boundaries between who is writing and who is being written about, "Agnes' Song" responds to Adorno's axiom:

[51] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995) 602.

this lyric poem can help avoid, however minimally, removing or reproducing the boundary of violence.

Furthermore, what emerges prominently at the end of the poem is a theme of community, a theme that makes us reconsider our concepts of the political, ethical, and aesthetic. "Agnes' Song" is not revolutionary: it does not employ a language that voices a revolt against male violence and sexual crime. Yet, it is political and ethical in that it attempts to transcend ideological assumptions—there is no division of the powerless and the powerful, the male and the female—and work toward an interresponsibility and a form of community, as shown especially in the last stanza. The "I" and the "you" can be either Mija or Heejin, but what is important is that the "I" gives her prayer and protection to the "you" and musters her strength to envision the other as the addressee, who in turn provides comfort and promise to the speaker. The "I" knows her capacity to take power through and for the other, the "you," just like Heejin who speaks through the voice of Mija, whose empathic relationship with the girl then leads to the discernment of her own condition of oppression and her ultimate breaking of the silence. In addition, for the speaker "I," "crossing the black river" does not signify the end of everything but a new beginning because her anticipation of meeting "you" reveals the possibility of a new community where there is no more alienation, violence, or injustice. The poem is an act of unification and fusion.

In summary, both the poem "Agnes' Song" and the film Poetry as a whole are the result of Lee's attempts to resolve his perennial inquiry into art's relationship to the vice of the world, as well as to respond to Adorno's dictum on the impossibility

of poetry in the face of atrocity. Ultimately the filmmaker shows us that despite the possible aesthetic injustice done to the victims of vice and violence of the world, it is still art—notably poetry and film—that gives them a voice. Yet, he does so with an ingenious twist: in order to produce poetry and film, he relies on the very notion of the impossibility of doing so, by conjuring the images of death and mourning. Mija produces a poem after proclaiming, on numerous occasions, the impossibility of writing poetry in the wake of tragedy. The poet Kim Yong-tak, a mouthpiece for Lee in the film, urges his students to write and love poetry, at the same time that he says that we are living "in an era when poetry is dying" and that "[the] day will come when people no longer read or write [it] anymore." Similarly, the filmmaker offers us Poetry while at the same time announcing the death of film in press interviews: he claims in particular that "certain types of films" he makes and wants to see are dying.[52] While making possible the impossibility of processing horror through art, what he ultimately reveals is then anxiety about imposing meaning and bringing closure with lens and pen. Poetry is not about the end of poetry, but about the "death to the death of poetry,"[53] to borrow the expression of the former American poet laureate Donald Hall.

In the works of the three women poets, the theme of death, mourning, and remembering is as important, if not more important, than in the film. In the case of Kim Myŏng-sun, the loss of her mother at an early age and also of her country when

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[52] Christopher Bell, "Interview: Lee Chang-dong Talks 'Poetry,' How 'Avatar' Affected Him, An 'Oasis' Remake & More," IndieWire 8 Feb. 2011.

[53] Donald Hall, "Death to the Death of Poetry," Death to the Death of Poetry: Essays, Reviews, Notes, Interviews (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994) 18-26.

Korea became a Japanese colony in 1910 had a profound impact on her. The sense of alienation pervades her poetry and she invokes and remembers her mother as her muse, her poetic companion. The mournful recollection of her country is more complicated, however, because of its moralist critics' constant attack on her. Ultimately, she used poetry to respond to the country that drove her into madness and suicide attempts, imagining her death due to its maltreatment. In the case of Ko Chŏng-hŭi, the *kut* ("Korean shamanistic ritual") tradition of recalling the dead was important as a literary device. In her poetry, she often plays the role of shaman herself, invoking and appeasing the spirits of those women who were exploited and died unfairly throughout Korean history for the sake of men, as well as revenging their death, albeit metaphorically. It is through poetry that she attempted to bridge the worlds of the dead and the living, before her own untimely death. As for Kim Sŭng-hŭi, the focus of her poetry is often on self-destruction, violence done to one's own body, in the form of suicide. She recalls her own suicide attempts as well as those of her past or contemporary women artists, intellectuals, and writers. She does so in order to expose how the morality of social structures that dictates the suppression of emotions and desires while prescribing the ideal of womanhood and motherhood can harm women psychologically, which is manifested in the forms of depression, anger, illness, and even self-murder. Ultimately though, she uses suicidal figures as a device for survival and a channel through which she communicates the incommunicable.

To summarize, I have analyzed Lee Chang-dong's film Poetry, which masterfully portrays the emergence of an aspiring women poet against the

backdrop of a patriarchal culture, to show recurring common themes in the poetry of Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi. In doing so, I have wanted to demonstrate that what Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert have called "a distinctively female literary tradition"[54] exists in the works of the three Korean poets. This leads us to think about the importance of evaluating the works of women writers "within the context of a woman's tradition," as Pam Morris claims by quoting Catherine Kerrigan, the editor of Scottish Women Poets: "Although critics (including myself) have tended to treat the work of these women as minor ripples . . . I now believe that this interpretation is based on a failure to look at their work in the appropriate context . . . These poems need to be read—not in contrast to . . . a traditional male canon—but in terms of women's work and experience."[55] Though it is also important to evaluate women's writing against men's in terms of quality, I believe the appreciation of women's shared tradition can enhance our recognition of the aesthetic, social and cultural values of their work.

In Chapter II "What Do Women Want?" I turn to the works of Kim Myŏng-sun (1896-ca.1953), the first woman writer of the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) to translate Western poets, such as Charles Baudelaire, Remy de Gourmont, and Edgar Allan Poe, into Korean. Influenced by her study in Japan, Kim introduced and experimented with free verse, narrative poetry, and a memoir in verse while challenging patriarchal modes of thought. This chapter outlines the struggles she had as a colonial intellectual questioning national identity and shows how a

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[54] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) xi.

[55] Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) 59.

frustration with a social situation that insisted on women's silence galvanized her role as a pioneering proto-feminist writer.

Chapter III "Where Are the Women in History?" presents Ko Chŏng-hŭi (1948-1991) as the second-wave feminist successor to Kim Myŏng-sun. Ko emerged in the 1980s as a groundbreaking poet whose subject matter deviated from commonplace themes of the era, such as the beauty of nature, love, and longing. This chapter explores the ways in which her epic narrative poems and epistolary verse masterfully expose the erased or suppressed histories of women from the Chosŏn (1392-1910) era—Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, Hwang Chin-i, Yi Ok-pong, and Sin Saimdang—, as well as from the modern era—Nam Cha-hyŏn, Kwŏn In-suk, and Im Su-gyŏng.

Chapter IV "How Can Women Take Flight?" explores the works of writer, scholar, and critic Kim Sŭng-hŭi (1952-), who, like Ko Chŏng-hŭi, came to feminism in the 1980s. Kim, however, unlike Ko, has shown her discomfort with mainstream feminism and her sense of marginality, while critiquing the idea of a "fixed" national, gender, or political identity in her poetry. This chapter focuses on her simultaneous feelings of personal displacement and solidarity with those on the margin of society through her identification with Greek and Korean mythological figures and historical and imaginary "madwoman" figures, as well as with Korean and Western figures affected by political events such as wars and revolutions.

As a conclusion, in Chapter V "Toward Global Networking of Women," I analyze Kim Sŭng-hŭi's poem, "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye," from her 2012 poetry collection Lonely Hope (Hŭimang i oeropta). The poem rewrites the life of Princess Tŏkhye, the last princess of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), against

the backdrop of the life stories of three women in Stephen Daldry's film adaptation of Michael Cunningham's The Hours. It also shows the style and imagery common to all three poets I have examined. While reiterating the common threads that run through the works of Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi, this chapter also highlights their search for a community of women, who write and read as women transcending the boundaries of space and time.

Before turning to individual chapters in detail, I would like to say a few words about the term "feminism." Broadly, Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi can be grouped together under the umbrella term "feminist" in that what unites them is their condemnation of patriarchy. There have been many definitions of "feminism," making scholars declare "the impossibility of constructing modern feminism as a simple unity,"[56] but they seem unanimous at least about its refusal of patriarchy, which signifies "the subordination of women."[57] Among the many definitions of the heavily loaded term, the one which is closest to my belief is that of Barbara Smith:

> Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women—as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.[58]

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[56] Rosalind Delmar quoted in Ellen Peel, Politics, Persuasion, and Pragmatism: A Rhetoric of Feminist Utopian Fiction (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002) 48-49.

[57] Peel 50.

[58] Barbara Smith, "Racism and Women's Studies," All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, eds. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Smith (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist, 1982) 49.

I find this definition appropriate for describing the works of the three Korean women poets because they all saw women as a group, stressed the interrelationship among women, and strived through poetry to put an end to oppression. While they experimented with different poetic forms and aesthetics, from epistolary and narrative verse to postmodern and confessional poetry, Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi all actively participated in public discourse on women, gender, freedom, equality, and power.

Lastly, I would like to stress that feminism in this study does not mean "anti-male" or "anti-heterosexual," but it means a movement, as the feminist cultural critic bell hooks beautifully puts it, that "will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all 'created equal.'"[59] I would be gratified if readers would hear, through my analysis of the three poets' works, the voice of hooks: "Come closer. See how feminism can touch and change your life and all our lives. Come closer and know firsthand what feminist movement is all about. Come closer and you will see: feminism is for everybody."[60]

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[59] bell hooks, Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000) x.

[60] hooks, Feminism is for Everybody x.

CHAPTER II

What Do Women Want?:
Rethinking Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in Kim Myŏng-sun's Poetry

I. Introduction

In April 1925, the first collection of creative work by a professional woman writer appeared in modern Korea.[61] Interestingly, rather than celebrating her achievement, the preface to the collection The Fruits of Life (Saengmyŏng ŭi kwasil) delivers a message of pain and bitterness. The author Kim Myŏng-sun (1896-ca.1953) writes in a sentence-long preface: "I present this work to the world in the name of suffering, anguish, and damnation of a young soul that has been misunderstood."[62] The statement shows that the general assessment of its author's reputation had been an inaccurate one, and it also suggests that her work is a response to the society that had condemned and tormented her.

Kim came to be known to the male-dominated literary world when she won a literary contest sponsored by the Youth (Ch'ŏngch'un) magazine in 1917 for her novella "A Girl of Mystery (Ŭisim ŭi sonyŏ)," and between then and 1939, she produced 170 pieces of work including poetry, essays, novellas,[63] and plays. However, despite her smashing entrance onto the literary scene and prolific writing career, it was not her creativity but her family background and groundless rumors

[61] Although there were collections of creative work by women during the Chosŏn era (1392-1910), none of those women were writers by profession.

[62] Kim Myŏng-sun, Saengmyŏng ŭi kwasil [The Fruits of Life] 1925 (Seoul: Munhak sasangsa charyo chosa yŏn'gusil, [197-]). Here and throughout, unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

[63] Though Kim's fictional works are often referred to as novels in Korean, in terms of length, I think it is apt to call them novellas.

about her love life that attracted male critics' attention. They initially hailed her as the first modern literary woman in Korea, but rarely read her work, only discussing her reportedly "outrageous" romance and her status as a concubine's daughter. The stigma associated with her birth and romantic affairs, most of which came to be made public by her male colleagues who satirized or fictionalized them, plagued her throughout her life. However, as revealed in the preface above, she did not simply stay silent behind the bars of frustration and agony. Her anger at injustice was an impetus for her creativity. Although her life ended in destitution, despair, and derangement, she left us rich and important works that show her feminist grievances and consciousness.

After her death reportedly in a sanitarium in Tokyo, Japan, sometime between 1953 and 1960,[64] Kim sank into obscurity. She was later rediscovered, and also recognized as the first professional female writer, with the growth of interest in women's literature in the 1980s and 1990s. The first part of the new millennium was especially good for the long-neglected writer, as her second collection of creative work Gift of the Beloved (Aein ŭi sŏnmul, c. 1928) was discovered in 2002, and The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun (Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip), which comprises 107 poems (including revised and reprinted ones), 21 novellas, 18 essays, 3 plays, and 12 translations, was published in December 2010. The Complete Literary Works is an important addition to the scholarship on Kim, not only because it is the first comprehensive compilation of her works, but also

[64] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, and Nam Ŭn-hye, eds., Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun] (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 63; Yung-Hee Kim, Questioning Minds: Short Stories by Modern Korean Women Writers (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2010) 16.

because, as the compilers claim, it has identified and excluded writing by a woman with the same name. Between 2000 and 2010, literary scholars also rushed to celebrate Kim's works, producing more than two dozen scholarly articles on her.[65]

Some of these articles examine her through the lens of her contemporary male writers, such as Kim Tong-in (1900-1951) who wrote her fictionalized biography, "A Life of Kim Yŏn-sil (Kim Yŏn-sil chŏn)," and Chŏn Yŏng-t'aek (1894-1968) who wrote a fiction piece on her final years, "Kim Tan-sil and Her Son (Kim Tan-sil kwa kŭ adŭl)." Others focus on her place in the "New Woman" movement in the 1920s and 1930s, along with two other notable literary women Na Hye-sŏk (1896-1948) and Kim Wŏn-ju (1896-1971). Both camps highlight distorted representations of the first intellectual modern woman by male critics and emphasize the urgency to put her work in its place in Korean literary history, but they often concentrate on her life in social context and neglect to offer a detailed analysis of her actual writing.

Among those scholars who focus on analyzing her prose and poetry, some attempt to give a more balanced outlook on her life and literary output, but others try to glorify her as a nationalist poet or paint her as a writer seeking femininity.[66] In addition, despite critics' unanimity on the importance of her status as a newly

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[65] Sŏ and Nam 846-48.

[66] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, "Tiasŭp'ora Kim Myŏng-sun ŭi sam kwa munhak" [Diaspora: Life and Literature of Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun], eds. Sŏ and Nam Ŭn-hye (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010); Nam Min-u, "Yŏsŏng si ŭi munhak kyoyuchŏk ŭimi yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Literature Educational Meanings of Korean Modern Women's Poetry], Munhak kyoyukhak 11 (2003); Maeng Mun-jae, Kim Myŏng-sun chŏnjip: si, hŭigok [The Complete Works of Kim Myŏng-sun: Poetry and Plays] (Seoul: Hyŏndae munhak, 2009); Chŏng Yŏng-ja, Han'guk hyŏndae yŏsŏng munhaksa [A History of Modern KoreanWomen's Literature] (Pusan kwangyŏksi: Sejong ch'ulp'ansa, 2010).

emergent woman writer who challenged patriarchy, there is surprisingly little feminist scholarship available, especially in the West, on her literary production. Therefore, my aim in this chapter is to show the ways in which her work informs a feminist understanding of the structural gender inequality in Korea. In doing this, I will focus on her poetry, in particular on the work that shows her struggles for recognition as a modern intellectual and as a woman writer. Before turning to an analysis of her poetry, I will offer a brief biographical sketch of Kim and the historical and social context in which she was writing.

Kim Myŏng-sun was born in P'yŏngyang, South P'yŏngan Province, in 1896, to "a wealthy merchant and his concubine, a former *kisaeng*, or woman of the entertainment world."[67] She began her schooling in P'yŏngyang in 1902 but transferred to Seoul in 1906 and entered Chinmyŏng Girls' School in 1909. Reportedly, after dropping out of school in 1911, she left for Tokyo in 1913 and studied at a Baptist Girls Secondary School,[68] but returned to Seoul in 1916 and graduated from Sungmyŏng Girls' High School in March 1917. She went back to Tokyo in 1918 and began contributing to The World of Women (Yŏjagye), a magazine founded by women students studying in Japan. In 1919 she became the first woman to join a Korean literary circle, the Creation (Ch'angjo) group, organized by Kim Tong-in and other male Korean students in Tokyo.

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[67] Yung-Hee Kim, Questioning Minds: Short Stories by Modern Korean Women Writers (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2010) 15.

[68] According to Yung-Hee Kim, Kim Myŏng-sun went to Kōjimachi Girls' School, but Sŏ Chŏng-ja claims that without giving the name of the school, it was just a Baptist school in Tokyo.

Back in Korea between 1921 and 1922, she began to publish in Creation (Kaebyŏk) magazine and the Korea Daily (Chosŏn ilbo). In 1925 she not only published her first collection The Fruits of Life, but also became a reporter for the Daily News (Maeil sinbo), establishing herself as "the third female journalist in Korea after Yi Kak-kyŏng and Ch'oe Ŭn-hŭi."[69] Despite the growth of her literary reputation, however, she continued to be a target for baseless rumors about her involvement in love triangles and her romantic adventures. As a result, she was subjected to social discrimination and ridicule. Moreover, her second collection, Gift of the Beloved, did not seem successful and "[b]y 1932 [her] literary activity had diminished, and her financial problems mounted."[70] Yung-Hee Kim writes that "[a]s an unmarried woman with no special skills besides writing, she struggled to support herself and at one point was even reduced to street peddling."[71]

Though between 1930 and 1935 Kim is said to have studied in Tokyo "with an aim to study abroad in Germany and France,"[72] she returned home without being able to accomplish her dream and began to publish orphan stories from 1937 to 1938, reflecting harsh realities such as alienation and homelessness. Beyond her publication of a poem "The Last Night of the Month (Kŭmŭm pam)" in the magazine The Whole of Korea (Samch'ŏlli) in 1939, not much information is available about

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[69] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, and Nam Ŭn-hye, eds., Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun] (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 833.

[70] Yung-Hee Kim, Questioning Minds: Short Stories by Modern Korean Women Writers (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2010) 16.

[71] Yung-Hee Kim 16.

[72] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, and Nam Ŭn-hye, eds., Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun] (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 835.

her life and literary career thereafter, but "unconfirmed rumors and hearsay claim that Kim Myŏng-sun returned to Japan sometime in 1939 and continued to live in extreme poverty until her presumed death [. . .] in a Tokyo mental hospital."[73] As seen in this biographical sketch, she had what Yung-Hee Kim calls "a kaleidoscopic life,"[74] but the facts of her life including the exact dating of her sojourns in Japan have eluded historians, and literary critics have relied on fictional accounts about her to fill the gaps in her life story. Although sensationalized newspaper articles about her family background and scandalized biographies concerning her life in Japan can help explicate her work, the most important source about her state of mind and clues to her authorial messages come from her own hand. In this chapter, therefore, I will primarily focus on her text to think about the goals she pursued as a woman and as a writer.

II. Memoir in Verse—Yearning for Intellectuality

In this section, I will focus on Kim's memoir in verse form. I will begin by examining "Half of My Life in Verse (Si ro ssŭn pansaenggi)" and then move onto "The Early Morning Dew's Dream of Flower (Choro ŭi hwamong)." The former is an autobiographical poem and the latter is a poem that has autobiographical elements. The former is from the last years of her literary career and the latter is identified as her first poem. I have selected these two poems because they provide helpful insights into the subject matters of her poetry in general, as well as into her

[73] Yung-Hee Kim, Questioning Minds: Short Stories by Modern Korean Women Writers (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2010) 16.

[74] Yung-Hee Kim 16.

interests as a modern literary woman and as a colonial feminist intellectual. More importantly, they can serve to show her stance as one of the first generation feminists. As Pam Morris points out, writing by women was important especially for early feminist groups because it could help other women reading it "combat [their] feelings of isolation and inadequacy" as it could "tell the story of the aspects of women's lives" that had been "erased, ignored, demeaned, mystified and even idealized in the majority of traditional texts."[75] For Kim, who did not have feminist predecessors or literary women in Korean history she could model herself on, it is she herself who initiated the feminist project of placing her life stories at center stage and letting others see an ordinary woman's history in an androcentric society. In analyzing the two poems, I will pay particular attention to her feminist consciousness expressed in the stories of her passion for intellectual pursuits.

In 1938, at the age of forty-three and a year before her disappearance from the public eye, Kim published "Half of My Life in Verse" in the East Asia Daily (Tonga ilbo). As explicitly indicted in the title, it is her autobiography in a poetic form. Divided into three sections, this is her longest poem, which tells about her childhood and early education in Korea; her adolescence and study-abroad in Japan; and her homecoming and state of uncertainty. The first section, titled "Childhood," starts with a sweet account of her infant stage, describing how she was cared for by both her mother and a nanny when she was little. The second and third stanzas continue to show her being looked after well:

> When I call Mom, Mom,
> going barefoot into a puddle formed during rainy season,

[75] Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) 60.

> 'My little baby,' it was the blood-curdling sound,
> the breathing sound of a young nanny dashing toward me.
>
> When I anxiously tap on the back of a servant
> and pester her, 'Where's mommy? Let's go find her,'
> Grandma, blinking her eye, carries me on her back,
>
> [. . . . . .]
> saying 'Mom is home, the nanny is also a mom.' (224-25)[76]

This part first shows the affluence of her family that could provide her with a nanny and a servant. This is corroborated in her personal essay, "For Myself (Nechasin ŭi wihae)," which is also included in The Fruits of Life, as she reveals, "she was raised in the second biggest city of the Korean peninsula as a noble daughter of a family of money and power" (649). Interestingly, she claims in the same essay that with her family background she "could have been married off to a wealthy family's son or paraded herself as a young wife of an influential man" but it was "her curiosity or a thirst for knowledge" that drove her to a different life (649).[77] This picture of the economically comfortable life in her youth, then, highlights in contrast her later extreme poverty, when she prioritized her intellectual pursuit over an early marriage and physical comfort. Another element worth noticing here is the frequent absence of her mother, who was still alive in this period. One can argue that by depicting an infant figure fretfully searching for her mother, the poet reveals her attachment to her mother, a figure who haunts her poetry. Also, the picture of

[76] All translations are mine. The number in parenthesis refers to the page number in Sŏ Chŏng-ja, and Nam Ŭn-hye, eds., Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun] (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010).

[77] Professor Sun Joo Kim has pointed out, however, that the poet's claim is not realistic because of her status as a concubine's daughter. She could have been a concubine, rather than a primary wife, of a wealthy and powerful man.

surrogate mothers such as a nanny, a maid, and a grandmother[78] replacing her biological one can accentuate the impact of her mother's death a few years later, a loss which is oddly never brought up directly in this poem, but affected her deeply throughout her life, which we will see later.

The second part of her childhood section highlights her upbringing and her intellectual precocity. Her father does not figure much, appearing only a couple of times in her entire poetry collection, and except for his merchant background and polygamy, little is known about him. However, it seems that he was an education-conscious parent, as depicted in the second stanza, "teaching her and her brother the Thousand-Character Classic Text" and sending her a local church school. Kim boasts that she "was rewarded for reading Chinese characters right" at home and "was one up on her peers in reading" at school. While studying in Seoul, away from her family, she "often cried" and "had a nightmare" but the poetic speaker proudly announces that she always excelled in class (225). Her father did not necessarily intend to educate her to become an intellectual, however.[79] In fact, it is her mother, according to her essay "A Recollection of Life (Saenghwal ŭi kiŏk)," who recognized her aptitude for learning words and said to her: "It is said that even in old days a woman who received education could achieve ladyhood. Do you want to study?"(692). Nonetheless, her father's openness to education for women,

[78] It is not clear whether the poet here is referring to her biological grandmother. It is worth noting that in Korea the word for grandmother (*halmŏni*) is used to mean both one's biological grandmother and simply an old woman. For more information about Korean kinship terms, see Ross King, and Jaehoon Yeon, Elementary Korean (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2009) 252.

[79] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, "Tiasŭp'ora Kim Myŏng-sun ŭi sam kwa munhak" [Diaspora: Life and Literature of Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun], eds. Sŏ and Nam Ŭn-hye (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 37.

presumably influenced by the spirit of the northern region which "was primed to embrace new ideas and institutions such as mass education, capitalism, and inclusive religion,"[80] facilitated her path to becoming a literary woman.

In addition, this section suggests that while writing about her youth, Kim is surprisingly conscious of traditional gender roles. "I no longer like a thimble; my finger nail hurts," she complains (226). Though it may sound like a childish confession of her dislike of the household chores, it reveals her implicit yet defiant choice of disobeying social conventions and stereotypical gender roles. This is more explicit as her tone becomes bright when she describes her school life, while painting herself as a motivated student who prompts her peers to study: "Anna, Po-bae/ In-sil, let's all read books together!" (226). Even as a child, it seems, she was aware of the distinctions between needlework, a symbol of traditional womanly duty, and a written work, a sign of the long-established male domain. And, she chose the world of books, rather than the world of feminine duties, revealing her early developed distaste for needle and thread and her joy of reading.

It is also interesting to note that though subversive, she did not proudly approve her failure in womanly duties but rather felt compelled to show the legitimacy of her quest for knowledge and search for self, as in the following anecdote that ends the first section. She recalls seeing an aunt during her school break at her eldest uncle's place and the older woman in the poem soothes the little girl's whining as follows:

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[80] Donald N. Clark, "The Missionary Presence in Northern Korea before WWII: Human Investment, Social Significance, and Historical Legacy," The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity & Culture, ed. Sun Joo Kim (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2010) 236; Kyung Moon Hwang, Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004) 273-89.

> Why are you nagging and whining?
>
> Listen to my story of living with my in-laws.
> To be obedient to the orders of my traditional parents-in-law
> I prepare breakfast and then weave fabric on the loom all day long
> and my legs hurt when I start preparing dinner.
>
> But you,
> you get to Seoul to study
> other older kids even can't do.
> So why are you crying? Stop crying. (229)

By way of comforting her crying niece, the aunt reveals constraining circumstances of patrilocality affecting women's lives and her resentment toward the lot of a married woman. As Martina Deuchler states in her seminal work The Confucian Transformation of Korea, traditionally "[e]ducation for women [. . .] was to instill in women, through the weight of China's classic literature, the ideals of a male-oriented society and to motivate them for the tasks of married life."[81] Further, "[a]fter the age of seven, girls [. . .] were more and more confined to the inner quarters of the house where they received instruction in domestic duties" and their "cultural training was focused entirely on filling the role of married women."[82] Based on the anecdote, Kim's unnamed aunt, though living in early twentieth-century Korea, embodies the Chosŏn society's traditional ideals of womanhood illustrated in Deuchler's work. However, in secret, she envies her niece who, with the opportunity to study in Seoul, could, even if limited, free herself from social constraints which otherwise would have stifled her life. For Kim, her aunt can come

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[81] Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 258.

[82] Deuchler 258.

to stand for the authority implicitly urging the girl to give her life not for womanly duty and self-sacrifice, but for study and self-fulfillment. Invoking the motherly and protective figure, the poet justifies her ambition to become a modern and intelligent woman, and writes with a tinge of pride about a new challenge she would take: "Having finished all the difficult studies/ I now embark on studying abroad in Japan" (229). In 1913, three years after Korea became a Japanese colony, she left for Tokyo.

From the title of the second section, "An Elevated Song," we would assume that her life in Japan was blissful, but it was quite the contrary. Poverty and wretchedness are the most dominant themes, as signaled and encapsulated in the last line of the first section: "I lived in sorrow without having enough money to cover the tuition" (229). According to Sŏ Chŏng-ja, a decline in her family wealth grew worse after the death of her father,[83] and we can observe the hardship she went through in the following stanza: "Going to school in the morning and in the evening,/ and selling cookies for the rest of the time,/ thin as a stick,/ I lived a lonely life" (231-32). Given the fact that "self-financed students constituted nearly 90% of the total number of students in Japan between 1912 and 1919,"[84] she was probably not the only one who had to work by day and study by night. However, considering that she did not even have enough food to eat, one wonders why she did not return to her home country. It seems that her ambition was the biggest factor that propelled her to stay in the foreign country even if she had to suffer from poverty.

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[83] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, "Tiasŭp'ora Kim Myŏng-sun ŭi sam kwa munhak" [Diaspora: Life and Literature of Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun], eds. Sŏ and Nam Ŭn-hye (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 830.

[84] Michael Weiner, The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989) 124.

She writes in the stanza before this: "Though from a backwater town,/ since I am in the city,/ I should get/ either money or knowledge" (231). In "For Myself," she boasts that her hometown P'yŏngyang[85] is "the second biggest city of the Korean peninsula," but here it becomes "a backwater town" (649) compared to the cosmopolitan city Tokyo. And, since it is only "the modern era [that] brought with it the possibility for women to travel abroad to pursue modern knowledge or new life opportunities,"[86] Kim preferred to take advantage of her first overseas trip and to study in Japan, a country which promoted "ideological principles of 'bunmei kaika (civilization and enlightenment)'"[87] and a colonial power which was regarded as "the equal to the West."[88]

Also, there existed at least one source that provided her with comfort and support: a church. She recalls: "Ah, the church is my paradise/and my teachers are like angels!/ For the holy Sunday/ the congregated devotees become purified" (233). As in P'yŏngyang, she attended a mission school in Tokyo, studying in both cities with western teachers, who were presumably missionaries. It is important to note that as Hyaeweol Choi points out, "it was American Protestant missionaries

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[85] It is important to note that P'yŏngyang "had far more wealthy residents than any other city in Korea" during the colonial period, and "the considerable overrepresentation of the northern women" among college graduates was due to the fact that "family property was a decisive factor in one's receiving a college education." See Jihang Park, "Trailblazers in a Traditional World: Korea's First Women College Graduates, 1910-45," Social Science History 14 (1990): 542.

[86] Hyaeweol Choi, "In Search of Knowledge and Selfhood: Korean Women Studying Overseas in Colonial Korea," Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific 29 (2012): 2.

[87] Andre Schmid, Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919 (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 103.

[88] Schmid 107.

who pioneered education for girls and women"[89] in Korea and there was "a systematic route for studying in Japan [which] evolved through American missionary ties in both Korea and Japan."[90] More important, as Theodore Jun Yoo shows, "the first generation of students who graduated from these missionary schools would emerge in the early 1920s to challenge the Confucian patriarchal system and to articulate new goals for women's education."[91] The early efforts to establish Christian missions in Asia, together with religious Korean reformers' effort to create new ideology of modern womanhood,[92] thus paved a way for young women like Kim to have access to education that had been almost exclusively reserved for men, and to come forth to write poems that protested against cultural restrictions on women.

However, the phenomenon of the New Woman, "often associated with the 'girl students' (*yŏhaksaeng*) and a small group of elite women who became prominent public figures in art, literature, education, journalism and politics in the

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[89] Hyaeweol Choi, New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook (New York: Routledge, 2012) 5. Kenneth M. Wells also points out that "[s]hortly after Korea became a Japanese colony in August 1910, a Christian organization named the Songjukhoe (Pine and bamboo society) was formed among teachers and pupils of girls schools in Seoul and P'yŏngyang, and a national network was organized with secret monthly meetings for the inculcation in women of the 'spirit of independence.'" See "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement," Colonial Modernity in Korea, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) 199.

[90] Hyaeweol Choi, "In Search of Knowledge and Selfhood: Korean Women Studying Overseas in Colonial Korea," Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific 29 (2012): 11.

[91] Theodore Jun Yoo, "The 'New Woman' and the Politics of Love, Marriage and Divorce in Colonial Korea," Gender and History 17 (2005): 299.

[92] Kenneth M. Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement," Colonial Modernity in Korea, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) 193-194; Theodore Jun Yoo, "The 'New Woman' and the Politics of Love, Marriage and Divorce in Colonial Korea," Gender and History 17 (2005): 296.

1920s,"[93]caused public uneasiness. Reflecting this tension, Kim writes in the same section: "The domination of the night school by waitresses;/ the emergence of spies at church;/ bullet-like eyes that try to seize human beings;/ are they suspicious of me, a mere lonely being?" (233). This stanza shows "the blurred boundary between the New Woman—the presumed pioneer of the modern—and female entertainers (*geisha, kisaeng*)—the locus of old vice"[94] that became a serious social issue both in Korea and in Japan. More specifically, according to Jan Bardsley, the Bluestockings in Tokyo anointed as New Women "were rumored to frequent cafés, imbibe Western liqueurs, fawn over European literature, and prey on innocent young men."[95] A *geisha* writer such as Ishii Miyo, on the other hand, defended "the teahouse as an elite institution that does not sell sex" and appropriated the language of the Bluestockings, stating that "*geisha*, too, must awake and become New Women."[96] In these circumstances, Kim, who occupied the place of the New Woman as *yŏhaksaeng* at night school, could not avoid the public eye that suspected her propriety. With a description of the turmoil using religious terms, she ends the section: "The vain attitude of the demon/ that tries to find out the death of the soul;/ the greed that metes out justice;/ the church was also a battlefield" (234). Indirectly referring to military conflicts such as World War I occurring at that time, she reveals how a

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[93] Hyaeweol Choi, "Allure and Anxiety: Entertainers, Glamour Girls and New Women in Japan and Korea," Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific 29 (2012): 3.

[94] Hyaeweol Choi, "Allure and Anxiety" 2.

[95] Jan Bardsley, "The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan," Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific 29 (2012): 8.

[96] Bardsley 6.

sacred place of worship became a theatre of war where ideologies about gender and ideals of womanhood were formed and contested.

Considering her living in an impoverished and wretched state, we can interpret that the title of this section "An Elevated Song" is indicative of not her existing condition but rather her hope of elevating her life and achieving a high intellectual level during her sojourn in Japan. And, at the minimum, she did attain the original goal of her journey, i.e., the gaining of knowledge. Her superior education is manifested in the stanza where she talks about western ideas of "aestheticism" and "realism" and quotes "panta rhei of Heraclitus" (232) to describe a constant change of literary and art movements. In addition, seemingly satisfied with the intellectual food she devoured, Kim, like those Korean students who "were bringing back knowledge of new professions, new politics, and all kinds of thinkers"[97] from Japan, also contemplated a similar enterprise as revealed in the following stanza: "This school and this church as they are,/ Shall I move them to our Chosŏn?/ Shall our own people hungry for learning/ then develop virtuous minds?" (233-34). Like other colonial intellectuals, she wanted to contribute to the advancement of her motherland, searching for a higher purpose in her existence. However, as alluded to in the following third section, which is untitled, her homecoming was not marked by a parade.

Kim starts this final section with a somber picture of her own exhausted self: "Even if a young poet comes back/ after wandering all over Japan,/ what we see is,

[97] Kenneth M. Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement," Colonial Modernity in Korea, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) 197.

shall we say, / only a lean and haggard woman?" (234). Strangely, it is not a strong and self-willed body of the New Woman, but a ghostly figure of a weary traveler that faces us. Though not explicit in the stanza, this humiliating picture could be engendered by her home country's cold reception. In her essay "For Myself," she reveals her disappointment and frustration: "While everyone on the Korean peninsula is seeking to have their selfish interests and desires fulfilled, isn't it absurd if you only think of doing your best for your country?" (651). She continues to state her discontentment by calling out the name of her country: "Chosŏn, Chosŏn! The faith between us, is that a lie?" (652). As if desiring to erase all traces of its maltreatment of the young woman poet, in this autobiographical poem Kim leaves out details of adversity she suffered upon her return, but from the essay where she writes "there was no bread, no home, no friend" (653), we can infer that her seeking too much knowledge and freedom was not met favorably.

As if without vigor, for the rest of the section, which is much shorter and less complete than the other two, the poet-speaker calmly describes her quest for a spiritual life. However, it is not without an ingenious twist. After depicting the rituals of going to mass, she reveals her feeling of admiration for the marvels of the God: "Oh, the wonder of the Creator!/ Youth brimming with talent/ is beautiful even after going through hardship/ and sacred as if not knowing any filth" (235). On the surface, the stanza bears witness to the talented yet impoverished poet who lives on after being orphaned and ostracized. On a deeper level, it suggests that the power of the Creator is like the power of the poet, which can enable her creative songs to survive in spite of her society's rejection and condemnation. In addition, though the

section ends with the speaker's invocation for the guidance of Saint Peter, her "conductor" and "her life-long companion"(236), a short poem "A Road"[98] which is appended as an epilogue reveals that what she pursues is more philosophical than religious. Her ultimate goal, it suggests, had been and continued to be seeking after the truth through an intellectual vigor, not a life of self-renunciation or self-sacrifice.[99] As we will see next, when Kim started her poetry writing, it is also not Christian spirituality but intellectual appetite along with physical desires that provided poetic inspiration.

Though not obvious from the title, "The Early Morning Dew's Dream of Flower," Kim's first published poem, also has autobiographical elements. In this much-commented-upon prose poem,[100] which appeared in 1920 in the magazine Creation (Ch'angjo), Kim tells about a love triangle laced with anticipation and betrayal, inserting herself as a character into writing. The poem takes the form of a frame story, and Kim gives her alias "Tansil," widely known to her contemporaries, to the main character who narrates her dream. She also uses her penname Mang-yang-ch'o (literally a flower looking out to sea) for the female protagonist who is

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[98] This is not a new poem, but a revision of the one, which was placed first in her collection The Fruits of Life.

[99] It is interesting to note that in spite of the influential impact that Christianity had on her education, she never claimed to be a Christian nor did she write specifically religious poems. As Kim Mi-young claims, although Kim Myŏng-sun's poems employ images that suggest Christian connotations, "for her, Christianity is not a specific religion" but "a universal force" that helps her go through the hardships of life. See "1920-yŏndae sin yŏsŏng kwa kidokkyo ŭi yŏn'gwansŏng e kwanhan koch'al [A Study on the Relationship of the New Women and Christianity in the 1920s in Korea]. Hyŏndae sosŏl yŏn'gu 21 (2004): 84-86.

[100] "The Early Morning Dew's Dream of Flower" is placed in the poetry section in Maeng Mun-jae's collection Kim Myŏng-sun chŏnjip: si, hŭigok [The Complete Works of Kim Myŏng-sun: Poetry and Plays], whereas it is classified as "a drama in verse" in Sŏ Chŏng-ja and and Nam Ŭn-hye's compilation Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun].

caught in a love triangle. Commenting on the poem, the critic Maeng Mun-jae praises Kim for breaking away from traditional verse form and contributing to the introduction of free verse,[101] and another critic Nam Min-u compliments her innovative style, claiming that inscribing her names in writing must have been "shocking" and "modern."[102] In addition, the frame narrative structure Kim tried out for the first time in Korean poetry, I argue, is also important because it reveals different versions of herself, thus allowing her to rediscover her identity.

As the poem opens, we find Tansil, aroused from a sound sleep, shedding tears as if not wanting to leave "the sweet dream" (699). Being sad, she goes to the backyard, sits "on the leaves of grass covered with dew," and starts to recall the dream she had (699). In the dream, while two sisters Paek Chang-mi (literally a white rose) and Hong Chang-mi (a red rose) talk about their love interest, Nam Ho-jŏp (an indigo butterfly), they hear a sad song that Mang-yang-ch'o sings on the seashore. When they approach the singer, Mang-yang-ch'o, "shedding tears of blood," tells her story: when she was young and in full bloom, the same Nam Ho-jŏp once came to her, and admiring her naïveté and honesty, promised on his departure to return to her. She has thus been "waiting for him every day for 10 years" (703) on the seashore and feeling lonely, she sings. As soon as she finishes her story, Hong Chang-mi sees Nam Ho-jŏp fly over the mountains looking for Hong herself and without telling Mang-yang-ch'o about their romantic relationship, she makes a haste

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[101] Maeng Mun-jae, Kim Myŏng-sun chŏnjip: si, hŭigok [The Complete Works of Kim Myŏng-sun: Poetry and Plays] (Seoul: Hyŏndae munhak, 2009) 285.

[102] Nam Min-u, "Yŏsŏng si ŭi munhak kyoyuchŏk ŭimi yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Literature Educational Meanings of Korean Modern Women's Poetry], Munhak kyoyukhak 11 (2003): 351.

departure with her older sister Paek Chang-mi. Tansil then opens her eyes wide, as if startled out of her reverie, and the poem circles back to the beginning. She still weeps alone as before and Kim writes "the tears of Tansil [are] due to an incurable illness" (704).

Like Chŏng Yŏng-ja, one can read it as "a sad love story"[103] and regard Tansil's illness, not specified in the poem, as lovesickness. Moreover, as Nam Min-u claims, unlike the modern style verse form, "the content of the dream represents the suffering and sorrow [*han*] of traditional women."[104] Kim seems, here, to advocate conventional gendered images of women as weeping, suffering, and faithful figures. However, the poem at the same time challenges gender expectations, presenting Tansil as a figure who dramatizes the situation of her (and the poet's) own desire and her love's betrayal by the act of dreaming, and who reexamines herself through her own imagined character Mang-yang-ch'o. Expressive of her emotions, Tansil is not merely a passive being, nor is Mang-yang-ch'o, the singer-poet whose retelling of her past can serve as a warning to other younger women. As doubles for Kim, Tansil and Mang-yang-ch'o create isolation as a medium through which they find the voice of the "I" who can speak.

Kim also makes it clear that women are not just emotional beings or an object of desire by men, but intellectual beings yearning for knowledge. Before she wakes, Tansil hears Mang-yang-ch'o sing a poem starting with "To my beloved," in

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[103] Chŏng Yŏng-ja, Han'guk hyŏndae yŏsŏng munhaksa [A History of Modern Korean Women's Literature] (Pusan kwangyŏksi: Sejong ch'ulp'ansa, 2010) 39.

[104] Nam Min-u, "Yŏsŏng si ŭi munhak kyoyuchŏk ŭimi yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Literature Educational Meanings of Korean Modern Women's Poetry], Munhak kyoyukhak 11 (2003): 353.

which the poetic speaker tells her lover that she would weave the flowers from her garden into a garland for his wedding gift, but if he finds it too little, he could pluck them more as he wishes. The speaker acts with stoical magnanimity in the face of her beloved's disloyalty, but though she may sound self-sacrificing and self-effacing, the poem ends with an interesting twist: "but my garden is/ a garden of thoughts;/ for you/ it's been refined;/so use it freely" (704). In reading these last lines, Nam Min-u claims that "Nam Ho-jŏp does not simply represent a lover but a new idea or an agent of a new world," which Mang-yang-ch'o and the two sisters are waiting for.[105] However, considering that the speaker is Mang-yang-ch'o or the poet, and that the garden is hers, not his, it is hard to see Nam Ho-jŏp as a carrier of new ideas. On the contrary, we can read the poem as her final resolution to stay composed, nurturing intellectual strength and moving toward her literary future, rather than staying behind and suffering from his inconstancy. Tansil's "incurable illness" is then not just lovesickness but her insatiable thirst for knowledge. In both "Half of My Life in Verse" and "The Early Morning Dew's Dream of Flower," while reconstructing her past Kim creates and reinforces her image as an intellectual woman who seeks solace in books and words.

III. Culture, Sex, and Gender Discrimination

In this section, I will now turn to Kim's poems on longing, disappointment in love, and suffering from discrimination against women who openly speak about their desire and passion. The idea of free love preoccupied the New Women of the

[105] Nam 351.

1920s, who argued that the Confucian chastity ideology dictated fidelity on the part of women while excusing men's sexual immorality and that "all forms of the old 'tyrannical and oppressive' marriage system (i.e., forced and early marriage) had to be replaced by the new ideal of love."[106] Though Kim does not use the term *chayu yŏnae* ("free love") in her poetry, she freely and explicitly expresses her desire and disappointment in love, reflecting her participation in the movement of sexual liberation. However, this does not mean that Korean society approved of the New Women's advocacy of free love. On the contrary, their "idealistic visions" were met with "the strong opposition of conservatives who viewed *yŏnae* ("free love") as nothing more than lust and an act of irresponsibility."[107] The New Women's desire to go beyond their traditional sexual role eventually led public discourse to portray them "as a sexual seductress who posed a danger to the hallowed institution of the family."[108] Registering these circumstances, Kim's poetry shows her struggle to live up to social expectations, her desire to become a liberated woman, and her resentment at social labeling and constraints.

What is most prominent in Kim's love poetry is her appropriation of the assertion of "self as lover" which Morris identifies as "characteristic of male love poetry."[109] In Kim's poem, it is the female speaker who speaks about her desire and says to her lover who does not come to her: "Should I go, then?" (180). Unlike the

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[106] Theodore Jun Yoo, "The 'New Woman' and the Politics of Love, Marriage and Divorce in Colonial Korea." Gender and History 17 (2005): 308.

[107] Yoo 308.

[108] Yoo 305.

[109] Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) 81.

traditional image of a woman in love, who is locked in her place passively waiting for the male lover to come, she shows a figure of the one who expresses her passion and is ready to go find him. When unable to set off for her loved one, without shame she writes about the reason, as in the following 3-line *sijo* poem: "If I were free I would drill through even a rock/ and go pour out anger to my beloved./ But, caught in a poverty trap, how can I go?" (202). While lamenting her poverty, the speaker is burning with fierce vitality. Though the lack of wealth detains her, her heart is capable of being kindled, breaking down the rocks to find her love interest. Even when she employs the fixed structure of *sijo* ("three-line verse form"), Kim indirectly defies the constrained form by suggesting not a conventional principle of restraint in women, but the possibility of their mobility.

In other words, in her poetry, rather than conforming to a stereotypical feminine passivity that the male poet writes in eulogizing a woman who serves to "mirror back a sense of the poet's sensibility, the intensity of *his* emotions, the fineness of *his* judgments and the anguish of *his* loss,"[110] Kim passionately and explicitly reveals her own feelings of longing, loneliness, or agony. In "The Flames," for example, the poetic speaker demonstrates her uncontrollable passion using the image of the body imprisoned: "Does my body belong to me?/ No, and no./ While longing when I see it in a dream/ it looks like a hostage of love./ While lonely when I see it again/it looks like a prisoner of pain" (189-90). It is important to note that while examining her own emotional states, she constructs herself as a desiring subject rather than becoming an object of male desire. To express and intensify her

[110] Morris 80.

fiery passion, she also often uses the color red. Her poetic speaker is personified as "one blood red flower/ floating on the blue water" ("Encountering Spring," 205); a girl who "writes and erases" her lover's name in blood ("The Name of My Loved One," 124); or "the red lipstick" that whispers to her lover ("A Doomed Song," 208). Given the sexual mores of the time required withholding emotion for women, her explicit expression of ardor is striking. In addition, she goes even further to pronounce the qualifications of an ideal man: it is "you who know how to love people/ instead of loving naughty flowers;/ you who do not shatter my conscience/ out of thorny jealousy;/ you who save me pricked and defeated by thorns/ with a scent of life" ("Should I Go, Then?," 180). The speaker, rather than being defined as an ideal woman by a male lover, demands that he who deserves her love should possess discernment, sensitivity, compassion, and high-mindedness. Kim reverses the gender roles by empowering the woman lover to express her subjectivity and reveal her need for a male lover who is equal to her and who does not dictate female subordination.

Another noticeable feature in her love poetry is that the poetic speaker rarely dreams of a joyful fantasy of romantic fulfillment. Of course, there exist poems such as "A Light Rain" where the speaker sweetly expresses her wishes for a renewed love and an eager anticipation of its fulfillment: "[. . .] / while we stand in the rain/ embracing each other,/ if a puddle is formed/ in our love,/ fresh green sprout will shoot up/ from our old love/ when spring comes back next year."[111] However, often

[111] Maeng Mun-jae, Kim Myŏng-sun chŏnjip: si, hŭigok [The Complete Works of Kim Myŏng-sun: Poetry and Plays] (Seoul: Hyŏndae munhak, 2009) 120.

Kim's speakers are more realistic than romantic, more somber than bright. In "Alter Ego" where she recalls her past love, she even portrays herself as a beggar woman rather than beautifying her persona:

> When I close my eyes
> I see a maiden beggar looking ashy pale
> look around front and back
> as if looking for something
> not in the day or night
> but in the blue fog on the cobblestone street.
>
> Turning my head around
> I recall something distinctly.
> I was on my way to school.
> I saw a shadow approaching me
> and heard a distinct voice asking,
> 'Where are you going?'
>
> But before he could stop his way,
> flying like an arrow,
> I walked past him without saying a word.
> And I set free a blue bird I had kept
> in my heart for three years
> over the path, crying.
>
> At this time of contemplation,
> oh, the old sorrow, why are you coming back again?
> I wasn't gentle to people;
> my heart couldn't nurture a bird.
> In my heart which is like thick, thorny vines,
> oh, the old sorrow, don't hurt me again! (122-23)

The critic Hwang Chae-gŭn claims that the poem shows "a course of free love" as it depicts the speaker "on her way to school unexpectedly meeting her lover."[112] Considering that traditional women were confined to the domestic sphere and physically secluded, the speaker's encounter with a man in a public setting can

[112] Hwang Chae-gun, "Kim Myŏng-sun si ŭi kŭndaesŏng yŏn'gu" [A Study of Modernity in Kim Myŏng-sun's Poetry]. Sŏnch'ŏng ŏmun 28 (2000): 34-35.

represent a feature of the adventure-seeking New Woman. However, their encounter is nothing erotic. Moreover, she is not a chic pretty woman who tries to seduce a man but a beggar woman who wanders aimlessly as if searching for a missing object. That object can be her lost love. However, when the man approaches her, she passes him like "an arrow" as if wanting to avoid facing him. The subject of the poem is neither the male lover identified only as "a shadow" nor a romantic love the New Woman idealized. It can then be her present self that acknowledges her inability to feel deep affection for somebody while recalling her failed love: her heart covered with thorns[113] cannot be "gentle to people," thus thwarting the possibility of nurturing "the blue bird" which symbolizes a love.

Her inability to love can stem from gender expectations of that time, and the poem can reflect her engagement with realities of women's lives. While paying particular attention to Kim's use of the beggar figure, "a lowly woman," and "her refusal to resort to an image of a lovely beautiful woman that typifies a doll belonging to a man,"[114] Nam Min-u suggests that the speaker is not a romantic heroine but a double for the poet who had to face discrimination against gender. He writes that "her school life was probably unhappy" because of the social prejudice against women getting education, reflected in the fact that "a girls' school was at

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[113] It is interesting to note that in another poem "A Doomed Song" Kim also employs a similar image of her heart covered with thorny vines but her sorrow this time comes from her loss of youth: "Oh, oh, oh, the red lipstick/ to whom will it whisper?/ My lips, once red, grow pale./Could I laugh again?/ My face, once fair, grows dark./ Could I look in the mirror?"// As if hiding gold in the earth/and hiding jade in stone,/I sow the seeds of sorrows/in my heart full of pain./ After rain and snow fall,/ thorny vines grow there" (208). It is not just poverty but also aging that caused her sorrow and pain.

[114] Nam Min-u, "Yŏsŏng si ŭi munhak kyoyuchŏk ŭimi yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Literature Educational Meanings of Korean Modern Women's Poetry], Munhak kyoyukhak 11 (2003): 353.

that time considered as a courtesans' school."[115] Therefore, she portrayed her alter ego as a beggar, he claims, to reveal her scarred soul.[116] In suggesting that she intentionally brought down herself to the level of a beggar to dramatize the harm inflicted on her by society, he dismisses the economic hardship she often faced. However, his reading helps us to see that the figure of the beggar can symbolize not just economic but emotional destitution. The revelation of her emotional destitution, though, does not mean her submission to the social ideology of feminine virtue and restraint. It rather suggests that just as she is not afraid of speaking openly of her passion in her other poems we have seen above, she is not afraid either of showing her lack of sexual desire, making the poetic speaker more real than idealized and also placing her in control of love, herself, and her lover.

In addition, as the following poem "Imprecation" will show, unlike her predecessors, especially those courtesan poets who were devoted to the passion their lovers aroused and who endured persecution and pain their faithless lovers caused, Kim boldly condemns the deceits of love. She writes:

> Love, rolling over on the ground
> out of the mouth of a hungry man,
> shakes one's ear.
> A lie called 'love'!
>
> A starving demon sucking blood from a maiden's heart
> shattered by the hands of a blind man
> makes kind-hearted women bear regrets.
> A lie called 'love'!
>
> You, fickle and unreliable,
> some days I pray to run into you;

[115] Nam 355.

[116] Nam 355.

other days I pray not to meet you.
A simple lie that deceived and cheated me!

You, rolling out of the mouth of a hungry man,
get shattered by the hands of a blind man.
Ah, disappear from my heart
even if I will die! (116)

Kim here strengthens her public voice as a poet by presenting a poem about a sexual betrayal. The speaker "I" invokes love only to denounce it as "a lie." As she warns, it is manipulated through "the mouth of a hungry man" presumably only seeking to have his desire fulfilled and by "the hands of a blind man" probably writing about feigned and calculated amorous emotions. However, the deceptive power of this "starving demon" called love is so great that once it sucks "blood from a maiden's heart," it seems hard for her to shatter its illusion as she confesses to be torn by her desire to "run into" love nevertheless. The poem then serves as not just a public denouncement of male infidelity and falsely professed passion, but also a way of self-criticism wherein she expresses her inability to completely reject the "fickle and unreliable" love. After the confession about her ambivalence, though, she publicly makes a resolution to banish love from her heart. As the last line implies, without love, she may not be able to live, but it seems that even if the resolution can take her life away, she does not want to suffer from the pain caused by seduction and betrayal and to be attached to passion's pleasure. By transferring the moral superiority from the unreliable male lover, endowed with socially sanctioned power because of his gender, to the female speaker who denounces falsely professed passion and upholds fidelity and self-restraint, Kim ultimately reveals her feminist consciousness against the stereotypes of the New Women as an immoral seductress.

Most importantly, as we have seen in the first section about her autobiographical poetry and the second section about her love poetry, what makes Kim different from traditional women poets is her ambition to be an intellectual being equal to men and her openness to expressing her passion and desire. However, as mentioned in the introduction, it is not her creativity or intellectuality, but rumors about her romance that attracted the attention of the public, and it is her contemporary writer Kim Ki-jin (1903-1985) who stirred up attacks on her. In 1924, he published an essay "An Open Letter to Ms. Kim Myŏng-sun (Kim Myŏng-sun ssi e taehan konggaechang)" in the New Woman (Sinyŏsŏng) magazine, revealing her involvement in a love triangle and tangles of other literary people such as Im No-wŏl and Kim Wŏn-ju.[117] As Sŏ Chŏng-ja points out, the essay is a form of personal attack, not a literary critique.[118] Kim Ki-jin argues that the poet's degeneracy originated from her birth, and although recognized as a writer due to the rarity of women writers, she is already passé.[119] Without offering any analysis of her work,[120] he suggests that she is not worth reading. Because of his accusation, she became known not so much as a great poet but rather as an immoral heroine of

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[117] Kim Ki-jin, "Kim Myŏng-sun ssi e taehan konggaechang" [An Open Letter to Ms. Kim Myŏng-sun], and "Kim Wŏn-ju ssi e taehan konggaechang" [An Open Letter to Ms. Kim Wŏn-ju], Kim P'albong munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim P'albong], ed. Hong Chŏng-sŏn, vol. 4 (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1988) 588-97.

[118] Sŏ Chŏng-ja, "Tiasŭp'ora Kim Myŏng-sun ŭi sam kwa munhak" [Diaspora: Life and Literature of Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim Myŏng-sun munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim Myŏng-sun], eds. Sŏ and Nam Ŭn-hye (Seoul: P'urŭn sasang, 2010) 45.

[119] Kim Ki-jin, "Kim Myŏng-sun ssi e taehan konggaechang" [An Open Letter to Ms. Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim P'albong munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim P'albong], ed. Hong Chŏng-sŏn, vol. 4 (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1988) 592.

[120] Kim Ki-jin quotes Kim Myŏng-sun's poems "Dream" and "Prayer," but it is only to say that "there is a smell of face powder in her work." See Kim P'albong munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim P'albong], ed. Hong Chŏng-sŏn, vol. 4 (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1988) 588-89.

a romance. From this perspective, "Imprecation," written around this time can be also read as her response to the publicized scandal.

Yet, her anger and frustration are nowhere more obvious than in the poem "In the Glass Coffin." It starts with the poetic speaker's emotional pain over the tenacity of life. As if holding colloquy with her self, she laments: "Because life still remains/I endured the suffering today as well." She then claims: "Because I was told I could lead a happy life/ if I worked, studied, and loved,/ I have endured this fickle world" (109). However, when the world shows that she cannot live like a prince in a fairy tale "dancing in the glass tube," she ends by exclaiming: "Being buried alive in this suffocation, what should I do?/ Oh, foolish I! Oh, foolish I!" (109). She is a figure of Kim's self, condemning the hypocritical society and speaking strongly in her own defense. As we have seen in her autobiographical poems, she worked hard to earn her living, eagerly pursued knowledge to progress, and searched for the self-actualization through "free love" rather than a loveless marriage, all of which were well suited to the claims of colonial reformists. As Kenneth Wells states, they argued that "the low status of women was a symbol of national backwardness, so that raising their status through education and legal reforms would enhance the overall level of civilization and strength" and "their rescue from oppressive family and social customs would signify the onset of a new society."[121] However, the "fickle world" labeled those who challenged traditional womanhood by advocating women's self-awakening and liberation as decadent, rapacious, and whorish. The

[121] Kenneth M. Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement," Colonial Modernity in Korea, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) 198.

suspicion of male intellectuals such as Kim Ki-jin about the poet's lack of virtue made her feel caught, suffocated, and "buried alive." In this repressive circumstance, she even depreciated her beliefs and values, castigating herself for being "foolish" to believe the rhetoric about supporting women's advancement. However, the poem shows that she was not just helpless. The real strength of "In the Glass Coffin" is to reveal the personal cost of her achievement and to prove her innocence by speaking in her own right. It seems that the "sexual slur" Kim Ki-jin casted on the woman who dared to write and speak only reveals his own fear of losing male privileged status, and ultimately does little more than perpetuate the image of seemingly modern and enlightened intellectuals' eagerness[122] to brew a scandal to sell their work.

IV. Female Identity: Mother-Daughter Dyads

Next, I will examine Kim's poems on the mother-daughter relationship. The figure of the mother is important not because her own mother embodied the social ideal of motherhood, but because her mother's status as a concubine and a former *kisaeng* served as her critics' rationale for attacking her moral character, and writing poetry about her mother became her response to their condemnation. When Kim Ki-jin insulted the poet in his 1924 essay by calling her an immoral woman, he argued that "her status as a concubine's daughter made her melancholic and hysteric," "her decadent nature was due to the impure blood from her mother," and "the marks of

[122] Kim Tong-in joined Kim Ki-jin in this effort by publishing "Kim Yŏn-sil [aka Kim Myŏng-sun] chŏn" [A Life of Kim Yŏn-sil] wherein the poet is described as a New Woman blindly pursuing Western civilization and a literary amateur acting out a scene from a romance novel. See Kamja: Kim Tong-in tanp'yŏnsŏn [Potato: Selected Short Stories of Kim Tong-in] (Seoul: Munhak sasangsa, 2004) 364; 378.

her bad bloodline appeared in her poetry, fiction, and personality."[123] By "the impure blood" he meant her mother's *kisaeng* profession and she is singled out here as a marker of moral and intellectual inferiority because of her mother's blood in her. As Ruth Barraclough explains in "The Courtesan's Journal: *Kisaeng* and the Sex Labor Market in Colonial Korea," *kisaeng* "were traditionally part of the caste economy of Chosŏn Dynasty Korea (1932-1910) where girl children were born into or apprenticed to the *kisaeng* profession, or sold outright to *kisaeng* houses."[124] Though their position changed "from hereditary slave to bonded labourer,"[125] they continued to "function in modern twentieth-century Korea"[126] and the stigma attached to this "lowest caste, the *cho'ŏnmin*," sharing once "the same status as butchers and slaves,"[127] did not disappear. Therefore, Kim Myŏng-sun, in "Me and the Stars," describes herself as "a slave of tradition without papers" (221).

Considering her contemporaries' slanders, we imagine that she would be eager to dissociate herself from the images of her mother. Yet, on the contrary, it is the feminist assertion of her desire to speak about her mother as a source for poetic creativity and as a moral guide that runs throughout her poems. In both "Doing Cute Things" and "The Old Song," her mother appears as a muse.

Mother says:

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[123] Kim Ki-jin, "Kim Myŏng-sun ssi e taehan konggaechang" [An Open Letter to Ms. Kim Myŏng-sun], Kim P'albong munhak chŏnjip [The Complete Literary Works of Kim P'albong], ed. Hong Chŏng-sŏn, vol. 4 (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1988) 591-92.

[124] Ruth Barraclough, "The Courtesan's Journal: *Kisaeng* and the Sex Labor Market in Colonial Korea," Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific 29 (2012): 3.

[125] Barraclough 4.

[126] Barraclough 3.

[127] Barraclough 3.

My child, without sleep,
what are you so happy about?

Oh, Mother,
my hopeful lights shine
all over the world.

Ho, ho, ho, my baby,
how come you are not sleeping
and just doing cute things?

Mother, tell me old tales.
Was there a girl like me
in the old days?

Ah, ah, there are no more old tales.
Every evening I told my daughter
all the good old stories. (81)

In this short poem "Doing Cute Things" that takes the form of dialogue between the daughter and her mother, Kim not only recalls her childhood but also reveals the old stories as a medium that strengthens the bonds between the two women. The picture of the mother's storytelling is significant because it shows Kim's acknowledgement of her mother as the origin of creative writing, stirring her imagination. It is also in the mother that she looks for a figure to stimulate her ambition to "shine all over the world." This cherished image of her mother as a raconteuse continues to haunt her in "The Old Song" where she even more explicitly eulogizes the power of her mother's language. The speaker yearns for "the sound of the serene old song, /coming and disappearing/ like the sound of footsteps in a dream; /a song of my mother, a song of love!" (84). While recalling the song starting with "T'abang, T'abang," she touchingly demonstrates her indebtedness to her mother, the singer who "taught [her] a ballad" (84). By publicly acknowledging, rather than renouncing, her mother's influence on her poetic imagination, I argue,

she confronts those who condemn her on the ground of her mother's former profession. *Kisaeng* were regarded as "complete artists" because they learned "a whole variety of instrumental and vocal music" as well as "court dances" and performed at the royal court or the *kisaeng* houses.[128] Therefore, ironically, among those who produced poetry prior to the early twentieth century, many more were *kisaeng*, the social outcasts, than the middle or high-class women. And, poetry was learned and passed onto others orally, as in "The Old Song" where the poetic persona learns the ballad from her mother verbally. What Kim accomplishes in "Doing Cute Things" and "The Old Song" is, then, to assert her identity as a woman poet, preserving a viable female tradition inherited from her foremothers, against those male writers who repeatedly attempt to cancel that tradition.

In addition, if the mother came to stand in the relation of muse to the poet above, in the following poem she appears as the figure of her hometown and her protection. In "Nostalgia," written while Kim was in Tokyo in 1923, the poet's homesickness brings up the image of motherland. However, its image is not warm or welcoming: "there is only serenity and calmness in my hometown" while "I am in pain and suffering" here (87). As the speaker laments that there is no way to inform her country about her wretchedness, the sense of desertion predominates in the beginning of the poem. Yet, when she is left without an external source of power, she writes, "A bluebird, my mother's emissary, has come;/ a true miracle braving the bitter reality" (87). As if afraid of being an orphan, she brings hope through a visionary effort to believe her dead mother lives on. Her presence is so vivid in the

[128] Barraclough 3.

speaker's imagination that she declares: "There is my mother in my hometown/playing the Korean golden zither to honor all the prayers" (88). It is then the mother or the image of her that gives significance to the place of her hometown. Korea cannot make up for what she has lost but it is still in her consciousness because of the presence of her mother's spirit that protects her. She also makes the connection between her mother and intellectual inspiration a few lines later when she writes of herself as "the one coming out of her hometown thanks to a mother's glory" (88). Imagining that her mother would welcome her with "a wreath of flowers" when she returns, she ends the poem by making a final enthusiastic pronouncement: "When a new time comes/ I will lift self-imposed restrictions/ and honor my hometown by shining all over the world" (89). She reveals her desire to become a liberated woman and to succeed in her career, bringing fame to her country. For Kim, the image of the mother is a necessity for her survival and success as a woman writer and intellectual.

However, commemorating her mother, the first powerful influence on her life, does not always rescue her from a state of feeling motherless, lonely, and disoriented. In another poem also titled "Nostalgia," the speaker confesses that:

> Being lonely,
> I left home saying
> I didn't like the comfortable place.
> But when the world laughs at me,
> to whom could I tell the agony and anger? (175)

From Sŏ Chŏng-ja's claim that Kim had a difficult relationship with her father's first wife and their children, we can understand her loneliness in her home and the reason for her leaving the place which would otherwise have offered her comfort

and community. With no one to turn to when she becomes a target of discrimination and ridicule, she ends up wallowing in self-pity as in "Prayer, Dream, and Sigh": "Every night, every night, in front of the mirror/ [. . .] /To dream of mother's precious bosom,/ a beloved daughter, a beloved daughter, becomes in a pitiful state" (90). She becomes pathetic so as to touch an unknown force, which then helps her see her mother in a dream. She then "in every dream, every dream, around the pond named A Shrine of Pitifulness,/ clasped in the arms of [her] mother,/ [weeps], unable to return her love" (90). Or, she gives a deep sigh, "alone in the empty garden," becoming pale and " burying her face in a round lotus leaf" (91). The speaker is constructed here as a fragile daughter who needs to be pitied, protected, and guarded. And, the process of intensifying her motherless and vulnerable state culminates in "At Midnight."

As the poem opens, the speaker who recalls "the days of hardship," spontaneously cries out, "Mother." She then sees an apparition:

> Wearing white just like when she was alive,
> with round eyes under long lashes,
> and pretty nose and mouth which look even prettier,
> she appears in the ceiling like a flower and says,
> 'Oh, my poor child, you're so in pain.' (239)

In her illusion, Kim searches for the hidden maternal presence and allows her mother a poetic voice that consoles her. On the surface, she, so lonely, seems desperate for taking refuge in her mother's arms. However, on a deeper level, we can see her attempt to find the self in her reunification with the maternal, which has a voice outside the realm of the patriarchal social system. She breaks off the spell of the fantasy and declares: "Mother, who is not present any more/ but shares flesh

and blood with me,/ knows my life and love" (239). Invoking the spirit of a mother who knows her whereabouts she becomes doubly strong. As long as her ghostly mother is present in her imagination, she would not be lost completely. We can also observe a similar structure in "Tansil's Dream at Dawn." The poem starts with the depiction of the young girl Tansil's distress at her mother's death: "In the chilly bosom of her mother/ a pubescent girl cries./Looking at her mother whose body becomes cold as ice,/she shouts out "Mother, Mother, why did you pass away?" (156). After lamenting the loss of her mother in passionate phrases, Tansil then "dozes off in the spring breeze" and sobs away in her dream where she hears "Heaven roars at her: 'Move forward! Move forward!'" (157). But when awake, "she was alone" (157). In this highly melodramatic scene, with a voice of Heaven, a spirit of her mother, she asserts the right for self-expression and the desire for moving forward. Therefore, even when the speaker is left to savor her loneliness, there is a touch of self-conscious emphasis on the power of the female voice that guides her.

In closing, I would like to stress that this exploration of Kim's poetry shows how much her work and history were misunderstood, just as she wrote in the preface to The Fruits of Life. Her words in her poetry are daring and honest, and she is iconoclastic and outspoken. However, she should not be deemed unworthy of reading as her contemporary male critics considered. Nor should she be deemed disreputable and debauched as they labeled her as being. The social ostracism she had to face, though, was too high a price to pay for her feminist persistence to subvert the gender hierarchy, and it led her to write "Last Will," in which she unflinchingly relates her denunciation of society: "Chosŏn! When I die and depart

from you/whether I fall into a brook or bleed in the field,/ torture my corpse even more./ But, if that is not enough,/ when someone like me is born in the future/ torture her once again as much as you can. /We who hate each other will then part permanently. /Oh, a ferocious place! A ferocious place!" (119). We can imagine how the land of her birth, "a ferocious place," suppressed, denigrated, and dehumanized her, and how fiercely she confronted it by uttering a sentence of death she herself conceived, speaking not as a passive, vulnerable victim but as an active, masculine authority. The real emphasis here is not on her suffering but on her triumph. She is not an uncomplicated writer, and by examining the complex and varied ways in which she engaged with such topics as the intellectual, the sexual, and the maternal in her poetry, this chapter shows there is ample material for feminist scholars to explore in her writings.

CHAPTER III

Where Are the Women in History?: Rereading Women's Life Stories in Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Poetry

I. Introduction

On June 9, 1991, the poet Ko Chŏng-hŭi, whom the literary critic Kim Sŭng-hŭi calls "the first full-fledged feminist of Korea,"[129] drowned at the age of forty-three, after losing her footing at Paemsa Creek while climbing Mount Chiri. Interestingly, Ko had previously published ten collections of poetry and was an active member of the Korean feminist movement, but she did not achieve national fame as the foremost feminist poet of her time until after her death. In fact, this posthumous fame was a direct result of the efforts of a feminist organization that Ko helped found in 1984, the Alternative Culture (Tto Hana ŭi Munhwa) organization. The AC organization, which defines itself as "a Korean feminist network which fosters feminist consciousness through publications and cultural activities,"[130] ensured Ko's lasting fame through a series of programs and initiatives celebrating and promoting her poetry. These initiatives began with the organization of so-called

[129] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 136.

[130] According to its website, the Alternative Culture organization has been dedicated to promoting "an equal and open society where women and men have true companionships, and children grow up with freedom, through planting a seed of an alternative culture in Korean society." See Tto Hana ŭi Munhwa, 5 Dec. 2013 <http://www.tomoon.com>.

"feminist funeral,"[131] which was a direct response to Ko's "National Literary Funeral," a completely male-dominated memorial service.

As Yi So-hŭi details in her essay "The Context of Feminist Cultural Politics in Ko Chŏng-hŭi: Historicity of and Connections to Feminism (Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan p'eminijŭm munhwa chŏngchi'ihak: yŏsŏngjuŭi yŏndae wa yŏksasong ŭi kwanchŏm esŏ)," the feminist political consciousness of the AC members was ignited by the patriarchal structure of her funeral on June 11, 1991, and in particular the fact that "the entire official ceremony was led by men."[132] As a reporter of The Women's News (Yŏsŏng sinmun) Choi Lee Bu-ja [Ch'oe Yi Pu-ja] notes, in Korea "women were rarely allowed to fully participate in the social ritual of death" and were often "relegated to the role of grieving guests while standing behind the men who took charge of the funeral."[133] As a direct result of their experiences at Ko's funeral, a consensus emerged among the AC members that "there was no ritual

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[131] Quoting Choi Lee Bu-ja's article "Women Solidarity Shown through 'Feminist Funeral': Women Resurrected through Sisterly Love" which appeared in a 2002 edition of *The Women's News*, Karen An-hwei Lee points out that "the concept of the feminist funeral" was used to "imbue women's deaths with social significance, resurrect progressive ideals in women's lives today, and memorialize Korean historical women for posterity" (74). Its history can be traced back to "the commemorative ceremony held in honor of Kim Gyeong Sook" who "lost her life to the police suppression of the workers' occupation of the Sinmindang (New People's Party) office in 1979," and she claims that participation in the social rites such as funerals created "an opportunity to build Korean women's solidarity through shared common ground and community proaction" (74). See Lee, "From Female Self-Sacrifice to Korean Freedom Fighter," Transnationalism and the Asian American Heroine: Essays on Literature, Film, Myth and Media, ed. Lan Dong (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010).

[132] Yi So-hŭi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan p'eminijŭm munhwa chŏngchi'ihak: yŏsŏngjuŭi yŏndae wa yŏksasong ŭi kwanchŏm esŏ" [The Context of Feminist Cultural Politics in Ko Chŏng-hŭi: Historicity of and Connections to Feminism], Chendŏ wa sahoe 6 (2007): 16. As for the details of Ko's death and the funeral, see Kim Ŭn-sil, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi sŏnsaengnim i chugŏtta?" [Is Ms. Ko Chŏng-hŭi Dead?], Cho Hyŏng et al., eds., Nŏ ŭi ch'immuk e memarŭn na ŭi ipsul: yŏsŏng haebang munhakka Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi sam kwa kŭl [My Parched Lips Upon Your Silence: The Life and Writing of Feminist Writer Ko Chŏng-hŭi] (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 1993) 211-27.

[133] Choi Lee Bu-ja, "Women Solidarity Shown through 'Feminist Funeral': Women Resurrected through Sisterly Love," trans. Cho Eung-joo, The Women's News 2002 12 July 2013.

mourning protocol for unmarried women."[134] Disturbed and frustrated by having to send "[their] feminist friend Ko" off with a patriarchal ritual that forced women to stand behind the men who were "in-charge" of the funeral, they decided to hold a second memorial service more "in keeping with the feminism she strove to uphold."[135] This service was held on June 15, 1991 at P'almojŏng of the Academy House in Suyuri, and was attended by about 300 people. The title of the service was "A Madang Play Performance: A Memorial for Ko Chŏng-hŭi,"[136] a reference to the *madang kut* ("shamanic theatrical performance") genre traditionally performed by a female shaman, which the poet often adopted in her work, such as her 1983 poetry collection A Memorial Service (Ch'ohonje) and her 1989 collection Green Grass on the Grave (Chŏ mudŏm wi e p'urŭn chandi).[137] The use of the *kut* ("shaman rituals") genre was intended to invoke Ko's spirit and bridge the worlds of the dead and the living, as well as to send her off with "a feminist ceremony" and "in the company of

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[134] Yi So-hŭi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan p'eminijŭm munhwa chŏngchi'ihak: yŏsŏngjuŭi yŏndae wa yŏksasong ŭi kwanchŏm esŏ" [The Context of Feminist Cultural Politics in Ko Chŏng-hŭi: Historicity of and Connections to Feminism], Chendŏ wa sahoe 6 (2007): 16.

[135] Yi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan" 19.

[136] Yi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan" 16.

[137] Antonetta Lucia Bruno explains that "*Ssikkim kut*, the shamanic ritual of purification, is performed on Chindo, the fourth-biggest island of Korea, situated off the southwest coast of South Chŏlla province. *Ssikkim kut* belongs to the rituals and religious practices related to death, which involves sending the deceased on to a 'good place.'" See Bruno, "A Shamanic Ritual for Sending On the Dead," Religions of Korea In Practice, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2007) 325. Also, Kim Hyŏng-gyu states that "Scholars have proposed various theories to explain the origin of *p'ansori*, but the most probable theory is that *p'ansori* emerged from narrative shaman chants and *kut* in Chŏlla Province in southwestern Korea. The narrative shaman chants of the Chŏlla region resemble *p'ansori* in the long story lines, the mixture of song and speech, and the musical structure and way of singing." See Kim Hyong-gyu, Understanding Korean Literature, trans. Robert J. Fouser (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997) 100.

her feminist woman friends," with the entire ritual stressing the importance of "sisterhood."[138]

After the memorial service, the AC members were unanimous in their sentiment that "making Ko Chŏng-hŭi, the first feminist poet in Korean literary history, a poet to be remembered"[139] was imperative. They resolved to create a series of Ko-related projects and initiatives, and in the years that followed they established the "Ko Chŏng-hŭi Award" and "Ko Chŏng-hŭi Literary Award for Youth," organized an "Annual Ko Memorial Trip" and a series of "Tours for Women," and coordinated events such as the "Dis-tory Festival for Asian Girls" and "Feminism for Girls" among others.[140] In addition, the Alternative Culture Organization Press published My Parched Lips Upon Your Silence: The Life and Writing of Feminist Writer Ko Chŏng-hŭi (Nŏ ŭi ch'immuk e memarŭn na ŭi ipsul: yŏsŏng haebang munhakka Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi sam kwa kŭl) in 1993, "an anthology of Ko's selected letters, poems on the feminist movement, essays on feminist literature, and essays by friends paying tribute to her memory."[141] The press also published The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi (Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip) in 2011, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of her death.

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[138] Yi So-hŭi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan p'eminijŭm munhwa chŏngchi'ihak: yŏsŏngjuŭi yŏndae wa yŏksasong ŭi kwanchŏm esŏ" [The Context of Feminist Cultural Politics in Ko Chŏng-hŭi: Historicity of and Connections to Feminism], Chendŏ wa sahoe 6 (2007): 18.

[139] Yi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan" 19.

[140] Yi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi rŭl tullŏssan" 10.

[141] Peter H. Lee, ed., Echoing Song: Contemporary Korean Women Poets (Buffalo, NY: White Pine, 2005) 102.

On the whole, unlike Kim Myŏng-sun in the first chapter, who languished in obscurity for many decades, through the efforts of the AC organization, Ko's standing was quickly established and she has been recognized as Korea's foremost feminist icon ever since. However, like Kim, Ko has not been a popular subject for scholarly inquiry outside of Korea. In an attempt to amend this oversight, my aim in this chapter is to introduce Ko and her work to an English-speaking audience through an in-depth analysis of her poems, as well as her role in the so-called "second wave" of feminism in Korea. In doing so, I will pay particular attention to her epistolary poetry in which she portrays both well-known and lesser-known Korean women in the past and present—which I will call her "portrait poems" hereafter.

Ko's portrait poems in letter form, especially in her 1987 poetry collection The Spring of Mt. Chiri (Chirisan ŭi pom) and the 1990 collection Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation (Yŏsŏng haebang ch'ulsapyŏ), are critical to this study because they capture most brilliantly her lyrical mode, at once intimate and rapturous, while focusing on women's issues. This does not mean, however, that as critics such as Sŏng Min-yŏp and Chŏng Ŭn-kwi assert, the voice of her poetry changed from one of passion and fight ("yŏlchŏng kwa t'ujaeng") to the lyrical voice of sadness in The Spring of Mt. Chiri.[142] In fact, we can easily trace her lyrical mode back to the first collection Who is Treading the Winepress Alone? (Nuga hollo sult'ŭl

[142] Cŭŏng Ŭn-kwi, "Ttang ŭi saramdŭl, daechi ŭi ŏnŏ: Ko Chŏng-hŭi wa choijacho ŭi tto hana ŭi saengt'ae sihak" [The People of Land and the Language of Earth: Another Ecopoetics of Joy Harjo and Ko Chŏng-hŭi], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 309-10.

ŭl palpko innŭn'ga). Her early poems are clearly religious and often seen as filled with sublimity,[143] but they are at the same time confessional and lyrical.

For instance, "Suyuri: Caprice, Part I" (Vol. I, 53), a poem recalling the place where the Korean Theological Seminary, which "taught her ingredients of life,"[144] is located, as well as "Ice" (Vol. I, 80), a poem evoking the winter at Taegu where she worked as a middle school teacher,[145] have autobiographical components. Also, poems such as "Who is Treading the Winepress Alone?: A Song of a Close Friend" (Vol. I, 30), "Zarathustra" (Vol. I, 33-36), "Spring of Labyrinth, Part 6: Festival" (Vol. I, 39-40), "Spring of Labyrinth, Part 7" (Vol. I, 41-42), and the "Auschwitz" sequence (Vol. I, 44-46) are written in an intimate and conversational tone. They reflect on what it means to be a poet and what poetry can be, and deal with such subjects as violence, death, and memory. Therefore, it does not seem that her poetic voice changed dramatically in the poems of The Spring of Mt. Chiri.

Rather, what is worth noting is that as the poet-critic Kim Sŭng-hŭi aptly points out, Ko "did not solely write the kind of confessional lyric poetry, personal and subjective, that women poets in the 1960s mainly wrote."[146] In other words, as opposed to those women poets who primarily wrote lyric poetry in the romantic mode separate from social concerns, she did not confine her lyrics within private

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[143] See Yi Kyŏng-su, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi chŏn'gisi e nat'anan sunggo wa kŭ ŭimi" [On the Sublime and Its Meaning in Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Early Poetry], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 65-94.

[144] Ko Chŏng-hŭi, "Preface," Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim Sŭng-hŭi et al., vol. I (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 97. Unless otherwise indicated, all poems are from this edition, 2 vols., and translations are my own.

[145] Ko Chŏng-hŭi, "Preface," vol. I. 97.

[146] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Afterword," Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim et al., vol. II (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 567.

walls and the natural world, but went beyond the conventions of her time by including critical views of the androcentric world, promoting the liberation of women as the oppressed people (*minjung*), and invoking the spirits of those who died for democratization.[147] Moreover, as Kim claims, Ko "brought about a poetic revolution which opened up new possibilities for lyric poetry" by incorporating occasional verse, the sequential structure of long narrative poems, the *kut* style, and epistolary forms.[148] In sum, I agree with Kim that Ko extended the horizon of Korean women's lyrical poetry, and I argue that this fact is most clearly encapsulated in her portrait poems in the epistolary style.

In addition, as we will see, these poems are intensely political in both the narrow and broad sense of the term. In other words, they concern not only public affairs such as warfare and state ideology (the narrow sense) but also "power relations between social groups that are mediated not through institutions but through attitudes" (the broad sense).[149] Thus, Ko's poetry can be largely situated

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[147] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Afterword," Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim et al., vol. II (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 567.

[148] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Afterword" 568.

[149] Oliver Conolly and Bashshar Haydar, "Literature, Politics, and Character," Philosophy and Literature 32 (2008): 88. It is also worth noting the examples Conolly and Haydar give to clarify the distinction between the narrow and broad sense of the term "political": "Feminist arguments for laws on sex discrimination and equal pay, and their proper implementation, are political in the narrow sense. However, feminists may also argue, irrespective of such institutional changes, that social attitudes towards women—the attitudes of a given society, including those of women—should be changed in certain ways. For example, a generally held view that emphasizes the importance of women's appearance, their role as adjuncts to their husbands—the kinds of views that were prevalent in the 1950's, say—is open to challenge by feminists outside a narrow institutional framework. The reason this stance is political is that it concerns systemic attitudes which underpin power relations between one group (men) and another (women)" (88-89).

within the realm of "engaged literature (la littérature engagé),"[150] and along with James Engell, I employ the term to signify "all talented writing or writing of genius—not crude or clumsy propaganda, but writing that aims to persuade, to carry one point of view, or to explore contested intellectual terrain."[151] Before she became deeply involved in feminist activism, she was preoccupied with the *minjung* ("the people") movement[152] of the 1970s and 1980s and especially with the Kwangju Uprising of 1980.[153] Her poems that concern the *minjung* movement and Kwangju[154] are political in theme and unconventional in form, clearly manifested in A Memorial

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[150] It is worth noting, however, that as James Engell points out, when Jean-Paul Sartre coined the term he excluded "poetry from his category." See Engell, The Committed Word: Literature and Public Values (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999) 4.

[151] Engell 4.

[152] As Kenneth M. Wells asserts, "there is no single *minjung* theory of Korean history" (12) that can clearly define the term ("who are the '*minjung*' and why?"). Yet, scholars seem generally to agree upon the fact that the *minjung* movement "has historically been concerned with nationalistic projects-redefining social relations during the 1860-1895 Tonghak movement, liberating the nation from the Japanese in the period from 1905 through 1945, eliminating military rule in South Korea, and reunifying the country" (1). See Wells, "Introduction" and "The Cultural Construction of Korean History," South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1995). Also, according to Namhee Lee, "Even before the Kwangju Uprising, the democratization movement as a whole had been obsessed with defining the true nature and concept of *minjung*. (The democratization movement is also known as the *minjung* movement.) *Minjung*, meaning 'common people' in the everyday sense of the term, also came to have a specific historical import within the democratization movement as constituting true historical subjectivity—that is, people capable of rising up against the oppressive system." See Lee, "Representing the Worker: The Worker-Intellectual Alliance of the 1980s in South Korea," The Journal of Asian Studies 64 (2005): 915.

[153] The Kwangju Uprising is "a ten-day struggle in the city of Kwangju and its vicinity that lasted from May 18 to May 27, 1980 [. . .]. The uprising was the culmination of a series of political crises, opportunities, and challenges that Korea experienced in 1979 and 1980. The assassination of President Park Chung Hee by the chief of the Korean CIA in October 1979, a subsequent military coup led by General Chun Doo Hwan in December, and democratic struggles the following spring were intimately related to the uprising." See Gi-Wook Shin, and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2003) xii. I will discuss the Kwangju Uprising in more detail in the next chapter on Kim Sŭng-hŭi.

[154] The only scholarly essay about Ko, in the English language, that I have located deals precisely with this subject. See Ann Lee, "The Kwangju Uprising and Poetry by Ko Chong-hui, a Writer of South Cholla," Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 29 (1997): 23-32.

Service, Green Grass on the Grave, and The Rain of Tears of Kwangju (Kwangju ŭi nunmulbi, 1990).[155]

In other words, in these poetry collections, she does not shy away from explicitly revealing the abuses and atrocities committed by South Korean military dictators. She also incorporates the style of shamanic ritual performances (*kŭk*)[156] as well as of the theater genre *madangguk*,[157] into her poetry, presumably to demonstrate "a sense of communal solidarity and to foster the development of popular consciousness" and to commemorate "resistance and revolution by the oppressed."[158] Significantly, her portrait poems in epistolary form bear similarities

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[155] It is worth noting that those who actively practiced the so-called "*minjung* poetry" in the 1970s and 1980s were mostly male poets, such as Kim Chi-ha (1941-), Sin Kyŏng-nim (1936-), and Ko Ŭn (1933-). See Pak Song-i, "Sidae e taeŭng hanŭn chŏllyakchŏk pangsik ŭrosŏ toepada ssŭgi koch'al"[On 'Writing Back' as a Strategy Corresponding to the Era], Han'guk munye pip'yŏng yŏn'gu 33 (2010): 226.

[156] For analysis of Ko's poems in the *kŭk* style in the collection *Green Grass on the Grave*, see Kim Ran-hŭi, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi kutsi e nat'anan kihochŏk k'ora ŭi t'ŭksŏng" [The Semiotic Chora Embodied in Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Shamanic Rite Poetry], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011):149-67. Also, see Yun In-sŏn, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi si e nat'anan hyŏnsil e taehan chaehyŏnchŏk palhwa yangsang yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Representative Utterance of Reality in Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Poetry], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 287-290.

[157] For analysis of Ko's poetry incorporating the people's theatre (*madang-guk*) and the shamanistic rituals (*madang-kŭk*), see Yi So-hŭi, "Pap kwa chabonjuŭi e nat'anan 'yŏsŏngminjungjuŭijŏk hyŏnsiljuŭi' wa munch'e hyŏngmyŏng" [Realism Based on Women-Minjung Ideology and the Writing Style Revolution in 'Rice and Capitalism'], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 123-130.

[158] According to Linda Sue Lewis, "The theater genre *madangguk* first appeared in the late 1960s as part of what became the *minjung* culture movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Based on the aesthetic principles of Korean traditional mask dance drama, with its emphasis on hierarchical inversion and the use of satirical dialogue, improvisational bantering among the players, and the encouragement of audience participation, *madangguk* is used to generate a sense of communal solidarity and to foster the development of popular consciousness. Along with other reconstructed forms of traditionally marginalized folk culture, such as farmers' music and dance and shamanic ritual performances (*kŭk*)—Korea's 'invented tradition of the 1980s'—*madangguk* flourished during the Chun Doo Hwan era (particularly on university campuses) as a vehicle for oppositional social and political protest, and peasant rebellion became a popular subject for the performing arts. As Choi Chungmoo says, 'The methodology of the *minjung* culture movement is essentially a rereading of history as history of the oppressed *minjung*'s struggle and a representation of that history as a paradigm of change. In the history thus reread, hitherto marginalized people enter the central arena of history or become agents of history.' *Minjung* imagery celebrates resistance and revolution by the oppressed; naturally, the historical moment about to be reread for us in the performance that day was the Kwangju Uprising

to her prior political poems. What is different, however, is that the first-person account in her epistolary verse[159] allows us an intimate look at the feelings and experiences of the women letter writers she portrays, as opposed to other political poems that highlight the community of, and resistance by, the oppressed in general.

This difference, I would argue, serves to counter some Korean scholars' claim that Ko "always prioritized the *minjung* over women."[160] There is no doubt that her poetry was part of the larger *minjung* movement and "the people," or "the masses," were her primary concern. I would maintain, however, that her portrait poems demonstrate her attention to the individuality of women, going beyond treating them as merely an anonymous part of the masses. In her treatment of individual women, as Kim Chin-hŭi points out, Ko moreover adopts an epic narrative style to add realism to her portrayal.[161] Given the fact that traditionally epic heroes are male, Ko's attempt to situate women within the larger narrative can be seen as innovative and subversive. Ultimately though, I would contend that it is the interpersonal dialogues—whether between the poet and the reader, between the poet and her characters, or among her characters themselves—as representative of her lyric poetry, interwoven with political messages, that offer an inspiration to

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itself." See Lewis, Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2002) 100.

[159] Along with Kim Sŭng-hŭi, one can also view that Ko's employment of epistolary verse with its conversational style is intended to subvert logocentrism. See Kim, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 136.

[160] See Yi So-hŭi, "Pap kwa chabonjuŭi e nat'anan 'yŏsŏngminjungjuŭijŏk hyŏnsiljuŭi' wa munch'e hyŏngmyŏng" [Realism Based on Women-Minjung Ideology and the Writing Style Revolution in 'Rice and Capitalism'], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 102; 104.

[161] Kim Chin-hŭi, "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 173-200.

subsequent generations of women working toward gender equality. In what follows, I will offer a brief biographical sketch of the poet and move on to analyze her portrait poems.

II. The Life Story of Ko Chŏng-hŭi

Ko Chŏng-hŭi (née Ko Sŏngae) was born on January 17, 1948, in Haenam,[162] South Chŏlla,[163] to Ko Yang-dong and Kim Ŭn-nyŏ, and was the oldest of eight children (five sons and three daughters). Born into an agricultural working-class family, Ko attended her local elementary school, Samsan, completed independent study through the Open Middle-High School (Chungang t'ongsin chunggodŭng hakkyo), and then took middle and high school equivalency exams to get into college. She published her first poems in the magazine New Farmers (Sae nongmin) in 1967 to favorable review by the poet Chang Man-yŏng (1914-1975) and was a member of the "Black Tide" (Hŭkcho) literary circle comprised of young writers from Mokp'o in 1969. She also worked for a year as a reporter for the New Chŏnnam Daily (Sae chŏnnam) and the Weekly Chŏnnam (Chŏnnam chugan) in

[162] It is worth noting that Haenam is the hometown of the notable activist poets Kim Chi-ha (1941-), Kim Nam-ju (1946-1994), and Hwang Chi-u (1952-). See Pak Song-i, "Sidae e taeŭng hanŭn chŏllyakchŏk pangsik ŭrosŏ toepada ssŭgi koch'al"[On 'Writing Back' as a Strategy Corresponding to the Era], Han'guk munye pip'yŏng yŏn'gu 33 (2010): 227.

[163] The fact that the Chŏlla region was the site of the Tonghak rebellion of 1894, one can argue, had a direct or indirect impact on Ko's development of writer-rebel. Tonghak, or Eastern learning, founded by Ch'oe Cheu (1824-1864), "was essentially an indigenous, quasi-religious community that evolved into a nation-wide movement enjoying wide support by the 1890s. [. . .] [it] offered an alternative to Western learning (*sŏhak*), or Catholicism, and was in large part a reaction against the popularity of Catholicism, the threat of foreign military intervention, and the deterioration of rural livelihoods." See George Kallander, "Chŏn Pongjun's 1894 Tonghak Declaration," Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910, ed. JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) 152.

Kwangju in 1970. From 1971 to 1974, Ko served as secretary of the Kwangju YMCA student division. In 1975 she made her "official" literary debut on the recommendation of the poet Pak Nam-su (1918-1994) with the poems "Resurrection, Hereafter (Puhwal kŭ ihu)" and "A Love Song (Yŏn'ga)" in the journal Modern Poetics (Hyŏndae sihak).

Ko entered the Korean Theological Seminary (Han'guk sinhak taehak, which became Hanshin University in 1992)[164] at the age of twenty-seven, graduating in 1979, the year that her first poetry collection Who is Treading the Winepress Alone? (Nuga hollo sult'ŭl ŭl palpko innŭn'ga) was published. She received the Award for New Voices in South Korean Literature (Taehan min'guk munhaksang sininsang) for her third collection A Memorial Service in 1983. From 1984 onward she worked at the Christian Academy Press (K'ŭrisŭch'an ak'ademi ch'ulp'anbu), "where she began to understand the structural contradictions of Korean society and launched her active career as a social critic and feminist writer."[165] As I noted before, Ko was a founding member of the Alternative Culture organization in 1984 and was the founding editor of the feminist newspaper The Women's News (Yŏsŏng sinmun), established in 1988.

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[164] It is worth noting that Hanshin University, "Korea's first certified theological university," is well known for "dedicating to founding a progressive theology, renewing the church of Christianity, democratizing our society, and to increasing rights of people." Its website claims that today it "stands solidly as a progressive university with such proud traditions" and "manifests its progressiveness constructing new alternatives and practicing active social and academic engagement." See Chai Soo-il, "Message from the President," 3 Dec. 2013 <http://www.hs.ac.kr/eng/intro/intro1.php?curStr=1_1>. Also see Theology Home Page, Dept. of Theology, Hanshin University, 3 Dec. 2013 <http://www.hs.ac.kr/eng/academics/academics1_1_tab01.php?curStr=3_1>.

[165] Peter H. Lee, ed., Echoing Song: Contemporary Korean Women Poets (Buffalo, NY: White Pine, 2005) 102.

In 1986, she also began work at the Korean Domestic Relations Office (Han'guk kajŏng pŏmnyul sangdamso), which specialized in family law assistance and information, where she published an edited volume of The History of the Family Law Reform Movement (Kajokpŏp kaejŏng undong sa) in 1991. Her eleventh and posthumous collection of poetry, Everything Disappearing Leaves a Space Behind (Modŭn sarajinŭn kŏttŭl ŭn twi e yŏbaek ŭl namginda), was released in 1992. Though not well known in her lifetime, as the critic Yun Kyŏng-suk sums up, Ko "lived an intense life as a feminist activist and a poet of the public voice."[166] As noted previously, her posthumous fame was established in part through the work of the AC members. However, I would argue that it was ultimately her poetry, with its call for women's liberation and revolution, in combination with her experiences of overcoming poverty and protesting against the patriarchy she was born into, that have sustained her reputation and inspired subsequent generations of young women.

Literary critics often divide Ko's 15-year writing career into two periods: from 1979 to 1983 and from 1984 to 1991.[167] They typically define the first period—beginning with the 1979 collection Who is Treading the Winepress Alone? and ending with the 1983 collection Abel of Today (I sidae ŭi Abel)—as one in which she produced poetry with a strong religious element, and the second period—beginning with the 1986 collection Flowers in Tears (Nunmulkkot) and ending with

[166] Yun Kyŏng-suk, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi si ŭi kyejŏl sangjing yŏn'gu" [A study on the Symbolic Meaning of the Seasons in the Poetry of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], Munch'ang ŏmun nonjip 46 (2009): 169.

[167] Yun, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi si ŭi kyejŏl" 171-72.

the 1990 collection A Beautiful Person (Arŭmdaun saram hana)—as one in which she wrote poetry for the masses and poetry with a strong awareness of women's issues.[168]

In making this divide, most critics agree that Ko did not develop a keen appreciation of women's issues as a principal theme in her poetry until 1984, when she came in contact with the other AC members.[169] She also did not emerge as a radical feminist poet until 1989 when she published Green Grass on the Grave. Indeed, in reading her entire oeuvre, one can easily trace her interest in such subjects as history, memory, and writing from the very beginning of her writing career, but poems that simultaneously highlight explicit feminist concerns did not appear until Flowers in Tears. Most of the poems I have selected and analyzed in this chapter, therefore, are the ones Ko wrote during the second period.

III. Pre-modern History, Women, and Re-vision

In this section, I will examine Ko's portrait poems from the 1990 collection Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation,[170] the poems that also have a subtitle "The Tale of Women's History." Critics generally agree that it is this

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[168] Yun, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi si ŭi kyejŏl" 171-72.

[169] Yun, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi si ŭi kyejŏl" 171-72. See also Yi So-hŭi, "Ellijabesŭ parett'ŭ pŭraning kwa Ko Chŏng-hŭi *Pigyo*yŏn'gu: sahoe pip'yŏng ŭrosŏ p'eminisŭt'ŭ si ssŭgi" [A Comparison of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Ko Chŏng-hŭi: The Act of Writing Feminist Poetry as a Social Criticism], Yŏngŏ yŏngmunhak 21 19 (2006): 128. Also, see Yi Kyŏng-su, "Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi chŏn'gisi e nat'anan sunggo wa kŭ ŭimi" [On the Sublime and Its Meaning in Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Early Poetry], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 65-98.

[170] Kim Yang-sŏn asserts that Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation (Yŏsŏng haebang ch'ulsapyŏ) was like "a primer on women's liberation" for those women who were awakened to feminism in the 1980s. See Kim, "486 sedae yŏsŏng ŭi Ko Chŏng-hŭi munhak ch'ehŏm" [The 'Generation 486' Women's Experience of Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Literature], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 42.

collection that placed her among the foremost writers of women's liberation,[171] and the focus of this section is on the poems that epitomize her reading and rewriting of history, especially those poems which revise the myths and images of pre-modern female figures that Korean history has eulogized and romanticized. The subjects of these poems—four women from the Chosŏn era (1392-1910): the poets Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (1563-1589), Hwang Chin-i (16th century), and Yi Ok-pong (late-16th century), as well as the famous woman painter and poet Sin Saimdang (1504-1551)—are recognized as "great women in Korean history."[172] They are also well known to modern Korean audiences and often portrayed through exaggerated or idealized images in textbooks and visual media.

Ko studied these female historical figures in "history books written by men,"[173] which reinforced their status as ideals of traditional womanhood. As she adopts the voices of these figures in her poetry, however, she reimagines them as woman warriors who fought against the inherent oppression in Chosŏn society and attempted to incite a sexual revolution, as well as social commentators who criticized gender inequality. As if echoing Adrienne Rich's notion of "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new

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[171] Pak Chu-yŏng, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 248.

[172] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 149.

[173] Pak Chu-yŏng, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 256.

critical direction,"[174] Ko looks afresh at the lives and texts of these notable female ancestors and re-imagines them in a new and subversive way.[175]

Rich's "re-vision," as "an act of survival," is meant to show "how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh."[176] Ko's re-vision, likewise, shows us how the images of the "ideal" woman in historical texts have influenced our concepts of gender and how reversing these myths can open our eyes to women's sexual oppression and to the necessity for a narrative freed from the prescriptive male tradition. In this sense, one can view Ko's approach as a so-called "feminist narratology"[177] one that rewrites history by telling women's stories from their perspectives, rather than simply chronicling events from the male perspective. She adopts the role of historian and blends the core events of traditional Korean history with commentary and complaints on the part of her protagonists regarding their portrayal in the "official" history and Korean society in general. Simultaneously, she takes on the role of a shaman who recalls the dead to the world

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[174] Rich, Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi (New York: Norton, 1993) 167.

[175] Pak Chu-yŏng, in comparing Eavan Boland and Ko Chŏng-hŭi, also asserts that these two poets enacted Adrienne Rich's notion of "Re-vision." See Pak, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 269.

[176] Pak, "Sinhwa" 167.

[177] See Ruth Page, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology (New York: Macmillan, 2006); Kathy Mezei, ed., Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology & British Women Writers (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1996).

of the living and mediates between the two.[178] Ko uses the term "Chosŏn" as a bi-temporal concept, referring both to the pre-modern period in which the four notable women lived and to the modern period in which the poet herself lives. In doing so, she weaves together present-day concerns and "factual" historical accounts in her poems, so that readers can simultaneously experience an overlay of the past and the present.[179]

Before turning to the individual poems, though, I would like to say a few words about the form. Ko employs the epistolary genre in these poems, as evidenced by their titles which follow the conventions of a letter, such as "From Hwang Chin-i to Yi Ok-pong" and "From Saimdang to Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn," and the use of typical salutations, such as "Dear Sister Yi" or "Dear Sister Kyŏngbŏndang-Hŏ.[180]" Although epistolary writing was not necessarily thought of as a literary genre in Chosŏn,[181] the private letter (*naegan*) was generally regarded as the domain of

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[178] For anthropological approaches to women's "biological proximity to the beginning of life, and their cultural proximity to the end of life, as well as the relational intimacies afforded by a woman's socireligious obligations to others," see John Corrigan, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 188-189.

[179] Kim Sŭng-hŭi maintains that by employing "dual coding and double voices," Ko criticizes "both the traditional and the contemporary situation." See Kim, "Afterword," Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim et al., vol. II (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 571.

[180] According to Yang Hi Choe-Wall, "[it] was not common practice for Chosŏn dynasty women to have a given name, except for women with special occupations such as *kisaeng*. This name, Hŏ Cho'hŭi (styled Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn) first appeared in Haksan ch'odam by Hŏ Kyun," her brother. See Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, trans. Yang Hi Choe-Wall (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 5. However, Professor Sun Joo Kim argues that Chosŏn women had a given name, although it was not often recorded. In the case of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, "Cho'hŭi" is her given name, and both "Nansŏrhŏn" and "Kyŏngbŏndang" are her sobriquets. See Yi Hye-sun, Han'guk kojŏn yŏsŏng munhak ŭi segye [The World of Women's Work in Classical Korean Literature] (Seoul: Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1998) 17.

[181] Young-Key Kim-Renaud asserts "women wrote letters by obligation and of their own accord. A *yangban* woman was required to write salutary letters to her parents-in-law, if they were away. These letters were strictly formulaic, and not writing exactly as required was a sign of bad

women[182] and was considered to be a "literary" form, along with essay and poetry writing, that educated women were allowed to exercise—albeit privately. It seems, though, that Ko introduces the epistolary form into her work, not just because it is a "female" genre, but because it allows the protagonist of each story to write the narrative as a first person account, letting them craft their own stories, which in turn facilitates Ko's viable use of intertextuality.

This form, with its personal and confessional nature, can present both an intimate and compelling look at "the woman question"[183] and put these historical women, who actually never met, into conversation with each other, thus providing them with the pretext to bond as women. In addition, the pre-modern figures' commentary on modern Korean society's use of history as a tool to oppress women is not only directed to the letter's recipient but also to the external readers, the women of Korea at large.[184] This form enables the poet to connect the women of the

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upbringing." See Renaud, ed., Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 15.

[182] Though, as JaHyun Kim Haboush asserts, in general letter writing was practiced by "nearly everyone, from the king to the barely literate regardless of gender," the focus of my study, the genre of "*naegan*," which literally means "letters by women," was considered the domain, though not exclusively, of women. See Haboush, ed., Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910, ed. JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) 2; Kim Hyong-gyu, Understanding Korean Literature, trans. Robert J. Fouser (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997) 28-29; Theresa Hyun, Writing Women in Korea: Translation and Feminism in the Colonial Period (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2003) 13. Also, see Kim Chin-hŭi, "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 186-87.

[183] "The Woman Question" generally refers to "the debates about women's nature, role, and literary status, in Victorian and twentieth-century discussion." See Nicola Diane Thompson, ed., Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1999) 3.

[184] Kim Sŭng-hŭi also claims that in these epistolary poems Ko tries to connect the daughters of Korea to the "great matriarchal tradition" by presenting "great historical women." See Kim, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 149.

past and the present in a sisterhood[185] of shared experience—a core concept of second-wave feminism.[186] Ultimately, by choosing a subject matter that was not necessarily domestic, but public and political, Ko's use of the epistolary genre challenges the dominant view of women's letter writing as domestic, private, and feminine.

The poem sequence "The Tale of Women's History" has been a popular subject of scholarly inquiry in Korea, partly because of its subversive feminist concerns. Most critics at least refer to the collection Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation in their essays, and many comment on "The Tale of Women's History," whether in passing or at length. Among them, Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Kim Chin-hŭi, and Pak Chu-yŏng stand out as the ones who have paid special attention to the poem sequence. Their comments on the collection in general and the parts of the poem sequence in particular are insightful and informative. None of them, however, have offered an exhaustive analysis of the poems on all four notable women. Therefore, in this section, while seeking to build upon and extend these critics' insights, I aim to

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[185] As Na Hŭi-dŏk points out, some scholars see Ko's attempt to connect the women of the past and the present as a way to establish the matrilineal tradition. Others see it as "the realization of sisterhood." I would argue that we can observe both her obsession with motherly figures and her emphasis on sisterly bonds in these poems. See Na, "Sidae ŭi yŏmŭi rŭl marŭm chihanŭn son" [The Hand Cutting Out A Linen Shroud of the Era], Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng 112 (2001): 325. As for critics who claim that Ko regarded the concept of sisterhood as part of women's movement, see Cho Hyŏng et al., eds., Nŏ ŭi ch'immuk e memarŭn na ŭi ipsul: yŏsŏng haebang munhakka Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi sam kwa kŭl [My Parched Lips Upon Your Silence: The Life and Writing of Feminist Writer Ko Chŏng-hŭi] (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 1993) 68-69. Also see Yi So-hŭi, "Pap kwa chabonjuŭi e nat'anan 'yŏsŏngminjungjuŭijŏk hyŏnsiljuŭi' wa munch'e hyŏngmyŏng" [Realism Based on Women-Minjung Ideology and the Writing Style Revolution in 'Rice and Capitalism'], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 103. It is also worth noting that Kim Chin-hŭi maintains that the epistolary style is effective as a means of affecting readers' emotions because it allows readers to share the reality the speaker describes. See Kim, "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 187.

[186] As for the centrality of the themes of "the personal is political" and "sisterhood is powerful" to the second-wave feminist movement, see Joanne Hollows, Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 4-5.

provide detailed examination of "The Tale of Women's History" from Part I to Part IV, thereby expanding the scholarship on Ko's portrait poems.

III-1: The Courtesan Poet Hwang Chin-i's Dreaming of Poetic Revolution

The first poem I will look at is "From Hwang Chin-i to Yi Ok-pong" which has a subtitle "The Tale of Women's History, Part I" and is divided into four sections: Spring Letter, Summer Letter, Autumn Letter, and Winter Letter. In her Spring Letter, the sixteenth-century courtesan (*kisaeng*) poet Hwang Chin-i addresses another sixteenth-century yet highborn poet Yi Ok-pong and laments the dearth of poetry championing women's liberation. Hwang begins by praising the improvement of women's status in modern-day Korea: "I've recently heard the foreign press say/ women in Chosŏn Korean peninsula today/ have become strong and sagacious at home and abroad,/ so in all aspects of knowledge, visions, and capability/ they are equal to men" (Vol. II, 237). However, stating excitedly that "it's the world we've been eagerly anticipating," she turns cautious: "but, it's too early to be so optimistic yet/ since there doesn't seem to be any outstanding poetry/ for women's liberation in Chosŏn yet" (Vol. II, 238). One can claim that, by using the voice of one of the most celebrated female poets of Korea, Ko expresses her dissatisfaction with the dearth of women's liberation literature despite the apparent improvement of women's status. Moreover, along with her complaint, she suggests the necessity for such literary work and coyly implies that she is attempting to remedy this lack.

Hwang's Summer Letter focuses on present-day scholarly research on herself. She says to her recipient: "My dear Sister Yi/ I received yesterday from the earth /a book called *A Study of Hwang Chin-i.*/ [. . .] / I should say I'm just grateful/ but there's one thing I wanted to point out./ Though their affection for my poetry is excessive/ they don't seem to understand my ideas" (Vol. II, 238-39). She then expresses her dissatisfaction with popular narratives which claim that "I became a *kisaeng* courtesan because I was a daughter born of a concubine/ or I became a courtesan because of a young man who loved me and died of lovesickness" (Vol. II, 239). She refers to these narratives as "patriarchal pretense" (Vol. II, 239) that, one can argue, reinforces her image as a passive victim or as a romantic heroine. In addition, for her, the labels later generations have given her, such as "the poet of a blue-gray color" and "the feminine poet of sorrow and resignation," are "empty names" (Vol. II, 239), that promote the same victimized or romanticized images.

She protests that she became a *kisaeng* "not because of her birth status" (Vol. II, 239) but because of her desire for freedom (Vol. II, 240). She says: "I saw the yoke of frightening and dark destiny in Chosŏn women, / [. . .] / under the so-called 'Conducts of Three Dependencies' (*samjongjido*) and 'Seven Reasons for Divorce' (*ch'ilgŏjiak*),/the man-controlled outrageous safety-code./ Women, although also human beings,/ are in thrall/ as soon as they are born" (Vol. II, 240). Recalling the Conducts of Three Dependencies that a woman should obey "her parents as a child, her husband as a wife, and her son as a widow,"[187] that defined a woman's role in

[187] Young-Key Kim-Renaud, ed., Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 6.

connection to men, as well as the Seven Reasons for Divorce, "disobedience toward the parents-in-law, failure to produce a son, adultery, theft, undue jealousy, grave illness, and extreme talkativeness,"[188] that controlled women's behavior and speech, Hwang reveals an unhappy situation for Korean women and justifies her path to liberation. She ends the letter by declaring: "the path to joining men but not belonging to them;/ the path to being a part of the world but not being constrained by it;/ the path to stripping away the elite (*yangban*) class snobbery/ by using aesthetically pleasing mockery and derision;/ that path was the house of courtesans;/ it is there/ that I had my mind set on ending my life/ while dreaming of poetic revolution" (Vol. II, 241).

This Summer Letter is on the one hand Ko's critique of the social and scholarly branding of the *kisaeng* poet Hwang and on the other it is her own re-reading of Hwang's life and work. In other words, Ko recognizes that the general emphasis placed on Hwang's birth and love affairs is a product of a patriarchal society, which heavily values blood[189] over talent and regards women as sexual rather than intellectual beings. Ko thwarts this patriarchal casting of Hwang with her radical re-reading of her as a rebel "dreaming of poetic revolution." In revising

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[188] Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 273.

[189] For the role of women on the social status of their children and the discrimination of the *sŏŏl*, the descendants of concubines, see Young-Key Kim-Renaud, ed., Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 6. See also Kyung Moon Hwang, Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004) 208-11.

the history of Hwang, of which no official documents exist,[190] Ko imagines the sixteenth-century poet's possible motivations for becoming a courtesan as an effort to ridicule the hypocrisy of the aristocracy and reverse the patriarchal order through her poetry.[191] At the same time Ko highlights a fundamental double standard in Korean society: a simultaneous disdain for the courtesan class coexistent with an adoration of their sexuality. Though Ko's reading can be problematic in that it reworks the myth of Hwang, her 1990 vision of her as a revolutionary nonconformist is nonetheless important in paving the way for multidimensional readings of traditional Korean figures.[192]

In her Autumn Letter, Hwang continues to challenge the conventional view, which stresses the excessive power of her sexuality. An Unofficial Document of Historical Stories (Ŏuyadam), where many of her popular stories come from, portrays her as a coquettish and unprincipled whore: she tries to seduce the upright

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[190] Kevin O'Rourke states that "No direct sources of information on Hwang Chini are known to exist; her career can only be pieced together from fragmentary references in a number of sources, all written after the Hideyoshi war, hence some fifty years after Chini actually lived. None of these sources are official records" (96). Also, he points out that "Her popular profile depicts her as a member of a despised class, a registered *kisaeng*, who associated freely with aristocrats, scholars, and artists, and gained a reputation for defying the accepted social conventions of the time. She stands today as a symbol of art and the free spirit, a woman who battled the odds to express her individuality" (96-7). See O'Rourke, "Demythologizing Hwang Chini," Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 96-121.

[191] Pak Chu-yŏng also pays attention to the fact that Ko makes "the house of courtesans" not a place of victimization and abuse but a space of revolution. See Pak, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 250-51.

[192] See, in particular, the works of David R. McCann who argues that Hwang "[challenges] the Chinese linguistic and cultural hegemony" (151) in her poetry and also Kevin O'Rourke who questions the Hwang Chini myth and urges us to "separate the historical Hwang Chini and from the mythical Hwang Chini" (119). See McCann, "Performance and Korean *Sijo* Verse: Negotiating Difference," Early Korean Literature: Selections and Introductions (New York: Columbia UP, 2000); O'Rourke, "Demythologizing Hwang Chini," Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

scholar Sŏ Kyŏng-dŏk but fails; she takes a trip to the Diamond Mountains with the scholar Yi Saeng where she "would sell sexual favors to a monk in return for food"[193]; she listens to the musician Yi Sa-jong sing and invites him to come to her home and live with her for six years. Ko's re-reading, however, highlights Hwang's virtues by focusing on her "three principles": "Because I loved the fall of Songak,[194]/ I was called 'Bright Moon (Myŏngwŏl)' of Songak. / And, Myŏngwŏl had three principles:/ never put on make-up; / never adorn herself in front of men;/ and sit down only with virtuous men" (Vol. II, 241). Though it is not necessarily a rewriting of the life of Hwang, as the stories of these three principles do appear in sources such as Songdo kii,[195] Ko nevertheless revises the mainstream portrayal of Hwang by downplaying her physical ornamental beauty, which only highlights her status as *kisaeng* or a concubine's daughter, and rather draws upon other sources that make her a more rounded historical figure.

The Winter Letter can be seen as an apologia for Hwang in that it portrays her as a woman intentionally seeking sexual and conjugal freedom rather than as a sexually perverse and promiscuous tart or a passive plaything of men. The poem focuses on the famous anecdote of her partnership with the musician Yi Sa-chong and their marriage contract which was summed up as: "We decided to live together for six years, three multiplied by two/ for the first three years he would stay in my place/ for the latter three years I would stay in his place/ we provided food and

[193] O'Rourke, "Demythologizing Hwang Chini" 97.

[194] Songak is the old name of Kaesŏng, a city in present-day North Korea. It was the capital of the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392).

[195] O'Rourke, "Demythologizing Hwang Chini" 98.

supplies equally" (Vol. II, 245). What Ko adds to the well-known story is her comments through the voice of Hwang: "Being responsible for food and supplies in the same manner/ and being together only at the time appointed/ are very important in marriage" (Vol. II, 245). Speaking through the voice of Hwang, Ko stresses the importance of equality and independence in married life. Thus, the poem's focus is not on her being free spirit, but on her way of love as in the following lines: "loving someone but not staying/ and marrying someone but not building a house/ there exists a world of liberation" (Vol. II, 246).[196] As made clear in the preface of the collection Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation, Ko had Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre's relationship in mind in writing this poem. She saw "the marriage contract between Hwang and Yi as more advanced and autonomous" than that of this western counterpart (Vol. II, 339). Ko recasts Hwang's so-called marriage pact—often dismissed as an entertaining anecdote of a love affair or regarded as more ordinary than scandalous because of her birth as a concubine's daughter and her career as *kisaeng*—as a significant feminist gesture toward sexual liberation.

In addition, one can observe that Ko's admiration for Hwang as her poetic foremother, as well as her effort to display the sixteenth-century poet's talent and revolutionary spirit, continued beyond this epistolary sequence. In "Hwang's New Love Song" which appeared in the 1992 collection of Everything Disappearing Leaves a Space Behind (Sarajinŭn modŭn kŏttŭl ŭn twi e yŏbaek ŭl namginda), Ko

[196] Reading these lines, Pak Chu-yŏng asserts that they represent "a radical perspective on the marriage agreement." See "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 252.

reimagines Hwang as her contemporary activist poet calling for reunification of the Korean nation:

> On a October full moon night
> I will cut a piece of the divided waist,
> soften it with love
> in the heart of the 'reunification flame,'
>
> and spreads it over one body of
> north and south in bed over and over.
>
> O, the divided nation in the green mountain,
> don't boast of your two waists!
>
> When the united mountains and rivers are fresh and green,
> the ice wall divides in vain.
>
> Why not tie up the two waists
> and unite affection from every corner of Korea? (Vol. II, 554)

This poem is Ko's rewriting of Hwang's two most celebrated *sijo* ("three-line verse form") poems. One is as follows: "I will cut a piece of this long November night,/ wind it in a coil and slip it down beneath a spring blanket,/ and unwind the coil the night my love comes." The other runs as follows: "Blue stream, don't boast about running through the green mountain so easily!/It's hard to come back once you have reached the ocean./ Why not take a rest when the bright moon fills the empty mountain?" While combining these two love poems into "Hwang's New Love Song," Ko inserts the narrative of the two Koreas and expresses the urgency of reunification, thus giving old material new life. A woman's waist in the original becomes the DMZ, the 38th parallel between North and South Korea, and her passion becomes the "reunification flame" that will melt the barbed-wire fence of the DMZ. The bright moon, a sobriquet of Hwang, often seen as to seduce the blue

stream, a pun on a male scholar's sobriquet "Pyŏkkeysu,"[197] in the original, becomes a political voice conveying the urge to unite the two Koreas. Through Ko's imagination, Hwang is reborn as, not a pining beauty, but as an activist poet raising political consciousness.

III-2: The Oppressed Poet Yi Ok-pong's Social Critique

The second poem I will look at is the addressee Yi Ok-pong's reply, subtitled "The Tale of Women's History, Part II." The late sixteenth-century poet Yi starts this eight-page prose poem with verse inserts by praising the letter writer: "Sister Hwang, you were different from us. Your dignified life, bravery, and high spirit were like a channel for us from a house of nobility. How ahead of your time you were!" (Vol. II, 247). She then moves onto the main subject, her thoughts on "women's liberation in the Korean peninsula today," apparently responding to Hwang's Spring Letter:

> Men of Chosŏn are said to be very enlightened, aren't they? Since feudal society is crumbling and capitalist society is on the rise, I bet, they can't live without an equal society. With the collapse of the paternal lineage and the hierarchical system, they can see, women are realizing their capabilities. However, it is said that there is a long way to go before changing the infrastructure. Though these men live in an enlightened world inside their heads, in their hearts there is still the Chosŏn idea that a woman should follow her husband (Vol. II, 247-48).

[197] Other translations of and commentaries on Hwang's original poems, see Kevin O'Rourke, "Demythologizing Hwang Chini," Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 109-12; David R. McCann, "Looking Within: The Kisaeng's Song," Early Korean Literature: Selections and Introductions (New York: Columbia UP, 2000) 149-51.

Like Hwang, Yi warns those who are savoring the apparent change of women's position through the industrialization of the country without considering the actual lack of improvement of their status. In other words, although modern capitalist industry challenged the old hierarchies based on blood and provided women with the opportunity to participate in the public sphere, Yi seems to argue, the treatment they receive from society in general and men in particular has changed little. Modern Korean men "in their hearts" still desire for a woman to follow her husband just like pre-modern Chosŏn men ordered the "Conducts of Three Dependencies" as we saw in the previous section. Those who want to change the world, the poem suggests, cannot achieve their goal with the empty rhetoric of enlightenment and without understanding the oppression of women inherent in society.

In the next section of the poem, Yi uses the example of Xi Shi (506 BC—?), a woman of Yue, a state in China's Spring and Autumn Period, who is considered one of the Four Great Beauties of Ancient China, in order to show men's empty promises and their exploitation of women's bodies. Yi quotes Xi Shi who laments in her song: "How ephemeral, how fleeting!/ Even though women who were sacrificed at the stone steps of power and authority/ blocked swords and spears with the breath of love, / the country's national heroes fall from power because of their love for fighting " (Vol. II, 249). In citing this song of Xi Shi who was offered as a tribute to the King of Wu for the sake of her country, Yue, which defeated Wu while its King lost himself in her beauty,[198] Yi's intention is not to praise her patriotism as

[198] Chan Yuk Ping, "Xi Shi," Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity Through Sui, 1600 B.C.W-618 C.E., eds. Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, and A.D. Stefanowska (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007) 84-86.

subsequent generations, both Chinese and Korean, have done. Her intention is rather to reveal the woman's suffering behind men's military exploits. Women helped their men and died for their country, but those male heroes fought not for equality or women's liberation but for fame and glory. From Xi Shi's song, Yi "hears the wailings of all the women slaughtered for the destinies of the Han nation" (Vol. II, 250). In addition, she evokes the Chinese figure, in order to point out parallel examples in Korea.

Yi subsequently enumerates them: women of Koryŏ (918-1392) who were offered as a tribute to the Chinese state Yuan (1279-1368), "comfort women" who were sacrificed as sex slaves under the Japanese rule (1910-1945), and women of *kisaeng* tourism[199] in modern Korea who were offered up as prostitutes to foreign capitalism (Vol. II, 250). Yi's goal of these retellings, though, is not just to show "these women are the axis of Korean patriotism" (Vol. II, 250) and how this story is repeated in different times and locations. It is also to draw attention to the fact that women were sacrificed and betrayed by society's empty words such as justice, benevolence, and righteousness, and the patriarchal ideals of nation governing (Vol. II, 250). In other words, although society makes women guilty for not sacrificing their lives for their country and puts women under an obligation to follow lofty patriotic ideals defined by men, it only allows their participation as sex objects, not

[199] The term *kisaeng* tourism has been used as "synonymous with Japanese-oriented tourism prostitution in Korea," and the "authoritarian nature of successive South Korean governments has played a major role in the commoditizing of women through *kisaeng* tourism. Existing sets of gender relations, reinforced through periods of colonization by the Japanese, have been consciously maintained by government policies which have exploited women's bodies for national economic gain." See Yiorgos Apostolopoulos, Stella Leivadi, and Andrew Yiannakis, eds., The Sociology of Tourism: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations (London: Routledge, 1996) 273.

as complete human beings. Xi Shi's biographer makes a similar claim: if a woman "is to command respect she must possess the qualities of chastity and wisdom, and demonstrate that she has the courage and the ability to serve a cause imposed upon her by men" but "it is apparent from her story that for Chinese historians patriotism overrode the usual demands that a woman be chaste, truthful, and self-effacing and refrain from meddling in politics."[200] After looking at both Chinese and Korean examples, Yi then asks: when "women are regarded only as sexual, are there any differences between near and far?" (Vol. II, 251). In the last section of her letter, Yi works on this question by using the fifteenth-century woman Ŏ U-dong as an example.

Ŏ U-dong is regarded as one of the most famous femmes fatales in Korean history, sentenced to death for being promiscuous, while the men who had affairs with her were lightly penalized. Yi writes about the scandal in a sympathetic tone by emphasizing her dignity: "Killing a woman because she enjoyed a sexual pleasure is preposterous. They should have just sent her into exile, but the King, afraid of a backlash, wanted to regulate women, and she, as a daughter of a noble family, was put to death. It is said, though, that when she mounted the gallows in a dignified manner, those who passed by bid her a tearful farewell rather than condemning her as a lascivious woman" (Vol. II, 252). What seems to frustrate Yi is the paradox that those women who serve as passive sexual objects are praised for their patriotism as in the section regarding Xi Shi, while those women like Ŏ U-dong who act on sexual

[200] Chan Yuk Ping, "Xi Shi," Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity Through Sui, 1600 B.C.W-618 C.E., eds. Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, and A.D. Stefanowska (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007) 86.

desire are labeled as evil women. Another contradiction Yi observes is the fact that the same "evil woman" is also adored, as evidenced by the popularity of the eponymous film.[201] She demonstrates her argument by sarcastically referring to the X-rated film Ŏ U-dong (1985) by Yi Chang-ho (1945-): "I've heard it was the talk of the town. If my guess is right, the film must have put women on sale by packaging them as sexual objects" (Vol. II, 252). Yi regards this historical film "blended with soft-core pornography"[202] as an object of contempt since it objectifies the female body and shows women as incapable of serious thought. Her remark also highlights the fact that the popularity of the sexual commodification of Ŏ U-dong mirrors the sexual repression that is imposed on society by Confucian ethics, which is in turn imposed on society by the ruling class.

Yi then ends her letter by recalling the past, a period she actually lived through, and lamenting her miserable life at that time. She writes: "Looking back on it now, Sister Hwang,/the law of women's chastity knew no limits in the era of Chosŏn./ Since women of a noble family didn't have the nerve to become Ŏ U-dong/ nor did they have the tenacity to join a courtesan house,/ they just had to bear their regrets of being born as women, didn't they?/ They could do nothing but hang themselves on account of waiting and longing" (Vol. II, 253). As Martina Deuchler describes: "Confucian ideology devised for women roles that called for specific behavior ('virtuous wife,' 'obedient daughter-in-law,' 'chaste widow'), and women

[201] The film was recorded as "commercially successful, drawing more than 500,000 people." See Min Eungjun, Jinsook Joo, and Han Ju Kwak, Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Democratic Imagination (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 2003) 65.

[202] Min et al., Korean Film 84-85.

were remembered either for their perfect enactment of these roles or for their rebellion against them."[203] According to a historical account, Yi was thrown out of her husband's place and lived alone for 10 years because she circulated her poetry in public against his instruction that he would only allow her to write in private.[204] She did not rebel like Ŏ U-dong, nor did she elect to become a courtesan like Hwang Chin-i. Instead, she sobbed, waited, and yearned for her husband, she confesses, while writing down her sorrow: "I wonder how my love is doing these days./ As the moon shines through the window, I long for him" (Vol. II, 253). By adding her illustration of Yi's regrets and self-pity, as well as her subconscious desire to be a "free woman," in this last section of the letter, one can argue, Ko shows to modern readers the falsehood of the sixteenth-century woman poet's idealized image generated by the "official" history. By enabling Yi to vent her bitterness and grievances, Ko also warns that those of her contemporaries who live in a modern world but adhere to the idea of the proper place of women and their traditional roles, as shown in the beginning of the letter, can fall into a pitfall of reversing progress.

III-3: The Revered Mother Sin Saimdang's Self-Critique

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[203] Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 280-81.

[204] Pak Yŏn-ok, "Yi Ok-pong," Chosŏn ŭi yŏryu siin miindo [Portraits of Chosŏn Women Poets] (Tongduch'ŏn, Kyŏnggi: Orora tŭrim, 2011) 54; 58-59.

The third poem I will examine is a 14-page long letter written by Sin Saimdang[205] to Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, subtitled "The Tale of Women's History, Part III."[206] Sin opens her letter by explaining why she decided to choose as its recipient Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, who "was born much later than her" (Vol. II, 255). She writes that it is because like herself, Hŏ also belonged "to a distinguished family, lived as a legal wife in women's quarters/ and thus knew its truth and falsity from A to Z" (Vol. II, 255). In fact, the primary target of her criticism throughout the letter is directed toward the modern upper-middle-class women who are reinforcing regressive gender roles and slowing the progress of the women's movement through the establishment of an award named after her.

She begins by telling Hŏ "the sad news" she has just received: that is, "legal primary wives of Chosŏn gather together annually/ and have a feast putting on a Korean bridal crown/ to give and receive the so-called 'Sin Saimdang award'/ and they even have built the so-called 'Sin Saimdang Shrine'/ to use as a place for women's etiquette education" (Vol. II, 255). While recounting this news, Sin vents her dismay and fury by calling it "the most horrifying among horrifying news" and "the most severe disaster among disasters!" (Vol. II, 255). She is here referring to the fact that since 1969 the Association of Korean Housewives (Taehan chubu k'ŭllŏp yŏnhaphoe)[207] has annually selected "a woman of the year with a huge celebration

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[205] On Sin Saimdang's biographical sketch and her career as a painter, see Yi Sŏng-mi, "Sin Saimdang: The Foremost Woman Painter of the Chosŏn Dynasty," in Kim-Renaud, 58-77.

[206] An insightful analysis of this poem, see Pak Chu-yŏng, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 253-56.

[207] For further details, see the Association's website: <http://www.jubuclub.or.kr>.

in Tŏksu Palace in central Seoul."[208] One might think that the Association's celebrating women's achievements should be laudable. However, the problem is that rather than recognizing those who, for example, have fought for the rights of women, it has selected a woman who represents the traditional concept of "a good mother and wife,"[209] as a recipient of the Sin Saimdang Award.

One can argue that by comically imagining Sin Saimdang's possible reactions in this poem, Ko intends to criticize the modern-day glorification of the sixteenth-century woman who is best known for being the mother to Yi I (1536-1584), one of the most celebrated Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Chosŏn dynasty, and for her established image as *hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ* ("wise mother and good wife").[210] Sin continues to pour out her anger:

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[208] Young-Key Kim-Renaud, ed., Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 19.

[209] Renaud 19. It is also worth mentioning that the concept of "*hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ* (wise mother and good wife)" is not uniquely Korean. In the case of Japan, Koyama Shizuko argues, "*Ryōsai kenbo* [good wife, wise mother] was the official, nationally sanctioned, fundamental principle for women's education in prewar Japan, and it was through the school system that the 'good wives' and 'wise mothers' were produced" (xii). She writes: "The model woman described in the *jokunsho* [instructional text for girls] of the Edo period [1603-1868], when preservation of *ie* [household; family] lineage was valued above all, was one who served and obeyed her husband and parents-in-law. Underpinning this model was the belief that women were stupid in comparison to men and a general tendency to degrade women. On the other hand, the role of mother was hardly mentioned at all. [. . .] But from Meiji [1868-1912] onward, educating the citizens who would uphold the nation became a top priority in the project to build a modern nation-state. In this context, the role of a woman as mother in raising and educating her children, and then as a wife with responsibility for managing the household, came to be emphasized; and calls were made for the creation of education designed to bring this about" (181). In sum, Koyama sees that the concept of "good wife and wise mother" developed in close connection with the development of the modern nation-state. See Koyama, Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" in Modern Japan, trans. Stephen Filler (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[210] It is worth noting that as Yi Sŏng-mi points out, "Saimdang (literally hall of emulating T'aeim) is the sobriquet given to her by her father, who wished her to emulate the mother of King Wen of China's Wesern Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-771 B.C.), Tairen (in Korean, T'aeim), who, in Chinese history, was revered as the paragon of a benevolent mother and good wife." See Yi, "Sin Saimdang:

I hear times have changed greatly.
[. . . . .]
The general trend for those enlightened people is
democratic, progressive, radical ideas.

But three things still seem unchangeable
in the land of Chosŏn.
What are these?
A man's demand that a woman be a good wife;
a woman's living off a man saying she will be a good wife and wise mother;
a woman marrying into a man's family
and wanting to bear a son.
Claiming that the epitome of such a good wife and wise mother is me, Sin Saimdang,
they select a woman according to the laws of my era,
a woman especially good at abiding by the customs of my era,
and give her the award and a round of applause.
What a strange disaster of an age this is! (Vol. II, 256)

In this long self-parodying stanza, she condemns those conformists who are trying to preserve this ideal of traditional womanhood and those pretentious moderns who proclaim the advent of a new era of equality while at the same time upholding the traditional gender divide. She further argues that the wall of ideology called "Conducts of Three Dependencies (*samjong jido*)," which also emerged as an object of criticism in the previous two poems, as well as "the wall between women and men," is "more alarming than the Cold War ideology," and thus it is imperative to break down these walls prior to tearing down the wall between the two Koreas (Vol. II, 257). She seems to suggest that the fall of gender barriers will advance democracy in Korea and the unification of the nation (Vol. II, 257).

Sin's attack on those who are trapped and "haunted by the ghost of *hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ*," despite their "living in an age of science and space exploration" (Vol. II,

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The Foremost Woman Painter of the Chosŏn Dynasty," Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 59.

258), does not end here. She even confesses in a self-critical manner that "To tell you the truth/ even though I'm praised for raising the great man of the era, Yulgok,/ it is not as much to boast about as if I raised a female Yulgok of the era" (Vol. II, 257). By revealing her humiliation at having been unable to produce "a female Yulgok of the era," Sin is condemning society's favoring of sons over daughters, while at the same time as mocking those who continue to uphold the traditional Chosŏn idea that a wife's "failure to produce a son" was one of her greatest sins,[211] that until she "bore a son, her position in her husband's house was insecure," and "[only] after the birth of a male heir had the wife fulfilled her duty and gained the privileges and authority of motherhood."[212] Regrettably, this type of wifehood and motherhood is precisely, as the poem reveals, what Ko's contemporary middle-class women promoted.

Ko, in the voice of Sin, moves on to denounce these middle-class women, what she dubs as "a modern version of the *chŏngsil puin*" (Vol. II, 259), which can be translated roughly as legal primary wives. Before we look at Ko's denunciation of her contemporaries, a word of explanation is needed about the nature of a primary wife. In traditional Chosŏn society, only the primary wife "could assure her son a full share of the social recognition necessary for him to become the legitimate heir of his father's descent line and succeed in the world," and "any other woman the husband may have taken into this house was, as far as his descent group was concerned, of

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[211] Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 273.

[212] Deuchler 263.

secondary importance."[213] However, the primary wife can be expelled for "the Seven Reasons for Divorce," and as Martina Deuchler points out, "[for] a woman who received recognition and social standing in society only through marriage, the threat of being expelled from her husband's family and the social stigma attached to remarriage were effective means of keeping her obedient and submissive."[214] In other words, in order to preserve her secured standing, the legal primary wife had to emulate feminine virtues.

What is disturbing to Ko is that although women of her era did not have to solely rely on marriage for their economic or social independence, those middle-class women such as the Association of Korean Housewives are eager to perpetuate these same traditional ideals. The letter writer Sin reveals that modern-day *chŏngsil puin* are "parroting Chosŏn womanhood/ with no concerns about current affairs,/ saying since there is a gender division of labor/ women should not break away from their responsibilities of cooking, washing, and rearing the children" (Vol. II, 259). They are, in the eye of the forward-thinking feminist, a threat to women's progress.[215] Their use of traditional values as a tool to repress any women who deviate from this *chŏngsil puin* ideal can reaffirm that the threatening yet mistaken proclamation the famous Chosŏn Confucian scholar Yi Ik (1681-1763) made still

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[213] Deuchler 267.

[214] Deuchler 273.

[215] In a same vein, one can understand Korean feminist groups' opposition to the Bank of Korea's decision to feature the portrait of Sin Saimdang on its new 50,000-won bill in 2009. Kyung Moon Hwang reports: "Critics of this choice suggested that Lady Sin's claim to fame was based not on her artistic talents, however admirable they might have been, but rather on the fact that she raised a celebrated scholar and statesman who, along with his admirers, placed Lady Sin on an underserved pedestal." Kyung Moon Hwang, A History of Korea: An Episodic Narrative (Basingstoke, NY: Macmillan, 2010) 79.

lives on: "a woman shouldn't study / and using her talents is a national calamity"[216] (Vol. II, 260). Ko's words are biting and at times preachy, but her sharp satire is not simply the product of an emotional reaction. It is a well-thought-out procedure for laying out her ultimate goal: putting social class on the political and feminist agenda.

In the following stanza, Ko calls readers' attention to the class conflict among women generated by the divide between the primary and "other" women. She writes:

> What is monogamy on earth?
> It's the way to regard women as property.
> What is *chŏngsil puin*?
> It's a female mandate to severely discipline concubines and secondary wives.
> Who are these concubines and secondary wives?
> They are the victims of a pimp culture.
> What is a pimp culture?
> It's an eternal scheme
> to subjugate a woman's womb to a man's penis. (Vol. II, 260)

I suggest that Ko uses the term "monogamy" to refer to a practice of privileging *chŏngsil puin* rather than its strict sense of "the practice of marrying only once" or "the condition of being married to only one person at a time."[217] Deuchler offers her keen insight into the problem caused by this type of "monogamy," in which a high-class wealthy man can take many wives but only one can be elevated to the status of his primary legal wife with exclusive privileges:

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[216] For Yi Ik's emphasis on gender divides in his Sŏngho sasŏl [Essays on Insignificant Subjects by Sŏngho], as well as scholars' varying, and often contradictory, interpretations about Sin Saimdang's life, see Cho Sŏng-suk, Ŏmŏni ranŭn ideollogi: ŏmŏni ŭi kyŏnghŏm segye wa chaa ch'atki [An Ideology Called Mother: The Experience of the Mother and the Seeking of Self-Identity] (Seoul: Hanul ak'ademi, 2002) 275-301; especially 288.

[217] "Monogamy," Oxford English Dictionary Online (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

> primary wives were selected from the *yangban* elite, while secondary wives were of lower-class pedigree. In a wider perspective, then, the ranking of wives was intimately connected with dividing society into two broad categories: the superior and inferior (*chonbi*) or noble and base (*kwich'ŏn*). [. . .] This 'social divide' depended largely on the proper social identification of women, and women therefore became the keepers as well as the victims of an unequal system.[218]

The passage shows that this practice of enforced "monogamy" not only treats women as a market commodity, or "property" in Ko's word, but also legitimizes the hierarchy of women while widening the gap between the upper and lower class. The bigger problem Ko tries to expose in the poem using Marxist terms, though, is that the same kind of "monogamy" continued to exist in her own time. In other words, while bourgeois middle-class women were busy fulfilling their roles of giving birth to a son to inherit the family name and spreading the Sin Saimdang ideals, working-class women, such as "textile and garment factory workers" (Vol. II, 263), succumbed to the roles of "concubines" or "secondary wives," often sexually exploited by their powerful upper-class men. By describing these "concubines and secondary wives" as "the victims of a pimp culture," Ko is evoking the language of Engels and Lenin who saw prostitution as closely tied to the development of monogamy and as "maintained precisely by the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie" who called for fighting against it.[219]

In the rest of the poem, the voice of Ko as a Marxist feminist becomes more articulate, as the letter writer Sin focuses on the exploitation and emancipation of

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[218] Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 236.

[219] The Woman Question: Selections from the Writing of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V.I. Lenin, and Joseph Stalin (New York: International Publishers, 1951) 41. See also 35-40.

the oppressed class in her discussion of women in general, and working-class women in particular. After relating the story of a working-class girl—who, sexually harassed and violated "in the machine rooms and backrooms" of the factory, decides to sell her body to *kisaeng* tourism, knowing that with the loss of her chastity she "can no longer become a wise mother and good wife," Sin asks: "has there been a poet in Chosŏn who vents/ [. . .] / this pain of women,/ this oppression of women,/ this bitterness of women?" (Vol. II, 264). She then looks at the activist poet Pak No-hae (1957-)[220] but only to condemn his work: "Recently a labor poet called Pak No-hae/ wrote a poem of women's liberation titled "Sewing a Blanket."/ But reading it carefully/ I see this is nothing more than confessing that/I also had been oppressing my wife like a dictator" (Vol. II, 264). Pak is Ko's contemporary and well known for his "underground poems dealing with the hardships and injustices experienced by workers"[221] and his arrest and imprisonment under the National Security Law for assembling "a revolutionary communist labor organization."[222] Thus, Pak does not appear in Ko's poem because he lacks the consciousness of class struggle.

Ko chose Pak, I would argue, precisely because he was a labor poet who demanded social reforms, and she used him as a representative of those reformists who failed to include feminist concerns in their class-conscious agenda. One might think, however, that she is too harsh. Pak's poem "Sewing a Blanket," which

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[220] Pak No-hae, née Pak Ki-p'yŏng, is a penname he took from the expression "pakhae pannŭn nodongja ŭi haebang" (the emancipation of the oppressed laborers).

[221] Michael J. Seth, A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2011) 433.

[222] David R. McCann, ed., The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 264.

appeared in his 1984 best-selling collection of poetry The Dawn of Labor (Nodong ŭi saebyŏk), can be read as a manifesto criticizing his own actions and behavior in hindsight: until he began "sewing a blanket / while waiting for [his] wife," he had not realized that "my wife is not my servant" and "all of our relationships/ should be trustful, respectful, and democratic."[223] It can be seen as a call for recognizing gender inequality. Yet, his confession of having neglected women's issues was not powerful enough for Ko, who endeavored to resolve problematic and seemingly incommensurable views between social reform movements that were "conscious of the structure of oppressing the masses but not considerate of the oppression of women," and feminist movements that "presented sharp logic supporting sexual oppression but were indifferent to the historical and political oppression of the masses" (Vol. II, 339).

Ko found the voice that could integrate socialism and feminism in the sixteenth-century woman poet Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn who actually wrote about a poor working girl. Addressing the letter's recipient Hŏ, Sin writes:

> 400 years ago, you, Kyŏngbŏndang,
> already saw women's status as a class
> 400 years ago, you, Nansŏrhŏn,
> already recognized women's fate as an oppressed people
> 400 years ago, you, Ch'ohŭi,
> already put a bullet in men's heads, those feudal despots,
> no, no, Nansŏrhŏn, you are the first woman poet
> who revolted against the feudalism of Chosŏn,
> you are the first poet
> who saw women as an oppressed class. (Vol. II, 264-65)

[223] Pak No-hae, Nodong ŭi saebyŏk [The Dawn of Labor] (Seoul: P'ulpit, 1984) 27-28.

Invoking Hŏ's various names, such as "Kyŏngbŏndang," "Nansŏrhŏn," and "Ch'ohŭi,"[224] Sin presents her as a member of the first generation of Marxist-socialist feminism, a movement during the 1970s that recognized the connection between the oppression of women and economic inequality and dependence.

Hŏ's poem that Sin praises for recognizing "women as an oppressed class" is titled "The Song of a Poor Girl." What is printed in Sin's letter, i.e., Ko's rendering of the poem, portrays a poor girl doing needlework in the cold at night: "How lonely, weaving into the late night! / Whose clothes am I weaving?/ [. . .] / The long winter nights are just cold./ Whose clothes am I weaving?// While cutting out the clothes with scissors,/ I breath on my fingers to keep them warm on a cold night./ While making wedding clothes for others day and night,/ I sleep curled up alone in a cold room year after year" (Vol. II, 265). Perhaps additional information from Yang Hi Choe-Wall's English translation of the entire original poem can help readers to better understand this stanza: the girl "does not lack beauty/ nor skills in sewing and weaving," but her poor family background makes "matchmakers ignore her,"[225] and being unable to find a spouse, she sleeps alone in the cold night.

What interests Ko in Hŏ's poem, though, is not the girl's loneliness at night, but her economic plight. The girl's poverty causes her to work all day in a cold room for a living, her work is to make "wedding clothes for others," presumably those middle or upper class people, who are wealthy or reputable enough to find a spouse.

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[224] Further information on Hŏ's names, see Yang Hi Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 5.

[225] Choe-Wall 65.

Moreover, this is not just the story of a bygone era. Ko, born into a farm-family, can relate to her on a personal level. The poor girl can also represent those "textile and garment factory workers" (Vol. II, 263) during the 1970s in Korea, most of whom were women working for low wages in hazardous environments.[226] The story, combing the issues of class and gender, thus, serves Ko's purpose well.

Furthermore, the fact that the poet Hŏ "showed a remarkable understanding and sympathy for the deprived groups of society" even as a member of the *yangban* elite, "unlike the majority of women who had the same family background,"[227] is also of great use for Ko's feminist agenda. Feminism in general, and dominant Western feminism in particular, has been faulted for emphasizing the rights of middle-class women, such as "getting women employed in high-paying professions," and alienating masses of poor and working-class women.[228] I would argue that Ko attempts to amend this limitation of mainstream feminism and expand its horizons by inserting and underscoring the importance of Hŏ's poem, which can attest to the diversity of women's experiences, and also by juxtaposing it with her critique of the middle-class housewives advocating traditional womanhood found in the Sin Saimdang ideal. For the twentieth-century poet, to a certain extent, the sixteenth-

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[226] For the working condition for the girls and women in the textile and garment industry in the 1970s, see Chun Soonok, They Are Not Machines: Korean Women Workers and Their Fight for Democratic Trade Unionism in the 1970s (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003).

[227] Yang Hi Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 66. Also, in reading this poem, Pak Chu-yŏng maintains that Hŏ's poem embodies the notion of "sisterhood." See Pak, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 258.

[228] bell hooks, Feminist Theory from Margin to Center (Boston, MA: South End, 1984) 100. See also Elizabeth V. Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon, 1988) 3-4.

century poet acts as the avatar of her feminist view, and thus Ko's admiration for Hŏ is certainly understandable. However, her re-mythologizing of Hŏ by repeatedly evoking the exaggerated image of her that Korean history has constructed—"a Heaven-sent poet; a Heaven-sent genius; a Heaven-sent beauty"[229] (Vol. II, 266-67)—still seems strange and needs justification. In the following poem she continues to pay homage to Hŏ, but at the same time empowers Hŏ to question her own myth.

III-4: The Elite poet Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn's Dreaming of Social Revolution

The fourth poem I will examine is a letter written by Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn to the daughters of Korea ("Haedong"[230]), subtitled "The Tale of Women's History, Part IV." It is worth noting that the addressee is not Sin Saimdang in this letter. The reason that Hŏ turns to posterity rather than to Sin who has written her is three-fold. First, after condemning the image of Sin as a paragon of feminine virtues in the previous letter, Ko probably did not want to make Hŏ pay homage to Sin just out of respect

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[229] According to Yang Hi Choe-Wall, the "Nansŏrhŏn legend" tells that she was "a divinely gifted poet, possessed of unworldly qualities and enduring beauty, who predicted her own demise at the age of twenty-seven" (1). She argues that it is "[the] dearth of well-documented biographical material (with the exception of a few fragmentary descriptions of her life, gleaned from traditional sources)" that "has no doubt contributed to the mystique that surrounds her" (1). See Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003).

[230] The term Haedong, which literally means "east of the sea," is known to have been coined during the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392). According to Remco E Breuker, "Samhan (Three Han)," "Haedong," and "Tongguik (eastern country)" are "synonymous: they all refer to Koryŏ or the Korean peninsula. In different contexts, however, these three alternatives acquired quite different connotations. [. . .] 'Haedong,' a name that is still in use, occurs in roughly two senses: in one guise it appears as an alternative for 'Samhan' in the sense of the historical community on the peninsula, but without the connotations that associate 'Samhan' with the people of the peninsula. [. . .] The other sense in which 'Haedong' is found in the sources, is, as mentioned above, in contrast with China." (37). See Breuker, Establishing a Pluralist Society in Medieval Korea, 918-1170: History, Ideology, and Identity in the Koryŏ Dynasty (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 37.

for her seniority. Second, as noted above, it seems that Ko sees Hŏ as her avatar, a well-educated, class-conscious, and prominent feminist figure, through which she can speak to younger generations about the "woman question." Third, the act of looking forward is as important as looking back and revising the past for her feminist project of finding the path to women's liberation. In the first part of the letter, Ko aims to establish a sisterly bond between Hŏ and her posterity, by letting her narrate the story of her life and work in an intimate voice. In the second part, Ko works to empower Hŏ to deliver her call to arms to the younger generations to fight for women's liberation.

Hŏ starts with giving an account of how her work has come to light. She writes: "Born in 1563,/ during my short 27 year life span,/ [. . .] / I wrote countless poems,/ but right before my death I realized that/ transient life was a mere drop in the ocean/so in my will I asked to burn all of my traces./ However, thanks to my brother Hŏ Kyun who felt sad about this,/ a collection of my work [Hŏ Nansŏrjae munjip]/ bearing the bitterness of the Chosŏn history/ has been left behind/ for you" (Vol. II, 269-70). To understand her decision to discard her work, a word of explanation about writing and women in her time is needed. As Choe-Wall spells out:

> It was not considered proper for a woman to write poetry [. . .]. Women therefore rarely wrote poems. When they did, however, the poems they wrote were shown only to their families before being destroyed, for fear of damaging the reputation of the lineage. It was because of this discrimination that their poems were seldom published or handed down to later generations. Likewise, most of

> Nansŏrhŏn's poems—said to have been so many that they filled her room—were burnt in accordance with her wishes.[231]

However, some of her poems remained in her parents' place and were preserved, compiled, and made public by her brother following her death at the age of twenty-seven.[232] She accepted her fate, without resisting the social prejudice against women entering the public arena as creative writers. Just as the literary critic Kichung Kim compares her to the figure of Shakespeare's sister Judith that Virginia Woolf created,[233] Hŏ, despite the fact that her education and creativity were equal to her younger brother Hŏ Kyun,[234] perished silently without seeing her poems published whereas he garnered a reputation for his literary works in his lifetime.

In giving voice to Hŏ, however, Ko empowers her to express her own resentment. Her anger against her harsh circumstance was, by extension, also Chosŏn women's, as revealed in the line that Hŏ's literary collection bears the scars of "the bitterness of the Chosŏn history," i.e., her country's slow acceptance of women in the intellectual realm, especially in comparison to her neighboring

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[231] Yang Hi Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 30.

[232] Choe-Wall 30; 3; 7. Also, Kichung Kim, quoting Yŏngsuk Kim's Chosŏn yŏryu munhak ŭi yŏn'gu [The Study of Chosŏn Women's Literature], states that "Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn's 200-odd surviving poems can be divided into three broad groups: 96 of them deal with the world of immortals (*Sŏn'gye*) and dreams; 90 with real-life situations; and the remaining 27 with empathy, that is, the poet placing herself in the shoes of another person, frequently a poor, abandoned, or lonely woman." See Kim, "Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn and 'Shakespeare's Sister,'" Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 83.

[233] Kichung Kim, "Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn" 78-95.

[234] Yang Hi Choe-Wall writes: "The leading critic of the late Chosŏn dynasty, Hwang Hyŏn (1855-1910, styled Maech'ŏn), in his poetic discourse Tokkukcho chegasi (On Reading Poems by Various Poets of Chosŏn Dynasty) affirmed 'the three jewels' of the Hŏ family to be the foremost group of writers during the Chosŏn dynasty, referring particularly to Nansŏrhŏn, whom he considered the most outstanding of the three." See Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 9.

country of China. Hŏ writes: "Though shameful, I must confess that/ it was in China, not in Chosŏn,/ that the poetry collection of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn was first published./ [. . .] / it was also in China, not in Chosŏn,/ that the collection The Orchids of Chosŏn (Haedongnan) was published" (Vol. II, 271). Though there is no evidence, she is drawing the reader's attention to the reported fact that a Chinese envoy from the Ming Court, Chu Chi-fan (fl. 1595), "first published Nansŏrchejip in China in 1606."[235] By articulating this alleged fact as "shameful," she is denouncing the hostility of the Chosŏn dynasty literati towards women's attempt at literary work and intellectualism, such as poetry or studying and writing in Chinese.[236] In addition, she highlights the fact that Hŏ Kyŏngnan, a woman poet of the Ming Dynasty,[237] read the collected work of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn, took a sobriquet "Sosŏrhŏn" out of admiration for her literary skills, and wrote answering poems to her poetry. Her responses were then published alongside the originals under the title, The Orchids of Chosŏn. In calling attention to Hŏ Kyŏngnan's Chinese poetry collection, Hŏ is asserting that her work did not receive adequate attention not just from men,

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[235] Choe-Wall 30-31.

[236] Choe-Wall uses Hong Taeyong (1731-1783) as an example of such hostility. She records that when Hong "went to Beijing as Military Attache" and met with Chinese writer-painter Lang-kun, he said: "Women of our country should only read and write *han'gŭl* [vernacular Korean] script. Writing poetry is not what a woman is supposed to do and even if she does, the poetry should be kept within the confines of the house and not be taken outside" (103). In addition, in response to Lang-kun who praised Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn's poetic talent, he said: "In their spare time from woman's work, they may study literature and history to learn women's precepts and the cultivation of feminine virtues! This is what women are supposed to do. To cultivate fine literature and eventually acquire fame is not the right way (to act)" (104). See Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix: The Poems of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003).

[237] Hŏ Kyŏngnan was a daughter of the Korean interpreter Hŏ Sun—who was posted to the Ming Court during the reign of King Sŏnjo—and his Chinese wife. She obtained the collected work of Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn published by Chu Chi-fan, a Chinese envoy to Chosŏn. See Ko Chŏng-hŭi, Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim Sŭng-hŭi et al., vol. II (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 271; Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix 32.

but also her own countrywomen, thereby suggesting an apparent "lack" of sisterhood (Vol. II, 271) in Korea.

In fact, her aim for the first part of the letter is to draw readers' attention to this lack of a sisterly bond and to the importance of initiating connections between her and posterity. To that end, she narrates her less-than-happy marriage in personal and colloquial language. She writes:

> Some say Nansŏrhŏn is
> a Heaven-sent poet,
> a Heaven-sent genius,
> and a Heaven-sent beauty, but
> that's not true, not true, not true.
> [. . . . .]
>
> Heaven gave me
> only a talent that can control the poetic universe
> but not the right time.
> Heaven gave me
> only a desire for love
> but not the right guy.
> Heaven gave me
> only a labor pain
> but not the fruits of maternal love. (Vol. II, 272-73)

She first negates her own legend, the same legend that the epitome of perfect motherhood and womanhood Sin Saimdang related in her letter addressing Hŏ. She then moves to explain the reasons for this refutation by revealing her human side[238] as opposed to her mythology. First, despite her talent, she was not born at "the right time" and thus her poetry was not read during her lifetime. Second, she is said to have been beautiful but not loved by her husband, who was not as handsome or

[238] Kim Chin-hŭi aptly points out that by showing Hŏ's conflicts and sufferings as a woman and as a person, Ko achieves truthfulness in her portrayal. See "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 191.

talented as she.[239] Instead, her superior gifts and intellect repelled him, and he kept his distance from her while seeking "the favours of another woman."[240] Thus, her thirst for love was not quenched. Third, she had two children but they died one after the other as we can see in her poem "Mourning My Children," which begins: "Last year I lost my beloved daughter./ This year I lost my beloved son."[241] She went through labor pains, but her tenure as a mother was short.

In sum, this stanza reveals her failure to fulfill her expected roles and joys as a wife and mother,[242] as well as her miserable conjugal life. Hŏ importantly recounts these failures, as well as the depth of her intimate wounds, in a confessional and "lyric"[243] mode, as if she were having a woman-to-woman talk with her addressees, "the daughters of Korea." In doing so, she invites them, as well as the readers of the poem, to take note of the female experience. In this way, she can create a female dialogue and female bonding, which brings the poets and the readers into contact. She then lays out her core idea: the urgency of "paving the way for women's

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[239] Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix 103.

[240] Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix 10.

[241] Kichung Kim, "Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn and 'Shakespeare's Sister,'" Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 91. See also Choe-Wall, Vision of a Phoenix 50-51.

[242] Kichung Kim, in commenting on her poem "Mourning My Children," asserts: "Her grief and despair must have come not only from personal sorrow but also from her sense of having failed to fulfill her familial and institutional obligations as a sixteenth-century Korean daughter-in-law and wife. For, by failing to raise an heir to her husband, she had failed her central role as a married woman in that society, and we can easily imagine how drastically her status must have fallen in her husband's household and how great must have been the chill of indifference and hostility of her parents-in-law and husband toward her." See Kim, "Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn and 'Shakespeare's Sister,'" Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 91.

[243] Kim Chin-hŭi, "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 192.

liberation in Chosŏn" (Vol. II, 273), in other words, reforming a society that over-celebrates the figure of Sin Saimdang as a representative of the ideal womanhood, despite Hŏ's intellectual and creative superiority. To make her point, she asks the following questions: "They say the time in which I lived is that of feudal lords/ and the time in which you live is that of democracy and of the masses,/ but how come women's liberation is so slow?/ [. . .] / They say the new era of ordinary women has begun,/ but where on earth is the house of liberation/ in which ordinary women/ can eat freely,/ dress freely,/ and work freely? (Vol. II, 273-74). Presumably referring to "the era of ordinary people,"[244] a catchphrase used by the South Korean president Roh Tae-woo in 1988, she insists that the modern younger generations should keep up with the changing times, rather than being confined by pre-modern thinking, and should advance women's liberation so that all women can live freely and equally.

She then goes one step further to draft the so-called "memorial stating the reasons for a campaign to fight for the liberation of Chosŏn women" (Vol. II, 275). In the second part of this letter, she adopts the traditional Chinese practice of writing a memorial to the emperor about military campaigns, and writes a long statement that justifies a campaign to fight for women's liberation. What makes her "memorial" different from the traditional norm is that she does not address one all-powerful man, but instead addresses all of those women who are disenfranchised,

[244] In his inaugural speech on February 25, 1988, Roh Tae-woo stated that "the era of 'ordinary people' has arrived, and that 'the day when freedom and human rights could be relegated in the name of economic growth and national security has ended.'" See Europa Publications Limited, The Far East and Australasia, 34th ed. (London: Europa, 2003) 690. Also, as for the usage of the term "feudalism," see Nancy Abelmann, Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 267.

abused, and discriminated against. Her memorial does not call for armed forces, but asks women to rally to overthrow the patriarchy and end sexism. This part of the poem, from which the title of Ko's collection Reasons for the Campaign for Women's Liberation was taken, reaffirms how seriously the twentieth-century poet treated the idea of female solidarity in her work and how importantly she regarded Hŏ as her alter ego.

In the manner of a socialist chant, Hŏ begins her memorial by describing young Korean women's readiness to take collective action: "Now our daughters of Haedong Chosŏn have risen up to their feet!" (Vol. II, 275). After declaring that "establishing gender equality and peaceful democratic world will be/ the direction of our struggle for women's liberation" (Vol. II, 275-76),[245] she moves onto the highlight of the poem: conjuring up those women who were slaughtered throughout Korean history for the sake of wars driven by men and in the name of nationalism.

> O daughters of the Koryŏ dynasty, who were offered up to the Mongolians of Yuan!
> In the name of thirty-five million sisters,
> we will hang the hypocrisy of the sycophancy and the scholarly spirit!
>
> O daughters of *Chŏngsindae* (military sexual slavery), who were violated by Japanese Empire's lascivious desire of pillaging the world!
> In the name of thirty-five million sisters,
> we will behead the lineage of the patriotism and quislingism.
>
> O daughters of *Kisaeng* (prostitute) tourism, who were sacrificed to the palace of comprador capital and the business-government alliance!

[245] Ko Hyŏn-ch'ŏl, who regards Ko Chŏng-Hŭi as a postcolonial feminist poet, asserts that she extends liberation from imperialism and colonialism to the liberation of women by equating women with "colonized Other" and men with the colonizers/ imperialists. See Ko, "P'yŏngdŭng kwa haebang ŭl wihayŏ, kolŭn hyŏnsil ŭi ch'iyu rŭl wihayŏ" [For Equality and Liberation, and for Healing the Festering Reality], Onŭl ŭi munye pip'yŏng 7 (1992): 169.

> In the name of thirty-five million sisters,
> we will burn the tradition of the pro-Japanism, pro-Americanism, and traitorous cooperation. (Vol. II, 277-78)

These three groups of women appeared previously in the verse letter by Yi Ok-pong, which we examined above, but they were mentioned there only briefly as a parallel example to the Chinese figure of Xi Shi, who was exploited as sex object by her own country. While writing in the manner of her contemporary activist poet Kim Chi-ha,[246] Ko summons these women here again, not only to reiterate the crimes and atrocities committed against them, but more importantly to avenge their victimization and death "in the name of thirty-five million sisters."

In other words, she punishes, through metaphorical hanging, beheading, and burning, those Koryŏ scholar-courtiers who proclaimed their upstanding morals but who were in actuality subservient to "the great and powerful" (*sadae*), as evidenced by their offering of their women as gifts to the Chinese court[247]; those colonized men in Korea who exhibited ostensible patriotism, but collaborated with the colonizers

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[246] In particular, for the manner of Kim Chi-ha's long narrative poetry and dramatic poetry marked by "the underlying story-telling tradition" and "a 'ballad-opera' kind of *p'ansori* element," see Ko Won, "Kim Chi-ha: Poet of Blood and Fire," Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 9 (1977): 23. Also, Kim Chi-ha's "A Declaration of Conscience" and Sugwon Kang's "The Politics and Poetry of Kim Chi-ha" in the same magazine provide insight into the then-political situations and Kim Chi-ha's writing style. See Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 9 (1977): 8-15; 3-7.

[247] "The first waves of Koryŏ women into the Mongol empire arrived as captives seized during the bloody fighting of the mid-thirteenth century. These women were variously used as slaves, married to recently surrendered Southern Song soldiers, or distributed as war booty to Mongol warriors. Late in the thirteenth century, Qubilai and other Mongol aristocrats began to demand women from elite Koryŏ families as wives and consorts. Despite initial efforts to avoid these demands, the Korean government eventually responded by establishing government bureaus to organize and control the flow of Koryŏ women to the Mongol empire." See David Robinson, Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009) 52.

by selling their women to the Japanese military as sex slaves[248]; and those government-backed businessmen who declared themselves patriotic heroes working for national economic growth, but actually wronged and betrayed their women by simultaneously operating "industrial prostitution" rings for the entertainment of American and Japanese businessmen.[249] One can argue that this act of retelling the plight of women as a shared experience, or what Kim Sŭng-hŭi calls "the return of the oppressed (the *minjung*, laborers, the subalterns, women, and the colonized),"[250] raises the feminist consciousness. As the black feminist thinker bell hooks explains, "learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained" leads to "awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case

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[248] Bonnie B. C. Oh writes: "During World War II, hundreds of thousands of women, about 80 percent of whom were from Korea, but also from other parts of Asia, were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army to 'serve' soldiers on the front lines. Generally known as 'comfort women,' these victims were stationed in 'comfort stations' throughout Asia and the South Pacific" (3). As Oh details, "The recruiting method of 'comfort women' progressively deteriorated as in the case of the Korean laborers. In the early to mid-1930s, most young women were recruited with the enticements of traveling abroad, of high-paying jobs, and even of educational opportunities. [. . .] After the outbreak of the war with China in 1937, the Japanese authorities employed unscrupulous Koreans to recruit Korean young women. Low-ranking local police, village authorities, and paid recruiters participated in the recruitment of Korean girls. They all deceived young women, made them sign up, and ordered them to show up at the police stations or government offices" (11). See Oh, "The Japanese Imperial System and the Korean 'Comfort Women' of World War II," Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II, eds. Margaret D. Stetz and Oh (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

[249] As Heisoo Shin states: "Industrial prostitution is a direct product of South Korea's development path. [. . .] Businessmen use it [industrial prostitution] widely as a strategy to obtain credits and secure favors as well as to increase sales in domestic and world markets. South Korea depends primarily on Japan and the United States." See Shin, "Industrial Prositution and South Korean Dependent Development," Women's Lives and Public Policy: The International Experience, eds. Meredeth Turshen and Briavel Holcomb (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993) 177.

[250] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 150.

scenarios, oppressed."[251] By showing how Korean women have been systematically abused, Ko, in the voice of Hŏ, awakens her female contemporaries to the horrors of the patriarchy[252] and the urgency of feminist thinking.

After appeasing the spirits of the dead victims with these penalizations of their predators, Hŏ ends the letter by turning to women in present-day Korea, who are similarly sacrificing their lives for the sake of men, with an exhortation to "rise up and march together" (Vol. II, 278). She urges them to participate in the fight for women's liberation by claiming that "the day of the liberated world that we women of the past began/ and you women of the present will actualize is approaching" (Vol. II, 278). She reaffirms the gravity of political solidarity between women in building the world of liberation, as well as in effecting "political revolution," "sexual revolution," and "educational revolution" (Vol. II, 278-79). This epistolary poem is a prime example of the slogan "Sisterhood is powerful." Ko's poetic speaker asks, in another poem,[253] "What will be if women unite?" She answers: "It will be a new world" (Vol. II, 298).

IV. Modern History, Women, and Re-vision

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[251] bell hooks, Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000) 7.

[252] In reading this poem, Kim Sŭng-hŭi claims that Ko is one of the first women poets in modern Korea who showed how the imperialistic, phallocentric, and nationalistic discourses had contributed to the suffering of women. See Kim, "Han'guk hyŏndae yŏsŏng si e nat'anan chegukchuŭi namkŭn ilki" [Reading the Phallus of Imperialism in Modern Korean Women's Poetry], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 7 (2002): 82-86.

[253] "For the World Where Women Become One: The Tale of Women's History, Part VI," Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip [The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi], eds. Kim Sŭng-hŭi et al., vol. II (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 2011) 285-300.

In this section, I will continue to look at Ko's poems that rewrite women's history in the spirit of Rich's "re-vision," as in the previous section. The focus this time, though, will be on the modern female figures that Korean history has either dismissed or denounced—the independence fighter Nam Cha-hyŏn (1872-1933), the labor activist Kwŏn In-suk (1964-), and the political dissident Im Su-gyŏng (1968-). These women do not represent the "ideal" womanhood like the female figures we examined above. On the contrary, they are often viewed as "abnormal" and "masculinized" in that they actively participated in a domain reserved for men: politics. Depending on political orientation, some people (often progressive liberals) have celebrated them, and others (often staunch conservatives) have demonized them. Overall, though, they have often gone unremarked and in general are not treated as importantly as Hwang Chin-i, Yi Ok-pong, Sin Saimdang, and Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn in mainstream history.[254]

Therefore, I regard Ko's poems about Nam, Kwŏn, and Im as a project of not only adding a woman-centered perspective, but also uncovering and rejuvenating the stories of these women. This "biographical turn"[255] enables her to re-insert the lives of these ordinary women back into history while also revealing their histories of suppression and discrimination. As Barbara Caine points out in Biography and

[254] It is also interesting to observe that even those critics who are fascinated by Ko's undertaking of rewriting women's history have paid little attention to these heroic women of modern Korea. Also, in general, Nam Cha-hyŏn is more frequently mentioned than the other two women. See Kim Chin-hŭi, "Sŏjŏng ŭi hwakchang kwa siro ssŭnŭn yŏksa" [The Extension of Lyricism and History Written in Verse], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 193; Pak Chu-yŏng, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 264-66.

[255] Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat, and Tom Wengraf, eds., The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples (London: Routledge, 2000). See also Barbara Caine, Biography and History (Basingstoke, NY: Macmillan, 2010).

History, for "social, feminist and some post-colonial historians, it is not the light shed on the lives of powerful individuals which is most important, but rather what can be learnt from the lives of less-exalted and ordinary people."[256] In the previous section, I demonstrated how Ko took the task of rewriting the celebrated lives of mythologized women from a perspective of a feminist historian. In this section, I will show how, in highlighting these lesser-known women's stories, she takes the position of feminist biographer-historian and expounds on modern Korean society's gender and sexual politics and their connection to colonialism, dictatorship, and political hostility between the two Koreas. Unlike the epistolary poems in the previous section which are 8-14 pages long, the poems in this section are short, 2-4 pages long. In addition, although these poems do not necessarily follow the conventions of a letter or use typical salutations, they nonetheless show epistolary traits as the poet addresses the reader or her heroines directly in an intimate tone.

IV-1: The Forgotten Freedom Fighter Nam Cha-hyŏn's Rebellion

The first poem I will look at is "The Ring Finger of Nam Cha-hyŏn," which has a subtitle "A Study of Women's History, Part III." This poem, included in her 1987 poetry collection The Spring of Mt. Chiri, tells the tale of a woman freedom fighter during the Japanese occupation of Korea, who has faded into oblivion despite her extraordinary military feats. Ko opens the poem with a direct address to a fellow citizen:

> Women in the late Chosŏn period are all asleep
> but, compatriot, why are you so rushed?

[256] Caine 1.

> Stop your hurried steps for a moment
> and offer the incense, shining as the light of the free world,
> to the spirit of Nam Cha-hyŏn wandering around the field of
> Manchuria.
> You will see then
> the words 'A Female Member of the Independence Army'
> written in blood with her third finger. (Vol. I, 589)

By calling the anonymous compatriot's attention to the deceased, this first stanza serves as an introduction to the overlooked historical figure Nam Cha-hyŏn whose obscurity is evidenced by the necessity of a footnote in the poem. The motivation in the opening line, urging the compatriot to pay respect to Nam, is Ko's critique of those "women in the late Chosŏn period" who were "asleep," i.e., confined to the "women's quarters" conforming to the prescribed gender roles and indifferent to current political affairs, unlike the heroine of the poem. Therefore, the "light of the free world" that Ko encourages the addressee to offer to Nam suggests not only the light of a liberated nation, which Nam the freedom fighter was fighting for, but also the light of a genderless or gender-free world, which Nam the woman was fighting for.

In the second stanza, Ko moves onto a brief biographical sketch of her heroine:

> Nam Cha-hyŏn, born in Andong, Northern Kyŏngsang province,
> married to the scholar Kim Yŏng-ju at the age of nineteen,
> did cooking and laundry, and raised a son as widow.
> But once enlightened,
> she relinquished her fame well known in Andong,
> as *hyobu yŏllyŏ*,
> cut the rope called *yŏp'il chongpu*,
> and became a member of the national independence army of the Manchurian government Sŏro. (Vol. I, 589)

The focus of this biography is on Nam's transformation from a traditional woman to a socially and politically awakened woman warrior. Apparently, Nam, like many of her upper-class female contemporaries, was a dutiful wife and devoted her life to "cooking and laundry." The poem recounts that she was also *hyobu yŏllyŏ*, which means "a filial daughter-in-law and chaste woman." In other words, she served her parents-in-law well, refused to remarry and raised her son alone after her husband, who had joined the militia (*ŭibyŏng* or the Righteous Army), died. Until this moment, she seemed to embody the *hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ* (wise mother and good wife) ideal.

However, once awakened to political consciousness, she renounced her duties as an ideal daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. Refusing to abide by the idea of "*yŏp'il chongpu*" which dictated a woman follow her husband into death, she left her home and travelled abroad to join the independence army established in China. It is perhaps due to this act of abandoning her womanly virtues that she has not been widely celebrated or memorialized. When her first biography[257] written by journalist Yi Sang-guk was published in 2012, a reviewer in an article titled "Nam Cha-Hyŏn, A Woman An Chung-gŭn: A Forgotten Whirlwind Life" referenced the fact that in 1962 when the Korean government awarded medals to 58 people of merit who fought for national independence, there was one woman awardee, and that was

[257] Yi Sang-guk, Na nŭn Chosŏn ŭi ch'onggu ta: Ilche ŭi simjang ŭl kyŏnun tongnip t'usa 'Manju ŭi yŏho': Nam Cha-hyŏn p'yŏngjŏn [I Am the Gun of Chosŏn: The Freedom Fighter Holding Japan at Gunpoint, A Female Tiger of Manchuria: A Critical Biography of Nam Cha-Hyŏn] (Seoul: Sech'ang midiŏ, 2012).

"not the famed Yu Kwan-sun" but "Nam Cha-hyŏn who has been buried in history and whose name is not well known."[258]

Neither the reviewer nor the biographer offer a clear clue as to why her accomplishments were so underestimated when it is claimed that she is comparable to An Chung-gŭn (1879-1910), one of the most celebrated male independence activists, who assassinated the Japanese Resident-General of Korea Itō Hirobumi in 1909 and was subsequently sentenced to death, or to Yu Kwan-sun (1904-1920), the most well-known young female freedom fighter who participated in the massive independence movement on March 1, 1919, and who was tortured to death in prison. Nam, who was arrested on her way to assassinate a Japanese ambassador in Manchuria and died in prison from a hunger strike,[259] differs from these figures in that she was a widow who had deserted her parents-in-law for her political beliefs and who had refused to stay "chaste" to her husband by committing suicide honorably after his death. In other words, she became a warrior after abandoning her "female responsibilities," which seemed unacceptable in the eyes of society.

It is worth mentioning that Ko rediscovered and reinserted this much ignored woman Nam's life story into history, more than two decades prior to the publication of her official biography, when no mainstream historians paid attention to her heroic deeds. The last part of the poem retells these exploits:

> She spent about ten years passing across the border
> while picking out twelve sites of liberation in northern Manchuria
> and sowing the seeds of the new world for women's enlightenment.

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[258] Yi Sang-mi, "Yŏja An Chung-gŭn, Nam Cha-Hyŏn, ich'yŏjin kŭnyŏ ŭi pulkkot kat'ŭn sam" [Nam Cha-Hyŏn, A Woman An Chung-gŭn: A Forgotten Whirlwind Life]. Asia Kyŏngje 5 June 2012.

[259] Yi, "Yŏja An Chung-gŭn."

> But, facing an impregnable fortress, she put her ten delicate fingers
> on the cutting board of the foreign power.
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> This Chosŏn lady then cut her ring finger with a single stroke
> and inscribed in blood: 'A Female Member of the Independence
> Army.'
> This ring finger of hers still wanders! (Vol. I, 590)

The first line refers to the fact that Nam traveled around northern Manchuria to help build 12 churches and 10 women's educational associations to "enlighten" women and improve their rights and lives. The second line and the last stanza zoom in on her fingers, retelling the episode of her signing a pledge in blood. Ko's footnote informs us that when Nam heard that the League of Nations (LN) was dispatched in September 1932 to Harbin, a city of northeastern China, to find out about the details of the Japanese invasion, she cut off her ring finger and wrote in blood "A Member of the Chosŏn Independence Group"[260] on a white cloth and sent it with the piece of her cut finger to LN as a form of petition to investigate the atrocities committed by Japan. Though neglected for many decades since her death, she has now been, through Ko's poetry, revived as a feminist patriot. The poem shows that she not only challenged traditional gender roles but also opened up the possibility for women's liberation by paving the way for women's participation in education and politics in early twentieth century. As the poet-literary critic Kim Sŭng-hŭi points out, Ko

[260] Pak Chu-yŏng claims that by changing Nam's self-description from "A Member of the Chosŏn Independence Group" in her original letter to "A Female Member of the Independence Army" in the poem, Ko tries to emphasize her gender, i.e., a "*female* freedom fighter." See Pak, "Sinhwa, yŏksa, yŏsŏngsŏng: Iban polraendŭ wa Ko Chŏng-hŭi ŭi tasi ssŭnŭn yŏsŏng iyagi" [Myth, History, Femininity: Eavan Boland's and Ko Chŏng-hŭi's Rewriting the Stories of Women], Pigyo han'gukhak 19 (2011): 265.

"wrote women's history, i.e., her-story, as a counter-discourse to his-tory, a record of male heroes."[261]

IV-2: The Lesser-Known Labor Activist Kwŏn In-suk's Breaking of Silence

The second poem I will examine is "An Arrest Warrant For Freedom And Liberation," subtitled "To Kwŏn In-suk, the Torch of Defiance and Resistance, Representing 20 Million Women," and which was included in The Spring of Mt. Chiri. It takes a form of open letter, addressing the subject of the poem, Kwŏn In-suk, and publicly endorsing her defiance of patriarchal oppression. Before turning to analyzing the poem in detail, though, some background information on a political and sexual scandal involving Kwŏn is necessary. Her name has most frequently appeared in writings about human rights issues[262] since the case of her sexual assault by a policeman became public. She was a student labor activist who "concealed her university background in order to organize factory workers into a trade union," when she was arrested in 1986 "for falsifying job application documents."[263] While interrogated at the police station, she was subjected to sexual torture by a police officer, and through her lawyer she filed a complaint against

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[261] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Sangjing chilsŏ e tojŏnhanŭn yŏsŏng si ŭi moksori, kŭ chŏnbok ŭi chŏllyakdŭl" [Transgressing the Symbolic Order: The Subversive Voice of Female Poets], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 2 (1999): 136.

[262] See Julie Brill, Assessing Reform in South Korea: A Supplement to the Asia Watch Report on Legal Process and Human Rights (Washington, DC: Asia Watch, 1988) 32-34; William Shaw, ed., Human Rights in Korea: Historical and Policy Perspectives (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law EALS, 1991) 247; Ueno Chizuko, Nationalism and Gender, trans. Beverley Yamamoto (Melbourne, Austral.: Trans Pacific, 2004) 71; "Lawyers Ask Review of Decision Not to Prosecute Officer in Sexual Abuse Case," UCA News 3 Sept. 1986.

[263] William Shaw, ed., Human Rights in Korea: Historical and Policy Perspectives (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law EALS, 1991) 247.

him.[264] This act was unprecedented since women had been ordinarily forced into silence regarding sexual violence.[265]

While reflecting upon Kwŏn's sexual-torture case and her courage to break silence to make it public, Ko writes:

> O Sister, how holy!,
> When 20 million women in this land
> carrying frightful darkness and silence on their back
> are standing on the edge of history
> trampled, trampled, and trampled
> with military boots of men under military dictatorship in this land,
> you are also screaming out of brutal torture,
> with your limbs bound with a rope of oppression,
> in the name of 20 million women,
> in the name of 10 million workers,
> at the end of the world where freedom breaths its last,
> in front of those profiteers who stab you in the back,
> O, the flames as the truth of the era gush out,
> making its way through the darkness of the unprecedented
> murderous regime!
> O, the hands that strip away lies and deceits
> burst out, shouting
> 'even if the limbs can be bound with a rope
> the truth cannot be put into prison!' (Vol. I, 597)

The poet regards Kwŏn as saintly in that she paved the way for 20 million women of Korea, who were "trampled" and oppressed, to rise and demand justice. In other words, she challenged and shook up the patriarchal society that turned women's

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[264] Shaw 247.

[265] Namhee Lee notes that there were several similar cases as "female students were forced to stand naked and submit to body searches, and they were subjected to verbal abuse and even brutal beatings. It was not until the Kwŏn case became public that these students too went public with charges of such abuses" (911, footnote 1). Lee also points out that "[although] her decision to go public with the charge of sexual abuse was indeed unprecedented, Kwŏn was only one of an estimated three thousand undongkwŏn [activists in the democratization movement] in factories in the mid-1980s. [. . .] At that time, thousands of university students and intellectuals plunged into the world of the factory worker, forgoing university diplomas, job prospects, and middle-class lives in the hope of bringing about 'revolution'" (912). See Lee, "Representing the Worker: The Worker-Intellectual Alliance of the 1980s in South Korea," The Journal of Asian Studies 64 (2005).

suffering of sexual assault into shame, by openly declaring herself a victim. The line in the poem, "even if the limbs can be bound with a rope," refers to the fact that the police officer "handcuffed her wrists behind her back" before carrying out the sexual torture,[266] however her cry for justice shows "the truth cannot be put into prison." Her brave act is thus like a beacon of hope for those women who have been forced into "darkness and silence."

Ko also regards her act of confronting "the unprecedented murderous regime" as a torch of defiance. Korea had been under military dictatorship since its division and was ruled by the military dictator Chun Doo Hwan when her sexual abuse case emerged. His regime tried to cover up the case by controlling the media. As Asia Watch reports, the government ordered that the newspaper headline of the story "must read 'sexual insult' and not 'sexual assault.'"[267] The Korea Herald also reported that the sexual predator was protected as evidenced by the fact that "the authorities fired police officer Mun, but neither he nor any of his superiors were prosecuted initially."[268] Moreover, "the press was directed to publish the prosecutor's entire report" in which investigating authorities declared that her allegations "were found to be groundless fabrications and part of a communist

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[266] Stephen A. Oxman, Otto Triffterer, and Francisco B. Cruz, South Korea: Human Rights in the Emerging Politics: Report of an ICJ Mission from 25 March to 12 April 1987 (Geneva, Switz.: International Commission of Jurists, 1987) 37-38.

[267] Asia Watch Committee et al., Freedom of Expression in the Republic of Korea (Washington, DC: Asia Watch, 1988) 49-51.

[268] The Korea Herald, 24 July 1988, quoted in Julie Brill, Assessing Reform in South Korea: A Supplement to the Asia Watch Report on Legal Process and Human Rights (Washington, DC: Asia Watch, 1988) 33.

strategy."[269] To occlude injustice and to safeguard the police, the authorities adopted the rhetoric of ideology, which was frequently used by the regime at that time:

> The dictatorship has long invoked national security to rationalize its repressive regimentation of South Korean society. The ideological pretext for human rights abuses has been a fanatical anti-Communist demonology. In order to retain power with minimal accountability, the military regime purposely blurred the distinction between political dissent and real threats to national security.[270]

In these circumstances, authorities, "those profiteers who stab you in the back," in Ko's words, could easily turn Kwŏn's attempt to unionize factory workers into a threat to national security and an anti-government and pro-communist act. To them, her complaints were intended not to reveal the corrupted officials' exploitation of female sexuality, but to "[damage] the prestige of law-enforcement agencies and [abet and escalate] revolutionary anti-establishment struggles."[271] Kwŏn was in fact convicted and sentenced to eighteen months, becoming a double victim of sexual abuse and human rights abuse.

The government's censorship was eventually made public by the progressive journal Language (Mal)[272] and her perpetrator was also finally, three years later, in

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[269] Asia Watch Committee et al., Freedom of Expression in the Republic of Korea (Washington, DC: Asia Watch, 1988) 49-51. See also "The Case of Miss Kwon," South Korea: Human Rights in the Emerging Politics: Report of an ICJ Mission from 25 March to 12 April 1987, Stephen A. Oxman, Otto Triffterer, and Francisco B. Cruz (Geneva, Switz.: International Commission of Jurists, 1987) 37-41.

[270] William Shaw, ed., Human Rights in Korea: Historical and Policy Perspectives (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law EALS, 1991) 223.

[271] Shaw 247.

[272] "In December 1986, the government arrested journalists Kim T'ae-hong and Sin Hong-bŏm when the journal they edited Mal (Language) printed a copious sampling of the official 'information guidelines' the government had been distributing to control the press." See Shaw 229.

1989 "sentenced to five years in prison for sexual harassment, misconduct in office, and assault."[273] It was, as Ko exclaims, "the disguised freedom for 40 years;/ the disguised liberation for 40 years" (Vol. I, 598). In other words, although Koreans were liberated from the hands of Japanese colonialists in 1945, they lived in a draconian society disguised as a free one as they had fallen into the hands of military dictators who abused words such as freedom, liberation, and democracy only to control the public.

Thus, after paying tribute to Kwŏn by commending, "O Sister, how heroic!/How splendid, the victory of truth!," Ko announces that "O, but not yet / is our fight over" (598). She then ends the poem by urging the student activist and the implied readers to keep working together to fight for liberation:

> until we can remove discrimination from women's hearts,
> until we can remove the latch on men's hearts,
> until we can call it a land of liberation,
> no one should stop the march.
>
> O, Sister, let's go forward!
> Let's cross that ridge of death!
> Let's put handcuffs on false freedom!
> Let's put an end to disguised liberation!
> There's only one truth we're longing for:
> long live the liberation of women!
> long live the good democratic world ! (Vol. I, 599)

Ko suggests that both women and men should band together to fight for justice. In other words, those women who are affected by sexism should rise to speak up rather than holding the discrimination in their hearts; those men who turn a blind

[273] Asia Watch Committee et al., Freedom of Expression in the Republic of Korea (Washington, DC: Asia Watch, 1988) 33.

eye to the "woman question" should lift the latch, open their hearts, and join women in the struggle for freedom. In the last stanza, Ko also encourages Kwŏn to keep up the fight by showing her sisterly solidarity to join in that endeavor. The poet enlists her 'sister' activist in the task of risking their lives to issue an arrest warrant for "false freedom" and "disguised liberation," and in working together toward their ultimate goal of "women's liberation" and a "good democratic world."

Whether the two women interacted directly with each other in person outside Ko's poetic space is not known. Yet, it seems clear that Kwŏn has carried on and worked for feminist causes. First, as the foremost Japanese feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko claims, Kwŏn's demand for justice, which made public violence against women an important human rights issue, prepared the way for the testimony of the former military sex slave Kim Hak-sun, which took place on August, 14, 1991,[274] about two months after Ko's death. Second, Kwŏn came to the United States in 1994 to pursue her graduate degrees in women's studies at Rutgers and Clark Universities and has since become a professor in the field, teaching and writing about women, gender, and sexuality. The poet is no longer physically present, but her endorsing and encouraging voice in this poem seems to resonate in the works of the labor activist turned feminist scholar, works that investigate such topics as gender equality, women and war, and militarism and masculinity.

IV-3: The Political Dissident Im Su-gyŏng's Dream of Reunification

[274] Ueno Chizuko, Nationalism and Gender, trans. Beverley Yamamoto (Melbourne, Austral.: Trans Pacific, 2004) 71.

The following two poems that I will examine, "Putting Handcuffs on Hands Having Planted Flower Seeds" and "A Female Prometheus and An Eagle," focus on the political dissident Im Su-gyŏng. Im received international media attention when she travelled secretly to Pyongyang in North Korea to attend the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students on July 1, 1989. Upon her return, she was arrested because, as the North Korea specialist Andrei Lankov notes, "the National Security Law, an unfortunate remnant from the Cold War era, criminalizes all unofficial/ unauthorized interaction with the North."[275] Compared to Nam Cha-hyŏn and Kwŏn In-suk in the previous sections, Im is much better known in Korean history in general, in part because of the social and political ramifications of the historic event she staged. However, writing in favor of her bold act was, and still is, viewed as leftist and procommunist, and her story has often been suppressed, distorted, or celebrated, depending on the writer's political orientation. For Ko, who had a great interest in topics such as Korean unification, social justice, and democratization, along with the advancement of women's rights, the so-called Im scandal must have been an important and intriguing political event. Inserting the two poems into her poetic sequence (15 poems total) titled "Our Spring, Seoul Spring"—which refers to student protests in the spring of 1980 and the Kwangju uprising in May, 1980, as well as alluding to the 1968 Prague Spring[276]—in the 1990 collection The Rain of Tears of Kwangju, (Kwangju ŭi nunmulbi), Ko demonstrates the significance of Im's

[275] Andrei Lankov, "Im Su-kyong—Then and Now," The Korea Times 17 June 2012.

[276] Ko also wrote a poetic sequence titled "Prague Spring" included in Flowers in Tears (1986), a sequence that touches on the so-called Seoul Spring in 1980 and the Kwangju uprising but in a rather indirect manner.

dissident act under the oppressive regime in the path to political liberalization and democratization in Korea.

The poem "Putting Handcuffs on Hands Having Planted Flower Seeds," subtitled "Our Spring, Seoul Spring, Part X," centers on Korea's geopolitical situation as a divided nation and on Im's undaunted performance of bringing two separate countries together, albeit momentarily and symbolically. In particular, recalling the epithet "The Flower of Unification (T'ongil ŭi kkot)," which the dissident has been awarded since her visit to North Korea, the poet highlights Im's heroic act of crossing "the ice wall across which brothers are fighting and snarling at each other" (Vol. II, 144) and sowing a seed of hope:

> Im Su-gyŏng, 22-year old daughter of Chosŏn,
> O, you've planted flower seeds for the first time.
> O, you've planted flower seeds of reunification at last.
> O, the country is one! You've planted flower seeds of meeting.
> O, the world is one! You've planted flower seeds of peace.
> O, love is one! You've planted flower seeds of the people. (Vol. II, 144-45)

In stressing the oneness of the nation, the world, and love in general, Ko reveals her own longing for the unified state of Korea, which she sees Im has begun to carry out. The poet pays tribute to the young and defiant college student who dared to travel across "the wall of ice," which can refer to the Korean demilitarized zone and also the ideological wall between the South and the North, and who planted flower seeds of contact between the two Koreas, not the seeds of violence, such as "guns and swords," "nuclear weapons," or "the red-white dictatorship" (Vol. II, 144-45).

It is worth noting that in the poem Ko does not necessarily favor the capitalist and supposedly democratic South over the communist North. She

describes the land where Im planted flower seeds as the one "where only the clanking sounds of iron fetters are heard,/ where the icy wind of conspiracy/ drearier than death is howling,/ where the red-white patriarchy is flapping its wings" (Vol. II, 144). Ko does not explicitly say which nation state it belongs to, but perhaps it is part-north and part-south. She seems to suggest that despite the apparent ideological divide, both the "white" South and the "red" North share the similarities of controlling and persecuting the people under a dictator-patriarch rubric.

In fact, in the second half of the poem, the target of criticism is the rhetoric of McCarthyism, which has been on the rise in South Korea since the Korean War (1950-1953), and the government's harsh treatment of its political dissidents. After eulogizing Im, the poet deplores the ramifications of her political move: "O, we have put handcuffs on your hands!/ O, we have bounded the hands planting flower seeds with fetters of iron!/ Being afraid of reunification,/ afraid of peace,/ and afraid of equality,/ we have sent you into prison!" (Vol. II, 146). Using the first person plural pronoun "we" rather than the third person plural form, she reveals the importance of interpersonal relations and has all of us passive spectators held accountable for the government's persecution. This does not necessarily mean that she is being passive or is afraid of offending government authorities, as we will see in the second poem about Im. However, in the beginning of her writing career in the late 1970s, she was not always so straightforward in criticizing government repression.

In "Catacombs: June 25," one of the most explicitly political poems included in her first poetry collection Who is Treading the Winepress Alone?, for example,

she takes a more subtle approach to the ideological wall of the Cold War. She opens the poem with a metaphorical allusion to the McCarthyist witch-hunts: "The red line on father's family register!/ When I awoke from the 30 years of sleep,/ I was already in the tomb of red lines" (Vol. I, 31). In the title, she makes clear reference to the Korean War, which started on June 25, 1950, and in the first stanza she alludes to the so-called "guilty by association law" through the image of the red line. That is, it is reported that during and after the Korean War, the South Korean government punished the family members—including parents, spouses, and children—of those who were suspected of being North Korean agents or those who were abducted by the North Korean army by marking them off with a red line on the family register. Those with a red line were often unable to find employment, were under constant surveillance, and were forced to denounce their loved ones publicly.[277] More than just an effort to supplant communism, these policies were a punitive strategy to suppress any political challenges posed against the government, as we saw in the case of Kwŏn In-suk in the previous section. Despite these powerful allusions, though, in the rest of the poem, rather than explicitly condemning the practice, the poet focuses on the speaker's psychological struggle to escape from the "red-lined" underground tombs while passively listening to "a group of eagles gnawing your heart" (Vol. I, 32). However, writing a decade later about the arrest of Im Su-gyŏng,

[277] It should be noted that the "guilty by association law" was a byproduct of the National Security Law. The Law was "enacted in 1948 to control the activities of 'anti-state' organizations," and although its "ostensible purpose is to protect national security," it "has frequently been applied selectively to punish domestic dissidents." See David R. McCann, ed., Korea Briefing: Toward Reunification (Armonk, NY: East Gate, 1997) 214.

Ko becomes bold enough to identify conservative authorities as eagles pecking on the heart of the dissident.

In the poem "A Female Prometheus and an Eagle," subtitled "Our Spring, Seoul Spring, Part XI," she makes an analogy between the Greek myth and the Im scandal. Ko writes with a direct address to the reader:

> Listen to the sounds of the execution of a 22-year-old female
> Prometheus!
> A woman who has brought fire to the field of the cold war;
> A woman who has sparked a fire in the heart frozen by division of territory for the first time;
> [. . . . .]
> The female Prometheus born for the reunification of Korea that you
> and I long for.
> Listen to the sound of the Prometheus branded as a radical rebel,
> surrounded by conservative eagles,
> at the court of original fascist Zeus,
> sentenced to 10 years in prison!
>
> A woman who has crossed the line of ideology for the first time,
> they say, the female Prometheus who
> defied the boundary of division,
> and took the fire of reunification,
> the fire of the nation,
> should be a prey of an Eagle. (Vol. II, 148)

She portrays Im as the Greek demigod figure, the woman-Prometheus, who brought "the fire of reunification" to the divided nation by traveling to the North and who is condemned to imprisonment for defying the authorities, embodied here as the "fascist Zeus." In addition, those who persecuted the dissident for plotting treason and collaborating with the North while rekindling fears of its military attack and a pro-communist rebellion in the South Korean society acutely wary of Communism since the Korean War are represented as "conservative eagles."

Ko continues her biting satire for the rest of the poem while picturing Im's imprisonment, interrogation, and persecution:

> Listen to the sound of the female Prometheus,
> dreaming of a peaceful reunification,
> whose limbs are chained to the Caucasus,
> dripping with blood!
> Listen to the sound of a flock of conservative eagles with sharp beaks and fierce claws,
> using 1990s tactics such as new men, new ideas,
> pecking at the liver of the 22 year-old woman!
> Listen to the sound of them smacking their lips
> after pecking at her lung,
> after pecking at her gallbladder,
> after pecking at her heart! (Vol. II, 148)

Like the vulture feeding on the liver of the enchained Prometheus, the "conservative eagles" are pecking at the internal organs of the 22 year-old woman, using "sharp beaks and fierce claws," which can signify the use of torture. This scene of inflicting pain on the dissident further dramatizes the violence done to those intellectuals and artists who peacefully express their views but are unfairly convicted of threatening national security, or to those activists who protest against dictatorship and human rights abuse but are unjustly accused of cooperating with North Korea.

It should be noted that although Ko did not live long enough to see it, Im was released in 1992, after three and a half years of imprisonment, and became a National Assembly member in 2012. It seems, though, that she is no longer an activist calling for the unification of the nation or protesting against human rights abuses. After being newly elected to the National Assembly in 2012, she provoked criticism from both conservatives and liberals when the news reported that she insulted a North Korean refugee during a chance meeting. As Andrei Lankov claims,

her "actual views" may be "surprisingly irrelevant": Im "might secretly be critical of North Korean regime, or she might be one of its zealous admirers."[278] I should make it clear, though, that her secret thoughts or her current political stance are not the subject of Ko's poems and of this chapter's analysis. What is important is that Im's historical visit to the North and its ramification inspired Ko to write the poems above, which reveal that South Korea's military and authoritarian regime was not any better than North Korea's communist dictatorship in terms of human rights issues and the treatment of dissidents. Furthermore, for Ko's project of writing and revising women's history, it was imperative to record and insert the story of Im, a woman who defied male authorities and made the first step towards reconciliation between the two Koreas.

In exploring Ko's poetry on women's history, I have focused on individual portraits. Though she wrote about unnamed women carrying out daily activities as well, it is through the exploration of named individuals that she makes feminist critiques of patriarchal institutions such as marriage, prostitution, war, and politics. It is also in the well-known historical female figures that Ko finds her "sisters" who in turn lend their voices to her cause of overthrowing the patriarchy and empowering posterity, "the daughters of Korea," who will, the poet hopes, eventually realize this revolution. As we have seen, Ko's poems about the lives of women are explicitly political. She believed in a social revolution and wanted to find its driving force in women. To that end, she reclaimed, reread, and reevaluated women's lives.

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[278] Andrei Lankov, "Im Su-kyong—Then and Now," The Korea Times 17 June 2012.

Through her imagination, the courtesan poet Hwang Chin-i is no longer seen as a plaything of elite men and becomes a Korean Simone de Beauvoir questioning the oppression of women and dreaming of sexual revolution. The oppressed poet Yi Ok-pong is no longer a pining woman longing for her lover, but instead becomes an outspoken critic of the unfair social treatment of women as sex objects. The revered mother Sin Saimdang is no longer a graceful and dutiful matriarch boasting about her famous son, but is rather a cynic who challenges the traditionalists' mythmaking and idealization of women. The underrated poet Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn is no longer an unfortunate intellect born out of time, but is Ko's alter ego who dreams of creating a classless and genderless society through poetry.

Also through Ko's poetry, the forgotten freedom fighter Nam Cha-hyŏn is revived and reevaluated as a feminist rebel who abandoned traditional gender roles and participated in military activities. The lesser-known labor activist Kwŏn In-suk is revitalized as a beacon of hope for those female sexual victims condemned to suffer in silence. The political dissident Im Su-gyŏng is recast as the woman-Prometheus who defied the supreme male authority and brought the fire of hope to a divided frozen nation and lit the flames of unification. In presenting all these notable women whose life stories are often dismissed or misinterpreted by men, Ko began with the known facts and then moved on to recreate their stories on her own terms. In doing so, she sought to establish a kinship between these figures, the poet herself, and her female audience. Even though she highlighted the extraordinariness of these women, she also made sure to emphasize that they were especially extraordinary to the extent to which they influenced other women's lives. Through

her poetry, Ko wanted to write women's history, explore the possibility of connecting women, in the past and present, dead and alive, and transform the lives of both contemporary women and future generations.

CHAPTER IV

How Can Women Take Flight?: Retelling Androgyny, Madness, and Atrocity in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry

I. Introduction

In February of 2012, the prolific poet-novelist-literary critic Kim Sŭng-hŭi gave an interview to emerging American poet Ruth Williams, which was translated into English and appeared in Cerise Press's 2013 Spring issue. In the interview, Kim claims that "women writers who were awakened to feminism in the 1980's resemble one another, but at the same time they are different."[279] In other words, like Ko Chŏng-hŭi in the previous chapter, Kim came out as a consciously feminist writer in the late 1980s, dealing with such issues as societal gender inequality and the importance of writing and revising women's history. However, unlike Ko, who tried to trace the roots of feminism in East Asia, Kim has manifested a great interest in global networking, often forming a literal and imaginary bond with writers and intellectuals, both men and women, Western and non-Western. Moreover, unlike Ko, who wrote poetry with socialist feminist concerns in a straightforward manner, Kim has written poetry about women and gender in a more abstract manner with a (post-) modernist and philosophical slant.

In addition, she, like Ko, is often considered "a guerrilla feminist,"[280] but the two poets' position toward feminism is significantly different. Ko focused on the

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[279] Ruth Williams, "Poetry Chants at the Moment When Water Evaporates: An Interview with South Korean Poet Kim Seung-Hee," trans. S.B. Cerise Press: A Journal of Literature, Arts & Culture 4 (2013).

[280] Williams, "Poetry Chants."

urgency of disseminating feminist ideas in Korean society while overlooking the complexity of feminism as an ideology in the Althusserian sense. Kim has publicly acknowledged her discomfort in freely using the term "feminism." Despite her numerous "feminist" writing pieces including poetry, fiction, essays, and literary criticism, she confesses that she is "not an activist" and opposes "[defining] the world by applying an ideology such as feminism" because "it places shackles on us."[281] Nevertheless, she has had to rely on a feminist approach because it enables her to investigate the pervasive operations of patriarchal ideology.[282] In other words, through "the eye of a woman" and "the voice of a woman" in her poetry, she examines "the patriarchal, masculine, and oppressive reality of Korean society," searches "for its invisible elements—those that are tarnished and hidden under the disguises of culture," and makes "them appear in front of us."[283]

Overall, Kim's statement about feminism in the interview is significant for two reasons. First, it suggests the importance of recognizing different types and degrees of feminism among Korean women writers. Kim Sŭng-hŭi (1952-) is often

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[281] Williams, "Poetry Chants."

[282] I would also like to point out that despite her discomfort with feminism, many critics have taken a feminist approach to her work. For example, see Ch'oe Mun-ja, "90-yŏndae yŏsŏng si e nat'anan ŏdum ŭisik t'amgu" [The Study of the Consciousness of Darkness in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry], Tonam ŏmunhak 14, (2001); Kim Ŭn-hŭi, "Kang Ŭn-gyo, Kim Sŭng-hŭi si ŭi yŏsŏng sinhwajŏk imiji yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Mythical Images of Women in the Poetry of Kang Ŭn-gyo and Kim Sŭng-hŭi], M.A. thesis (Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo, 2007); Ku Myŏng-suk, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan yŏsŏng ŭisik" [Women's Consciousness in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Asia yŏsŏng yŏn'gu 36 (1997); Pak Yŏng-gŭn, "Yŏksa wa hyŏnsil, kŭ kot'ong ŭrosŏŭi chonjae" [History, Reality, and the Painful Existence], Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng 111 (2001); Yi Hyŏn-jŏng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si yŏn'gu" [A Study of Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Sŏngsin ŏmunhak 9 (1997); Yi Myŏng-hŭi, "Hyŏndae yŏsŏng si e nat'anan kojŏn sok yŏsŏng sinhwa ŭi chŏnbok jŏk yangsang" [The Subversive Aspects of Traditional Female Myths in Modern Women's Poetry], Onchihakhoe 32 (2012).

[283] Williams, "Poetry Chants."

grouped with other women poets such as Ko Chŏng-hŭi (1948-1991), Ch'oe Sŭng-ja (1952-), Yi Yŏn-ju (1953-1992) and Kim Hye-sun (1995-) under the umbrella term "radical feminism."[284] However, the kind of feminism she pursues and the degree of her engagement are not necessarily identical with those of the others. Like them, she attacks patriarchy in her poetry, but unlike them, she is explicit about the influence of male writers, thinkers, and artists on her work, and about her identification with Western female figures. Second, it publicly acknowledges feminism as a heavily loaded term. In Korea, the foreign term "feminism," which is generally translated into Korean as "yŏsŏngjuŭi" or transliterated as "p'eminijŭm," has not been necessarily loaded with the same negative connotations as it has in the West.[285] However, being aware that feminism—like liberalism, socialism, fascism, and nationalism—is one of the modern political ideologies that "are complex structures of discourse which carry immense amounts of inherited, interwoven baggage"[286] and that "do not stand side by side with something objective or real,"[287] Kim warns of the danger of blind adherence. Although she is not completely free

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[284] Brother Anthony of Taize concisely sums up the achievement of these "feministic confessional poets." See Brother Anthony, "Preface," Walking on a Washing Line: Poems of Kim Seung-hee, trans. Brother Anthony and Lee Hyung-Jin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2011) x-xi.

[285] It is also worth noting that as in the case of Ko, some feminists who arose in the late 1980s and the early 1990s did question the dominance of the "Western, white, middle-class feminism" that neglected so-called "Third World" women's struggles. Also, I use the term "Third World" following Chandra Talpade Mohanty: "Geographically, the nation-states of Latin America, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, China, South Africa, Oceania constitute the parameters of the non-European Third World. In addition, black, Latino, Asian, and indigenous peoples in the United States, Europe, and Australia, some of whom have historic links with the geographically defined Third World, also refer to themselves as Third World peoples." See Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003) 47.

[286] Andrew Vincent, Modern Political Ideologies (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992) 20.

[287] Vincent 21.

from ideologies in general, and feminism in particular, as we will see, she makes great efforts to go beyond littérature engagée, or committed writing, by blending the political with the lyrical and the personal, and by framing the "woman question" in the context of questioning institutions and discourses.

With these observations in mind, I will look at how Kim relates her life story and how she rewrites women's history. Overall, like Ko, she presents individual portraits of women in many of her poems. Yet, in contrast to Ko, who mainly focuses on her Korean literary and historical predecessors and contemporaries, Kim identifies a wide variety of women as her "sisters": the goddesses Diana and Aphrodite, fictional characters Ophelia and Nausicaa, writers Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton and Na Hye-sŏk, painters Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keeffe, and dancers Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi, Kong Ok-chin and Anna Pavlova. Also, while Ko devotes much space to the details of her subjects' stories in lengthy poems, Kim assumes readers' knowledge of these female figures and thus either simply refers to their names or briefly sketches out their history. More importantly, she does so while blending her own stories with theirs, blurring the boundaries of the poet and her subjects. Often, they become one, as is clear in her assertion that "they are a part of me which I call 'intersubjectivity,' formed by a poetic 'intertextuality' that transcends history and space."[288]

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[288] Ruth Williams, "Poetry Chants at the Moment When Water Evaporates: An Interview with South Korean Poet Kim Seung-Hee," trans. S.B. Cerise Press: A Journal of Literature, Arts & Culture 4 (2013). Also, for a scholarly work that has touched upon the subject of sisterhood in the poetry of Kim, see Yi Hyŏn-jŏng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si yŏn'gu" [A Study of Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry]. Sŏngsin ŏmunhak 9 (1997): 219-21.

In terms of the mode of her poetry, it is much closer to that of Kim Myŏng-sun, which is confessional. In the same interview, Kim Sŭng-hŭi reveals:

> Fundamentally, my poems are pieces of confessional literature. The inner part of the self in crisis is exposed via exaggeration and dysphemism. As I once said in 1995, writing a poem is like committing suicide in vain. It is a rebirth in a world filled with sin and gloominess, by way of poetic language. When writing poems, I feel that I am transported to a free and weightless world from a repressed and heavy reality.[289]

What is worth noting in this proclamation is that her work does not neatly fit into the traditional confessional poetry that David Perkins defines as "[rendering] personal experience or emotion as it actually is, regardless of social conventions."[290] In other words, although her poetry reveals many autobiographical elements—especially "the self in crisis," her "confession" does not simply mean unmediated, straightforward, and real.

By employing the carefully devised language of "exaggeration and dysphemism," I would argue, she defies any easy conflation or collapse between the poetic speaker and the poet herself. Moreover, by inserting and interweaving her personal history and experience into those of other women and men, the poet challenges the assumption of the biographical relevance in the confessional mode. In addition, I view "the confessional" in her poetry as related to "the political," based on her argument that women poets' inclination for confessional poetry in the 1980s

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[289] Williams, "Poetry Chants."

[290] David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987) 588.

was part of their effort to move from "feminine poetry" toward "feminist poetry."[291] I will look at specific examples after providing a biographical sketch based on "the most reliable information"[292] from The Poetry of Freedom for Freedom (Chayu rŭl hyanghan chayu ŭi sihak), a first and concise monograph on the poet published in 2012.

II. The Life Story of Kim Sŭng-hŭi

Kim Sŭng-hŭi was born on March 1, 1952, in Kwangju, South Chŏlla to Kim In-gon, a civil servant, and Chŏng Kyŏng-mi, a schoolteacher, and was the oldest of five children. She entered Sŏ-sŏk Elementary School in Kwangju in 1958, and one day when she accompanied her father to a barbershop, Yi Hye-wŏn reports, she saw a framed picture with a poem called "Invocation (Ch'ohon)" by one of the most important and esteemed poets of twentieth-century Korea, Kim So-wŏl (1902-1934). Reading the poem awoke her interest in poetry, and when she was in fourth grade, she won first place for a poem called "Tree (Namu)" in a writing contest.[293] In 1964, she entered South Chŏlla Girls Middle School and became fascinated with Yi Sang (1910-1937), another celebrated Korean poet of the early twentieth-century, after reading his poem "The Cliff (Chŏlbyŏk)." As a child, she spent most of her time

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[291] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, "Siŭi hyŏngmyŏng kwa sijŏk hyŏngmyŏng: simmijŏk abanggarŭdŭ wa 'onmon ŭi si' rosŏŭi abanggarŭdŭ" [The Revolution of Poetry and the Poetic Revolution: The Aesthetic Avant-Garde and the Avant-Garde as 'The Poetry of the Body'], Han'guk sihak yŏn'gu 20 (2007): 31.

[292] Yi Hye-wŏn, Chayu rŭl hyanghan chayu ŭi sihak [The Poetry of Freedom for Freedom] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2012) 11. According to Yi, at her request, Kim Sŭng-hŭi provided a chronological listing of her life and works.

[293] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 32-33.

with books, and especially enjoyed reading what her mother liked, such as essays by Yi Ŏ-ryŏng (1934-) and the novels of Pak Kyŏng-ni (1926-2008).[294]

In 1967, she moved to Seoul where she attended Sungmyŏng Girls High School and during this time she was absorbed in Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism. She also devoured the books popular at that time, such as Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil, Dostoyevsky's "Notes from Underground," Luise Rinser's Middle of Life, Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy and Heidegger's What is Philosophy?.[295] Her reading list reveals that she developed, early on, a keen interest in the modernist movement and also in the insights into the depths of the human condition reflected in literature and philosophy of the West. Her passion for Western literature and thought, which would later influence her poetry to a great degree, continued and she began her college training in 1970 at Sŏgang University with a major in English Literature. She made her literary debut in 1973 by winning first place in poetry for the Kyŏnghyang Daily Newspaper Literary Contest with a poem called "The Water in the Picture (kŭrim sok ŭi mul)." While working for the magazine Munhak sasang in 1975, she came to know the intellectual circle of Korean writers such as Yi Ch'ŏng-jun, Ch'oe In-hun, Cho Se-hŭi, Chŏng Hyŏn-jong, Hwang Tong-gyu, and Kang Ŭn-gyo.

On October 24, 1977, Kim married Pak Hong-T'ae, who was then pursuing graduate studies in Seoul National University's Philosophy Department. She also began graduate studies in Korean poetry at Sŏgang in 1979 and her first collection of poetry, A Mass for the Sun (T'aeyang misa), was published the same year. She

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[294] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 33.

[295] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 33.

earned an M.A. in 1981 with a thesis on the symbol of the mirror in the poetry of Yi Sang, a favorite poet of her youth, who became a steady topic of her studies, resulting in The Thirteenth Child Is Also In A Critical Condition: Critical Biography of Yi Sang and His Collected Poetry (Che sipsam ŭi ahae to widok hao: Yi Sang si chŏnjip p'yŏngjŏn) in 1982. She also received a Ph.D. with a dissertation on "Semiotics and the Speaking Subject" in the poetry of Yi Sang in 1992.[296] Therefore, I should make it clear that although her scholarship on Yi and his influence on her poetry are not a central theme of this chapter, he holds a place as important as that of her "sister" poets in her work. In particular, one can easily trace the marks of his idiosyncrasies and mental disorders in the portrayals of her schizophrenic, melancholic, and suicidal speaker, whose stories are often interwoven with those of her doubles including Plath, Sexton, and Woolf.

The first woman poet to receive the So-wŏl Poetry Prize (1991), Kim has published, as of spring 2014, nine books of poetry, a collection of selected poems, a novel, a collection of short stories, and eleven essay collections, in addition to a number of books and chapters on Korean poets and poetry. Before taking up a professorship at her alma mater in March 1999, she spent several years in the United States, starting with a residency at the 1993 International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, where she interacted with poets and writers from around the world. During this time, she wrote her first short story "One Who Goes to Santa Fe (Sant'ap'e ro kanŭn saram)," which won the 1994 Tonga Daily Newspaper

[296] Further details about her educational background, see Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 34-36.

Literary Contest, and gave lectures and poetry readings in Chicago, Miami, San Francisco, Oakland, and Phoenix.[297]

She also taught Korean poetry and literature at UC Berkeley as a visiting professor from August 1995 to December 1997, and at UC Irvine as a full-time lecturer from January 1998 to January 1999. Yi Hye-wŏn notes that during her stay in California, Kim became fascinated with the West Coast's intellectually stimulating and liberal atmosphere and was deeply affected by the fact that those who were marginalized, especially African-Americans, women, and ethnic minorities, had a voice and were being heard.[298] It is also during this period that she developed interest in the relationship between modern Korean history and the lives of Korean Americans,[299] the issues her prose work most often deals with. The result of her experiences in California is A Bird Whose Left Wing Is A Bit Heavy (Oentchok nalgae ka yakkan mugŏun sae, 1999), a novel about the lives of migrants and minorities, and "The Story of the Thirteenth Month (13-wŏl ŭi iyagi)," a short story about the 1992 LA Riots. While her poetry rarely makes direct reference to the problems of Korean-ness in the U.S. or events occurring in Korean-American communities, many of her poems nonetheless refer to the issues of identity crisis. Most importantly to this study, it seems that her stay in the United States made her a more aggressive feminist.

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[297] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 38.

[298] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 40.

[299] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 40.

Since her return to Korea to teach in the Korean Literature Department at Sŏgang University in 1999, she has written extensively on women and literature, as well as on Korean poetry in general. Men Do Not Know (Namjadŭl ŭn morŭnda), which was published in 2001, explores the questions of women, woman-ness, and women's literature while explicating poems by Korean and Western women writers from a feminist perspective. The Story of Women by Kim Sŭng-hŭi and Yun-sŏk-nam (Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Yun-sŏk-nam ŭi yŏsŏng iyagi), published in 2003, is a collection of essays about what it means to be a woman. There Is An Island Called Nevertheless (Kŭraedo ranŭn sŏm i itta, 2007), which gathered a series of essays she had written for a newspaper from Oct. 2003 to May 2004, along with her old and new poems, shows that despite the anger and frustration women go through due to social constraints, they "nevertheless" live on thanks to the power of love and compassion. In recognition of her feminist endeavor and creative talent, she received the 2003 Ko Chŏng-hŭi Award.

Having looked at her life and work, I would argue that as she claims, she may not be an activist in the sense of one who takes to the streets and protests for women's rights, but she has nevertheless participated in feminist activism, whether consciously or unconsciously, through her poetry and prose, which expose the shared oppression of women and which promote social change toward gender equality. In addition, it is worth noting that although she was not directly involved with the Alternative Culture (AC) Organization like Ko was,[300] Kim supervised and

[300] Kim Sŭng-hŭi published her poems in Alternative Culture, the literary magazine published by AC Press, but it seems that she was not an active member of the organization. See Tto Hana ŭi Munhwa

wrote an epilogue to The Collected Poems of Ko Chŏng-hŭi (Ko Chŏng-hŭi si chŏnjip) when it was published by the AC Press in 2011 and has actively promoted the poet's works. Despite her political ambivalence towards feminism, Kim, being educated during the vibrant second wave feminist movement, has been a poet consciously and continuously working towards establishing sisterhood and challenging the inequalities of the patriarchal system. In her evolution as a poet, she has become more engaged with the social and political climate. However, as we will see in the following sections, her poetry never becomes like Ko's socialist feminist chant calling for revolution, but remains like the lyric poetry of Kim Myŏng-sun, though in a much more sophisticated and darker way. In what follows, I will demonstrate how Kim Sŭng-hŭi destabilizes the patriarchal system and dreams of poetic revolution through the portrayal of her self-identity as an androgynous dreamer, a suicidal madwoman, and a philosophical social commentator.

III. Androgyny: Kim's Overcoming of Sex and Gender Duality

In this section, I will examine how Kim constructs her persona as androgynous, rather than specifically and essentially female. Her inclination for androgyny is important in understanding both her discomfort with feminism's tendency toward exclusionist and separatist positioning, and her simultaneous feminist stance of unsettling "patriarchal ideas of sex and gender."[301] Some critics

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Tongindŭl, Yŏsŏng haebang ŭi munhak [The Literature of Women's Liberation: Alternative Culture] (Seoul: Tto hana ŭi munhwa, 1995).

[301] Cristina Liquori, "Woolf, Le Guin, and Winterson: Androgyny as a Literary Strategy in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing," The Psychology of Love, ed. Michele A. Paludi, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012) 183. Liquori in the same essay explains the effectiveness of androgyny as a feminist

have dealt with this topic, but as Ku Myŏng-suk states, they often emphasize that the poet, "despite being a woman, seems to distance herself from femaleness" or "femininity" by revealing her "untamed passion" and writing about "masculine subject matter."[302] I differ slightly from these critics in that my reading underscores that Kim's emphasis lies on deconstructing a fixed identity rather than prioritizing one gender over another. In addition, those critics who examine her androgynous characteristics often begin their analysis with her two collections of poetry published in the 1990s—How Can I Get Out? (Ŏttŏk'e pak ŭro nagalkka) and The Heaviest Struggles in the World (Sesang esŏ kajang mugŏun ssaum)—, thereby ignoring her earlier works. By starting with her first collection A Mass for the Sun, I show that her transgression of gender boundaries began early in her writing career.

In this collection which critics often regard as "too foreign and exotic" for Korean readers,[303] Kim identifies her poetic self first as a sister to the androgynous figure Diana and then as the goddess herself. For instance, she begins the second poem of the collection, "A Sun Hunter," by invoking the goddess. The poetic speaker calls out: "Sister Diana,/ hitch the horses to the chariot. / It's a nice day, let's go

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mode of expression: "Because the normative cultural binaries of sexual identity are patriarchal, disrupting these binaries is in the interest of feminist writers. As opposed to men, who see androgyny as a weakened state tainting their masculinity, there is potential in the androgynous state of women. Disrupting hegemonic ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality is part of the feminist agenda in order to unsettle women's inferior position in the patriarchal system" (175).

[302] Ku Myŏng-suk, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan yŏsŏng ŭisik" [Women's Consciousness in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Asia yŏsŏng yŏn'gu 36 (1997) 33.

[303] Yi T'ae-dong, "Yesul ŭi chip kwa sŭmul-yŏdŏl pŏn ŭi yŏrŭm" [The House of Art and Twenty-Eight Summers], T'aeyang misa [A Mass for the Sun], Kim Sŭng-hŭi (Seoul: Koryŏwŏn, 1979) 109.

hunting."[304] After also summoning the nymphs as well as the young Mozart, with the help of her "sister," she then chases and captures her target: the sun. She happily reports their success in the last stanza: "On the chariot ride home/ is the hair of the sun" (MS 21). On the surface, the poem portrays the idyllic natural world with the enchanting insertion of the mythological figure, the goddess of the hunt, generally depicted as "armed with bow and arrows."[305] However, on a deeper level, it deals more complexly with the theme of the poet's androgynous identity as well as her creativity.

The Greek myth tells that Apollo and Diana are "the twin offspring of Zeus and the Titan Leto" and "the gods of the sun and moon."[306] What the hunter in the poem pursues is then not simply the sun in a general sense, but Diana's twin brother, a fact which is substantiated by her invocation of "the young Mozart," who wrote the opera Apollo et Hyacinthus when he was eleven years old.[307] By reinforcing Kim's kinship ties with Diana and her subsequent possession of Apollo, I would argue, the

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[304] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, T'aeyang misa [A Mass for the Sun] (Seoul: Koryŏwŏn, 1979) 20. Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation MS. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. I have consulted the two translated volumes of Kim's selected poems, but they focus more on her later poems than on her early ones that I examine here. The two volumes are: I Want to Hijack an Airplane: Selected Poems of Kim Seung-hee, trans. Kyung-nyun Kim Richards and Steffen F. Richards (Paramus, NJ: Homa, 2004); Walking on a Washing Line: Poems of Kim Seung-hee, trans. Brother Anthony of Taize and Lee Hyung-Jin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2011).

[305] Mark P.O. Morford, Classical Mythology (New York: Longman, 1985) 141.

[306] "According to the ancient Greeks, Apollo and Artemis, the twin offspring of Zeus and the Titan Leto, are the gods of the sun and moon. As sun god, Apollo carries the epithet Phoebus, or "shining one," and his twin Artemis is Phosphoros, or "bearer of light." Known for their skill as archers, Artemis is also the goddess of the hunt and her twin is the hero who slays the monstrous dragon Python with his silver arrows." See Lorena Laura Stookey, Thematic Guide to World Mythology (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004) 194.

[307] Mark P.O. Morford, Classical Mythology (New York: Longman, 1985) 581.

poem synthesizes feminine and masculine symbols, simultaneously revealing the dual character of her as androgynous poet.

What is more, in the third stanza we learn that her pursuit of the sun is also related to poetic composition:

> I know,
> when I enter into the composition of eternal darkness,
> the wilderness, which always appears again
> out of white waves, black waves, and blue waves.
> I know and will endure
> a sterile consciousness's conifer needlelike leaves
> and a sound of darkness that will persist perpetually.
> I'll shoot an arrow and I'll light up. (MS 20-21)

The stanza represents the poet's state of writing in and through darkness and her constant anxiety and agony of lacking in creativity. In other words, what agonizes her is not just the solitude and darkness in which she is placed, but the wilderness of sense and sterilization of imagination she faces when she begins to write. She seems, though, not in complete despair. She knows her fate as a poet: to endure the unbearable pain of walking through eternal darkness[308]; to go through the anxiety of filling in blank until she sees the light and gives birth to a poem. This is reflected in the last line of the final stanza: "the shining hunting song, my song."

To produce her song, then, she needs the powers of both Apollo, the god of the sun, light, and music, and Diana, the god of the moon and the hunt. As above,

[308] It reminds one of Percy Bysshe Shelley's statement from "A Defense of Poetry": "A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen magician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why." See The Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and Their Contemporaries, ed. David Damrosch (New York: Longman, 1999) 699.

darkness, which is typically considered one of Diana's realms,[309] causes the poet angst, but it is also the origin of her poetry. After all, Diana is the goddess of childbirth, reminding one of the nexus between creativity and childbearing. She is also the goddess of the moon, which, as John Fiore explains, "shines through the darkness and mingles with it, offering cool illumination without dispelling the mysteries of the night."[310] Furthermore, as depicted in the second stanza, when the poet-speaker approaches the sun, it appears murderous with strong and desiccating power. However, it is also the sun that lights up the darkness. As a result, it is not only Diana but also Apollo, often described as "warm and emotionally expressive,"[311] that eventually make her song shine.

Just as the twin gods, an androgynous trope, are "at once each other's opposite and complement,"[312] the poem shows that the speaker's pursuit of androgynous unity—male and female; masculine and feminine—is not deleterious but rather desirable. The most explicit revelation of her androgynous characteristics appears in the last line of the third stanza when she declares: "I'll shoot an arrow and I'll light up." She does not invoke Apollo or Diana to do the work for her but rather transforms herself into the gods themselves. Moreover, considering that both Apollo and Diana are "known for their skill as archers" and the sun and the moon

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[309] John Fiore, Symbolic Mythology: Interpretations of the Myths of Ancient Greece and Rome (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club, 2001) 108.

[310] Fiore 108.

[311] Fiore 108.

[312] Fiore 108.

are both "bearer of light,"[313] this line shows that the "I" can be either Apollo or Diana or both, which then illustrates the poet's deconstructing and overcoming of the gender boundaries, consequently highlighting sexual undecidability.

Kim's invocation of deities that symbolize androgyny continues throughout the collection. In "The Benevolent Spirit of the Passion Flower," for example, she calls up Selene, another lunar goddess who is often identified with Artemis/ Diana, and whose brother Helios is identified with Apollo. The center of this lyric poem, though, is not the female deity, but her lover, Endymion, who was considered "one of the most handsome mortals in all of Greek mythology."[314] In contrast to the previous poem, however, the poet-speaker does not identify with either of the gods. Instead she reveals her interest in and sympathy toward Endymion. She entreats Selene "not to make Endymion into a stone" (MS 76), alluding to the fact that the female deity, out of her "mad passion" for the charming mortal, asked Zeus to put him into an eternal sleep.

What is more, she goes one step further and takes on his voice in a love lyric titled "In Your Name—To My Endymion." She begins her soliloquy with a desire for her lover: "I won't be able to forget whose face this is/ even if you've gone a long time ago/ and are asleep on the other side of the village" (MS 79). She continues to portray her recollection of him in his haunting image, but by taking his place in the middle of the poem and weaving her story with the legend of Selene's "many

[313] Lorena Laura Stookey, Thematic Guide to World Mythology (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004) 194.

[314] C. Scott Littleton, ed., Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology (New York: Marshall, 2005) 475.

nocturnal visits" to make love to Endymion sleeping "in a cave on Mount Latmos."[315] The poet writes: "Who is coming to me,/ tapping on the clear crystal window/ which no one knows?// [. . .] // But,/ to me,/ you appear clearly, even if you've removed everything, even your bones./ Like a dream, like a fairy tale,/ you are coming to this place/ to see me disguised as will-o'-the-wisp!" (MS 79-80). Recollecting her lover's visits, she transforms here into Endymion who can see his lover even in sleep. This cross-gender narration is one of the earliest instances to reveal her inclination for dressing as a man, which occurs often in her poetry.

Throughout her writing career and, in particular, before she started to produce consciously women-centered poetry in 1989, she has written many poems with a repeated affinity for male figures—mostly philosophers, composers and writers as well as some mythological characters. She declares, "I am the Mozart who is crying" (MS 78); she imagines having "a dialogue with Paganini" and Beethoven (MS 62; 52); she envisions her lone way to Bach (MS 63); she likes to invoke Mallarmé, Kafka (CL 138),[316] and Rimbaud, (CL 141); she quotes Dante (SU 199)[317] and reads Nietzsche (LE 22)[318]; and she turns into Yi Sang hailing his lover "Kŭm-

[315] Littleton 475.

[316] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Oenson ŭl wihan hyŏpchugok [The Concerto for the Left Hand] (Seoul: Munhak sasangsa, 1983). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation CL.

[317] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Miwansŏng ŭl wihan yŏn'ga [Love Songs for the Unfinished] (Seoul: Nanam, 1987). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation SU.

[318] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Ŏttŏk'e pak ŭro nagalkka [How Can I Get Out?] (Seoul: Segyesa, 1991). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation HC.

hong, Kŭm-hong!" (PB 46).[319] This type of bond with male intellectuals, one supposes, can be one of the causes for her discomfort with feminism, as reflected in her interview discussed in the introduction of this chapter. In looking at these poems, one cannot think of her as "a feminist" in the narrow sense of promoting the female voice and women's rights. I would argue, however, that her male personification is "feminist" in that it subverts gender dichotomy and also makes what is repressed in her emerge, i.e., the intellectual power which has long been regarded as male and masculine. In other words, it is a symbol of her ambition as a poet and intellectual, without gender marks.

Moreover, I consider her androgyny to not simply eradicate women discursively. Rather, as it becomes clear in her later poems, such as the "Soaring" sequence,[320] what she wants to obliterate is largely a fixed identity. She reveals her hybridity parenthetically in the following soliloquy as if whispering her secret thoughts: "(O, I can't help thinking I'm mixed blood./ There's a black dog inside me and there's also a white dog that is oppressing it)" ("Soaring, Part 3," HS 17). After unsettling the established hierarchy of humans over animals, and whites over blacks, she depicts the pleasure of her struggle against norms:

In order to savor a sweet power of scars

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[319] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Naembi nŭn tungdung [Pots Bobbing] (P'aju, Kyŏnggi: Ch'angbi, 2006) 78. Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation PB.

[320] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Sesang esŏ kajang mugŏun ssaum [The Heaviest Struggles in the World] (Seoul: Segyesa, 1995). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation HS. For analysis of the images of "soaring" in Kim's poetry, see So Chin-yŏng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan sujikchŏk sangsangnyŏk yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Vertical Imagination in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 26 (2011). In this essay, So asserts that "Kim Sŭng-hŭi's 'soaring' represents 'the flight of a being' which breaks away from the prescribed confinement of reality to search for true self" (214).

> I put a match to
> my long hair hung down my back, below my waist,
> and, like a witch burning at the stake jumping up and down,
> I bounce up and down, looking for a breed of bliss.
> The black dog inside me says:
> pre-cise-ly,
> this type of striptease of suffering,
> ISN'T IT THE ART OF THIS AGE? (HS 18)

Her adoption of the androgynous mode—taking on the male voice and thus negating "proper" sexual identity—can then be seen as an artistic production of inscribing scars on her body and deriving pleasure from destabilizing the marked gender opposition, as shown in this stanza.

Without transgressing the dominant idea that society imposes, she declares, we will become a part of that idea: "If we don't thrust and break down oppression/oppression/oppression/oppression,// it'll become an evil deed,/ and the evil deed,/ the evil deed,/the evil deed,// which we'll come to dread" ("Soaring, Part I," HS 12). In addition, without "breaking away from the cave," ("Soaring, Part IV—Getting Out of the Cave," HS 19), a place of comfort and security but also deception and illusion, which may allude to Plato's allegory,[321] one cannot jump over the barrier called oppression and "bring it down." ("Soaring, Part I," HS 13). In other words, if we do not dismantle, or at least shake, the normative thinking that consciously and unconsciously oppresses us, we will recreate the vicious cycle that generates further oppression, another cave. She then asks, "How can one hope to rise high/ without taking apart the colonial rule of the web," a web "woven by the fingerprints of the genes of inertia, oblivion, and submission, / inserted, like DNA, in

[321] Plato, The Republic of Plato, trans. John Davies and David Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1888) 235.

the blood of modern man" ("Soaring, Part V," HS 21)? To surge and soar, Kim urges us to arise from the numbing ennui, as Baudelaire did in "Au Lecteur (To the Reader)."[322] And, to exemplify her point, I would argue, she stands up to the negative values of passivity ascribed to women and instead seeks to work with the disruptive potentiality of androgyny in her poetry.

The figure that appears most frequently and prominently in Kim's poetry, a figure that displays her androgynous mind, is the sun, which is traditionally perceived as male and masculine. We have already seen her fondness for the solar symbol, but it was in relation to Diana and Apollo. In numerous other poems, though, the sun itself is the center of her attention, which borders on obsession. In a poem called "A Mass for the Sun," she declares: "I dare to dream/ the solar waves of enchanting particles/ will connect my life to the sun" (MS 98). Further, in another poem titled "The Sun Scripture," she consecrates herself to reach and possess the sun:

> Feeling guilty—,
> if unable to flare up,
> I'm a candle.
> Now that offering is ready,
> please set lovely fire to
> my wick—.
>
> [. . . . .]
> I lay down
> my naked self on the altar of fire.
>
> The candle made out of human flesh flares up like flowers.
> O, God, this is my worship,
> it's my contentment,
> it's my altruism. (CL 21-22)

[322] Charles Baudelaire, Les fleurs du mal (Paris: Gallimard, 1961) 33-34.

After the rite, she asserts: "One who is burning her spirit will become immortal/ and the sun belongs to her—" (CL 22). By using words with religious connotations, she makes sacred her attachment to the sun and her desire to connect with it. At the same time, these poems show the extent to which she is fixated on it. She seems even possessed with the sun god, and in fact, she pronounces her preoccupation as "T'aeyang pyŏng" (MS 101), literally "the sun sickness," the state of being ill because of her passion for the sun. Why is she then so obsessed with the sun? It seems to be more than the sun's supremacy among the heavenly bodies.

As she reveals in "Three Motifs," a short poetic piece in lieu of an afterword to her first collection A Mass for the Sun, one reason might be her belief in her vocation as a poet. She writes:

> I am 'the child of the sun' in exile. I am not sure what types of crime my ancestors committed to receive divine punishment, but my father, the Sun-God, threw me out of the winged divine stallion, and I was born at two o'clock in the morning as a banished spirit in this world. [. . .] And, I have chosen poetry. Thus, my poetry is a record of the Quest of a black spirit dreaming in a place of exile. (MS 100)

In this fantasy-driven piece, at once imaginative and playful, Kim recasts herself as a daughter of a solar deity. Her obsession with the sun, then, can be seen as her attempt to legitimate her calling.[323] Following the age-old definition of the poet—which goes back to Plato and Aristotle, who launched philosophical literary theory and criticism—as a messenger and imitator of the God and gods, Kim declares her relation to divinity. At the same time, however, she both destabilizes her self-image

[323] It is worth noting that Yi Ch'an-gyu, in writing about the French poet Arthur Rimbaud's influence on Korean women writers, shows the similarities between him and Kim Sŭng-hŭi in their particular affection for images of the sun. See Yi, "Arŭt'wirŭ raengbo sam kwa munhak" [Life and Literature of Arthur Rimbaud], Chakka segye 76 (2008): 287-88.

as a traditional emissary of pure poetry and dethrones her self as a virtuous poet, by presenting her as a condemned angel that has fallen to the earth and has elected to become a poet.

It appears, then, that the angel of her poetry is closer to the one in Wallace Stevens' famous "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," an angel without wings, an "angel of reality." In fact, her admiration for the American poet is evident in the epigraph of the collection: "Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,/ Since, in my sight, you see the earth again." As Stevens explains in his letter, the fact that "the angel is the angel of reality" is "clear only if the reader is of the idea that we live in a world of the imagination, in which reality and contact with it are the great blessings. For nine readers out of ten, the necessary angel will appear to be the angel of imagination and for nine days out of ten that is true, although it is the tenth day that counts." [324] Like Stevens, Kim insists on the nexus between the imagination and the reality: "The reality of this life is 'a bow' and fantasy is 'an arrow'" (MS 101). Both poets show that despite the power of imagination, it cannot replace reality, and also, as the literary critic Harold Kaplan puts it, reality must be "joined inseparably at one end of its apprehended existence with a 'fiction.'"[325]

Furthermore, considering Kim's and Stevens' frequent echoing of Platonic concepts in their poems, one can think of the reality as that which the prisoner in

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[324] Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966) 753. Also, see George S. Lensing, Wallace Stevens and the Seasons (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2001) 106.

[325] Harold Kaplan, Poetry, Politics, and Culture: Argument in the Work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2006) 128.

the cave in Plato's allegory[326] sees when approaching the sun. One can argue, then, that for Kim, the sun signifies the elusive reality she seeks to represent through imagination. And, writing poetry is a step toward the sun and toward bringing out the reality—the suppressed masculine Other of Kim herself, who is like "the sun locked up in the five viscera" which "howls/ and barks 'it's stifling!'" (CL 15).

After her early poems were criticized for abstraction, conceptualism, foreignness, and aestheticism, she started to incorporate more native themes such as a Korean creation myth, but the thread of androgyny carries on. According to the creation myth, also known as the Tan'gun legend, there lived a tiger and a bear that entreated Hwanung, who had descended from Heaven, to turn them into human beings. Hwanung "gave them a bundle of sacred mugworts and twenty cloves of garlic and said 'If you eat these and shun the sunlight for one hundred days, you will assume human form.'"[327] The tiger failed the test but the bear succeeded and became a woman who then wed Hwanung and gave birth to Tan'gun, the founder of the first Korean kingdom. The myth of Korea's origin has generated much attention and many debates, establishing the so-called Tan'gun studies[328] and spawning diverse interpretations. But, most pertinent and crucial to the reading of Kim's poems are the treatment and general perceptions of the two animals, such as this:

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[326] For Stevens' appropriation of Plato's allegory, see Thomas R. Flynn, and Dalia Judovitz, eds., Dialectic and Narrative (Albany: State U of New York P, 1993) 72-74; Harold Bloom, ed., Wallace Stevens (New York: Chelsea, 1985) 107.

[327] Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds., Sources of Korean Tradition (New York: Columbia UP, 1997-2000) 16.

[328] One of the most comprehensive treatise in English on the myth and Tan'gun studies is Hyung Il Pai's Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000). As for the Tan'gun studies, see Pai 67-78.

"The impatient tiger—who was to be the man—gave up and ran away. The patient bear became a woman."[329] Although the Buddhist monk Iryŏn's Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk yusa) at the end of the thirteenth century, which first recorded the legend, does not necessarily assign gender or characteristics to the animals, interpreters of the story commonly regard the tiger as a figure lacking perseverance and the bear as exemplifying endurance. As for the sex assignment, the consensus is that the bear is biologically female, shunning any homosexual connotation between the god and the animal, but there is disagreement over the tiger: some, such as Jean R. Renshaw, view it as biologically male whereas others, such as Edward A. Olsen, see it as female.[330] The tiger appears, then, to be androgynous in the interpretations of the narrative.[331]

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[329] Alison Peirse, and Daniel Martin, eds., Korean Horror Cinema (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP, 2013) 2.

[330] Edward A. Olsen writes: "On earth, in a cave, lived a female tiger and a female bear who prayed to Hwan-ung in order to become human. Only the bear succeeded and became a woman who then mated with Hwan-ung when he led a band of followers to Paektu Mountain." See Olsen, Korea, the Divided Nation (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) 10. Also, Sarah M. Nelson writes: "The Tangun legend is a creation story, involving a tiger and a bear—both female, and both wanting to become the mother of humanity (or perhaps just the mother of Koreans, this distinction not being made). The bear wins by perseverance and adherence to ritually imposed sanctions, and becomes the mother of Tangun with the aid of the God of Heaven." See Nelson, "The Politics of Ethnicity in Prehistoric Korea," Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: The New Pragmatism, eds. Robert W. Preucel and Stephen A. Mrozowski (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2010) 294.

[331] My reading that proposes to regard the bear and the tiger as a separate entity and emphasizes the androgynous characteristics of the tiger is different from general readings that treat the animals as one entity. For example, Kim Ŭn-hŭi argues that the poet does not separate the bear and the tiger but see them as the one, and that women organically had both the "bear"-ness (femininity) and the "tiger"-ness (masculinity) in them but they had to suppress the masculine tiger-ness to become a gendered woman (55). She continues to argue that the poet tries to restore the original state of women by highlighting the tiger's wildness (56-57). Also, another critic Yi Myŏng-hŭi shows a similar approach by arguing Kim's poems reveal "the union of anima and animus which are hidden in women" (89). As for Kim Ŭn-hŭi's reading that highlights "the recovery of women's original identity," see "Kang Ŭn-gyo, Kim Sŭng-hŭi si ŭi yŏsŏng sinhwajŏk imiji yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Mythical Images of Women in the Poetry of Kang Ŭn-gyo and Kim Sŭng-hŭi], M.A. thesis (Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo, 2007), in particular, 55-59; also, see Yi Myŏng-hŭi, "Han'guk hyŏndae si e nat'anan t'alsingminjuŭijŏk mosŏng: Kim Hye-sun, Kim Sŭng-hŭi si rŭl chungsim ŭro" [A Postcolonial Myth of Motherhood in Korean

Kim takes on the legend in her poetry, but only to overturn it by empowering and favoring the tiger, the androgynous figure that Korean history has denounced and neglected[332] over the eulogized and idealized bear. As in "The Tiger's Nipples" and "The Psychopathic Rabbit," the tiger is not a representative of impatience and failure, but a rebel, a nonconformist, and also an object of desire. Kim first recounts the story of a rabbit, a misfit "who just can't adjust to her era," remotely evoking John Updike's Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom saga:

> The rabbit that said 'I can't live a life like memorizing multiplication tables, I can't,'
> can't put up with her contemporaries
> without getting crazy
> (Right,
> who
> said
> 'The only political activity that I know of
> is psychosis?'
> Who? Someone.)
>
> Her nickname is a psychopathic rabbit. (HS 84)

In Kim's poetry, rabbits in general, as described in another poem "The Age of Rabbits," personify those who become docile and assimilated into the social system that dictates conformity. They are the ones who maintain: "What can you ask more than/ a secure job, a steady social status, and a guaranteed vacation?" (HS 80). In

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Modern Poetry: Focusing on the Poetry of Kim Hye-sun and Kim Sŭng-hŭi].Kukche ŏmun hakhoe 10 (2011): 89.

[332] I should make it clear that when I talk about the tiger in examining Kim's poetry, I am referring solely to the one in the creation myth. As in Tiger, Burning Bright: More Myths than Truths about Korean Tigers, a collections of "tiger stories handed down in many parts of the country," outside the creation myth which the collection does not refer to, it seems that "Tigers have always had a special place in the hearts of Koreans. Having had to share their habitat with the most terrible animal from time immemorial, Koreans have spun myths and tales around the animal that made it their friend, guardian and mentor." See Kathleen J. Crane Foundation, Tiger, Burning Bright: More Myths than Truths about Korean Tigers (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1992) 7.

this world where everyone speaks "the language of hypocrisy," claiming "[w]e like the blissful obedience more than the untamed creativity" (HS 81), the rabbit—which is unable to "put up with her contemporaries" and social conformity, like Updike's "young American family man [who] goes on the road"[333] escaping from responsibility—becomes isolated and labeled "psychopathic."

Tellingly, the poet reinforces the nonconformity of the psychopathic rabbit—that regards a life bounded by social rules as boring and systematized drills like "memorizing multiplication tables"—, by revealing her affection for a tiger:

> She loves especially a tiger.
> Sometimes wanting to burst out of the boundaries,
> the rage of her heart (O, there's still someone who can blaze up as if her red blood cells burst open!).
>
> Untimely,
> due to such untimeliness,
> she becomes labeled more and more
> a psychopathic rabbit.
> Facing the pain of being unable to go out,
> the tiger becomes the tiger with a capital T,
> and resides in her body.
> The Tiger becomes her body.
> One day
> the body
> will be ripped up. (HS 85-86)

As Larry Taylor points out in his reading of Updike's saga, a rabbit is "a delicate, skittish, unintelligent and untrainable little animal" that often "runs in circles."[334] Kim's female rabbit, epitomizing the poet herself, is also a small soft animal but she holds a tiger within. Her violent heart that tries to break out of boundaries implies

[333] John Updike, "'Introduction' from *Rabbit Angstrom*," John Updike: The Critical Responses to the "Rabbit" Saga, ed. Jack de Bellis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) 229.

[334] Larry Taylor, "From *Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral in the Works of John Updike*," John Updike: The Critical Responses to the "Rabbit" Saga, ed. Jack de Bellis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) 7.

the dissident and nonconformist traits of the tiger in the myth. Her defiance, however, is viewed as "untimely" as the poet claims, evoking Nietzsche's Untimely Meditations (Unzeitgemässe betrachtungen),[335] and the "untimeliness" is what makes her "psychopathic." Kim then depicts the growth of the tiger in the body of the rabbit as she faces both the classification of insanity and her inability to escape from the trap. Her frustration makes the tiger forming in her body the one with the capital T, the mythical figure signifying an aggregate of noncompliance. It is through the masculine ferocity of the tiger that the rabbit rips off her body, her confinement, and reaches freedom.

Kim's reliance on the figure of the tiger becomes more conspicuous and her attachment to the animal becomes even more intense in the poem "The Tiger's Nipples," in which she visualizes her desire to be a daughter of the tiger. She confesses:

> If I could have a wish right now,
> I'd wish to find the nipples of the devil and gulp down the milk I've
> been hungry for;
> I'd wish to rub against the glaring, hairy chest of
> the Mother Tiger expelled from the Tan'gun legend;
> I'd wish to consume the golden blaze of untamed primitive times
> and put on the glittering black and gold stripes of

[335] As Daniel Breazeale explains the terms "timely" and "untimely" by using Nietzsche's section on Strauss, "if Strauss's *The Old and the New Faith* can be described (as it is described by Nietzsche) as 'timely,' then Nietzsche's attack upon it has to be described as 'untimely'" (xivi). Breazeale continues to assert: "his perspective on the present is 'untimely' precisely because of his urgent concern with *the future*. Anyone as preoccupied as Nietzsche with the possibility of a new cultural rebirth has no choice but to be a 'fighter' not only against the past, but also against the present. (A similar point is made in the fourth *Meditation* in praise of Wagner's 'art of the future'.) Nietzsche's own *Meditations* are therefore 'untimely' because in them he presumes to evaluate the present from the standpoints of both the past and the future. But there is also, as already noted, a constant note of transparent irony in this use of the term 'untimely,' since the author believes that nothing is more needed by our own age—and thus nothing is more 'timely'—than precisely the kind of 'untimeliness' represented by these very texts, a point that is affirmed in the concluding paragraph of *Strauss*" (xlvi). See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations, trans. R.J. Hollingdale., ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997).

the tiger swallowtail, bustling, and fluttering. (HS 119)

On the surface, this stanza illustrates the poet-speaker's desire to materialize what has been suppressed, i.e., her untamed and untamable wildness, by sucking the milk of the bestial tiger "expelled from the Tan'gun legend." We can see here the similar desire to escape from domestication into wildness, which was also depicted in her camouflage, the psychopathic rabbit. And yet, what is especially striking is the poet's envisioning of the tiger as a mother figure. The picture of the Mother Tiger not only creates "gender trouble" in traditional views that see the animal as "the king of the beasts"[336] and "a military figure,"[337] but also destabilizes the normative reading of the creation narrative that recognizes the bear as the Mother of the Korean nation.

In other words, by adding the nurturing traits traditionally associated with femininity to the tiger often defined by ferocity traditionally associated with masculinity, Kim makes the animal an androgynous figure. In doing so, she questions the gender boundaries fabricated in the myth. Moreover, rescuing the tiger, "expelled from the Tan'gun legend," and offering the maternal entitlement, she suggests that it is not necessarily its lack of tenacity that leads to the failure to transform into a woman, but rather it is social history that has intentionally dismissed the tiger in order to suppress wildness and rebellion and to promote in women the bear's tameness and submissiveness. The poet's preference for the

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[336] Hyung Il Pai, Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000) 76.

[337] Pai 69.

rebellious and androgynous tiger over the obedient and feminine bear is especially remarkable considering many female scholars' touting of the bear.

A notable example is the decision the editors of an anthology of Korean women's stories made in choosing to title their work Daughters of the Bear, claiming that "In Korea today, the bear signifies tenacity, power, aplomb, guardianship, and transformation"[338] and "the legend of Ung-nyo [the bear-woman] embodies the Korean women's journey to actualization and our journey to record their stories."[339] The writer of Korean Women Managers and Corporate Culture also proudly reports that: "the persevering, enduring, and ultimately successful animal that became human, was female."[340] However, what these scholars dismiss is the fact that the bear's victory "by perseverance and adherence to ritually imposed sanctions"[341] can also be employed as the moralists' rhetoric that women should follow what society imposes on them, like their bear mother. The theologist Meehyun Chung agrees with this view when she argues that "this foundation myth requires more endurance and perseverance from women than from men. There is, therefore, a certain danger of tolerating injustice to justify and honour perseverance."[342] And, when the poet

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[338] Maite Diez, and Jennifer Mathews, eds., Daughters of the Bear: An Anthology of Korean Women's Stories, trans. Young-Oak Wells, Kenneth Wells, and Brother Anthony of Taize (Dallas: UP of America, 2004) xi.

[339] Diez xii.

[340] Jean R. Renshaw, Korean Women Managers and Corporate Culture: Challenging Tradition, Choosing Empowerment, Creating Change (New York: Routledge, 2011) 26.

[341] Sarah M. Nelson, "The Politics of Ethnicity in Prehistoric Korea," Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: The New Pragmatism, eds. Robert W. Preucel and Stephen A. Mrozowski (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2010) 294.

[342] Meehyun Chung, "A Different Motherhood for Mary," Weaving Dreams—Träume weben, eds. Chung and Elisabeth Miescher (Leipzig, Ger.: Frank, 2009) 71.

attacks myths which are "constructed by male chauvinism" in "The World of Marriage—To Hŭi-gyu in New York," we can find in the following line that she also condemns those women who blindly adhere to traditional stories: "strangely, even if there are many folk beliefs which are made for men/ and by men, it is women who are eager to advocate and disseminate them" (HS 132).

Significantly, Kim does not end by privileging the tiger to criticize the uncritical acceptance of the myth, but goes one step further to assert that the bear's triumph signifies sorrow to her descendants rather than bliss. In "Playing with Sorrow," she envisions "a mother" pregnant with her, and in her fantasy, the mother takes the role of a doctor while playing hospital with her: "Where do you ache? Where?/ The doctor then writes a prescription:/ 'Take for one hundred days/ mugwort and garlic'" (SU 76). The poem shows that the mother also imposes on her daughter what the Heavenly Being dictated to the bear in the myth, and the life of the daughter, the speaker "I," becomes depressing "because a mother called sorrow is pregnant with me;/ because I'm always eating mugwort and garlic" (SU 77). Viewed against the nonconforming Tiger-Mother, who gives positive energy to fight against oppression, the conforming Bear-Mother here seems rather negative and sinful.

Kim makes this clearer in "Love, Part 6—The Soliloquy of Hwanung,"[343] where she gives the voice to the celestial being, the husband of the bear-woman, and where he unabashedly reveals his contempt for her:

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[343] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Pitcharu rŭl t'ago tallinŭn usŭm [Laughter Speeding Away on a Broomstick] (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 2000). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation LS.

> Whenever his offspring takes a step against the will of the son of
> Heaven,
> Hwanung said:
> 'It is thy mother's fault.
> Thy mother is a beast I pulled out of the dirt,
> a hopeless creature,
> filthy and soggy, like the pitch-dark mud,
> which has nothing to do with the bright light in the sky.
> [. . . . .]
> I am the Son of Heaven who came down to rule the earth.
> I pondered for a while what to do with this accumulated mass of sins,
> the filthiest and the darkest of creatures.
> And, I imposed restrictions.
> Because I pitied her
> I tried to purify her body
> and to share the lights of Heaven.' (LS 26)

Echoing the story of Eve's fall into sin, which was considered to make her descendants sinners as well, Hwanung reveals a similar view of his wife, the bear-mother, as a bearer of the "accumulated mass of sins," which causes his offspring's disobedience. In addition to her original sin, he presents her wild, filthy, and dark sides as the pretext for taming her by imposing "restrictions"—which refers to the eating of mugwort and garlic and the shunning of the sunlight for one hundred days. By controlling and colonizing, or in his word "purifying," her body in this way, he claims he intended to "share the lights of Heaven," which signifies enlightenment and civilization. Betraying the title of the poem "Love," Hwanung's soliloquy is packed with condescension, repugnance, and disdain, thereby revealing a social double standard toward the mother of the nation. The poem shows the ostensibly lauded story of the bear in Korean history is a thinly disguised misogyny, and we need to deconstruct the story to discover the ideology behind it. Furthermore, I would argue that Kim ultimately demonstrates that socially constructed images of

mothers are crucial to the version of "woman" their daughters assimilate, and therefore urges us to choose the transgressive tiger-mother over the submissive bear-mother.

As we have seen in this section, Kim employs the androgynous or masculine figures, above all, in order to unsettle a fixed identity determined by sex and gender. By doing so, she also extends her discourse to make us become conscious of the so-called "world of 'Of Course'," a world in which everything is arranged "without question" and "without doubt" (HS 66). She tells us that because "there is the world of 'Of Course' when we wake up" and "the world of 'Of Course' is naturally created by those who are naturally qualified,/ those who are naturally capable/ and those who are naturally unquestionable," we believe without doubt that "the world of 'Of Course' is of course proper" (HS 66). And, the androgynous identity Kim has adopted in her poetry provides a way to break away from these conventionally accepted norms of behavior and morals. Put another way, for Kim, the androgynous figures who transgress boundaries and rise up, i.e., the self-overcoming, are like the "superman (Übermensch)," Nietzsche's ideal man who could rise above conventional moral traditions to create his own values.[344] However, as I will show in the next section, this radically transgressive poet, who reads Thus Spake Zarathustra at night eschewing sleep, pays a high price for her transgression, which is manifested in the form of mental illness.

[344] Robert Pippin, "Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," Introductions to Nietzsche, ed. Pippin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2012) 153; 158; 162.

IV. Kim's Madwoman and Suicidal Figures

In this section, I will explore how Kim constructs her persona as "the madwoman in the attic" to use Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's term. Interestingly, the recurring images, which Gibert and Gubar have found in their examination of the nineteenth-century Western literature by women, i.e., the images of "enclosure and escape," "maddened doubles" and "diseases,"[345] are also the ones we frequently encounter in the poetry of Kim. And, we can also observe those Western literary women's "impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement" in the Korean poet through her portrayals of suicide attempts and schizophrenic behavior. The death and madness which pervade her poetry serve as the outlets for her rebellious energy and wild imagination, as seen in the previous section, and for her frustration and depression caused by the patriarchal construction of ideal womanhood, as we will see in this section.

In the poems that illustrate her death drive and psychotic disturbances, Kim invokes and forms a sisterly bond with many imaginary and historical women. Among them are several main players who haunt her most often, and she calls them "The Cast of Ghosts." She calls out their names—"Marina Tsvetaeva/ Sylvia Plath/ Yun Sim-dŏk/ Na Hye-suk/Camille Claudel who died of madness/Frida Kahlo"—and confesses that "Always, they were closer to me" (PB 146) than any others. As the critic Yi Chae-bok points out, these women are "the ones who tried to break free from that which oppressed them and who even went mad or committed suicide for

[345] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) xi.

that cause."[346] Among these women who led a scandalous life and rebelled against patriarchal society, Plath is the most dominant figure and inspiring muse in Kim's poetry, which will be the focus in this section.

A most distinct feature of Kim's take on Plath's story is her interweaving of her own stories with those of the American poet. By doing so, she provides an unexpected twist to the life of and myths around Plath, rather than merely retelling. The earliest poem that makes allusion to Plath's death is "Making a Will." "To wash off sins/ which have filled my bones," Kim declares, "I am making a will" (CL 38). After "writing letter by letter with care and attention,/ while dipping my soul's pen/ into the potent poison cyanide-like ink," she depicts her preparation for suicide:

> I enter into the kitchen,
> seal every crack of the door with lacework,
> turn on the gas,
> and calmly lie down
> on the filthy kitchen floor.
>
> And after hammering nails, clang—, clang—, into
> my youthful body which is still so fresh,
> which so longs to live longer,
> I throw the hammer into the air.
> The shreds of my flesh are scattered,
> and my beloved blood, warm, pools like a sac of amniotic fluid. (CL 38-39)

When the speaker confesses that she is writing a will, we hear the voice of the "I," the poet, but when she starts describing her suicide attempt, we begin to see Plath walk into her life. Plath, born in Boston in October 27, 1932, took her life on February 11, 1963, after having suffered from depression resulting from the

[346] Yi Chae-bok, "Si hogŭn wigi ŭi mihakhwa wa mihak ŭi wigi" [Poetry, Aesthetics of the Crisis and the Crisis of Aesthetics], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006): 68.

infidelity of Ted Hughes, British Poet Laureate and her husband, and her subsequent ruptured marriage. Her biographer Linda Wagner-Martin summarizes the incident of her death as follows:

> Early on the morning of [that day], she knelt beside the open oven in the second-floor kitchen of her Primrose Hill flat and turned on the gas. She had left cups of milk beside the children's beds. She had put tape around the doors and had shoved towels under them to protect the children from escaping fumes. She had taken a quantity of sleeping pills, and had left a note, asking that her doctor be called.[347]

Kim never mentions Plath in this poem but we can see that her ghost lurks behind. And, considering that Kim, while at college, had read about the American poet's death,[348] and that her 1983 fictionalized memoir The Pensées of a Thirty-Three Year Old (33-se ŭi p'angse) was influenced by Plath's novel The Bell Jar,[349] we can safely claim that she was under the dead poet's spell.

In this and other poems where she identifies with Plath, she holds the dead poet's mask so closely that it often seems hard to distinguish the two. However, as in the stanza above, we can nevertheless recognize the living poet's voice through her sympathetic words toward the dead. In other words, as she imagines nailing her body into the floor, she highlights her "fresh" and "youthful body" which desires to "live longer" despite the intention of its possessor and we can see her taking pity on Plath's untimely death. Also, despite her fusing with Plath in the scene of suicide attempt, Kim deviates from her at the end of the poem. Unlike her predecessor, she does not completely perish. Remembering the moments of learning "the Korean

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[347] Linda Wagner-Martin, Sylvia Plath: A Biography (New York: St. Martin's, 1987) 243.

[348] Yi Hye-wŏn, Chayu rŭl hyanghan chayu ŭi sihak [The Poetry of Freedom for Freedom] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2012) 34.

[349] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan 37.

alphabets" from her mother and experiencing "the dreadful pain and gratefulness" at the birth of her first child wakes her up from her self-destruction. She writes: "I rise to my feet like a flash of lightning/ and open the window./ The moonlight is falling, like first snow./I pick up my skull,/ scoop up the moonlight, and gulp it down./ O, my life seems purer/ as if I were given Holy Communion after confession!" (CL 39). What comes after depicting her suicidal desire and envisioning the explosion of her body is her impulse here to elevate her troubled psyche to the level of piety and restoration. The enactment of suicide, i.e., verbally expressing a death instinct, for her, is then a remedial process. In the end, it seems, acting out death is celebrated and her poisoned soul is purified. The will she was writing at the beginning of the poem to "wash off sins" might then be regarded as a script of her performance.

In fact, in "The Night's Cooking" Kim makes the theatricality of suicide attempts even more tangible. In this poem, though, the speaker takes the role of observer. She begins by narrating her witnessing of a woman's suicidal act: "Inside the gigantic nickel silver pot/ is lying a woman/ whose face is covered with newspaper/ and whose whole body stoops depressingly like the chicken in the egg" (SU 99). As in Plath's death scene, the kitchen, traditionally perceived as a woman's space, is the site of her self-murder. Strangely, the woman seems serene, like a condemned convict waiting for her death sentence in a cell, represented here as a pot. This serenity soon breaks down as the poet starts to seem no longer a passive spectator, but rather an instigator behind the self-killing. As if electrified, she orchestrates the woman's suicide with enthusiasm: "Sprinkle gently/ with white

condiment/ and put on the lid!/ Turn the gas stove to high/ and bring her charnel house to a rolling boil!" (SU 99). As if stewing a chicken in the oven, she orders the woman's body cooked, turning the kitchen into a slaughterhouse in this theatrical scene. The speaker, out of her madness and excitement, becomes a double for the suicidal and silent woman herself.

After the climax of the spectacle of the diabolic murdering, just as in "Making a Will," a moment of catharsis appears in the final stanza. The poet-speaker observes the woman inside her finding peace: "She administers Holy Communion by herself/ and she received Holy Communion.// Sleep comes to her at last,/ and when the starving demon in the perennially starved stomach falls asleep,/ a dream appears;/ a peaceful world arrives" (SU 100). As in "Making a Will," drawing a comparison between commemorating the Last Supper and the woman's feeding her body and blood to "the starving demon," Kim makes a cult of the experience of dying. In fact, the speaker confesses that the suicide performance is "The arcane game of the death penalty/ which is carried out every night!" (SU 99), which reminds us of Plath's famous poem "Lady Lazarus," where she defines "dying" as "an art, like everything else" and "the theatrical/ Comeback in broad day," and where she proudly asserts that "I do it exceptionally well."[350] Both Kim and Plath defy the conventional notion of suicide: it is not a delightful act, but both celebrate, ritualize, and theatricalize it. Although Plath's suicide attempt eventually resulted in her

[350] Sylvia Plath, Ariel: The Restored Edition (New York: Harper, 2004) 15-16.

actual death, both women's acting out dying also seems to act as a survival kit[351]: mimicking the self-destructive impulse in order to keep it in check.

Despite the celebratory tone at the end of both of Kim's poems, however, something utterly eerie is lurking in her fascination with self-destruction. In particular, considering the fact that "'Lunacy' was originally ecstatic possession by the Moon goddess, which could bring revelation *or* madness,"[352] her persona's act of drinking the moonlight after the suicide ritual in "Making a Will" reveals the images of her insanity. Similarly, "the starving demon" that resides in her "perennially starved stomach" and lives on her idiosyncratic suicide ritual also unveils her disordered body and mind. In fact, the demonic figure in Kim's poetry is a symbol for lunacy as it is made clear in "The Song of a Lunatic Whose Monster is Trying to Jump out of Her Body": "O, the wailing mouth!/ I look into the mirror/ with my mouth wide open, revealing the uvula./ O, somebody or rather something,/ pushing the uvula upward,/ tries to jump out with all its might.// [. . .] / O, the blood-stained mouths/ from serving to purge sins!/ O, I'm going crazy quietly/ [. . .]." (CL 31-32). The monster is her double, a rebel inside her trying to come out, but because it has to be suppressed, it causes her to become insane and miserable. Therefore, one can sense that Kim's bond with Plath is not simply located in her interest in retelling the dead poet's suicide at the age of thirty that has become a myth. It is also Plath's discontent, derangement, and depression, as well as her struggle for self-

[351] In fact, Kim, in the poem "Like a Beast, Part I," confesses that "I have got more pessimistic/ after giving up the idea of / committing suicide, and now long to live like a dog,/ hearing the laughter of the velvet insignia/ and tittering always behind his [Mozart's] Requiem" (SU 66).

[352] Jules Cashford, The Moon: Myth and Image (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002) 286.

identity and liberation from man-made institutions, such as marriage and the laws, that serve as poetic inspiration for Kim.

The recurring themes in many of her poems, which tell us what drives her into insanity, depression, and suicidal crises, are as follows: her struggle with the cult of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood; and her feeling of guilt and horror when faced with the abandonment of her life's dream and the loss of her self-identity due to her compulsion to live up to the ideal of womanhood held by her society. Before analyzing these poems in detail, though, I would like to mention what Brother Anthony of Taize said in the preface of the translated collection of her selected poems: "she would certainly not wish her private life to be discussed here; the poems must stand on their own merits."[353]

I have previously referred to her memoir The Pensées of a Thirty-Three Year Old, but it is a reconstructed biography that tells her life events up until days before her marriage, especially focusing on her dysfunctional family dynamics and her fascination with Western literature and philosophy. Yi Hye-wŏn defends Kim's faculties by asserting that the publisher made a false claim about the poet's suicide attempts to stoke up interest in The Pensées based on her epigram "writing one poem is like one attempted suicide."[354] And, I would like to make it clear that my analysis does not intend to prove whether Kim's poems draw upon her own suicide attempts, or to reconstruct her pathological history, especially considering that

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[353] Brother Anthony, "Preface," Walking on a Washing Line: Poems of Kim Seung-hee, trans. Brother Anthony and Lee Hyung-Jin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2011) xiv.

[354] Yi, Chayu rŭl hyanghan chayu ŭi sihak [The Poetry of Freedom for Freedom] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2012) 37.

unlike the Plath case, there is no official document on Kim's case.[355] The amount of autobiographical detail she uses adds interesting and important dimensions in reading her poetry as confessional, but I am also aware that it is a work of art, where the real author, the implied author, and the poetic speaker coexist, and that the confessional mode is a well-conceived and effective literary device.

One of the poems that deal with the feelings of emptiness, depression, and dissatisfaction with the dullness of domesticity is "In Pursuit of a White Whale." Paradoxically, contrary to what the title refers to—i.e., Herman Melville's 1851 story Moby-Dick; or The Whale—the poem is set in the messy kitchen, not in the open sea; it is not an epic like Melville's that chronicles the saga of Captain Ahab's pursuit of Moby-Dick, but a lyric poem that tells a housewife's dreaming of the white whale while facing the ritual of doing domestic chores. Yet, what makes the poem extraordinary is precisely this irony Kim employs to intensify the narrowness of domesticity. The poet-narrator penetrates into the mind of the unnamed housewife while she is looking at the dirty dishes waiting to be washed: "She recalls/ the word 'domestic fowl'/ and also the word 'detention.'/ Because everyday life is like a floor made of glass panes,/ it's precarious for her to walk/ and it's perilous for her to move" (SU 172). This thinking woman bound into the gender roles feels ensnared like "domestic fowl," and the state of being detained makes an idea of revolt

[355] It is worth noting, however, that Kim said in an interview that reading Plath's novel The Bell Jar brought on impulse to suicide. She also stated that around the year of 1980 she witnessed "a death of her blood relation" and "the Kwangju massacre," and when she was working on her second poetry collection The Concerto for the Left Hand, she was haunted by these two deaths. See, Yi Yŏn-sŭng,"Kim Sŭng-hŭi siin kwa ŭi mannam" [An Interview with the Poet Kim Sŭng-hŭi], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006): 21. Also, "[a] death of her blood relation" mentioned in the essay above can refer to "a death of her child," based on the assertion the critic Ku Myŏng-suk makes, but she does not provide evidence. See Ku, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan yŏsŏng ŭisik" [Women's Consciousness in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Asia yŏsŏng yŏn'gu 36 (1997) 33.

dangerous. Thus, she retreats from revolt and falls into depression and paralysis as the narrator relates: "the woman has long forgotten/ what it means to live, or something like that" (SU 172).

Significantly, we soon learn that the narrator was looking at her own mind and she is the woman herself as the voice of the poem changes from the third person to the first. She satirically confesses: "I'm the most exquisite dancer of the world/ because I'm dancing and living on the glass floor with feet bound!" (SU 172). Recalling the Chinese ritual of footbinding,[356] she compares living and doing domestic work under oppressed society to dancing with physical pain and limited mobility. The only resistance available to her, it seems, is daydreaming and not complying with her duties: "until dawn/ I've dreamed of the white whale" (SU 174), she reveals, while looking at "the tap which does not stop flowing" and "white fungus growing/ on the dirty dishes" (SU 174). While the crippled Ahab hunts down Moby Dick to murder it for revenge, the poet seeks out the white whale in quest of freedom from domestic drudgery. A sink full of dirty dishes, as a symbol of domesticity, and her aversion to the mundane life very often appear in her poetry. Out of despair from coping with the same tasks every single day, she seems to envision the sink as the open sea. The poem reveals a sense of dejection, but it does not seem imbued with morbidity.

[356] It is important to note that the footbinding rite which "scholars say commenced in the period between the T'ang and Sung dynasties, spread like a cancer throughout China and into Korea. By the twelfth century it was widely accepted as correct fashion among the upper classes." See Mary Daly, "Chinese Footbinding: On Footnoting the 'Lotus Hooks,'" Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon, 1978) 139.

However, as we will see in the following two poems, her feeling of entrapment in the role of maintaining the home and the family quickly gives way to pathological depression. In "The Empire of 'Because Of' (ttaemun e wangguk)," Kim depicts the loss of her dream and self-identity due to her family obligations:

> When I was twenty-three, I was planning to study abroad in the U.S.
> but I couldn't because of my mother, because of my father, and
> because of my younger siblings.
> When I was thirty-three, I had a chance to travel to India
> but I ripped up my passport and travel document
> and threw them away on the Yanghwa bridge overlooking the church
> because of my stubborn husband and our newborn baby.
> There was always
> the 'Because Of,' 'Because Of,' 'Because Of'
> and because there was always the 'Because Of,' 'Because Of,' 'Because
> Of,'
> I sank again and again into the mire
> of immobility.
> [. . . . .]
> I was always depressed because of a persecution complex.
>
> Because I was depressed,
> my life became affected by housewife's eczema. (SU 124-25)

In this mini-biography, she tells us how being considerate of the needs of her family both before and after marriage led her to give up her personal aspirations. Like most women who are taught at home to conform to their traditional roles, she apparently did an excellent job living out the classic role of a filial daughter, an angelic older sister, an obliging wife and a devoted mother. To put it differently, reflected here as the repetition of "Because Of (ttaemun e)," family and society gave a justification for her submission to socially prescribed traits of femininity.

Although her compliance might have freed her from the burden of guilt—what would otherwise have made her guilt-ridden, her sense of diminution and her self-sacrificing renunciation had at the same time crippled her mind. She reveals her

discontent by describing her depressing unhappy life as being afflicted by "housewife's eczema," a skin disease that is caused by "continual exposure to detergents" or "having the hands in water too frequently"[357] and that occurs often on the hands of housewives. As in the previous poem "In Pursuit of a White Whale," her life here is also reduced to the task of domestic drudgery. Thus, confined in this way in the home, "the empire of 'Because Of,'" an inescapable prison, she develops and suffers from persecutory delusions: i.e., imagining she is the only one sacrificing everything for her family and everyone else is her persecutor. This affliction develops further into a more morbid disturbance of consciousness.

"Love—Untitled"[358] is one of the most chilling narratives on this subject. The speaker asks herself: "Shall I kill myself?/ If not, should I keep on going with/ this unhappy life?" or "Shall I get a divorce?/ If not, should I keep on going with/ this depressing marriage?" (LE 58). She then confesses: "I married because of hopelessness/ but I have doubled the hopelessness;/ I had children because of emptiness/ but I have doubled the emptiness.// What should I call 'you,'/ who keeps self-prescribing/drugs that have no effect?" (LE 58-59). To cure and fight against the overwhelming feelings of despair and meaninglessness, we can observe, she chose marriage and family, but she is now realizing that they have aggravated her condition, driving her into the borderland between sanity and madness, into an

[357] Lionel Fry, An Atlas of Dermatology (Pearl River, NY: Parthenon, 1996) 12.

[358] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Talgyal sok ŭi saeng [Life Inside an Egg] (Seoul: Munhak sasangsa, 1989). Further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will appear in the text after the abbreviation LE.

inner conflict where the splitting of the self is articulated.[359] We can also see the discontent, which the speaker's more rebellious "half-self" has, with her more conventional "half-self," the "you," that has been prescribing ineffective drugs. This is expressed in a self-mockery in the last stanza: "It feels like I'm an actor utilized for drug experiments,/ playing the role of a critically sick person,/ in the movie you are making" (LE 59).

However, we cannot tell what exactly goes on in her life, especially with regard to the ritual of marriage and childrearing, until we get to "Between Angel and Witch." The poem begins with a child calling out his mother:

> Mommy, Mommy,
> please be a Holy Mother,
> just like the good mothers of Korean traditional fairy tales!
> O, well, in fact, there's Lady Sin Saimdang!
> You should be a perfect lady like the Mother Sin Saimdang
> and feed me the milk of motherly love,
> never-ending, all your life. (LE 179)

Behind this seeming innocence of the child's plea is lurking the dominant ideology of motherhood. What the poet tries to do by employing the voice of the innocent child is, then, to satirize the social perception of mothering and motherhood. Significantly, Lady Sin Saimdang whom we saw in the previous chapter on Ko Chŏng-hŭi's poetry reappears here. The sixteenth-century woman best known for being the mother to celebrated Neo-Confucian scholar Yi I, and for being a shining example of the "wise mother and good wife" again serves as a model of perfect motherhood. But, as in

[359] The literary critic Kim Chun-o offers an existential approach to "Love—Untitled" while arguing that Kim Sŭng-hŭi's poetic speaker is "not a tragic character but an absurd one" and that the poet works through absurdity." See Kim, "Chaa, yŏksŏl, pujori" [Self, Paradox and Absurdity], Chakka segye 2 (1989): 366.

Ko's poetry, she is also the implied object of Kim's criticism. The child, a patriarchal figure in this poem, who has been inculcated in the socially engineered notion of the maternal duties, demands unselfish, self-sacrificing, and unvarying love from his mother.

When we move to the second stanza, we can now hear the husband calling his wife:

> Honey, Honey,
> please be a Woman Saint!
> You should be like a nurse who would give me drugs,
> like a prostitute who would offer me flowers,
> and like a healthy and strong maid who would create
> a happy bedroom for me, all the time. (LE 179)

Like the child, the husband draws upon the constructed image of a "Woman Saint," the one complying with his demands and domestication of her without complaints. And, through his fantasy of the wifely role, he builds a composite identity for her: a caring caregiver, a sexy lady, and a dutiful servant. In this patriarchal world, she not only becomes secondary in status, a supporting actress, but as the title of the poem indicates, she is reduced to the dichotomous image of either angel (the title she will get if she is conforming) or witch (if she is nonconforming). Moreover, when her life is given over to others, the poet tells us, the woman also ceases to exist and in the end becomes like "the still life in the frame" (LE 180). It is these circumstances reflecting her existential crisis that make her flirt with nonexistence, as we saw in "Love—Untitled," a love that has no name. It is also in these circumstances that she becomes obsessed with scrutinizing an egg, one of her favorite metaphors for a confined yet destructible world. Echoing the famous lines from Hermann Hesse's Demian—"The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be

born must first destroy a world."[360]—, the speaker in "Life Inside an Egg"[361] exclaims: "When I look at an egg,/ I could grasp:/ 'O, there exists someone/ who is waiting for liberation like that!'" (LE 101).

However, what is worth noting is that despite the recurrent images of domestic drudgery and desire for liberation, as well as the obsessive representations of oppression and its tragic result of madness, the poet nevertheless shows a strong and unique bond with her children.[362] In particular, she elevates her experiences (and, by extension, every mother's), of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare above the common level, rendering them dignified, sacred, and sublime. "The Statue of the Female Buddha," which echoes Erica Jong's "The Buddha in the Womb,"[363] is one of the best examples on this topic:

> It's not because I loved a man
> that I feel this pain.
> It's not because I had fleeting physical pleasure with a man
> that I feel this bitter suffering.
> O, women!
> O, women who are wailing, falling into pieces, whimpering, running riot!

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[360] Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, Demian, and Other Writings, ed. Egon Schwarz (New York: Continuum, 1992) 166.

[361] Many have written about the influence of Hermann Hesse's Demian on Kim's "Life Inside an Egg" sequence. See Ku Myŏng-suk, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan yŏsŏng ŭisik" [Women's Consciousness in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Asia yŏsŏng yŏn'gu 36 (1997): 51-52; Kwak chae-gu, "Ch'ukche wa kot'ong kŭrigo chayujuŭija ŭi kkum" [Festival, Suffering, and the Dream of Liberalist], Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng 65 (1989): 274-75; Sin Pŏm-sun, "Kabyŏun chonjae ŭi kamok kwa miro" [The Prison and Labyrinth of the Lightness of Being], Chakka segye 11 (1991): 275; So Chin-yŏng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi si e nat'anan sujikchŏk sangsangnyŏk yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Vertical Imagination in Kim Sŭng-hŭi's Poetry], Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu 26 (2011): 217; Yi Hye-wŏn, Chayu rŭl hyanghan chayu ŭi sihak [The Poetry of Freedom for Freedom] (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2012) 81-85.

[362] In an interview, Kim Sŭng-hŭi confesses that "before I gave birth to a child, I was not conscious of being a woman as a gendered other." One can then argue that for Kim, childbearing and motherhood have existential significance. See Yi Yŏn-sŭng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi siin kwa ŭi mannam" [An Interview with the Poet Kim Sŭng-hŭi], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006): 22.

[363] Erica Jong, What Do Women Want?: Essays by Erica Jong (New York: Penguin, 2007) 238-40.

> In this sacred white cave
> a man is nothing more than
> a trivial accident.
> Our act of screaming, like a beast, like a beast,
> ripping and tearing at our body,
> is like diving into the sea of the fire of the cremation
> to save the soul of the deceased monk. (CL 56)

The speaker of the poem, which has a subtitle "In the Delivery Room of Severance Hospital," describes the process of childbirth, apparently drawing upon her own experience. Significantly though, from the beginning of this long stanza, she repudiates a lowly association of childbearing with "fleeting physical pleasure with a man." She instead redefines the maternal performance by comparing it with the process of "cremation" and sacred rebirth. Further, she calls out all the women in labor, whose screaming, mingled with whimpers of pain, evokes the behaviors of beasts, to remind them that their "pain" and "suffering" is in fact like a lofty process of bringing back a deceased noble soul to life.

What is equally striking is that in depicting in the last stanza the stunning birth image of a child, she projects her own death, rebirth, maternal power and creative force. The speaker recalls: "Falling into a swoon as if in jouissance,/I think/ I've heard the sound of the Buddhist temple bell miles away rolling through far off the universe./ O, the sound of a baby—the first cry of the newborn baby" (CL 57). Exhausted due to the spasm which precedes the actual birth of child depicted in the first stanza, she falls "into a swoon," which signifies both a temporary death and the jouissance of combined pleasure and pain. She wakes up, however, upon hearing "the first cry of the newborn baby," her creation, against "the sound of the Buddhist temple bell," the divine and spiritual force. When the child is born, she is reborn as a

"mother-poet,"[364] suggesting the powerful connection between writing poetry and giving birth.

The sacred mother-child bond is sealed, as Erica Jong asserts: "The baby or the book? [. . .] The mother *is* the child and the child the mother, so how can there be any question of choice between them? How can you choose between two creatures that are one?"[365] Thus, even when Kim sardonically proclaims: "Love. When I think of love,/ I can't recall a loving family or a warm meal" in "The Diary of Peace, Part 4," she still, and in fact "only," recalls "the scar of the C-section / implanted on my belly, flowing across my abdomen" (LE 148). And, she continues to write: "In the desiccated scar of the wound, /looking burned and ironed out,/ always a galaxy of stories of suffering,/ *twinkle, twinkle*, / is writing lyric poetry of the universe" (LE 148). Like the screams and tears in her natural delivery, poignantly described in "The Statue of the Female Buddha," the mark of her surgical delivery here also provide her with an occasion for lyrical meditation, transforming the suffering only mothers can experience into the "lyric poetry of the universe." She does not necessarily idealize motherhood, but does reaffirm the unique mother-child intimacy as well as the creative power of the mother-woman.

Furthermore, "The Bactrian Camel" shows that despite her abhorrence for the domestication of motherhood which leads to her descent into madness, Kim also has a strong sense of responsibility for her children. She writes: "Hae-in and Wang-in/ have climbed up my back and are sitting on it./ Mom is a camel./ Even if she is

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[364] The term is coined by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. See Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 305.

[365] Erica Jong, What Do Women Want?: Essays by Erica Jong (New York: Penguin, 2007) 242-43.

sick or thirsty/she needs to walk, bearing a heavy burden/ on the hot sands" (LE 116). While describing herself as the two-humped camel carrying on her back her two children, Hae-in and Wang-in, she shows as in "Mister Mom" that the day of mothers is like that of "a war correspondent" (PB 79). Interestingly though, she seems to embrace the traditional values of the self-sacrificing mother, without much resistance. Moreover, she even goes one step further to wonder: "is it perhaps because of these two humps/ carried on my back" that "I can live on;/ I can keep on going without dying/ despite the symptoms of not just paranoia/ but depression, hysteria, and delusions of guilt?" (LE 116-17). The institution of motherhood, one of the causes for her mental breakdowns, ironically also provides her comfort and strength. Her love for her children is deep: her inner wounds are healed and her self-respect is restored because of her tenure as a mother. And, she unashamedly reveals her lifelong devotion to them, as if fearing the epithet "bad" attached to the mother who has failed to be a superhuman. How can one then explain this discrepancy between her satirical statement about the ideals of womanhood in "Between Angel and Witch," and her tender presentation about maternal duties here?

Before we judge whether she is a conforming mother and a contradictory person, it might be useful to look at "Institution."

> My child is painting a coloring book picture all day long.
> There are butterflies, flowers, clouds, and rivers.
> My child is afraid of coloring outside the drawing lines.
>
> Who has taught the fear?
> How does he know
> he shouldn't go outside of the lines?
> [. . . . .]

> If I were not a mom,
> I'd say like this:
> Smudge the line! Paint outside the lines!
> [. . . . .]
>
> I have detested institutions so much
> but Mom is an institution, too.
> O, I bind you with that which has bound me!
> I am that woman, a governor-general!
> Kill the Mom! La-la (HS 72-73)

Though written much later than "The Bactrian Camel," she is obviously aware of her own contradictions and dilemmas. As in "Between Angel and Witch," she sees traditional motherhood as an oppressive institution, but at the same time she seems unable to pull herself out because she is part of the very system. Like the child who fears to transgress "the drawing lines," the mother is afraid of overthrowing the institution of motherhood. While comparing herself with a governor-general who propagates colonial ideologies, she in the last resort proposes to kill the colonizing institution named "mother." To put it differently, being unable to destroy the social institutions that oppress her, she turns to murdering herself, merely a composite of constructed ideas.

The self-murder in Kim's poetry is then not just an act of literal killing of her own self, but also a killing of the traditional ideas and values of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood that have infiltrated her and shaped her identity. The nervous breakdowns illustrated in many of her poems are also not just the literal signs of her losing touch with reality, but also the representations of her anger against her inability to completely break out of the overarching system of patriarchy. Now we can return to our point of departure, Kim's identification with

Plath and her fascination with the American poet's death and mental disorders, and reaffirm that Plath is not just her poetic predecessor, but her double, "the incarnation of her own anxiety and rage" as well as her desire for "protest and revolution."[366] In other words, as Gilbert and Gubar famously put, "[it is] through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained."[367]

Just like Bertha, who "not only acts *for* Jane," but also "acts *like* Jane"[368] in Charlotte Brontë's acclaimed novel about confinement, rage, escape, and madness, Plath similarly acts for Kim, and acts like Kim in the world of her poetry in large, although the cause for such acting is different. Therefore, I would argue that the recurring image of Plath is not simply the symbol of pathology; as her double, Plath is a device for her survival, and a channel through which she communicates the unspeakable:

> You, somewhere,
> are about to die again at dawn of the day,
> after putting to bed in the room upstairs
> your pretty-haired daughter
> and your adorable son who's still sucking on his bottle.
> You are coming downstairs on tiptoe
> like an alley cat,
> and going down the stairs to the basement.

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[366] Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980 (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 4.

[367] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 85.

[368] Gilbert and Gubar 361.

O, my goodness, I hear the woman upstairs died last night!
They say she set out milk and got breakfast ready
on the table for her kids,
turned on the gas in the furnace room,
and was sprawled out like a dog, in her night gown. Can you believe it?
How horrible! Aye, aye, how horrible!
Drool, filth, vomit, all over the place,
O, dear, O no, how filthy!
Can you believe that she's the wife of a professor?

Whenever I wake up from sleep,
it feels like my corpse has already left,
always, like that, in the ambulance.
When I see myself having a messy breakfast
with my hair disheveled, I think
what one can do
at best in life
is to shoot a suicide ball to score a goal.
When I think about it during a sparkling midday when
morning and afternoon are spread out like a wrapping cloth,
dying is like pornography.
When I think about it, awake suddenly
in the middle of the night,
living is also like pornography.

Sylvia Plath!
Why are you asking about my well-being,
every night standing outside my bedroom window,
wearing moonlight-like black mourning clothes,
without going away for good and all?
When I think about it, lying with my two children at my side,
Sylvia Plath,
only the maxim that suicide and lovesickness have similarities
comes to mind, like the human immunodeficiency virus. (LE 172-74)

In "Sylvia Plath," a poem in memoriam, Kim once more narrates the suicide of Plath and the commotion arisen from her death in a theatrical manner. The first and second stanzas reflect on the details of the day she took her life, which we also saw in the beginning of this section, and yet they highlight her tender motherly love for her children. In addition, Kim also illustrates Plath's gossipy neighbors' reactions in an exaggerated fashion—"how horrible!"; "how filthy!"— as if she had committed

horrible violence, to show the moral assumptions following her death. In doing so, Kim presumably also envisions possible reactions to the self-murder, imagined or real, of herself, "the wife of a professor" in real life, as well as the social morality that has condemned her to commit suicide attempts.

The speaker's identification with Plath becomes much clearer as we move to the third stanza, where it shows she has been constantly dreaming of Plath and her own death. After her repeated reflections on the dead poet and her suicidal self, the conclusion she makes is nihilistic: living and dying are after all like meaningless "pornography." As I noted in the first section, Kim is staunchly Nietzschean and her nihilism should not come as a surprise. What is astonishing, however, is the fact that her nihilistic attitude turns not to self-annihilation but to the affirmation of life in the end. The last stanza reveals that the ghost of Plath, though wearing "black mourning clothes," in fact looks more like her guardian protecting her than an evil spirit snatching her life. From studying and reimagining the violence of Plath, her double, a violence as reflected in her life, poetry, and death, Kim experiences her own destructive anger and depression expressed and calmed. What the still agitating spirit of Plath injects into Kim's blood is not a death-inducing morphine but the replicating virus of life: ultimately, Kim compares suicide with lovesickness, longing for love. She turns to Plath not to die, but to live, to survive.

Similarly, we can read Kim's "Water Lily" poems not just as the ones about dead women, but also as the ones about sisterly bonding, or "co-feeling in the sense

of Milan Kundera."[369] As I have noted, she shows strong sisterly ties with those well-known mystical or historical women who either committed suicide or died of madness. Interestingly, a number of them are drowned women, as she exclaims in "Love 13": "Chang-hwa Hong-nyŏn, Sim Ch'ŏng, Ok-pong, Ophelia (O, dear, there are so many women who drowned!)" (LS 41). For Kim, these women, along with Nausicaa, Circe, and Aphrodite,[370] legendary female figures related with the sea, are her "historical sisters" ("Water Lilies," PB 51) who elicit her sympathy: "While living under the water/ it's not easy to rise above the water./ While bodies are heavy, hearts are heavier,/ so it's better to stay under the water" (PB 51). She speaks for the women who live or are forced to live "under the water" after drowning, and especially for those whose "hearts are heavier" because they are drowned by a broken heart, whether due to an evil stepmother's persecution, a filial devotion, social oppression, or distress caused by court intrigue.[371]

She speaks for them also because she believes that "there must be many women who fall into the water and drown/ at dawn when they suffer from nervous

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[369] Yi Yŏn-sŭng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi siin kwa ŭi mannam" [An Interview with the Poet Kim Sŭng-hŭi], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006): 35.

[370] Nausicaa: the daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete in Homer's Odyssey, and her name means "burner of ships"; Circe, a goddess of magic who lived with her wild animals on the island of Aeaea; Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, fertility and sexual love, who is described as being born from the sea. See Homer, Homer: The Illiad and the Odyssey, trans. Samuel Butler, ed. James H. Ford (El Paso, TX: El Paso Norte, 2005) 315-16; C. Scott Littleton, ed., Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology (New York: Marshall, 2005) 1036; Patty O'Brien, The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2006) 49.

[371] Chang-hwa Hong-nyŏn, the two sister protagonists in a Korean folk tale who had drowned after being persecuted by their wicked step mother; Sim Ch'ŏng, a legendary filial daughter in Korean history who sold herself for her blind father to sailors, who then threw her to the ocean to appease the Dragon King; Yi Ok-pong, the sixteenth-century poet who loved poetry so much as to wrap herself up in hundred sheets of papers on which poems were written when she jumped into the sea; Ophelia, Shakespeare's famous character who went mad and was drowned in the brook. As for Yi Ok-pong, see Cho Py'ŏng-hwan and Pak Hye-suk, Chosŏn sidae yŏsŏng siin yŏn'gu [A Study of Women Poets of Chosŏn] (P'aju, Kyŏnggi: Han'guk haksul chŏngbo, 2005) 141.

breakdown" and they are the ones who make water lilies bloom, as they push them up by "their love," a force of their bodies twisting to "rise up above the water, rise up above the water once more" ("Who Makes The Water Lilies Bloom?," PB 88). Here, one can read water lilies as reincarnations of the dead women emerging as a double for those who are today driven to despair, derangement, or death by the feelings of entrapment and oppression. The point is that most of the dead women figures in Kim's poetry serve as a mirror for the poet (and by extension the readers), projecting her anger, frustration, and suicidal madness, as well as her drive for survival and assertion. Their bodies could not resist their repressive society, but their spirits did and still do. As the agitating ghosts of madwomen haunt Kim, her "insane" and "hysterical" persona haunts readers. However, these women are here not to spread out the germs of madness and suicide, but to demonstrate women's suffering and its causes. In the end, the schizophrenic ghost of Kim, flowing around, insists assuredly: "Because you're different;/ because you aren't the same as others,/ you don't need to go mad or kill yourself!" (PB 95). She urges readers in reality to free themselves from mad and frail images of women and empower themselves to confront a repressive, normative society.

V. Women in Battle Fields—Kim's Political Poems

If the madwoman figure we saw in the previous section focused on domestic and private matters, the female figures in Kim's poems in this section are directly related to public and political events. This section will pay particular attention to Kim's role as a social commentator, delineating her development from the lyrical

poet, masking her radical ideas in well-made lyrics which mix fantasy and realism, to a political poet with feminist concerns. Of course, this does not mean that she has abandoned lyricism in her political poetry, but, rather, it means that if her poems in the previous two sections tended to occupy a distant political space,[372] the poems in this section directly engage with external political reality.

Before examining her political poems, however, I would like to take a brief look at "The History of Korean Literature Devoid of Me," a manifesto of what her poetry is and is not. She asserts:

> In the age of pure poetry, poetry without ideation,
> I didn't write pure poetry.
> In the age of engaged poetry,
> I didn't write engaged poetry (I COULD NOT write!).
> In the age of deconstructionist poetry,
> which was in fashion
> in the history of Korean poetry of the eighties,
> I didn't write deconstructionist poetry (I COULDN'T!).
> In the age of market-driven worldly love poetry,
> I couldn't write love poetry (I DIDN'T!)
> In the age of the people's poetry,
> I didn't write the people's poetry (I COULD NOT write!). (LE 51)

In this poem which was included in her 1989 collection of poetry Life Inside an Egg (Talgyal sok ŭi saeng), she enumerates the dominant poetic movements in the history of modern Korean poetry: pure poetry, engaged poetry, deconstructionist poetry, romantic love poetry, and the people's poetry (*Minjung si*).[373] She does so in order to claim that "[in] today's parlance," they are "part of the comprador's'

[372] The poems in the previous sections are also political to a certain extent because they elucidate the problems of the ideology of womanhood and motherhood and also allow us a glimpse into its psychological damages done to women.

[373] For a concise introduction to the trends of modern Korean poetry in the English language, see Park Soo-yeon, "Guest Literature—Korea: An Introduction to Korean Poetry," Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature 43 (2012): 142-44.

aesthetics/ aiding and abetting the ideology of authoritarianisms" (LE 51). By using the word "comprador," which the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, "the name of a native servant employed by Europeans, in India and the East, to purchase necessaries and keep the household accounts,"[374] to describe those poets, from the 1920s to the 1980s, who came in contact with the artistic movements from the West and put into practice the popular American and European poetics, Kim criticizes the materialization, or the branding, of the work of art and its practitioners.

She, at the same time, defends herself for not participating in any of the mainstream movements, dubbed here as "the ideology of authoritarianisms," which presumably suggests Korean poets' tendency to venerate and obey Western artistic ideas as the norm, the authority. She also expresses in the last stanza her dissatisfaction with the fact that her works do not, and cannot, fit into the history of Korean poetry because of her refusal to support the popular poetic practices:

> I, today, am a rat flea,
> before the History of Korean Literature, which is
> like the wall neatly covered with methodically patterned wallpaper,
> a *female* rat flea (here the emphasis is very important!). (LE 52)

Comparing herself with "a rat flea," a tiny insect, on the wall called "the History of Korean Literature," covered with wallpaper embossed with Western aesthetic patterns, she reveals her powerlessness—although a flea can spread plague, the touch of a finger can crush it in a second. Furthermore, she reinforces her vulnerability as putting an emphasis on the gender of the rat flea: "female." In Korean literary history where the main players who have introduced and put into practice Western poetics are men, her being a "female" writer resisting the

[374] "Comprador," Oxford English Dictionary Online (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014).

dominant ideas makes her status even more precarious. To sum up, the poem is an ironic apology for her poetry failing to conform to male-dominant literary parameters that define the norm and the quality of a canonical poet.

I have examined this poem, before looking at her political poems, in part, to show her original intentions as a poet, and in another part, to show that despite her resistance to producing a work of art tainted by any kind of ideology, she seems unable to remain impervious to the current political landscape. In other words, although she may not want her work to be markedly engaged or committed, as we will see in what follows, many of her poems reveal how fully she is aware of the political climate. I will start with a poem entitled "The 1980s" because it shows that no matter how eagerly she tries to push aside political thought, she cannot be free from it. In this poem, she confesses that: "I was always unsure/ between dream and realism/ without being able to choose one.// [. . .] // Somewhere between dream and realism,/ firebombs were thrown and tombs in Mangwŏl-dong were erected,/ but I was always like nothing,/ like a UFO that is not identifiable" (LE 36-37).

Kim is here referring to one of the most tragic political events of the 1980s in Korea—the Kwangju Uprising against Chun Doo Hwan's military regime and the South Korean army's massacre of civilians in the City of Kwangju.[375] Despite the gravity of the event, however, she has trouble retelling the violence because her

[375] As Jung-kwan Cho asserts, "Although the uprising lasted only ten days, its impact on Korean politics lasted more than fifteen years, changing the ideology and features of the antigovernment movement, restricting the relationship between the authoritarian regime and the democratization movement, functioning as a symbol of the struggle for democracy, and conditioning other major political processes." See Cho, "The Kwangju Uprising as a Vehicle of Democratization: A Comparative Perspective," Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2003) 67.

"dream" world of poetry—where the separation of imagination and reality resides—seems incompatible with her urge to report the incident with a degree of "realism" without aestheticizing the atrocity. Being torn between the two, she indicates the incident only by the title of the poem, "The 1980s," and one word in the poem, "Mangwŏl-dong," a district in Kwangju, "where most of the victims were buried," [376] and which "served as the symbolic center for mourning and memorialization."[377] Her inability to choose between "dream and realism" and to write an explicitly political poem about the incident subsequently leads to guilt and self-condemnation, manifested in her regarding herself as a "nothing." This poem, included in the same collection where "The History of Korean Literature Devoid of Me" is also located, reveals her difficulty, no matter how hard she tries in placing herself outside social, political, and national realities.

Moreover, the harder she resists it, it seems, the more she becomes aware that she is not an innocent bystander to the massacre, which occurred in Kwangju, her hometown. How can she stand outside it then? Ko confronted this question and wrote "engaged poetry." For Kim, who feels a strong disinclination to this mode of poetry, the only strategy seems to be engaging with a postmodernist poetry[378]

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[376] The new 5.18 Cemetery was open in 1997, but as Linda Sue Lewis points out, "the municipal graveyard in Mangwŏl-dong" was "the most sacred 5.18 site in Kwangju" (112). Lewis also explains: "In the early 1980s the cemetery was contested ground as the government tried to prevent people from making it a locus of memory and mobilization. On May 18, 1981, BFA [5.18 Kwangju People's Uprising Bereaved Families' Association] members attempting to hold graveside anniversary memorial rites for the dead were barred from Mangwŏl-dong, and the association's leader, Chŏng Su-man, was detained under the National Security Law (NSL)" (113). See Lewis, Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2002).

[377] Lewis 112.

[378] Postmodernism is a controversial concept. In this chapter, I follow Fran Mason's definition: "Postmodern" means "[a] critical or theoretical position, philosophy, political viewpoint, or overall

which privileges complexity, decentralization, and diversity, thereby complicating and decentralizing politics' narrativity, and "Soaring, Part 8—I Laugh" is such an example. In the poem, included in The Heaviest Struggles in the World which was published in 1995, six years after Life Inside an Egg, Kim finally tells the story of the Kwangju massacre directly while highlighting its intertextuality by inserting other narratives of war and revolution within.

Before narrating the story of uprising, however, the speaker of the poem recounts a story of a woman she has encountered in New York: "When I was waiting for the train/at the Fifth Avenue station in New York,/ a woman standing next to me started to laugh, all of a sudden./ It sounded like buh, buh, buh, a clot of phlegm gurgling in her throat,/and it was also like hack, hack, hack, the coughing sound" (HS 28). As if the bizarre sound of the laugh of this unidentified woman were a prelude to morbidity and mortality, in the following stanza we learn: "When the train was approaching, dimming its headlight,/ she jumped into the air, falling to the ground,/ and died on the rail, died while laughing" (HS 29). Whether this story is real or imagined is less important than what it triggers: i.e., what the woman left behind—her "white linen kerchief and her bloodstained hair/ wrapped in the kerchief" and her "deep and dark laugh/ that echoed to the last, reverberating across underground cave" (HS 29)—brings the speaker to her memory of Kwangju:

It reminded me, all of a sudden,

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outlook that privileges decentralization, deconstruction, and the primacy of systems of signs (both linguistic and visual) in the creation of social, cultural, economic, and political reality. The term 'postmodern' should be distinguished from 'postmodernism' (postmodernist aesthetic and textual approaches) and 'postmodernity' (the totality of postmodern and postmodernist processes that constitute postmodern culture) to primarily describe a viewpoint that is usually associated with the critical theory of poststructuralism." See Mason, Historical Dictionary of Postmodernist Literature and Theater (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2007) 257.

> of those mothers with their heads covered with white linen kerchiefs
> in the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina;
> of the year of 1980, the month of May, the city of Kwangju, the tombs
> of unknown people, and missing men,
> the infinite funeral streamers following the coffin of Yi Han-yŏl,
> the colorful streamers looking as if sobbing,
> saying 'you, the living, follow!,'
> the diamond-like black tears of Africa,
> and of the mothers of Chechnya,
> who blocked, barehanded, the invading army tanks,
> saying 'please don't shoot my son.' (HS 29-30)

Kim frames the story of the Kwangju Uprising which occurred in May 1980 between two historical events: the May Revolution of 1810 in Buenos Aires that led to Argentina's independence from Spain in 1816, and the First Chechen War which was begun by Russian troops' invading Chechnya to crush its independence movement in 1994, a year before the publication of the poem. By connecting the three occasions, the poet attempts to present the Korean political event as a part of world history and place it in the realm of international politics.

More importantly, she links the three events together by envisioning women, mothers in particular, on the forefront of battles. What puzzles the reader, however, is the fact that there seems to be no documented evidence about mothers fighting in the Argentinian revolution and in the Chechen-Russian War. In fact, the images of the mothers, "with their heads covered with white linen kerchiefs," who encircled and blocked the military tanks, closely resemble those women in Kwangju who came out to the street, supported the student-protesters, and who witnessed their sons perish at the hands of the South Korean army in May 1980. That these women are strategically carved out of the contested site of Kwangju and inserted masterfully into a composite of historical world sites, I would argue, reflects Kim's

effort to envision a transnational community, connecting women around the globe. This simultaneously brings to life memories of women in general, who were part, as witnesses or participants, of wars and revolutions led by men but mostly stayed out of public view and are forgotten.

Furthermore, by reimagining the Kwangju Uprising and by deploying the word, "mothers," that evokes a private and domestic world, it seems that Kim tries to insist on the lyric as a dominant mode in this political poem. While maintaining her poetic elegance, however, she reveals her spirit of public involvement by mentioning Yi Han-yŏl and by using the expression, "you, the living, follow! (san cha yŏ ttarŭra)" which recalls "A March for My Beloved (Im ŭl wihan haengjingok)."[379] Yi Han-yŏl, a Yonsei University student from South Chŏlla, is not a victim of the Kwangju massacre, but he was killed in a student demonstration in 1987 against the dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan, inheriting the spirit of the Kwangju Uprising,[380] and he has been remembered as "democratic martyr."[381] "A March for My Beloved" is a popular song, which was composed in 1981, based on a poem by the political activist Paek Ki-wan (1932-), to commemorate the posthumous marriage of the activist Yun Sang-wŏn who died during the Kwangju Uprising on May 27 in 1980,

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[379] Linda Sue Lewis has translated and used a part of "A March for My Beloved" in her book: "Without love, or honor, or even a name to pass on,/ one's whole life to push forward, a fervent pledge./ Our comrades are gone, and only a banner waves;/ until a new day dawns, let's never waver./ Awakening, we call out, a fervent battle cry. // I'll go on ahead, and you, the living, follow!/ I'll go on ahead, and you, the living, follow!" See Lewis, Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2002) 131.

[380] Georgy Katsiaficas, and Na Kahn-chae, eds., South Korean Democracy: Legacy of the Gwangju Uprising (London: Routledge, 2006) 17.

[381] Sunhyuk Kim, "Civil Society and Democratization in South Korea," Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State, ed. Charles K. Armstrong (London: Routledge, 2006) 58.

and it has been used as a protest song.[382] Invoking Yi, an icon of student protests, and "A March for My Beloved," a popular song with a militant tune, the poem now emerges as fully political.

Kim's tour de force does not lie in simply enumerating political actors and scenes. It lies in blurring the supposedly firm line between "political poetry," which is generally seen as active and public and intended for actual political effect, such as Ko's, and "lyric poetry," which is often seen as passive and private, having a voice "speaking to itself in meditative solitude."[383] As we have observed in the stanza above, "Soaring, Part 8—I Laugh" is a political poem because it concerns a specific political situation, but the subsequent stanza seems to unsettle that assumption by returning its focus to the interiority of the speaker:

> And then, a laugh bursts out of my mouth, all of a sudden.
> O, uncontrollable, reverberating around my ribs and in my lungs,
> the sound of a laugh that bursts out so hard as to paralyze my arms,
> legs, back, and shoulder!
> Was the laugh that reverberated around the New York train station,
> then, my gloomy response, my tribute to the night of mankind? (HS 30)

In revealing the fact that the sickly, suicidal, madwoman of the New York station is the speaker herself, she brings readers' attention to how language can be disrupted and how self can be fractured by war. In other words, the impact of war on the text and her horror as a witness of violence are expressed through the gurgling sound of phlegm interrupting normal communication, and through the schizophrenic nature of her psyche, mixing historical facts together.

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[382] Linda Sue Lewis, Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2002) 133.

[383] David Orr, "The Politics of Poetry," Poetry Magazine 1 July 2008.

This poem is, then, about the damage that witnessing or experiencing violence inflicts on language and psyche, and Kim reinforces this fact by putting emphasis on laughter. Through the poetic speaker's provocative, outright laughter, Kim not only expresses the impossibility of communicating this horror in a straightforward and coherent manner, but also discloses the radical power the sound of laughing conveys, a notion well formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. As the Russian philosopher and literary critic has showed in his study of the French writer François Rabelais, "In the Renaissance, laughter in its most radical, universal, and at the same time gay form emerged from the depths of folk culture" which, with its "carnival gaiety," destabilized the hierarchical relationships of society.[384] In a similar vein, Kim reveals that the sound of the woman's wild, mocking, and carnivalesque laughter has the potential to degrade the then sacred power of the dictator and former president Chun Doo Hwan and his military regime. In fact, toward the end of the poem, the speaker confesses:

> When I pass by the Yŏnhŭi area;
> when I am in Yŏŭido; and when I pass through the giant media
> conglomerates,
> I laugh,
> I laugh. (HS 31)

When she pass by the Yŏnhŭi area where Chun's residence is located, the Yŏŭido district where the National Assembly is located, and the news media companies

[384] Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 72. He also writes: "The Renaissance conception of laughter can be roughly described as follows: Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter" (66).

owned by the so-called "chaebol (business conglomerate)"[385] which forged a tight alliance with South Korean military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, she laughs. She uses the laughter, a form of the "unofficial" and of "freedom"[386] in the Bakhtinian sense, to confront the official and constraining powers.

In addition, considering the fact that the "I" is also the hysterical woman at the New York station, we can relate her to the French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous's laughing figures: the frightening Medusa ("The Laugh of the Medusa") which embodies an image of castration, and the wild witch who laughs at her master (The Newly Born Woman).[387] As Cixous's figures symbolize a threat to patriarchy, Kim's madwoman can be seen as equally threatening[388] as she laughs at the authority figures—the dictator, politicians, and family business patriarchs. Additionally, the speaker's enigmatic laughing sound, which is similar to the onomatopoeic words like "kŭrŭrŏng kŭrŭrŏng" (a gurgling sound of phlegm) and "kul-lŏk kul-lŏk" (a coughing sound), seems to represent a repulsive and

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[385] Eun Mee Kim explains the tight alliance between the *chaebol*, "family-owned and family-managed large business groups, such as Hyundai [Hyŏndae], Samsung [Samsŏng], and Lucky-Gold Star," and the South Korean developmental state in Big Business, Strong State: Collusion and Conflict in South Korean Development, 1960-1990 (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1997) 51.

[386] Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 89.

[387] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément describe her as follows: "She laughs and it's frightening—like Medusa's laugh—petrifying and shattering constraint." See Cixous and Clément, The Newly Born Woman, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 32. Also see 33-35.

[388] One is reminded that "[w]hen '*The* Repressed' of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is *absolutely* shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions." See Cixous and Clément, The Newly Born Woman, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 95.

grotesque[389] sound intended to counter the self-important officials in Yŏnhŭi and Yŏŭido. Perhaps, when she has no other power to confront them, as Georges Bataille reminds us, "Laughter is the only way out."[390]

Kim returns to the subject of the Kwangju Uprising once again in her 2000 poetry collection Laughter Speeding Away on a Broomstick (Pitcharu rŭl t'ago tallinŭn usŭm). As the title indicates, she now takes laughter even more seriously, placing it at the heart of the aesthetic endeavor. In the "Afterword," she declares that while preparing the collection, she "learned the power of laughter" (LS 94),[391] and she wants her poetry to have "the existential resonance" of laughter which can "counter and overthrow hegemony and authority" (LS 95). Many poems in the collection do provide a moment that can draw a few laughs from the reader. However, the subjects and situations they deal with are not funny, but extremely serious. After she published The Heaviest Struggles in the World in 1995, as she tells us in the same "Afterword," she moved to California, and had a chance to visit Wounded Knee, a village in South Dakota where the massacre of Native Americans

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[389] Mikhail Bakhtin elaborates on the power of the grotesque as follows: "The essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better. The very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character. This principle is victorious, for the final result is always abundance, increase." See Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 62.

[390] Georges Bataille, Inner Experience, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1988) 204.

[391] In the "Afterword," Kim Sŭng-hŭi refers to the painter Kim Ki-ch'ang as her source of influence on learning "the power of laughter," but in an interview, she also mentions Frida Kahlo's influence, by quoting her: "Nothing is worth more than laughter. It is strength to laugh and to abandon oneself, to be light. Tragedy is the most ridiculous thing." See Yi Yŏn-sŭng, "Kim Sŭng-hŭi siin kwa ŭi mannam" [An Interview with the Poet Kim Sŭng-hŭi], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006): 31.

occurred in 1890. This visit made her more keenly conscious of "the suffering of others," as well as more interested in such topics as neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and cultural imperialism (LS 93), and the poems in Laughter Speeding Away on a Broomstick consequently reflect these interests.

"A McDonald's in Sinch'on," a poem that makes reference to the Kwangju Uprising, likewise starts with reflections on neocolonialism: "McDonald's has come to the center of Sinch'on Circle!/ The breasts hanging up high in the air,/ dripping with blood./ To feed us, before we know it/ McDonald's has come to the Korean Peninsula!" (LS 46). The speaker expresses her astonishment that fast food restaurant giant McDonald's, which started franchising in Korea in 1988,[392] has opened a store in Sinch'on, a busy area of Seoul and a student magnet, where major universities such as Ewha, Yonsei, and Sŏgang (where Kim teaches) are located. What is most unsettling here is her employment of the image of a woman's "breasts" to illustrate the multinational corporation representative of homogenizing and westernizing global culture, as critics have pointed out: "consumer products such as McDonald's burgers have spread around the globe. [. . . .] replicating similar types of culture worldwide."[393] Why did Kim choose the female breasts? They are obviously emblematic of fertility and nurturing, i.e., the world of maternal love, but they are also viewed as sexual organs, representing the world of erotic desire. However, curiously, the breasts she is depicting in the first stanza are not bursting

[392] Sŏ Yŏng-ch'an, "1988-yŏn Maekdonŏldŭ kungnae 1-hojŏm kaejŏm" [The Opening of McDonald's First Franchised Store in 1988], The Kyunghyang Shinmun 28 Mar. 2010.

[393] Luke Martell, The Sociology of Globalization (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2010) 90.

with nourishment or voluptuousness, but covered with blood, floating high up in the air.

It is from the middle of the second stanza onward that we discover how the two mutually exclusive entities are coopted into calling on ideas of (neo-) colonialism, war, and violence. After making a farcical analogy between the Eucharist and having the Big Mac during her trip to New Mexico, the poet writes:

> I have finally come into the Santa Fé I longed to see.
> But, my cherished Santa Fé,
> nowhere can I find anything like that!
> Massacred and violated by Spanish troops.
> The slaughter was completed in times long past, once upon a time.
> Santa Fé Museums are a museum of Massacre,
> the May 18 Memorial Museum, and the Yongsan War Museum.
> The already lacerated breasts of Native American mothers and daughters!
> Have you seen the ghosts of the colonized wandering around,
> peddling blankets, wall hangings, and silver necklaces?
> O, the ghost of Native American maids wearing moccasin boots,
> still hovering over the Plains ! O, warriors! O, touristic souvenirs!
>
> O, the mouths of colonies!
> O, McDonald's, I don't mean to single you out for regulation!
> The breasts of the colonized people are
> still assaulted somewhere, everywhere, today.
> The breasts dismembered on the street,
> on May 19, 1980, in Kwangju,
> a stab wound to the left-side chest, a penetrating wound to the right-side chest,
> wouldn't just belong to the nineteen-year-old girl Son Ok-rye only. It wouldn't.
> But, standing in Sinch'on Circle,
> staring at your golden breasts displayed high in my sky,
> the imperialism that propagates: 'We shouldn't annihilate the natives!
> We should feed the natives!'
> [. . . . .]
> I'm just looking at the hunger of my colonized country. . . . . .(LS 47-48)

Now it becomes clear why Kim made the analogy between McDonald's and female breasts: on the surface, it is because of the similarity in their shape, or appearance—

McDonald's logo, the golden arches,[394] and the curve of breasts.[395] On a deeper level, she expands the external resemblance through a semiotics approach, in the spirit of French philosopher Roland Barthes,[396] to reveal how the sign of the golden arches becomes a signifier for an ideological signified of colonialism and militarism; how the image of the female breast becomes a signifier for the colonized and the oppressed.

Writing from the perspective of the colonized (being a citizen of Korea, a postcolonial country), the oppressed (being a native of Kwangju) and the marginalized (being a woman),[397] Kim first contextualizes the battles between the Spanish colonists and the Indians, caused by the Spanish conquest of New Mexico in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[398] by comparing it with the conflicts in

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[394] In reality, McDonald's logo, the golden arches, "represent the first letter of the eatery's name." See Marcel Danesi, Why it Sells: Decoding the Meanings of Brand Names, Logos, Ads, and Other Marketing and Advertising Ploys (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2008) 85.

[395] In fact, the narrator of Kim's short story "Gray Whale, Trip to the Coast" reveals that McDonald's logo reminds her of a mother's breast. See Kim, Sant'ap'e ro kanŭn saram: Kim Sŭng-hŭi sosŏlchip [One Who Goes to Santa Fe] (Seoul: Ch'angjak wak pip'yŏngsa, 1997) 135-36.

[396] Notably see Barthes, Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill, 1968; 1988); Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill, 1972); S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill, 1974); Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill, 1968; 2012). Also for a succinct history of semiotics, see Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford UP, 1983).

[397] As opposed to some critics such as Cho Yŏn-jŏng who question Kim Sŭng-hŭi's place as "the other"(87) focusing on her status as "an elite woman poet" (73), I would view her as the marginalized other. Kim is not "subaltern" if the term means a class position as Cho argues, but she nevertheless occupies marginalized status as a woman. In addition, when Cho asks "how the elite woman Kim Sŭng-hŭi can speak 'for the subaltern' if she cannot speak 'as the subaltern'"? (88), the critic seems to forget that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak whose work she heavily relies on is in fact an elite intellectual who tries to render audible the voice of the subaltern. Despite "the intellectual superiority" Cho observes in Kim's poetry, I argue that the poet succeeds in speaking as the marginalized other and giving voice to the subaltern. See Cho Yŏn-jŏng, "Mogugŏ rŭl p'umko, haech'e hago ch'angjo hanŭn siin" [A Poet Who Develops, Deconstructs, and Creates Her Mother Tongue], Yŏllin sihak 11 (2006).

[398] For example, "In 1687 Governor Domingo de Cruzate, in an abortive attempt to retake New Mexico, attacked the pueblo in what was to be one of the bloodiest battles between the Spanish and

Korea. More specifically, she does so by drawing a comparison between museums: the Santa Fé Museums which contain the history of religious persecution and massacre of the Indians; the May 18 Memorial Museum which commemorates the brutal killing of the people of Kwangju by military leaders; and the Yongsan War Museum[399] which commemorates the Korean War, the conflict between the Korean people resulting from differences in political ideology. By comparing them, she demonstrates how the museums, the sites of collective memory,[400] can connect people beyond space and time in their attempts to honor the dead and denounce systematic violence against humanity.

Furthermore, she joins these historical atrocities together by constructing the "lacerated" or "dismembered" breasts of women as a symbol of violence, oppression, and suffering. In particular, by drawing special attention to Son Ok-

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the Indians. Even allowing for inflation of numbers, the Indian losses must have been considerable. Cruzate claimed that about six hundred Indians were killed and that the seventy remaining were sentenced to ten years of slavery, 'except for a few old men who were shot in the plaza.' It is no surprise that the villagers, recalling the horror of those previous few years, submitted peacefully to Vargas and agreed to rebuild the church. A large cross was erected in the main plaza, the stone base of which remains to this day." See Marc Treib, Sanctuaries of Spanish New Mexico (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 238.

[399] As Donald N. Clark sums up, the War Memorial of Korea was built in 1994, "on the site of the former Japanese army regimental headquarters in Seoul, to honor the Republic's military and identify the South Korean cause in the Korean War with the heroic military traditions of the ancient Korean kingdoms of Koguryŏ, Silla, Koryŏ, and Chosŏn." See Clark, Living Dangerously in Korea: The Western Experience, 1900-1950 (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2003) 323.

[400] Susan A. Crane illustrates that "Pierre Nora, directing a collaborative project on French collective memory, urged attention to the 'sites of memory' around which collective memories aggregated. 'Sites of memory' persist even when direct connection to the past appears to have been lost, and allow for the recovery of memories without necessarily involving traditional historical study. Collective memory thus compensates for loss." See Crane, "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums," A Companion to Museum Studies, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA; Blackwell, 2006) 105.

rye,[401] a civilian who was shot in her right chest and stabbed in her left chest during the Kwangju Uprising,[402] the poet highlights the horrors of conflicts in which unarmed women, men, and children are massacred. Moreover, she reminds us that it is not just tyrannies and dictatorships but cultural imperialism and global capitalism—which are more abstract and indirect than militarism as reflected in the slogans "We shouldn't annihilate the natives!/ We should feed the natives!" (LS 48)—that can enslave, oppress and abuse people, generating many innocent victims like Son Ok-rye. Finally, by observing the paradox of those Native American women who live on selling touristic souvenirs which have traces of their colonial history, and of those Koreans who crave McDonald's from America, a country which has been blamed for its roles in both the Kwangju Uprising[403] and the Korean War,[404]

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[401] Kim also wrote about Son Ok-rye in her short story "Gray Whale, Trip to the Coast." See Kim, Sant'ap'e ro kanŭn saram: Kim Sŭng-hŭi sosŏlchip [One Who Goes to Santa Fe] (Seoul: Ch'angjak wak pip'yŏngsa, 1997) 141-42.

[402] A report on the death of Son Ok-rye is documented and included in 5.18 Kwangju minjuhwa undong charyo ch'ongsŏ [A Series of Reference Documents on the May 18 Kwangju Democratization Movement], vol. 12 (Kwangju: Kwangju kwangyŏksi 5.18 saryo p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1997) 265.

[403] Keun-sik Jung explains the U.S. role in the suppression of the Kwangju uprising as follows: "The image of the United States as a supporter of democracy began to crumble after the revelation that it approved the deployment of Korean military forces before and during the Kwangju uprising. The United States began to be seen as a public supporter of Korean military authorities and the divided system in Korea." See Jung, "Has Kwangju Been Realized?," Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2003) 47.

[404] For example, mass killings of Korean civilians by American troops during the Korean War, such as the massacre at No Gun Ri: "According to the AP investigation, which was confirmed by 12 former soldiers who had witness the event, American troops machine-gunned as many as 300 civilians. They had taken shelter under the bridge in an attempt to escape strafing by U.S. warplanes that had already killed about 100 people. [. . .] The massacre of No Gun Ri was not the only attack on civilians in which U.S. forces were involved during the Korean War. In another incident, American aircraft reportedly firebombed 300 civilians trapped in a cave, even though some pilots voiced misgivings that they might be targeting innocent people." See Leslie Alan Horvitz, and Christopher Catherwood, Encyclopedia of War Crimes and Genocide (New York: Facts on File, 2006) 319-20. Also, see Charles J. Hanley, Sang-Hun Choe, and Martha Mendoza, The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

Kim shows the tragedy of how the once colonized and oppressed people, under the capitalism of our day, become figures of promoting neocolonialism.[405]

Though not making direct reference to political events, "Brutal Editing" can be seen as an extension of her response to consumer culture and high capitalism and her attempt to reveal the disturbing realities of contradictory world we live in. The speaker looking at a picture probably in a woman's magazine exclaims:

> A black child of Ethiopia is dying,
> as thin as a pencil lead, hanging from
> an Ethiopian woman's black chest with breasts as flat as a sheet of
> paper.
> A child as parched as a pebble of Somalia,
> a child as starving as a ghost of Sarajevo,
> is dying.
> (An advertisement right beneath this picture reads:)
> The beauty of being slim is every woman's dream and pride!
> You can achieve beauty through fasting!
> To help you fast, we have magic potions of natural plants and yeast
> yogurt!
> Voilà, magic slim beauty!
>
> I wasn't someone this cold, this cruel, this callous, from the beginning,
> but because of living so long in this kind of editing mold,
> I've been just, just, just, brainwashed into cruel oblivion. (HS 65)

The first stanza is divided in two parts, starting from the authorial voice in brackets and reflecting the magazine page layout—the upper panel displaying a picture of an African child dying out of famine and the lower panel an advertisement for weight-

[405] Librado F. Cano, P.E. provides a concise definition of the term as follows: "Neocolonialism is a term used by post-colonial critics of developed countries' involvement in the developing world. [. . .] Critics of Neocolonialism contend that private, foreign business companies continue to exploit the resources of post-colonial peoples, and that this economic control inherent to Neocolonialism is akin to the classical, European colonialism practiced from the 16th to 20th centuries. In broader usage, current especially in Latin America, neocolonialism may simply refer to involvement of powerful countries in the affairs of less powerful countries. In this sense, Neocolonialism implies a form of contemporary, economic imperialism: that powerful nation behave like colonialism in a post-colonial world." See Cano P.E., Transformation of An Individual Family Community Nation and the World (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2010) 26.

loss products. As in "A McDonald's in Sinch'on," where we saw how the rhetoric and image of nourishment disguised cultural imperialism and neocolonialism, in "Brutal Editing" Kim similarly shows how "decoding," in the sense of Barthes' semiology, the images from popular consumer culture can lead us to uncover the contradictions of our daily life. The woman in this poem does not have full and curvaceous breasts like the McDonald's golden arches. On the contrary, her breasts are "as flat as a sheet of paper" due to malnourishment, but the ideology of the advertising copylines, which construct the ideal world of affluence, beauty, promise, and comfort, makes invisible the reality of the people dying from poverty and starvation. French philosopher Louis Althusser, however, tells us that the constructed messages "need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their [world outlooks'] imaginary representation of that world (ideology=*illusion/allusion*)."[406]

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, Kim is deeply interested in the concept of ideology and in employing poetry to make that which ideology makes invisible "appear in front of us."[407] We can then regard "Brutal Editing" as her reworking of the concept, as it becomes clear in the second stanza which suggests how the ideological "editing mold" has shaped our thoughts, brainwashing us "into cruel oblivion." And, by juxtaposing the image of famine—invoking children and women in such countries as Ethiopia,[408] Somalia,[409] and Bosnia[410] that have suffered

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[406] Luis Althusser, Essays on Ideology (London: Verso, 1984) 36.

[407] Ruth Williams, "Poetry Chants at the Moment When Water Evaporates: An Interview with South Korean Poet Kim Seung-Hee," trans. S.B. Cerise Press: A Journal of Literature, Arts & Culture 4 (2013).

[408] See Africa Watch, Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia: An Africa Watch Report (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991). Also, see Laurence Binet, Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia 1984-1986 (Médecins San Frontières Speaking Out, 2005).

severely from civil wars, ethnic conflicts, human rights violations, and food shortages—with the advertisement that recalls the issues of childhood obesity and commercialized beauty culture's role in women's obsessions with thinness in developed countries, Kim exposes the very contradictory reality that we either try to deny or become comfortably oblivious of.

Finally, it is worth noting that Kim took the point of departure for the two poems, "A McDonald's in Sinch'on" and "Brutal Editing," which are deeply concerned with political and social matters, from the reflections on her everyday life of consumption: gazing at the McDonald's logo, having the Big Mac, and flipping through women's magazines. We can see this as her effort to preserve the personal and the lyrical in her highly political poems. Balancing the lyrical and the political, or her preferred terms imagination and reality, can be precarious at times because the tension between the two can disrupt the unity or coherence of the poem. As we have seen, however, she succeeds in fusing the two and showing that the seemingly trivial private experiences can provide a source of inspiration for poets in developing themes related to the public events of war. In the following two poems which have war-related themes, she takes a similar approach and strategy.

"The Weather of the Queen" opens with an account of daily news reporting the weather and Queen Elizabeth's birthday: "If the weather can have skin,/ the weather today is like the queen's skin./They say Queen Elizabeth visited Hahoe

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[409] See Laurence Binet, Somalia 1991-1993: Civil War, Famine Alert and a UN 'Military-Humanitarian (Médecins San Frontières Speaking Out, 2013).

[410] For atrocities against civilians, especially women and children during the Bosnian War (1992-1995), see Helsinki Watch, War Crimes in Bosnia-Hercegovina, vol. 2 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992-93).

village in Andong/ and at the age of seventy-three, was offered a Korean traditional banquet (in the customs of Chosŏn) in honor of her birthday" (LS 44). We do not know what the poet means by "the weather of the queen" until we come to the last stanza that reveals: "The weather of the queen is warm, lovely, and beautiful,/ like the handsome and abundant production of silk" (LS 45). Still, it is not clear whether "the weather of the queen" denotes Queen Elizabeth II's state of mind or health (i.e., having a healthy state of intellect and skin despite her age, or exposing her happiness, as well as her gracefulness, on her birthday), or whether it is simply the poet's weather report of the day in flowery language.

What seems clear, though, is that unlike the dreamlike sweet world displaying the fine weather and the celebration of the British monarch's seventy-third birthday, the actual world Kim likes to represent is nightmarish and disturbing. After ending the first stanza with the exclamation, "God Bless the Queen!," the poet turns her attention, in the second stanza, to "comfort women," the sex slaves for the Japanese army prior to and during World War II: "Grandmothers and Catholic nuns are standing/ in the "Wednesday Protest" camp outside of the Japanese Embassy./But, where is Grandma Hun today?" (LS 44). The day (April 21, 1999) Queen Elizabeth II visited Hahoe village, a UNESCO world Heritage site since 2010, which is regarded as "a national symbol of Korean traditional culture,"[411] and celebrated her birthday was Wednesday, [412] which then reminded Kim of the

[411] Amareswar Galla, ed., World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2012) 236.

[412] For more information on Hahoe village and Queen Elizabeth II's visit, see "Hahoe Folk Village Best Preserves Korea's Traditional Look," The Chosunilbo 25 Apr. 2011.

"Wednesday Protest." It is a rally[413] of survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery and their supporters ("grandmothers[414] and Catholic nuns"), which has been held weekly outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul since January 8, 1992 and which marked its 1000th time on December 14, 2011.

In particular, recalling the former "comfort woman" Yi Nam-i, known as "Grandma Hun (Hun *halmŏni*)," who was born in 1924 and "brought to Cambodia during the Second World War to provide sexual services to Japanese troops"[415] and who returned home to Korea after nearly half a century at the age of seventy-three, Kim highlights the dramatic differences between the two women—Queen Elizabeth II and Grandma Hun—who were the same age. As we have seen, "The Weather of the Queen" is framed by a rather abstract and philosophical scheme: just as the opening line of "The Snow Man," the famous poem by one of her favorite poets Wallace Stevens, makes one wonder what "a mind of winter" exactly is, Kim's poem prompts the reader to ponder what "the weather of the queen" exactly is.

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[413] They call for an official apology from Japan and compensation for the *halmoni*. The journalist Bae Ji-sook records what the protesters demanded on December 7, 2011, as follows: "The Japanese government should admit to the crime. The Japanese government should investigate the case. The Japanese parliament should make an official apology for what happened. The Japanese government should compensate. The Japanese government should describe the truth in their school textbooks and teach their students about the uncomfortable truth!" See Bae Ji-sook, "Comfort Women to Mark 1000th Rally for Japan's Apology, Compensation," The Korea Herald 9 Dec. 2011.

[414] In Korea, the word for grandmother (*halmŏni*) is used to mean both one's biological grandmother and simply old woman. In the poem, "grandmothers" refer to those survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery. For more information about Korean kinship terms, see Ross King and Jaehoon Yeon, Elementary Korean (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2009) 252.

[415] Elizabeth Moorthy and Samreth Sopha, "Korea More Comfortable than Cambodia for Grandma Hun," The Phnom Penh Post 8 May 1998.

However, unlike Stevens who retains the abstract and lyric mode throughout the poem,[416] Kim departs from this level of lyrical abstraction to address the political questions of colonialism, wars, and violence against women. The abstract image of the happy monarch of Britain, which was a major colonial power until the 1960s not only in Africa but also in Asia, fades into the background while the more concrete image of the former sex slaves of her age, who were exploited for the colonial army, comes to the forefront. Although, as previously noted, Kim returns to "the weather of the queen" in the last stanza, before doing so she reinforces the poem's political theme, by interweaving a few more past and contemporary events in the relatively short second stanza.

After recounting the affair of "comfort women," the poet-speaker continues:

> The spirit marriage between the righteous courtesan Non'gae and the enemy general Keyamura Rokusuke
> 'Give my soul back!'
> 'We can return the portrait of the deceased, but not the soul!'
> William Cohen said:
> 'In the case of the Korean Demilitarized Zone
> until alternative weapons are developed to obstruct tanks
> we
> will
> continue
> to use mines.'
> Clinton said:
> 'There are no civilian deaths due to mines on the Korean peninsula.'
> It seems Diana died a little too early. (LS 44-45)

The first event she recounts here concerns a sixteenth-century courtesan named Non'gae who lived during the Japanese invasions of Korea ("Imjin Waeran," 1592-1598). The myth of Non'gae tells that when Japanese commanders had a party

[416] For an in-depth analysis of the poem, see the section "Snow Men and Heroes" in George S. Lensing, Wallace Stevens and the Seasons (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2001) 131-59.

forcing Korean female entertainers to serve them on a night in 1593, she lured the Japanese commander Keyamura Rokusuke onto a cliff and jumped into the overlooking Nam River while locking him in an embrace, killing them both.[417] The second event Kim refers to concerns the remark U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen in the Clinton administration made during his trip to the Korean DMZ in 1998 that "the United States needs land mines here" because "[w]ithout the land mines, the capacity for the forces in the north would be certainly eased to roll through this area to downtown Seoul."[418]

The first is related to the "comfort women" issue, revealing the fact that violence against Korean women by Japanese soldiers traces back further in time. The second is related to the first in terms of addressing war, militarism, and violence while evoking the haunting presence of the Korean War and the unsettling relationship of South Korea with the U.S., which occupied the country and has since maintained military forces there. The third event, the death of Diana in 1997, is related to the second: it alludes to the late princess's involvement in "the ban-the-mines movement,"[419] which serves as a critique of Cohen's insistence on the use of landmines. Despite its relevance, however, the change in voice and subject in the last line—the authorial voice commenting on Diana's death—seems too abrupt. To a

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[417] Keith Pratt writes about the event as follows: "In July 1593, as the Japanese fought their way back to the south coast, the final battle went their way at Chinju. Sixty thousand defenders and inhabitants were massacred, though a surprise Korean heroine, a *kisaeng* named Non'gae, earned immortality by embracing General Keyamura Rokusuke on top of a cliff and then toppling both of them to their deaths in the river below. The story may be apocryphal, but a memorial to her can still be seen in Chinju." See Pratt, Everlasting Flower: A History of Korea (London: Reaktion, 2006) 133.

[418] Douglas J. Gillert, "Korean Economic Woes, Threat from North Concern Cohen," American Forces Press Service, 2 Feb. 1998.

[419] "Princess Diana's Anti-mine Legacy," CNN Online 10 Sept. 1997.

certain extent, the tension between the lyrical or the personal and the political in the last part of the stanza disrupts its unity as well as the reader's reading experience. It is nevertheless remarkable to see the ways in which Kim develops an intercontextual lens through which we can observe the horrors of war that individual or national memory carries.

Like many of her intensely political poems, including those we have looked at in this section, the last poem we will examine is also framed in its opening and closing stanzas by the narration of her personal experience. Kim opens "That is What I Have Heard" with an account of cleaning her son's sneakers:

> For some reason a stain on this sneaker doesn't come out.
> My son is fifteen years old—,
> such an age that he goes out, getting all sorts of stains that can't be
> washed out no matter how hard I scrub.
> For a moment I lean my brow against the tile of the bathroom wall,
> having left the sneakers soaked in bleach.
> O, it was a sneaker, they said, a sneaker of about this size!
> I've seen such a sneaker lying on a country path. (PB 116)

At first glance, the speaker's activity of washing sneakers to remove dirt seems mundane, nothing extraordinary. Just as the poet-speaker's act of looking at the fast-food restaurant's logo in "A McDonald's in Sinch'on," scanning magazine photos and ads in "Brutal Editing," and watching the news of the British sovereign's special birthday party in "The Weather of the Queen" led her to contemplate socio-political events, however, the moment of noticing an indelible stain on her son's sneaker leads her to reflect on "what she has heard," which begins the second stanza: "Hyo-sun and Mi-sŏn were walking along a country path that day,/ on their way back home after school" (PB 116).

The rest of the stanza narrates the deaths of two schoolgirls Sin Hyo-sun and Sim Mi-sŏn, about her son's age, who were run over by a fifty-ton U.S. army vehicle in June 2002.

> 'Sergeant Mark Walker of the U.S. Army 2nd Infantry Division
> was driving an armored vehicle down Country Road 56
> in the village of Kwangjŏk of Yangju Country in the Province of Kyŏnggi.
> His right-side view was obstructed
> and just after turning a curve, his senior in the lead vehicle saw the girls
> and radioed a warning, but he didn't hear it.
> They admitted the flaws in their system that allowed driving a vehicle
> 3.65 meters wide on a lane 3.7 meters wide.
> It was a tragic accident.'
> Thus said Chief of Staff John Macdonald.
> 'According to the ROK-U.S. joint investigation team, no one could be held accountable,'
> said Major Brian Maka, public affairs officer for the 2nd Division.
> 'The investigation is now closed,'
> said Ch'ae Yang-do, the 2nd Division spokesman.
>
> That's what I've heard.
> O, Camp Red Cloud!
> 'The girls left behind vivid bloodstains
> and a right-foot sneaker on the country path,
> and became a handful of ashes at Pyŏkche Crematorium on June 15.'
> That's what I've heard. (PB 117-18)

She presents the story in the manner of news reporting, I believe, for three conspicuous reasons. First, she wants to show that what she has heard is considered as "truth" because it is from "official sources." Second, she wants to reveal that what is presented as truth in fact suppresses other aspects of truth. Third, she wants to expose that there is little or no trace of humaneness and compassion in the statements from those officials who are responsible.

As a matter of fact, all three of these points reflect the reality at that time, particularly the national sentiment regarding the treatment of the tragic event.

Alexis Dudden details it in Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States: "On Saturday evening, December 15, 2002, about fifty thousand South Koreans gathered for a demonstration in downtown Seoul's City Hall plaza. . . . [and] demonstrators—including countless families with small children—demanded an apology from Washington for the girls' deaths.[420] As Dudden explains,

> About three weeks earlier, a U.S. military court had convened in Seoul and determined that the road accident was 'unavoidable,' acquitting the two soldiers who were driving the armored car. The soldiers were flown out of Korea immediately, and what had been sporadic demonstrations since June's tragedy spread overnight into a nationwide, anti-American movement, gaining rapid momentum everywhere from Catholic convents to elementary schools, where homework assignments encouraged children to express their confusion and anger over the girls' deaths and the U.S. military tribunal's judgment of the soldiers' innocence.[421]

It is in these circumstances that she composed "That is What I Have Heard." At first glance, one wonders why she has chosen the phrase, "that's what I've heard," for its title. It reveals the passivity of spectators. Is this self-reproach? In other words, is she criticizing herself for being unable to produce a more explicit political protest? That may appear to be the case since it is only in the short exclamation, "O, Camp Red Cloud!," that we can sense her feelings. By calling out the name of the 2nd Infantry Division's headquarters, which is located in the city of Ŭijŏngbu between Seoul and DMZ,[422] she expresses her anger and frustration at the top officials' protection of the perpetrators. However, as she repeats the phrase, we can see that

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[420] Alexis Dudden, Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States (New York: Columbia UP, 2008) 97.

[421] Dudden 98. Dudden also discusses how South Korea's 2002 presidential candidates responded to the event. See 98-100.

[422] Stanley B. Weeks, and Charles A. Meconis, The Armed Forces of the USA in the Asia-Pacific Region (St. Leonards, Austral.: Allen, 1999) 96.

she is also mimicking those Korean and American officials who had shied away from responsibility by proclaiming: "no one could be held accountable."

As I pointed out in the beginning of this section, Kim does not champion committed literature, i.e., she does not approve of the view that poetry should serve a political and ethical purpose. Consequently, in these stanzas she shies away from directly accusing the offenders and officials, but despite her expression of impotence and passivity, it does not seem to me that she is passive and powerless. The fourth and last stanza, which links back to the first stanza, once again shows her masterstroke of expanding the lyrical moment of the present to the socially significant:

> I lean my brow against the tile of the bathroom wall
> and think about the stain on the sneaker that is not erasable
> no matter how long I soak it in bleach,
> and about history that can't be erased. (PB 118)

Kim makes clear that she is using "the stain on the sneaker" as an allegory to inspire readers to reflect on an indelible history of violence. This literary device, which she uses often, as we have seen previously, makes the familiar unfamiliar. Grounded in a carefully observed reality, this defamiliarization of the ordinary further allows us disturbing insight into the Korean War, and political upheavals generally.

As Dudden asserts, the protesters spilled out into the street on a wintry Saturday night in 2002 because they "were fed up with the accidental and purposeful violence against civilians that American soldiers stationed in South Korea so routinely commit"[423] and in fact the young girls' deaths are only a part of "a

[423] Alexis Dudden, Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States (New York: Columbia UP, 2008) 100. Also, for an array of essays that reflect on the complex causes of anti-

long list of violent incidents involving American soldiers and Korean civilians in South Korea."[424] This thorny problem traces back to "the early days of the Korean War in July 1950 when as many as several hundred people" were killed by the American army "under a railroad track bridge in the village of No Gun Ri in central South Korea."[425] Exposed for the first time by the Korean journalist Sang-hun Choe in 1998, "the massacre of Korean civilians by American soldiers" captured worldwide attention when the Associated Press on September 29, 1999 published an article entitled "The Bridge at No Gun Ri," which won the reporters a 2000 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting.[426] However, despite the exposure of the atrocity[427] and South Korea's demands for an apology from the United States, as Dudden writes, "Like Washington's stance on the events at My Lai in Vietnam in 1968, the American troops involved in the killings in Korea in 1950 were described as 'young, under-trained, under-equipped and new to combat' as well as 'legitimately fearful' of the enemy, meaning that in the end no one would be held

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American sentiment in Korea, see David I. Steinberg, ed., Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

[424] Dudden 101.

[425] Dudden 102.

[426] Walter J. Boyne, ed., Today's Best Military Writing: The Finest Articles on the Past, Present, and Future of the U.S. Military (New York: Forge, 2004) 329-30. The three Pulitzer Prize-winning authors, Charles J. Hanley, Sang-Hun Choe, and Martha Mendoza, eventually coauthored The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

[427] We can get a glimpse of the atrocity in a veteran's account: "there was lieutenant screaming like a madman, fire on everything, kill'em all…. Kids, there was kids out there, it didn't matter what it was, eight to eighty, blind, crippled or crazy, they shot them all." See Mike Davis, In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire (Chicago: Haymarket, 2007) 100.

responsible for what had happened."[428] We hear once again the reverberating echoes of Kim's phrase "that is what I have heard" and high officials' nonchalant and emotionless voice claiming "no one could be held accountable."

Overall the poems in this section show how Kim deals with the horrors of violence, without necessarily having the personal give way to the historical or political. Just like Lee Chang-dong in Poetry, Kim is aware of the inadequacy of language to portray the realities of atrocities and the cries of those who were murdered under such wretched circumstances, and she grapples with this issue by defamiliarizing the everyday, making new meanings out of ordinary words. Moreover, although the poems we have examined are clearly "political" in that they lend voices to social and political issues, what stands at the heart of her poetry is not necessarily politics, but memory, mourning, and compassion. Whether it is about the Kwangju massacre, the slaughter of Native Americans, the brutality against sex slaves, or the deaths of two schoolgirls which recall the No Gun Ri incident (or what Mike Davis dubs as "this Korean version of the Wounded Knee massacre"[429]), Kim's poetry tries to capture the memories of voiceless noncombatants in general, and women in particular, and to frame their stories within her own so as to establish trans-historical, trans-national, and inter-personal relationships.

In closing, I would like to underline that Kim, although never a self-proclaimed proponent of "feminism," nevertheless strategically employs feminist personas—an androgynous speaker, a mad woman, and a public intellectual—to

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[428] Alexis Dudden, Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States (New York: Columbia UP, 2008) 101-102.

[429] Mike Davis, In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire (Chicago: Haymarket, 2007) 100.

disrupt the fixed gender identities and inequalities that patriarchy promotes. As we have seen, androgyny, though manifested in the psyche, not in the body, of Kim's speaker, is still a useful tool to highlight the undecidability of sex and gender—her speaker is not either female/feminine or male/ masculine, but both, thereby unsettling the patriarchal binary cultures. Just as she does not wish to be called a "feminist activist" writer, it appears that she does not want to be called a "female" or "feminine" poet either. By putting on her androgynous mask, she is perhaps hoping to be called just "a poet," as her male counterparts commonly are.

However, with her marriage and childbirth, the issues of domesticity and maternity emerged and she has produced specifically female-centered poems, along with her androgynous texts. In doing so, she uses the images of madness and of (attempted) suicides. Madness, though considered essentially feminine, provides the poet with a useful tool to unsettle the repressive culture of patriarchy by giving voice to the unspeakable or incommunicable pain caused by its very system. Her meditation on endings also does not solely refer to the ending of life but the termination of institutions that have oppressed women. In the end, her seemingly depressing narratives convey a surprisingly positive message for hope and sisterly community.

Furthermore, despite her self-proclaimed aversion to committed writing that pursues social, political, or ideological goals, she has also produced poems engaging with social and political events, especially since her return to Korea in 1999 after her stay in California. By describing the horrors and dislocations of history with a postmodern outlook that decentralizes and deconstructs political reality, however,

she tries to complicate her engagement with politics. Moreover, while imaging the unimaginable atrocities, she blurs the boundaries between imagination and reality, the lyrical and the political, and the familiar and the unfamiliar, so as to reflect the horrors that exceed the reach of narrative logic or conventions. Most importantly, Kim blends the stories of mythical and historical women who became deranged, who committed suicide, or who were brutally massacred in their repressive society, with her own. In this way, they, the poet and her subjects, reach the state of oneness, which then produces a stronger and more defiant voice against oppression. Kim's call for sisterhood is certainly different from Ko's. However, Kim's fusing of the political into the personal in her lyrical mediation is as powerful as Ko's socialist chant for gender equality and sexual revolution.

CHAPTER V

Toward Global Networking of Women: The Film The Hours, Princess Tŏkhye, and Three Women Poets

In 2002, the film version of The Hours,[430] Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1998 novel[431] based on Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway,[432] was released. Ten years later, Kim Sŭng-hŭi published "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye," the longest poem in her 2012 poetry collection Lonely Hope (Hŭimang i oeropta) paying her homage to the successful screen adaptation of Cunningham's rewriting of Woolf's 1925 novel. I have chosen to analyze Kim's poem by way of conclusion, because it synthesizes the style and imagery common to all three poets' texts in my study: the confessional and conversational styles, and the themes and images of death and mourning, oppression and madness, confinement and escape, and women's creativity and subjectivity.

The poem, "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye," starts with the voice of Princess Tŏkhye,[433] the last princess of the Chosŏn (1392-1910) dynasty:

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[430] The Hours, dir. Stephen Daldry, perf. Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, Nicole Kidman, and Ed Harris, Paramount Pictures, 2002.

[431] Michael Cunningham, The Hours (New York: Farrar, 1998).

[432] Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (San Diego: Harcourt, 1925).

[433] As Chung Ah-young writes: Princess Tŏkhye was born to Kojong, the 26th Emperor of Chosŏn, and his concubine Lady Yang, a former palace lady-in-waiting, on May 25, 1912, the year the Emperor turned sixty, and shortly after the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. When the Emperor "suddenly and suspiciously died," the princess "was taken to Japan with the excuse of continuing her studies." In Japan, she apparently "suffered ostracism from the Japanese nobility and even involuntarily married Count So Takeyuki who was by no means powerful or influential," as well as "developed a mental illness." She was "diagnosed with precocious dementia" and "trapped in the hospital for 15 years," and finally "became a miserable, forgotten woman nobody cared about or recognized." She "returned home at the invitation of the Korean government in 1962" and died in the Ch'angdŏk Palace on April 21, 1989. See Chung, "Life of Joseon's [Chosŏn's] Last Princess Revisited," The Korea Times 19 Feb. 2010. For more information about Princess Tŏkhye, see also Ju Yeong-jae,

> I, Death Valley, a woman with dacryohemorrhea,
> the well in Samaria, the apple of everyone's eye in the Tŏksu Palace,
> my palace that has been in the well for 100 years.
> I, the voice, one single voice,
> the bitterness in the well,
> for 100 years
> the bitterness of those that don't flow, those that can't flow,
> the spider or the bat, a red ant or a tiger moth, in the darkness,
> the low hum of rustling wings . . . . . .
> the echoes, there, there . . . . . .
> I've stayed here, for 100 years, emaciated and pale.
> The bottom of a well, a shadow woman . . . . . three women.[434]

As if answering the voice calling her name in the title "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye," the speaker begins by affirming her selfhood, the "I," but nowhere can we find a predicate verb. As if indicating her fragmentary thoughts with the mental illness she suffered, this first stanza consists of nouns and noun phrases put together in a list, except for the last line that reaffirms her circumstances. Just as strikingly and disconcertingly, a sense of confinement and bitter frustration pervades the entire stanza. Although she was a princess, "the apple of everyone's eye in the Tŏksu Palace," the speaker identifies herself as the arid desert ("Death Valley") and a well in the mountainous region of ancient Palestine ("the well in Samaria"), as well as a woman shedding bloody tears ("a woman with dacryohemorrhea"[435]).

"The Japanese Collection of Princess Deokhye's [Tŏkhye's] Articles Visits Korea for the First Time," The Kyunghyang shinmun 11 Dec. 2012; Song Nai Rhee, "Chapter 9: Princess Deok-hye [Tŏkhye], another Fateful Twist," Beautiful As the Rainbow: Nashimoto Masako, A Japanese Princess Against All Odds for Love, Life, and Happiness (Bloomington, IN: Inspiring Voices, 2014) 116-24.

[434] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Hŭimang i oeropta [Lonely Hope] (P'aju, Kyŏnggi: Munhak tongne, 2012) 123. The translation of the poem is mine.

[435] Dacryohemorrhea is a medical condition of "The discharge of bloody tears." See W. A. Newman Dorland, The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1911) 285.

Moreover, she is pining away under the infliction of sorrow and anguish, from having been confined "in the well/ for 100 years." However, despite the image of mental and emotional disorders in her overwrought and phantasmagorical world, what is powerfully present is the word, "voice." The voice, the "one single voice" she possesses will tell the hitherto ignored story of her tragic life, her story of "bitterness." Alluding to the fact that Kim was writing the poem in 2012, the year marking the 100th anniversary of Princess Tŏkhye's birth, the poet here suggests the need to excavate the story of the princess who had lived "in the darkness" of the well "for 100 years," by giving her the voice she was deprived of.

Interestingly, Kim does so by interweaving the story of Princess Tŏkhye with the life stories of the women in the film The Hours. Both Cunningham's novel and Stephen Daldry's film tie together three women from three different time periods. In a similar vein, Kim traces a day in the life of each heroine, while alternating it with the history of Princess Tŏkhye, under the headnote: "Three Women, Three Spaces, Three Times."

> YOU, on a day in suburban Richmond in England in 1923:
> Nicole Kidman, as Virginia Woolf,
> is busy developing the plot for *Mrs. Dalloway*.
> O, her sister's family will be coming to visit from London, but there's no tea!
> All of a sudden, she thinks she needs to go to London by train, without delay,
> by train, without delay.
> Because of the sound of the maid's making meals, bones in my brain are crushing, smashing into pieces.
> I'm sick, always full of nervous breakdowns.
> She's dashing out of the house absentmindedly, and goes to the train station.
> Leonard, I love you.
> If it weren't for you, who would love me . . . . . .
> A marriage that denied sex from the start;

O, this nervous breakdown . . . . . .

I, on a day in the ruined nation in 1923:
I am a radiant daughter, born to Kojong, the 26th Emperor of Chosŏn,
and his concubine Pongnyŏngdang, Lady Yang,
on his 60th birthday in 1912,
the apple of everyone's eye in the Tŏksu Palace . . . . . .
My father built a kindergarten for me in the Tŏksu Palace.
My father, who did not want to lose his daughter to Japan,
had me engaged in 1919 to Kim Chang-han,
the nephew of the royal attendant Kim Hwang-jin.
But, at the request of Japan that the imperial family should get
educated in Japan,
I was taken there in 1925.
The engagement, which seemed like spring, was shattered—
O, the wedding gown of darkness!
From the spring of 1930, I started sleepwalking.
O, this nervous breakdown, as if it's crushing bones in my brain, smashing into pieces!
I [. . .] used to dash out of the house absentmindedly, and stand in pajamas on the train station platform saying, I need to take the train
without delay.

YOU, on a day in Los Angeles, America, in 1951:
Julianne Moore, as Laura Brown, is reading *Mrs. Dalloway*.
She, pregnant with her second child, pours water into the flour
to make dough to make a birthday cake for her husband.
O, how hard it is to add just the right amount of water to the flour
and to make dough well!
O, how hard it is to bake a cake in the oven like an expert!
Laura who has failed making a birthday cake for her husband,
Laura who ends up tossing the cake into the trash,
there are those women who are not good at these kinds of things.
Laura starts her car absentmindedly and rushes to the hotel,
her three-year-old son Richard with her neighbor,
to commit suicide.
O, pill bottles are scattered around.
When the waterfall is soaring up from under the bed, like a fantasy,
she attempts one self-murder, contentedly,
and comes back home, dejectedly.
I'll leave home when I give birth to the second child . . . . . .

I, I was divorced in 1951.
I gave birth to a daughter named Masae two years after I was forced to marry Sō Takeyuki, the owner of the island of Tsushima.

O, how could a princess of the Korean Empire have a marriage of convenience with the Count of a small island of Japan!
With the arrangement of the Empress Sadako, the Emperor Taishō's wife,
to reduce the impoverished Sō Takeyuki's financial difficulties,
they matched him with me who had a considerable dowry.
I was actually a little bit happy in the beginning.
But, after my daughter was born, my mental illness returned.
Through somnambulism, homesickness, and mental illness,
between recovery, relapse, and sheer madness,
I tried to dash out of the house absentmindedly, without delay.
They imprisoned me,
and tightly shackled my ankles together.
O, already the year of 1951! When the Empress Sadako passed away,
I was divorced that year.
My country was liberated years ago.
My country, no longer a kingdom, where no father, no mother, no one remained!
Nowhere to go other than the mental hospital in Japan,
there, there, there . . . . . the Bottom of the Well, I . . . . . .
Reportedly, drowned in the Korean Strait between Korea and Japan, or found dead on the hill,
Masae, my daughter, my daughter, Chŏng-hye . . . . . .

YOU, on a day in New York, America, in 2001:
Meryl Streep, as the publisher Clarissa nicknamed 'Mrs. Dalloway,' is buying flowers herself at a Manhattan florist.
She lifts the red flowers from the bucket to her chest.
O, I thought her blood was gushing out then!
She is planning a party for her ex-lover Richard,
who is to receive a literary award.
He's been producing works marked with deep scars
inflicted by Laura his mother's abandonment in childhood,
but he is now dying of AIDS.
Clarissa goes to Richard's place.
It's time for guests to arrive.
It's time for her to take him to her place.
But he jumps out of the window on the fifth floor,
in the middle of a conversation with her, before her eyes . . . . . .
Laura who comes to the funeral of Richard, who has jumped to his death . . . . . .

We meet and part, part and meet, just like that.
In 1962, I came back to the Naksŏn House in the Ch'angdŏk Palace,
after living in Japan for years.
Time had passed while I was having sleepwalking episodes,

homesickness, mental illness, and a stroke.
The last princess of Taehan Cheguk, or the Great Han Empire,
lived in her liberated native country without being added to the family registry for 20 years.
After being back home in Korea for 20 years, I was entered into the household register, but
I died of dementia, aphasia, and so many other diseases
on April 21, 1989.
My husband, who remarried a Japanese woman, had already died in 1985.
Masae, Chŏng-hye . . . . . when the waves of the Korean Strait
are sweeping over the well of aphasia,
I think I can understand Laura,
the woman who ran out of the house absentmindedly and rushed to the hotel
in the middle of making a birthday cake for her husband,
after leaving her son to her neighbor.
Laura, working far away as a librarian,
couldn't come and see her son when he was alive,
but arrived in New York on the day of his funeral.

I, You, the inside of the well is our Tŏksu Palace, the bottom of the well, the bottom of the well called love, the bottom of the well called time, the bottom of the well called wind, the bottom of the well called history, the well in Samaria, death valley, the bottom of the well . . . . . [436]

As in Mrs. Dalloway, the thoughts of the protagonist, the speaker "I" here, form the structure of each stanza as the narrative jumps from one place to another, from one time period to another. On the one hand, these fractal and chaotic dynamics are mirroring the mind of the speaker and, perhaps, also the poet herself. On the other, what unites these distinct stanzas, which read more like reportage than verse, is those women's common lives and their struggles and resistance under patriarchy. Most notably, this union is expressed in the form of madness in the lives of the four women.

[436] Kim Sŭng-hŭi, Hŭimang i oeropta [Lonely Hope] (P'aju, Kyŏnggi: Munhak tongne, 2012) 123-28.

The poem shows that Princess Tŏkhye, who was taken to a foreign land and forced into marriage, suffered from loneliness, schizophrenia, postpartum depression, and hallucination; Virginia Woolf, who in the film was writing a novel that would have a powerful influence on modern readers, struggled with melancholy and mental illness[437]; Laura Brown, an avid reader of Mrs. Dalloway, suffered from delirium, nervous breakdowns, and postpartum despair, which led to her suicide attempts; Clarissa Vaughan, "Mrs. Dalloway," and the avatar of Woolf to a certain extent, seemed most sane, but with her homosexual and bisexual desires, possessed a maddening and disruptive power. Similarly, the poem ends with a final statement of interconnectivity: "Four Women, Four Spaces, Four Times . . . . . ." The ellipsis at the end of the line suggests, however, that more than four women, spaces, and times exist. The poem as a whole implies the fluidity and plurality of gender, sexual, and national identities, as well as the multiplicity of time, space, and perspective.

Having looked at the commonalities among the four women in the poem, I would like to reiterate the common threads that run through the works of all three poets I have examined, by making connections to "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye." Looking back over Kim Myŏng-sun's, Ko Chŏng-hŭi's, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi's poetry, we can now see that their ostensible differences turn out to be not a drawback but a benefit. What separates them from one another is not just temporal but ideological. In particular, Kim Myŏng-sun, situated in a different

[437] Scholars have identified that she had a mental disorder called "manic-depressive illness," which led to her suicide by drowning in 1941. See Thomas C. Caramagno, The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992) 1.

temporal and spatial location (colonial Korea in the 1920s and 1930s), may seem distant and divergent from the other two contemporary poets. Ko Chŏng-hŭi and Kim Sŭng-hŭi may also seem to inhabit disparate worlds of thought: the former strove to explicitly incorporate socio-political ideas into her poetry until her untimely death in 1991, and the latter attempted to resist so-called "committed poetry," by disguising political messages in her lyric poetry, from her earliest work to her latest.

However, despite their differences, as we have seen in this study, they are united in their recognition of the importance of the confessional/ autobiographical voice "I" in women's writing. Corresponding to the voice of Princess Tŏkhye, Kim Myŏng-sun's, Ko Chŏng-hŭi's, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi's first-person lyric voice[438] are all determined to assert women's subjectivity, to preserve women's experiences, and to confirm the ideas that the survival of women's community depends upon a common bond between mothers and daughters, as well as between sisters, whether biological or imaginary, historical or literary.

In addition, I have also pointed out that all three poets identified connections between the personal and the political. In other words, the private and confessional voice in their poetry describing the seemingly mundane daily life of women and the symptoms of their disturbing madness and hysteria, in fact reveals their observations on social and political issues. The poets wrote confessionally or lyrically, reflecting upon the historical reality of war, massacre, and protest, thereby

[438] One major difference between Ko Chŏng-hŭi and Kim Sŭng-hŭi is that Ko's first-person voice projects her own emotions and desires onto other historical women and Kim's first-person voice often remains behind the mask of the androgynous twin gods Diana and Apollo, or Sylvia Plath.

countering the traditional notion that women's poetry, especially with the lyric "I," is inherently delicate, passive, trivial, and apolitical. To recapitulate this point, I would like to historicize the three poets, along with the two authorial figures in "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye"—Princess Tŏkhye and Virginia Woolf.

First, what connects Princess Tŏkhye, a historical and "authorial" figure, to the author of Mrs. Dalloway is more than just an authorial voice. As highlighted on the surface of the poem, they are connected by their unhappy married life and nervous breakdown, but more importantly, they are also linked by their experience of militarism. Scholars have pointed out that Woolf's "location in war-ridden England impacted her psychological make-up."[439] Similarly, Princess Tŏkhye's traumatic experience—being taken from Korea to Japan by force, put into school there, and forced to pledge allegiance to a colonial power with a marriage of convenience—affected her mental health. What is more, by bringing together Princess Tŏkhye and Woolf, Kim also reveals the interlocking connections between the ravages of male militarism and those of women's oppression in patriarchal society: in the poem, the women's inner turmoil, in fact, reflects historical realities of the time.

Seen this way, we can now observe that all three poets, consciously or unconsciously, inserted the subject of political turmoil in the inner world of women, the world which was also at war, i.e., mental instability. In other words, Kim Myŏng-sun directly experienced Japan's war efforts both in colonized Korea and in colonial

[439] Surila Agarwala, Ira Das, and Kavita Kumar, eds., Health Psychology (New Delhi: Allied, 2009) 311.

Japan. Ko Chŏng-hŭi witnessed the ramifications of McCarthyism in post-war Korea, as well as student demonstrations and the Kwangju massacre. Like Ko, Kim Sŭng-hŭi observed these political tensions in Korea, but she also learned about political conflicts in the West while traveling abroad. And, in their poetic world, they attack the immorality of militarism as male violence, while writing about women's personal experiences of physical and rhetorical violence which can lead to mental disorder and death. In sum, these poets connect the public display of violence with the politics of the personal.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the three poets' conscious and subconscious search for a community of women who write as women about women, and who read as women, transcending the boundaries of space and time, as also manifested in the woman-centered community in "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye." It is worth mentioning that Kim Myŏng-sun, Ko Chŏng-hŭi, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi promoted the sharing of woman-centered perspectives, but I do not believe they would necessarily advocate matriarchy because the concept of dominant female power, like dominant male power, can contribute to the inequality that feminists have condemned. Instead, I would argue, they focused on the figure of mother as a creative force, a force which can bring about social changes.

As I have illuminated, Kim Myŏng-sun saw her deceased mother as the source of her poetic imagination. Rather than passively suppressing, she skillfully used the images of her biological mother to counter the very patriarchy that had denounced her maternal bloodline, thereby illustrating creativity's potential to unsettle patriarchal injustice. Moving from Kim's focus on her own biological

mother, Ko Chŏng-hŭi turned to her Korean historical and literary foremothers and regarded them as the origin of her creativity. What is more, while appropriating their voice to articulate her present-day concerns such as gender inequality and the neglected women's history, she recognized those mothers as the source of inspiration for subsequent generations of women in Korea, thereby expanding the network of women working for change.

Evolving from Ko, who mostly focused on women in Korea and East Asia, Kim Sŭng-hŭi broadened and diversified the community of women by including women from both the East and the West, as well as from both the past and the present. This diverse community is apparent particularly in "You, the Bottom of the Well, Princess Tŏkhye," but also can be seen in her other work. Furthermore, she attempted to break away from the matrilineal transmission of creative power by grouping all of her literary and intellectual foremothers and contemporaries as her "sisters," suggesting her desire for equality and inclusiveness. The protean path of Kim reaching toward global belonging and networking is perhaps the one that shows the most promising direction for the future work of women poets.

Having recapitulated the common themes that run through Kim Myŏng-sun's, Ko Chŏng-hŭi's, and Kim Sŭng-hŭi's poetry, as well as the achievements these poets have made, I would like to conclude by underling how this project expands the field of extant scholarship. Despite a recent global surge in the reception and translation of Korean women poets, there has been surprisingly little scholarship in English on this topic. Thus, "Writing Herself: Resistance, Rebellion, and Revolution in Korean Women's Lyric Poetry, 1925—2012" expands the focus of Western scholarship

beyond the Korean male canon by providing the first in-depth analysis of the works of Korean women poets in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, unlike the general scholarship that tends to highlight the victimization of women and their role as passive observers, this study shows Korean women poets as active chroniclers of public memory and vital participants in global politics and literature. By revisiting forgotten texts by women and recognizing the power of women's agency, we can better understand the complexity of women's lives in Korea. The power that opens up the possibilities of rereading and reevaluating our lives is one of the reasons why literature continues to appeal to us.

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