

Chapter I

Introduction: Fragments of Memory

*“What if no one sees that this vase was once broken?
That’s falsity. Deceit. A wrong deed.”*

*Only then did I realize—
he had lined the little cracks with gold, not to flaunt his wealth,
but to show clearly what had once been lost.¹*

In Remembrance

Pak Wansō’s short story “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered” (*Pogwōn toejī mot’an kōttūl ūl wihayō*)² takes place shortly after the June 29 Declaration of 1987.³ A nameless writer steps into a bookstore and thumbs through a shiny new anthology. Titled *Selected Works of Wōlbuk and Nappuk Writers (Wōlbuk-Nappuk mun-in sōnjip)*⁴ it

¹ Pak Wansō, “Pokwōn toejī mot’an kōttūl ūl wihayō,” [In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered] *Na ūi kajang najong jinni-in kōt [My Very Last Possessions]* (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2006), 184-5 (all translations are my own). A literal translation of the title would read “For Things Unrecovered.” I have made the liberty of translating “wihayō,” meaning “for,” “for the sake of,” as “in remembrance of” because the protagonist utters these titular words, for the first and last time, while drinking—commemorating the memory of her former teacher. My translation admittedly brings to mind Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, translated in English today as *In Search of Lost Time*, but formerly as *Remembrance of Things Past*. However, the Korean translation has always been *Irō pō-rin sigan ūl ch’ajasō*, which, in English, translates back to *In Search of Lost Time*. I cannot corroborate whether or not Pak Wansō read or was influenced by Proust; therefore, the title—in translation—is solely my doing.

² All Korean words have been transcribed in accordance with the McCune-Reischauer romanization system. Exceptions are made for names that are used otherwise, e.g. “Park Chung-hee” rather than “Pak Chōng-hŭi.”

³ Following the mass pro-democracy anti-government demonstrations of June 1987, known as the June Revolution or the June Movement, the June 29 Declaration issued incumbent-President Chun Doo Hwan out of power and led to South Korea’s first direct presidential elections in sixteen years in December of 1987. Moreover, as South Korea prepared to host the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, the nation was, as Pak Wansō writes, “overflowing with hope and optimism.” *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴ The term “Wōlpuk” refers to those who voluntarily crossed over the 38th parallel to North Korea and “Nappuk” to those who were forcibly kidnapped by North Korean forces during the Korean War.

comprises works that had long remained censored for their communist sentiments. She searches, determinedly, for one name—that of her teacher from thirty years past: Song Sa-muk. She finds his name and exclaims: “How good times are now!”⁵ Only days earlier, she had been unsuccessful in convincing another writer to submit his work testifying to a small rural political scandal. He had submitted his work, aptly titled “Recovery” (Pogwǒn), for review, but had retracted it at the very last minute—from fear of retaliation. Now, seeing her teacher’s name “recovered”⁶ within the crisp white pages of the anthology, she feels deeply moved.

Sentimentality, however, quickly ebbs into dismay. The writer knows for a fact that her teacher, Song Sa-muk, had been sentenced to death—for his beliefs—in South Korea; he had neither crossed over to North Korea nor been kidnapped by North Koreans. Song Sa-muk: his name was a false recovery. The writer recalls an ugly porcelain vase she had once seen. Its owner, upon breaking the vase, had awkwardly pieced it together; gold lined its cracks. What had appeared, at first glance, hideously tacky, she grew to admire for its very unseemliness. Its stark honesty, “show[ing] clearly what had once been lost,”⁷ moved her profoundly. Putting the anthology down, the writer woefully asks: “Can what is broken still said to be recovered if its recovery fails to show its own fragments?”⁸

Intent on righting—and writing—the wrong, she doggedly pursues friends and family to bear witness. To her disappointment, she finds no one willing to testify. An old classmate has kept her past a secret and fears its disclosure, her teacher’s former

⁵ Ibid., 183.

⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁸ Ibid., 184.

colleagues are now much too important to be bothered, even Song Sa-muk's own sons implore her to leave well enough alone:

“So you know that your father was killed.”

“Of course, how could I forget? I remember.”

“Your younger brother seemed to think your father was kidnapped.”

“Oh, that. It's just how we talk about it in our family. ‘Sentenced to Death’ sounds so frightful; ‘Kidnapped’ sounds much better.”

“Just how you talk about it?”

“Yes, just how we talk about it. We didn't always. For some reason, Father happened to be included with the other *Nappuk* writers. We simply went along.”

“But you know that's not the truth. Why not correct it? How can you simply go along with a lie?”

“The worse the situation, the easier it is to side with the majority. It's a kind of self-defense mechanism.”⁹

The glibness with which Song Sa-muk's eldest son, in spite of his knowledge, brushes aside the truth infuriates the writer. The son has chosen, without remorse or responsibility, the easier path of “the majority.” He would rather live a lie in the present than relive the truth of the past through his memories. Realizing that certain pasts always remain hidden, unrecovered, beneath the glossy veneer of recovery, the writer, lonely, dejectedly, raises her glass—in remembrance of things unrecovered.

I open my dissertation with Pak Wansö's “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered” because she reveals any claims to total recovery to be fiction. Recovery by definition assumes loss; therefore, total recovery is a fantasy that will never arrive. Unity is always already deferred. Moreover, for Pak Wansö, “things” remain “unrecovered” because it is “easier”: no action is required. Unlike the term in English, there is no single word for “unrecovered” in Korean. The opposite of “*pogwŏn*,” “recovery,” is “*pogwŏn toeji mot'an*,” meaning “unable to be recovered,” or “*pogwŏn toeji an ŭn*,” “not recovered.” Pak Wansö's use of “*mot'an*,” “unable to,” rather than “*an ŭn*,” “not,” in her

⁹ Ibid., 203.

title seems to suggest a deliberate agency—and the possibility—in the act of recovery. That is, the past remains buried unless one engages in the arduous task of recovery which shows itself as recovery. Hence, the owner of the vase declares: “What if no one sees that this vase was once broken? That’s falsity. Deceit. A wrong deed.”¹⁰ Much like her obstinate writer, who admiringly recollects the whole-as-broken vase with its clumsy golden cracks, Pak Wansō would rather recover the past in all its fragmented ugliness than gloss over it. For, as her writer asks, how can one claim faith to a recovery that shrouds its very process of recovery? How does one act in the face of a recovery that effectively erases any trace of loss so that only the recovered stands in its place—as if always already extant?

The conflict between the writer and her teacher’s son in “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered” points to the unproblematized progression of South Korean nationalist historiography from colonial to post-colonial to post-war periods.¹¹ Not unlike in other nascent nation-states, in South Korea, too, a nationalist paradigm has posited the nation as a unified totality. South Korea’s national history, as celebrated in textbooks and depicted in mainstream accounts, therefore, reads as a narrative of emerging national self-consciousness: from the struggle against outside forces to the achievement of independence as a sovereign nation, from a poverty-stricken, war-torn third world to a

¹⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹¹ With the liberation of colonial rule and the emergence of two ideologically-competing Koreas, history became part of the competition. History fell under a frame of reference that either supported or denied the truth claims of each nation-state. Thus, a politics of nationalism has dominated the historical presentation, historiography, of modern South Korea. Moreover, in constructing historical narratives presupposing a linear progression of the South Korean nation, nationalist historians imposed on their history a system of binaries that produced an exceedingly limiting historical narrative: failed tradition in the face of modernity, backwardness overcome by progress, and so forth. National history, therefore, remained limited by its own bifurcating logic. See Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999). For a critique of nationalist narratives based on a linear history of the Western model in China, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

highly industrialized and developed nation. It is a history that erases how unity, progress, and recovery are so often built on the backs of repression and exploitation, obfuscating and obliterating all other possible modes of interpretation. The violent division into two ideologically opposed nation-states further intensified such a totalizing narrative: competing for claims to legitimacy as the true representative of Korea within the world community, South Korean history was fitted to better signify the *telos* of its political system.

When Pak Wansŏ wrote “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered” in 1989, South Korea was still grappling with the dramatic transformation that had taken place—the shift from military authoritarianism to civilian democracy.¹² Only a year ago, President Chun Doo Hwan had stepped down under pressure from the largest anti-government, pro-democracy demonstrations in South Korean history.¹³ South Koreans had just held their first direct elections in over sixteen years, electing a president, who, in turn, proclaimed the end of authoritarian rule and promised major democratic reform: pardons were issued, political prisoners spilled out of their cells, censored books found their way to the bookstores.¹⁴ Beneath this façade of optimism, however, President Roh

¹² Charles Armstrong posits that South Korea’s emergent democracy of this time can be seen as part of a global surge of democratization from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, sometimes called the “Third Wave” of democracy, a surge that toppled authoritarian regimes in areas as far-flung as Eastern Europe, Latin America, and South Africa. See Charles K. Armstrong, ed., *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy, and the State* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹³ What is often called the June Revolution was actually a series of wide-ranging pro-democracy mass demonstrations that took place all through the month of June in 1987. It brought students, workers, laborers, and the middle classes into the sphere of public protest in unprecedented numbers. These demonstrations also led to the mass workers’ demonstrations of July.

¹⁴ Despite showing up in the masses to celebrate their first direct presidential election in sixteen years, South Koreans saw yet another military man take the presidency, as Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-Jung (who would both later become, the first and second, civilian presidents) split the votes. South Korea also successfully played host to the world at the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games.

Tae-woo remained a military man through and through.¹⁵ In spite of an emerging civil society, the state remained, at times, unchanged.

With democracy movements in full swing and a majority of opposition party members in the National Assembly, it was not possible for Roh Tae-woo to overlook the ills of the Fifth Republic under Chun Doo Hwan. Yet, even as trials for the 5·18 Kwangju Uprising¹⁶ were taking place and memorials were being erected, the facts of the event remained undisclosed. Furthermore, even as new policies were being redrawn with North Korea, hinting at reconciliation, if not unification, there still existed considerable anti-communist sentiments: no efforts were made, on the part of the nation-state, to question the totalizing and bifurcated¹⁷ history of the divided nation. Individual voices calling out for *chinsang kyumyŏng* (examination into the truth) were quickly silenced.

As stories unbecoming of the nationalistic paradigm were brutally excised, repressed, and naturalized as absences, people were silenced into accepting the history

¹⁵ Roh Tae-woo had not only been friends and classmates with Chun Doo Hwan at the Korean Military Academy but had also been instrumental in aiding Chun Doo Hwan in his ascension to the presidency. He was an extremely important force in both the Incident of December 12, 1979, when then-General Chun Doo Hwan arrested the ROK Army Chief of Staff, General Chung Sung Hwa, on charges of involvement in President Park Chung-hee's assassination, and successfully overtook the Korean military, and the Kwangju Massacre of May 1980, when militia rolled into Kwangju in Cholla Province to quell protests against Chun Doo Hwan's *coup d'état* to power. As such, in spite of having been elected, Roh Tae-woo was still very much in line with Chun Doo Hwan. See Kang Man-gil, *I-sip segi uri yŏksa* [Twentieth Century History] (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1999).

¹⁶ The 5·18 Kwangju Uprising, also known as the Kwangju Democratization Movement or simply 5·18, refers to a popular uprising in the city of Kwangju, South Cholla Province, from May 18 to May 28, 1980. Citizens rose up against Chun Doo Hwan's military dictatorship and took control of the city; they took up arms to defend themselves, but were ultimately crushed by the South Korean army. The incident resulted in hundreds of deaths and many thousands wounded and missing. To this day the exact number of casualties is subject to dispute, and there is still controversy over who actually issued the orders that would cost so many civilian lives. During Chun Doo Hwan's reign, the so-called "5·18 Incident" was represented as a communist uprising. In 2002 a national cemetery was established in Kwangju and compensations were provided to survivors.

¹⁷ As I already mentioned above, the drive to legitimacy and to discover success, development, and progress in South Korea led to a nationalistic historiography entrenched in a bifurcated logic: South and North, heroes and villains, democracy and communism. As violent memories of the war and of division left most Koreans eager to leave the past behind, they came to tolerate postwar totalitarian regimes that relegated history to the truth claims of political systems.

prescribed by their nation. Sentiments regarding the Korean War and division also became fixed: on one hand, there was deep resentment and bitter animosity toward North Korea, on the other, considerable nostalgia and sorrow, articulated in the view that this was a partition of siblings that should never have occurred. Hence, in Pak Wansö's short story, "In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered," Song Sa-muk's son states, more than thirty years later, that he and his family did not always speak of their father as a *Nappuk* author. Given the only history available, they "simply went along" as "a kind of self-defense mechanism."¹⁸

For those teetering between the poles of this precariously defined love-hate relationship, remembering the past meant engaging in perilous struggle against the forces seeking to suppress them—whether by coercion or by collective forgetting. Thus, as the writer in "In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered" raises her glass in memory of her "unrecovered" teacher, she also contemplates over how to write about him: should she leave history, however wrong, alone, or fulfill "[her] responsibility to tell the truth"?¹⁹ Read in this context, I find Pak Wansö's "In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered" is as much a critique on the fiction of recuperation as it is about the difficulty of recovery in and through language. Having demonstrated that the dream of a complete historical recuperation is false, how does one recover and write the fragments of the past? Moreover, how does one write about a past as personal as partition²⁰ when the politics of

¹⁸ Pak Wansö, "In Remembrance," 203.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁰ As will become clearer in the following chapter, I use the term "partition" for the Korean "*pundan*," which is more commonly translated as "division." I do so deliberately to emphasize the personal over the political experience of the nation's rupture. The term "division" is frequently used to modify the nation: Korea as a "*pundan choguk*," "divided nation." In that the political division culminated in a catastrophic breaking apart of bodies, lives, families, homes, memories, I use "partition" to emphasize the more personal and emotional fragments of "*pundan*."

division dictates both the contents and methods of remembering the past? That is, how does one engage in a recovery so that the cracks show themselves?

It is this tension between absence and presence that my dissertation explores. More specifically, I examine the role of the literary imagination in recovering absent(ed) memories. As the writer in “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered” reminds us, however, the goal is not to reconstruct an original image of the past but to trace how the past is signified and forgotten. By shedding light on the forces in historical and cultural politics that seek to maintain and contest such amnesic elisions, as in the narratives of Song Sa-muk’s son, my dissertation aims to tease out the processes that have produced a forgetfulness about the nation’s recent past. In particular, it is an attempt to dislodge memories of partition from their confinement in national South Korean history, and to reconsider them within the terrain of South Korean literature.

Accordingly, I investigate the memory narratives on partition— partition literature—of three prominent South Korean writers: Kim Wõnil, Pak Wansõ, and Oh Junghee.²¹ All three authors lived through partition as children, and write about its lingering wounds through an exploration into their own childhood memories. As works of fiction, it is my contention that their texts open up a space from which to explore how personal—not national—memories of rupture, trauma, and loss are articulated. Thus, examining how Kim Wõnil, Pak Wansõ, and Oh Junghee, as writers, re-collect fragments of their broken pasts and, in turn, their broken nation, in literature is to reveal how literary texts can disrupt the totalizing narrative of national history. The fundamental question, then, becomes: Why literature? Why partition literature?

²¹ I will perform a more in-depth discussion of the genre of partition literature in the next section.

Why Literature?

Modern Korean literature is often called “literature of *han*” (suffering or grief). This epithet attests to the close relationship literature has always had with history in South Korea. Through the catastrophes of colonial occupation, partition, war, dictatorial regimes, and ruthless industrialization, modern Korean literature has stood alongside history, bearing witness to the lived experience of history’s devastations. Hence, in South Korea, literature provides an alternative system of knowledge—one focused on the sensibilities, mores, and lives of the Korean people.

Perhaps due to its entanglement with history, modern Korean literature, like modern Korean history, has often felt the strong, and persistent, grasp of nationalism. Even a perfunctory glance at mainstream postwar literature reveals the shadow of ideological strife—in both literary and critical works. Thus, even though myriad writers actively voiced opposition to the myopic historical perspective offered by the authoritarian and dictatorial regimes from Rhee Syngman to Chun Doo Hwan, their works were either prohibited for exhibiting subversive thoughts or read through a nationalist framework. Not surprisingly, works and writers, championing the ideology of conservative nationalism gained dominance.²²

In that the division of the Korean peninsula was (and still is) very much an unresolved and lingering reality, works depicting the pain of division and the brutality of the Korean War occupy an enormous space within the Korean literary field. A never-ending nightmare, the subject of division continues to capture the imagination of writers over different generations—from the 1950s to present day. It is this collective of literary

²² Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ung eds., *Hanguk sosŏlsa* [Korean Literary History] (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2000).

works on the subject of division that I call “partition literature” in my dissertation.

Generally called “*pundan munhak*” (division literature), its many names, “*yugi-o munhak*” (6·25 literature), “*pundan i-san munhak*” (division diaspora literature), and “*sirhyang munhak*” (literature of lost home), attest to the complexities and difficulties of writing on the nation’s traumatic divide.

While most literary scholars consent to “division literature,” their boundaries remain divided. Paek Nakch’öng, for example, classifies all postwar literature written in Korea’s divided system (*pundan ch’eje*) under *pundan munhak*. Ha Ŭng-baek talks directly back at Paek Nakch’öng: he finds the breadth of Paek Nakch’öng’s definition too wide and instead defines *pundan munhak* as literary works that “deliberately focus on division in order to probe the causes of division, the fetters of life after division, and the conflicts of disparate ideologies.”²³ Kim Yunsik, ever the diligent materialist, limits *pundan munhak* to the literary works of a particular generation of writers.²⁴

Kim Yunsik’s categorization of *pundan munhak* specifies a handful of writers who were born in the 1940s and narrativize the violence and trauma of division through the recollection of their own childhood memories—as adults—in the 1970s and 1980s. Kim Yunsik excludes works on division from the 1950s and 1960s: he finds them problematic—too steeped in the immediacy of the events; their experiences still raw, the writers lack the distance to step back. Writers in the 1970s, Kim Yunsik asserts, had obtained the distance necessary to portray the catastrophic events of division with greater

²³ Ha Ŭng-baek, “Jangja ũi sosöl, sosöl ũi jangja” [The Eldest Son’s Novel, the Novel’s Adult], *Sewöl ũi nõul* [The Tides of Time] (Seoul: Dongmunsa, 1996).

²⁴ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ŭng eds., *Hanguk sosölsa* [Korean Literary History] (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2000), 469-97.

objectivity, allowing them to move beyond visceral descriptions of suffering toward a keen socio-historical contemplation unfettered by ideology.²⁵

Kim Yunsik's definition of *pundan munhak*, while problematic in its narrow selectivity, emphasizes a politics of memory in the South Korean literary imagination—as a medium to articulate pressing, oppositional critique. Literary works that divorce themselves from the structures of power fulfill a political role in literature. While Kim Yunsik is often seen as having eschewed politics, I see in his definition the spirit of the April 19 Revolution in 1960,²⁶ when students rose up in protest and effected Rhee Syngman's abdication of the presidency. In that the bright light of democracy was a mere flicker, brutally snuffed out by an even more authoritarian regime, there is in Kim Yunsik's reading of Korean literature the lingering mark of 4·19. That is, his demarcation of *pundan munhak* points to an expectation in literature to critically approach social issues, maybe even mobilize political thought.

Not coincidentally, the South Korean literary field in the 1970s had grown remarkably political. Not only did President Park Chung-hee's repressive *Yusin* Constitution²⁷ provoke intense resistance, but more importantly, the dark underbelly of rapid and ruthless industrialization began to reveal itself. As laborers, peasants, and the (newly constructed) urban poor attempted to voice their grievances, oftentimes with

²⁵ Ibid., 473.

²⁶ On April 19, 1960, students, with intellectuals and laborers by their side, protested against the corrupt practices of Rhee Syngman's regime, forcing Rhee Syngman to abdicate. This pro-democracy movement, also known as "4·19," left an indelible mark on the Korean political imagination—the power of collective action in bringing about political change. It would influence future mass protests like the 5·18 Kwangju Uprising of 1980 and the June Revolution of 1987.

²⁷ In 1971, Park Chung-hee declared a state of emergency citing the dangers of the Cold War. In October 1972, he dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution; in December, a new constitution, the *Yusin* Constitution, was approved in a heavily rigged plebiscite. Borrowing its name from the Meiji Restoration of imperial Japan, the *Yusin* Constitution dramatically increased Park Chung-hee's power. It transferred the election of the president to an electoral college, increased the presidential term to seven years with no limits on re-election, and effectively turned South Korea into a police-state.

violence as their only means, writers sought to speak for these marginalized groups. Therefore, the literary terrain of the 1970s was marked by the rise of so-called dissident writers, who attempted to speak against both the ideological inequities of Park Chung-hee's dictatorial regime and the social injustices of industrialization.

Considered against this backdrop, I find Kim Yunsik's definition of *pundan munhak* effective. As a student of literature reading literature to re-illuminate historical events, *pundan munhak* as limited to a body of writers narrativizing the ever-present nightmare of division through their own childhood memories in the politically-charged literary terrain of the 1970s (and early-1980s) proffers an excellent opportunity to do so. Be that as it may, I find the widely used English translation of *pundan munhak* as "division literature" problematical. In that these literary works testify to the contradictions of division by way of their authors' personal experiences, "division" seems too broad a term. Even as the personal and political are inextricably intertwined, I believe "partition" better emphasizes the violent shattering and the consequent fragments of memory with which the individual was left after the event. It was a political division, but one that resulted in the breaking apart of lives, bodies, families, and homes—a parting against will.

Moreover, "partition," owing to its prevalent usage within the context of the partition of India, better captures the enormity of violence embedded in a nation's rupture than the somewhat banal term "division." Additionally, in that *pundan munhak* is an exploration into the language and representation of a traumatic historical event as filtered through memory, "partition literature"—rather than "division literature"—lends itself more readily to critical conversations with other literary works engaged in the exploration

of memory, from oral testimonies on the partition of India to letters from Hiroshima to Holocaust narratives. Finally, as one of a few divided nations, reading works on the Korean experience as “partition literature” allows for a more comparative study against other works from other traditions. While such a study lies outside the scope of my dissertation, I do think an inquiry into how national literatures were constructed in Cold War partitions, such as Vietnam and Germany, as opposed to colonial partitions, such as India, Ireland, and Palestine, would offer an interesting framework through which to explore Korean partition literature—an amalgamation of both.

Writing from Memory

My dissertation examines how division was experienced, that is, how division is remembered, represented, and re-written as partition literature in South Korea. Focusing on Kim Wõnil’s “Spirit of Darkness” (Ödum ũi hon, 1973), Pak Wansõ’s *The Naked Tree* (*Namok*, 1970), and Oh Junghee’s “Garden of Childhood” (Yunyõn ũi ttül, 1980), I investigate how particular histories were forced to take refuge within the realm of fiction. Kim Wõnil, the son of a defector, critiques the futility of ideology through an overly innocent young boy, Kap’ae, for whom ideology is a phantom darkness that has torn his family apart and, more importantly, left him hungry. Ideology finds no place in Pak Wansõ’s *The Naked Tree*; rather, Pak Wansõ depicts ordinary day-to-day survival after trauma. Deliberately writing herself into her fictional protagonist, Pak Wansõ demonstrates the simultaneous desire and difficulty of articulating the past. Lastly, Oh Junghee, contrary to her Edenic title, paints a portrait of sullied childhood; she plumbs a perverse abyss that lurks within and beyond the garden. Oh Junghee goes beyond Kim

Wŏnil's ideology and Pak Wansŏ's healing and opens up a new way of thinking about partition.

Because partition literature, while works of fiction, is based on individual experiences of a historical and, thus, collective event, it offers an ideal space from which to tease out the tangled relationship between modern Korean literature and Korean history. Even as Kim Wŏnil, Pak Wansŏ, and Oh Junghee recover and articulate an-Other fragment of division, they can—and have—fall(en) prey to yet another regime of truth. Korean literary criticism tends to bracket partition literature as a coming-of-age story: an innocent child searches for a lost father, whose absence has shattered the family; the search, while futile, allows the child to safely reach adulthood. Not only does such a reading simplify the complexities of each text, but it also reduces partition literature to allegory: division as a moment of nationalization—South Korea as a young nation, born out of ideological war, overcomes its plight to successfully reach nationhood.

Some partition works do lend themselves to such a reading. For example, Kim Wŏnil, whose entire literary career has been dedicated to writing about the Korean War and national division, betrays a desire for reconciliation in “Spirit of Darkness”: his Kap’ae is but a victim of ideology who, as an adult, learns to understand—and embrace—his ideologue father. On the other hand, Pak Wansŏ and Oh Junghee firmly resist such a reading. For these two women writers, the father’s absence, while a rupture, is what allows them to create a new feminine economy. The memories of both Pak Wansŏ’s protagonist Kyŏng-a and Oh Junghee’s protagonist Norangnuni show that, for the women, the search is not for the absent father but for an identity—a search that can only occur in the very absence of the father.

The trope of memory in partition literature allows Kap'ae, Kyöng-a, and Norangnuni to move freely through time—past, present, and future—and resist being co-opted and deprived of their unsettling and self-critical qualities; memory mocks, interrupts, and disrupts the totalizing narrative and progressive linearity of both Korean history and literary history. Hence, in reading Kim Wönil, Pak Wansö, and Oh Junghee, I deploy the concept of memory to unbind the notion of the political from the logic of nationalism. Doing so allows me to demonstrate how partition literature has been historicized and gendered and, in turn, free partition literature from the rigidified binaries of fiction/non-fiction, individual/collective, and memory/history. In that sense, my dissertation is grounded in both the Korean conversations of modern Korean literature and in the larger scholarly discussion of memory.

For some time now, both literary scholars and historians have deployed the concept of memory as part of their continuing efforts to expand the horizons of literature and history.²⁸ Because memory connotes the personal and emotional in one's relation to

²⁸ In addition to works that have been or will be discussed in some detail, some writings that have influenced my thinking on the relationship between memory, trauma, and history are Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Allan Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11:3 (1998), 37-62; Susan A. Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997), 1372-85; Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations*, no. 26 (spring 1989), 7-25; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Cathy Caruth ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, MD., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Michel Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory," *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and trans. Martin Jordin (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 89-106, and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard and trans. Donald F. Bouchard

the past, it produces a kaleidoscopic—fragmented but multiple—outlook of events. Kap'ae's recollection of the turbulent times, from liberation to war to division, rests on the persecution he suffered as an ideologue's son whereas the war only resonates for Kyōng-a as the cause of her brothers' deaths and the realization of her gendered identity. With claims to an experiential authenticity, moreover, memory validates those experiences located at the margins and disrupts the seemingly unitary nature of history: it restores alternative discourses the dominant would rather bleach out or forget.

However, because dominance is also sustained by memory—by a selective, highly ideologized form of recollection—memory brackets as much as it restores. This is not surprising since remembering entails forgetting; for memory to work at all, certain memories must be forgotten. Some are lost over time, fading and resurfacing in profoundly altered versions; some are lost unwittingly, tucked away into the deepest recesses of memory. Furthermore, as Maurice Halbwachs reminds us, memory does not exist outside of the boundaries of history.²⁹ Socially constructed historical narratives often define the shape of individual memories. Hence, memory is not unproblematic; it is always already mediated. Illuminating its constructed and mediated nature, therefore, will

and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-64; articles from “the comfort women: colonialism, war, and sex,” a special issue of *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5:1 (spring 1997); Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jane Flax, “Re-Membering the Selves: Is the Repressed Gendered?” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26, no. 1 (winter 1990); Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996); W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001); Rigoberta Menchú, *I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (New York: Verso, 1984); Arturo Arias, ed., *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
²⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

demonstrate more precisely the conditions of power that shape the ways in which the past is conveyed and ask how such representations produce subjects.

Andreas Huyssen asserts that we are witnessing a “memory boom of unprecedented proportions.”³⁰ As various peoples from various locations call for the recovery of heretofore marginalized or silenced experiences, it becomes even more imperative to reflect on why issues are formulated in terms of memory—of remembering and forgetting. We must also be vigilant about questioning how we remember—for what purpose, for whom, and from which position—lest re-collections fall into another naturalizing totality. In exploring the literary and political implications of remembering, my dissertation asks how acts of reinscribing and retelling memories of the past can do so without reestablishing yet another regime of totality and truthfulness. How can we remember loss in literature even as it relies on narrative structures that encourage closure? How can fragments of memories, once recovered, remain as unsettling fragments?

My dissertation does not privilege memory nor does it seek to rescue memory from hegemonic historical narratives. Rather, it problematizes the concept of history by claiming memory as an integral part of historical production. By revealing desires and anxieties—found within personal memory—my dissertation aspires to conceive of ways that intervene in the process of historical construction. For me, then, memory is the device through which I explore historical knowledge.

Consequently, my definition of memory does not lie in opposition to history; a binary, after all, effects more problems than solutions. In some studies, memory has often

³⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

been privileged as genuine and authentic knowledge about ordinary people's past experiences, in contrast to official History, which is considered to be a product of power, written from the perspective of "the victor."³¹ In other instances, memory has been associated with myth and fiction as found in memoirs and autobiographies, oftentimes looked down upon as lacking in evidence offering highly subjective, partisan points of view. Both cases reveal that there is no stable dichotomy between memory and history but rather that the knowledge about the past, whether as memory or history, is always intertwined. Hence, my engagement with memory is as one complicitous with history in producing accounts of the past; remembering the past cannot be divorced from the contexts within which remembrance occurs.

Here I am reminded of Joan Scott's caution on re-essentializing experience: "Experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore, political."³² For Scott, experience is not *ipso facto* truth. Instead, experience questions the very mediations through which certain events or experiences come to appear natural, authoritative, and self-evident, while others remain relegated at the margins or beneath the surface. Scott's warning is timely. In accessing memories within partition literature to reconsider Korean history, I must be aware of the multiple and contradictory elements implicit in how these authors remember—and forget—the past in certain ways and not others.

The theoretical framework for my dissertation is heavily informed by Walter Benjamin's reading of Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*. The *flâneur*, in his aimless strolling,

³¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256.

³² Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (summer 1991), 797.

sees “the true picture of the past flit by.”³³ At once a participator and observer, the *flâneur* sees social reality in a succession of separate, fragmented images, not in linear, whole narratives.³⁴ Hence, the *flâneur* is, for Benjamin, an implication of resistance, always already a point of ambivalence and hesitation, never defined or closed in meaning.³⁵ Moreover, the relative ease with which the *flâneur* glides around the city—unfixed in meaning, precariously contingent, always being written and re-written as it is built and rebuilt indefinitely—indicates, for Benjamin, dissolving ideological notions of fixity and homogeneity. Thus, Hannah Arendt likens the *flâneur* to the angel of history, the figure Benjamin saw in Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus.”³⁶ Like the angel of history, who has his face turned toward the past, looking at the expanse of ruins of the past, as he is blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress, so the *flâneur*, Arendt writes, through his “*gestus* of purposeless strolling, turns his back to the crowd even as he is propelled and swept by it.”³⁷ The *flâneur* as angel of history destabilizes progress; he would rather stay in the now, awaken the dead, and join together what has been smashed to pieces.

For Arendt, then, the *flâneur* lends structure to Benjamin’s notion of writing—narrativizing—history. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin writes that history as presented in a linear and homogeneous narrative of “progress” reduces and represses “other” voices; history is not a movement toward one developmental line of

³³ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The *Flâneur*,” *Charles Baudelaire, a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983). In speaking of the *flâneur*, I do not mean to presume that the specifically Korean context can be explained away by Benjamin’s specifically European concept of the *flâneur*; rather, I mean to show how theoretical formations based on other cultures may prove illuminating.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin,” *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1968), 165.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 174

progress, but rather “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage.”³⁸ The idea that mankind as a whole has achieved progress, Benjamin asserts, dismisses individuals and ignores their sufferings, and is thus false. As Benjamin’s *flâneur* calls for a radical displacement of our frames of reference, so partition literature interrupts the grand narrative of nationalist history with its splintered reminiscences. After all, assumptions have a hard time securing themselves to a world, real or fictional, that is revealed in fragments.

Therefore, I find partition literature, in Benjamin’s words, “brush[es] history against the grain.”³⁹ It interrupts the linearity of nationalist historiography running along “homogeneous, empty time” from the assumption of coherence.⁴⁰ Where nationalist history—and, nationalist literary history—recount events in the progressive tense, partition literature considers those that have been omitted from the formers’ accounts of events—in remembrance. By capturing those omissions, partition literature frees “the oppressed past” from a totalizing and teleological history.⁴¹ It brings to light the numerous counterpoints to the known course of the past so as to effectively subvert history’s inevitability.

Susan Buck-Morss’s interpretation of Benjamin further illuminates why his formulation might be important to my examination of the politics of memory in Korean partition literature. Piecing together Benjamin’s fragmentary writings, Buck-Morss makes clear what was at stake in his rethinking of conventional historiography.

Benjamin’s purpose, according to Buck-Morss, was “to bring into consciousness those

³⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 257, 262.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

repressed elements of the past (its realized barbarisms and its unrealized dreams) which ‘place the present in a critical position.’”⁴² That is, when the past is made urgently relevant to the present, it questions the power that historical truth is assumed to have over the present. In the case of South Korea, particularly in the 1970s, as economic development drove forward, social tensions intensified, and political unrest persisted, writers attempted to criticize the contradictions of the present through a new—critical and political—understanding of division. Reading Benjamin allows me to see how partition literature writes historical knowledge so as to remain critically relevant to present struggles for social changes.

My inquiry into partition literature’s struggle to re-illumine the history of national division begins in Chapter Two, “Opening the ‘Spirit of Darkness,’” with an exploration into my use of the term “partition” and “partition literature” within the particular South Korean historical and literary contexts. I raise the question of terminology at the outset to stress that my choice of the very term “partition,” as opposed to the more general “division,” determines not only the image constructed but also the questions asked about this historical event. The splitting of Korea at the 38th parallel was at once an effect of American military prowess, a consequence of the struggle between two global powers, a civil war that pitted kin against kin—as enemies, and an immense rupture that continues to pervade all aspects of life. While I use “partition” to emphasize the emotional legacy of the politico-historical event—even as the two are necessarily intertwined—it,

⁴² Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 338.

nevertheless, puts into question the very terms “partition” and “division.” Such an inquiry, I believe, leads us to rethink the meanings of this particular history.

Having defined “partition,” I introduce and contextualize *pundan munhak*, partition literature, against the backdrop of South Korea in the 1970s. This enterprise is twofold. I first investigate the progressive trajectory of so-called official history—a narrative that posits the moment of division as the birth of the South Korean nation and tracks its seemingly seamless evolution into a developed nation. It is a totalizing history that brooks no opposition. Such a monolithic history explains how particular histories were forced to take refuge in the fictional space of literature. As the South Korean literary field grew markedly political in the 1970s, literary figures, thus, came to play a substantial role in articulating dissent against the dictatorial regime by speaking for (sometimes, with) those relegated to the margins.

In particular, I posit partition literature as the site upon which to examine contentions about the recent past. As with my choice of “partition” over “division,” I perform a detailed examination of the term “partition literature” as compared to its others names, such as “division literature.” This chapter argues for the political valence “partition literature” allows by emphasizing the act of remembering within its pages—the adult narrator recollects fragments of his and her childhood experiences through the work of memory. I then examine the emergence of partition literature in the 1970s. That is, how, in the face of a rigidified nationalist history as constructed and enforced by the nation-state, partition literature came to occupy so prominent a place in postwar literary discourse—almost twenty years after the event. This is to situate partition literature within modern Korean literature, especially as it relates to countless other literary works

depicting national division and the Korean War. It is through examining the tension between the expression and repression of the event as told by the memory narratives of partition literature that I contemplate the confluence of history and literature.

This chapter focuses on one of the seminal texts in partition literature, Kim Wŏnil's "Spirit of Darkness," often considered the paradigm of partition literature. A wide-eyed child narrator lives amid the violence of wartime; lacking the faculties to fathom ideology, he struggles to understand why his once happy family has disintegrated—his father missing, his mother undertaking manual labor, and his siblings starving. Told in retrospect by a now-adult narrator, the story ends in the present with a reconciliatory understanding of the father who had to sacrifice family in the name of ideology. It is not surprising, then, that much of existing critical literature reads "Spirit of Darkness" as the *bildung* of a boy in search of his lost patriarchal father. I argue against such readings that reduce the complexities of experience and memory into the dissolution of the family and, by extension, nationalist longing.

Focusing on the slippages between the child and the adult narrator, I show how Kim Wŏnil articulates fragments of repressed knowledge about the past through memory. The fluidity of memory creates a liminal memory-space where the present and the past, the living and the dead, the child and the adult converge. Considered mere memories of an innocent child, moreover, this memory-space becomes a device for circumventing stringent censors even as it acts as a site for oppositional agency to exist. It is in this liminal space that the repressed are given voice to speak. Hence, Kim Wŏnil opens up a site for political and ethical critique in the trope of memory.

Whereas memory allows Kim Wõnil to critique ideology as an unknown and unknowable darkness that wreaks havoc, memory complicates Pak Wansõ's *The Naked Tree* by becoming gendered. This is not to say that Kim Wõnil's memory is not gendered; his is gendered male as Pak Wansõ's is gendered female. That is, both Kim Wõnil and Pak Wansõ remember—and write—from clearly-defined gendered positions. Nevertheless, Pak Wansõ, unlike Kim Wõnil, speaks from a gendered position that is always already defined in opposition—as an Other. Undoubtedly, the dramatic historical events that shaped Korea affected women differently. As the men, fathers, brothers, uncles, left for action, women were burdened as bearers of their memories. Chapter Three, “Shattered Speech and Broken Bodies,” elaborates on memories of division at the juncture of gender through Pak Wansõ's *The Naked Tree*.

Pak Wansõ, with whose short story I opened this introduction, again focuses on the very difficulty of recovering and articulating fragments of traumatic memory in *The Naked Tree*. I argue that the circuitous and choppy manner in which Kyõng-a's memories are narrativized calls into question the unproblematic linearity of nationalist history. When Pak Wansõ set out to write *The Naked Tree* in 1970, events of division and the Korean War were fast becoming a past that South Korea was eager to leave behind. Equating temporality with linear progression, “official” discourses focused on moving forward. In *The Naked Tree*, however, Kyõng-a's oftentimes unformed, oftentimes uninvited memories introduce time not as continuity but as plastic, irregular, and subjective. Moreover, three temporalities exist concomitantly in *The Naked Tree*: the present, the testimonial time in which Kyõng-a remembers the past; the past-present, the melancholic time in which Kyõng-a lives amid the chaos of war and tries to make sense

of it all; and, finally, the past, the traumatic time as revisited from the past-present. Even as the narrative proceeds chronologically within each of the three temporalities, memories constantly interrupt its progression. Memory arrests the passage of time and allows Kyōng-a to be taken out of time. This release from the passage of time becomes a kind of redemption for Kyōng-a. It is only the panicked that willfully order time. In remembrance, past and present might be concurrent or not, might start or stop.

Pak Wansō's narrative further demonstrates her resistance to the notion of an origin implying causality: not merely for beginning in *medias res* and ending on a perpetual present but because the long-awaited reveal of Kyōng-a's traumatic memory does not fully explain her melancholic isolation at the end of the novel. Resolution is forever deferred. Hence, this ending flies in the face of many literary scholars who read *The Naked Tree* as a story of Kyōng-a's coming-of-age—of her overcoming her tragic past. For memory returns, blasts forgetful time, and jerks Kyōng-a out of her paralysis, but it is not ontological; it unsettles rather than explains. In Kyōng-a's insistence on keeping memory alive, Pak Wansō emphasizes not so much the memory itself but how Kyōng-a contends with memory. That is, Pak Wansō goes beyond asking what past should be remembered; she problematizes how the past should be remembered—as we have seen her do in “In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered.”

Since memory retains only fragmented parts of an experience, it falls on the narrator to adjust them into a narrative. Memory, then, is always mediated by the ways in which it is described and interpreted to others. This chapter examines how Pak Wansō narrates her own past through *The Naked Tree*. Writing about her own lived experiences, Pak Wansō blurs the borders between fiction and non-fiction. Considering how Pak

Wansō initially set out to write *The Naked Tree* as a non-fictional biography of the renowned Korean painter Pak Sugūn, but ended up writing it as a fictional autobiography allows for an investigation into the literary—both fiction and autobiography—as the apropos medium for expressing memory, experience, and, ultimately, the past.

I further complicate memory at the juncture of language in this chapter. A pall of oppressive gloom hangs over the gray winter landscape of *The Naked Tree*, hinting at the weight of what remains hidden beneath the façade of quotidian life. Kyōng-a’s deliberateness to keep her memories locked in the deep recesses of her mind, even as they rise involuntarily, point to something untold, silenced, and violently cut out. This self-censorship of the mind paralyzes her linguistic faculties so that she is left simulating fluency, parroting words, uttering banalities, or playing mute. Torn between the need/desire to speak and the desire/need to remain silent, Kyōng-a fills her speech with empty words. At the heart of *The Naked Tree* lies a realm where language breaks down; language is always already a point of ambivalence and hesitation. I, therefore, examine how Pak Wansō deals with memories that lie on the border of what language can convey—how she speaks of the unspeakable and makes sense of the senseless. I argue that Kyōng-a’s dysfunctional expressiveness suggests her struggle between remembering and forgetting as complicated by the inadequacy of language.

If silence is the language of her grief, Kyōng-a has learned it well. Although “finding voice” has long been a trope in liberatory agendas that place speaking—and writing—as crucial for moving away from silences that imply consent to subjugation, I note how such a rhetoric perpetuates an overly simplistic binary and locates speech within a Western philosophical tradition that posits speech as synonymous with agency

and resistance. Silence admittedly presents practical agential difficulties, but it is not enough that any silence be replaced with any speech. Rather the question should be: Whose speech? Whose silence? And, in the context of my project, even: what is the value of the literary? Since both silence and speech occur in very particular ways, we must be vigilant to the kinds of mediations that transpire in the process of finding voice. Kyōng-a's deliberate self-silencing possesses its own resistance; silence warrants reflection.

For Kyōng-a, her inability to speak—find the words—reveals the mark of repressed memory impressed on her gendered body. I end this chapter by exploring the relations of memory, language, and the female body. Kyōng-a's resistance to remember illustrates the reluctance of the traumatized to activate their memory and confront their wounds; for Kyōng-a, the horror would surely die sooner with silence. But escape such as hers has its own torment. The painful operation of memory comes into play when her memory confronts the pain in her body—so that the body speaks. At the very moment Kyōng-a's body nears breaking, the memory of her brothers' death inundates her. Memory returns in the image of their mutilated bodies and leaves her with a cascade of words—fractured and unintelligible.

I further explore the gendered body as a crucial medium through which to remember the past in Chapter Four, “Embodied Memories: Re-membering the Female Body.” Focusing on the myriad female bodies in Oh Junghee's “Garden of Childhood,” this chapter examines how Oh Junghee's nameless narrator, “I,” remembers through the body—hers and others—so as to re-member the female body into a nation that effectively excludes them—on her own terms. Doing so is to challenge, at once, a nationalist

production of memory on the Korean War as seen in national history and a masculinist reading of memory on the Korean War as found in literary history.

Thus, this chapter details, with Oh Junghee at the center, a few factors that contributed to the development of women's literature. From the entrance of women into the industrialized workforce to the establishment of women's studies at universities, from the emergence of middle-class women to an increasing female readership, from the equalizing opportunities for education to a movement for women's liberation—all represented transformative moments for female agency. Accordingly, women's writings found themselves extricated from minority status—from *yōryu sosōl* (feminine fiction) to *yōsōng munhak* (women's literature). I argue that Oh Junghee's literary works be read against such a background so that it be properly politicized. Doing so affords us a platform from which to imagine re-collecting agency—as a Korean woman and as a Korean woman writer.

Juxtaposing the gendered spaces of the interior/private/home and the exterior/public/town, I show how, in “Garden of Childhood,” both spaces resist their seemingly gendered boundaries. Through the domestic violence enacted upon women by men, home loses any semblance of security; as women partake in a new labor force in town, feminine sexuality escapes the grasp of patriarchal authority that endeavors to control women's bodies. As such, “Garden of Childhood” reinscribes gendered spaces and challenges prevailing representations of women's bodies as well as interpretations of “Garden of Childhood” as a young girl's yearning for the father. By depicting women who refuse re-inscription into the nationalist discourse, “Garden of Childhood” subverts reading partition literature as ideological reconciliation and national reunification.

Close-reading the importance of the mirror, in front of which the narrator, a keen observer, spends countless hours, I analyze the frame of looking. I argue that Oh Junghee's mirror is a palimpsest that reveals and hides at the same time. What lies beneath can be recovered by moving back in time—by re-membering, by re-collecting. Looking at—and through—this frame reveals memory to be an act in the present on the part of a subject who constitutes herself by means of a series of identifications across temporal and spatial divides.

I close this chapter by examining the relationship between bodies and naming. The narrator, nicknamed *Norangnuni* (Yellow-Eyes), has no proper name, even as she is called into being through a variety of names. I argue that Oh Junghee's "Garden of Childhood" deconstructs the name-of-the-father by resisting a patrilineal name. Since names belong to an order of signification that is a social order, to resist these names is, at the very least, to resist that social ordering. Moreover, in creating a speaking subject whose only real name is "I," Oh Junghee places the reader in a position to question what causes the subject to unravel and cohere and in what contexts. The expansive and fictive desire for limitlessness that namelessness has signified through the text allows for a particular inquiry into the limits of intelligibility within the representation of identity.

I conclude my dissertation with a look at the current state of history and literature in South Korea. So much has changed since the time on which my dissertation focuses. After decades of authoritarian rule, marked by bursts of mass protests, South Korea entered into an era of peace and prosperity—which came with an intense consumer culture. A highly commercialized popular culture took center-stage; the technological boom of the 1990s created new mediums through which cultural productions were

produced and disseminated; new lifestyles and values spread across the nation. A new sensibility emphasizing personal pleasure (over that of the collective) was borne—quite a contrast to those political voices ringing through Kim Wõnil, Pak Wansõ, and Oh Junghee.

As much as national division is still very much a reality, and as volatile as relations between North and South Korea oftentimes are, the need to know the past is far from over—it is not self-evident. In fact, too often those who speak of the national division and the Korean War assume its inherent and inevitable significance. Perpetual debates between conservatives, who ceaselessly claim that the Korean War was “started” by North Korea on June 25, 1950, and liberals, who like to lay blame on the United States (even as gross American involvement cannot be denied), blind us from seeing the intricate entanglement of factors that led to national division.

In exploring partition literature as a critical and political remembering, I hope my dissertation, offers a more kaleidoscopic—memory-like—perspective of South Korea’s past. Confronted by the turn away from politically grounded discourse in South Korean literature, it is imperative that a re-conceptualization of politics, such as my dissertation, re-introduce political urgency. Only then can we envision some answers to other pressing concerns (and legacies) in contemporary Korea—whether that of finding restitution for former comfort women and military sexual workers or speaking for migrant workers from the so-called “Third World,” whose working situations within global industries in South Korea are chillingly reminiscent of the 1970s.

Finally, although my dissertation does not go into making any comparative analyses to partition as experienced and remembered outside of South Korea—such as

the memories belonging to the vast population of emigrants who left Korea, for destinations as varied as China, Japan, Germany, Brazil, and the United States, due to the very traumas caused by national division and the Korean War—these were on my mind as I examined the specificities of South Korea. For example, how do diasporic experiences and cultural productions reconstitute the memory of the nation and its ethnic identity? And what are their effects when they return to the homeland?

Much like the gaudily gold-lined vase in Pak Wansō's "In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered," memories of partition, as recovered and mediated through various narratives, must appear, necessarily, disfigured. Perhaps some fragments are forever lost, and are in need of a gold filling. For these traces of absences are just as necessary to understanding the past more critically—"without falsity."⁴³ The goal of this dissertation, like that of partition literature, is not to recover so-called "original" memories of partition through partition literature, but, rather, to re-trace its tracing of absences.

⁴³ Pak Wansō, "Pokwōn toejī mot'an kōttūl ūl wihayō" [In Remembrance of Things Unrecovered], 184.

Chapter II

Opening the “Spirit of Darkness”

Barely a few years ago, that day of *liberation*, father cheered with the village people. Under the blazing sun, bumping shoulders at the marketplace he roared hoarse Chosŏn doknip mansŏ! Then when was it? Yes, the winter before last, father disappeared. Only when darkness stole the light so father would prowl the grounds of the house. No one knows why. I hate the dark.⁴⁴

Lighting the Way: From Partition to Partition Literature

Excitement of liberation from Japanese colonization had hardly waned when Soviet Union then United States troops marched into the Korean peninsula. Division along the 38th parallel was quick, and hopes for a singular independent Korea were proven illusory as two Koreas emerged.⁴⁵ The rupture of the nation into communist North Korea and democratic South Korea produced great and growing tension. Winds of the Cold War had begun to blow, and Korea was trapped in the eye of the storm. Over time, lines hardened on opposite ends, a bloody period of shootings, rapes, guerrilla attacks, and purges claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Koreans before culminating in the Korean War.

Viewed in their totality, the losses sustained by the Korean people over the years

⁴⁴ Kim Wŏnil, “Ŏdum ũi hon” [Spirit of Darkness], *Maŭm ũi kamok* [Prison of the Heart and Other Stories] (Seoul: Dong-Ah Publications, 1995), 328 (all translations are my own).

⁴⁵ Bruce Cumings argues that there was no historical justification nor internal pretext for Korea’s division. Rather, it is the political and ideological division of the Cold War that accounts for Korea’s division. While Koreans were the primary actors during the liberation period (from liberation in 1945 to armistice in 1953), national division along the thirty-eighth parallel, Cumings asserts, was solely the responsibility of the Americans. The line was drawn in less than thirty minutes, with no consultation with the Koreans, for the purpose of containing Soviet power and providing an entry for American interests into Korea. See Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

since liberation were staggering. In the three years of warfare, some 230,000 South Korean soldiers were killed, along with 300,000 from the North. The death toll of Korean civilians on both sides of the parallel came close to one million; some 3.7 million people were left homeless in the South alone, and more than 100,000 children orphaned.⁴⁶ Beyond the deaths and destruction, separations and hardships, were deep scars impressed upon the people. For every ideologue like Kap'ae's father, in "Spirit of Darkness," there were many more uninformed, like *na* (I), who became embroiled in the postcolonial ideological war unwittingly. Victims against their will, against their knowledge, the destruction left for them a forever bleeding wound in the form of unanswered questions: "No one knows why."⁴⁷

With the trauma of wartime experience still etched on their minds, Koreans grew tolerant of the postwar authoritarian regimes that offered communist North Korea as an excuse for totalitarian rule. Violent memories of the war left most Koreans eager to leave the past behind in pursuit of a brighter future; they came to tolerate postwar totalitarian regimes that relegated history to the truth claims of their political systems. At the same time, memories of the Korean War made the threat of communism strong enough to justify the repression of dissent. And no one played with the memory of pasts better than President Park Chung-hee, who constructed, not without great force, the nation from the repository of traditional historical narratives and cultural memories so as to have the Korean people think their way toward an unchallenged collective national identity.⁴⁸

The nationalist paradigm under Park Chung-hee reads Korea's historical

⁴⁶ Frank B. Gibney, *Korea's Quiet Revolution: From Garrison State to Democracy* (New York: Walker and Company, 1996).

⁴⁷ Kim Wŏn-il, "Spirit of Darkness," 328.

⁴⁸ The Korean nationalist master narrative aligned itself to the present imperatives of international politics by fitting the problematic of the Korean peninsula into the American struggle against global communism.

experience, from colonization to partition, as a narrative of emerging national self-consciousness, the resulting struggle for expression against outside forces, and, finally, the achievement of political and cultural independence as a sovereign nation. While such progress clearly demonstrated itself in the sparkling skyscrapers of *chaebol* conglomerates and sleek expressways linking Seoul to its provinces, it failed to do so in the everyday life of the people. Under the guise of nation-building, progress exacted a heavy toll: long working hours at low wages in poor conditions. Those who rushed to the capital in search of dream-jobs quickly found themselves living in squalor—in the slums. Frequent arrests of politicians and so-called subversive intellectuals, tight censorship, and heavy policing by the infamous Korean Central Intelligence Agency further incensed the public.

By the time Park instituted his highly repressive *yusin* constitution in the fall of 1972, Korea had successfully achieved its “economic miracle”; however, the state’s arbitrary enforcement of laws had destroyed any semblance of justice and created an atmosphere of terror within the nation. As anti-*yusin*, pro-democracy movements were violently policed, dissenting voices began to move out of the political arena into the cultural arena. This was never more apparent than in the proliferation of publications, from newspapers to magazines, from novels to novellas, that endeavored to recover, represent, and rewrite pasts that had remained vastly undertapped, if not despised by the “cultural regime”—Park’s mixture of authoritarian modernization and nationalist cultural policies subjected to and hindered by censorship, national propaganda, and cultural exchange control.⁴⁹ Writers storied the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, as literature became the heated battleground for social and political

⁴⁹ Alain Delissen, “The Aesthetic Pasts of Space (1960-1990),” *Korean Studies* 25, 2 (2002): 243-60.

contestations.

For there was still room, in the 1970s, for uncertainty about the past of Korea; its recapturing remained a work-in-progress. Competing against the official anti-communist stance of the nation-state, prestigious literary magazines such as *C'hangjak kwa pip'yŏng* (Creation and Criticism), *Munhak kwa chisŏng* (Literature and Intelligence), and *Wŏlgan munhak* (Monthly Literature), famous to this day for overtly challenging the political powers, often at great risk, were founded to offer an alternative view of the past. If the former, in stressing “unity,” “modernization,” and “progress” had been unsuccessful at healing the nation’s now festering wounds, perhaps the latter would try highlighting “equality,” “freedom,” “social responsibility,” and “democratization.”

To counter the “official” story of national origin—the establishment of “the real” Korea—national division rose as a dominant literary theme of the time. Locating division at the center of the nation-building process and its discontent, writers turned to remembering that tragic period.⁵⁰ While narratives on division were hardly a novelty in the early-1970s, the manner in which writers of this era attempted to locate the origins of contemporary difficulties in national division (and its traumatic aftermath) was an original feat. Until then, such narratives had always dwelt on the material cruelties of the Korean War.⁵¹ Whether overwhelmed by its violence, or incapable of moving beyond naïve compassion, or blinded by anti-communist nationalist ideology, writers had mainly focused on producing detailed exposés that generalized events leading up to the Korean War rather than probe into its indelible wounds on the national psyche. As such, its violence was not localized to the Korean situation; what readers saw in these works then

⁵⁰ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ŭng eds., *Hanguk sosŏlsa* [Korean Literary History] (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2000).

⁵¹ Im Yongchan, *Modern Korean Literature and the Spirit of the Times* (Seoul: Kukhak Charyowon, 2000).

was not the Korean War, but war in general.

Beginning with Kim Wõnil’s “Spirit of Darkness” (Ödum ũi hon) in 1973, narratives on division witnessed a new trajectory coming into its own genre as *pundan munhak*—what I term partition literature.⁵² Unlike the ahistorical texts written immediately following the Korean War, these texts are distinguished by a keen socio-historical critique, a responsible re-presenting of history so as to foster a resistant collective identity, and a young first-person narrator *na* (I), who painfully attempts to grasp the magnitude of the devastation wrought by division and war in memory. These works also refer to a small and particular demographic group: writers born in the 1940s and writing in the 1970s and 1980s, who, having experienced division and the Korean War in their childhood, narrativize the violence and trauma of the event, as well as its catastrophic legacy, through the recollection of their own childhood memories.⁵³

I examine, in this chapter, the very seminal text of partition literature: Kim Wõnil’s “Spirit of Darkness.” Doing so is to explore the genre of partition literature within the terrain of Korean literary historiography. It is also to question why and how partition came to occupy so prominent a place in postwar literary (cultural) discourse almost twenty years after the event (at the height of nationalist modernization). In particular, I investigate how the South Korean literary field grew markedly political in the 1970s and how literary figures played a substantial role in articulating dissent. That is, what and how were they trying to remember in and around partition? I argue that partition literature became a site for examining the recent past—that particular histories were forced to take refuge in the fictional space of literature. It is through examining the

⁵² I discuss this nomenclature more fully in the next section.

⁵³ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ŭng eds., *Hanguk sosõlsa* [Korean Literary History] (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2000).

tension between the expression and repression of the traumatic event that I contemplate the impact of history within literature.

Investigating the memories that Kim Wõnil's narrative recalls, of an innocent boy named Kap'ae and his hungry search for his father, I argue that as partition literature shaped and, simultaneously, was shaped by an emerging culture of remembering, it necessarily maintained complex relationships with other constituencies—particularly the masculinist nationalist state. It seemed to share the power of writing with the state even as it competed with it for audience, influence, and authority. Hence, there exists a strange cohabitation of subversion and collusion in some of these texts. By examining the relationship between the literary text and the culture of remembering, particularly as it applies to the narrative under discussion, I hope to illuminate the implications for history when memory becomes further complicated at the intersections of nation and the repressive present.

Nationalist History, Nationalist Memory

Nationalist history presupposes an unproblematized sense of the nation, assumed to have always already existed in some natural form, by presenting a linear and homogeneous narrative of autonomous growth. Driven by a desire to show the antiquity and greatness of the nation, it conceives a unity through shared experiences of the past to create an “imagined community”⁵⁴ that further consolidates the nation-state. Yet, unity and progress of the nation cannot be all that counts in our pasts, nor can national history mean exactly the same thing to all parts of that imagined community. To acknowledge this,

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

however, would be to foreground the question of political power implicated in history, to admit that stability, prosperity, and unity are so often built on the backs of repression and exploitation, which in turn would defeat the nationalist claim of the nation as an always already formed totality.

Memory works to subvert such hegemony by producing a kaleidoscopic outlook of the nation. It is what “blasts” history from linear time and rewrites it by destroying the continuous, the homogeneous, the reductive, and the repressive—historicism.⁵⁵ Not only does memory look at the ruptures and discontinuities in history, but it also provides an interventionist strategy wholly necessary to those positioned in the margins of dominant accounts. Yet, private memories and personal histories feed upon the historical memories of the nation. For remembering is, Sheila Miyoshi Jager writes, “as much a political process shaped by the realities of the present as it is a historical narrative influenced by the discourse of the past.”⁵⁶

In the case of Korea, history has frequently fallen hostage to the truth claims of its political system. With division, two opposing nation-states competed to claim legitimacy as the true representative of Korea in the world community. History was thus appropriated to create a story that most coherently signified the telos of each separate political system. While Rhee Syngman had been no stranger to the nationalist paradigm of historical presentation, it was Park Chung-hee who really utilized history so as to reconstruct the modern nation.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1985), 253-64.

⁵⁶ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, “Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial,” *Public Culture* 14, 2 (2002): 387-409, 389.

⁵⁷ History textbooks from 1945 to 1960 demonstrate that historical study was not atop the national agenda. Although there was, after independence, a great national emphasis on education, the aftermaths of colonialism, partition, and the Korean War, made studying it difficult. History was studied perfunctorily as

A history enthusiast, Park Chung-hee knew the power of history as supporting claims to legitimacy, and invested heavily on usurping it. Unsurprisingly, it was during his regime that the pioneer of nationalist history, Sin Ch'ae-ho, long neglected during the post-liberation period, was resurrected as a leading nationalist historian.⁵⁸ In his own historical work, *Our Nation's Path*, Park Chung-hee appears to be strongly influenced by Sin Ch'ae-ho—particularly in his celebration of war heroes and martial warriors. Whereas Sin Ch'ae-ho had sought to rediscover the roots of national identity in the ancient military kingdom of Koguryŏ, now located in the regions of North Korea and Manchuria, Park Chung-hee, constrained by the realities of division, chose to emphasize the ancient Silla kingdom, located in the southeastern regions of the peninsula—not coincidentally his own hometown.⁵⁹

Silla, after many years of inconclusive warring in the three kingdoms period, had unified the peninsula—owing to its highly developed political and military institution of the *hwarang* (flower youth warriors).⁶⁰ By emphasizing a lineal connection to Silla, Park Chung-hee was clearly implying two things: first, as direct descendants of the *hwarang*, South Korea possessed the “original” martial spirit of the nation; second, Silla's defeat of

the small hand-sized textbooks—from lack of paper—merely supplied information on past kingdoms and dynasties. A call for more serious scholastic historical study came in the 1960s with the establishment of educational and research institutions under President Park Chung-hee. Exhibition pamphlet, “Old Textbooks: Transformations in Korean Education,” Seoul Arts Center, June-August, 2004.

⁵⁸ Andre Schmid, “Rediscovering Manchuria: Sin Ch'ae-ho and the Politics of Territorial History in Korea,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56 (1997): 24-46. Sin Ch'ae-ho, a nationalist historian in colonial Korea, was heavily engaged against the civilizing principles of Japanese imperialists. Writing Korea's “true” national history as a historical struggle against foreign imperialism, he framed this struggle in terms that reflected new concerns with modern manhood. Sin Ch'ae-ho attributed Korea's weakness to a lack of military spirit and adventurousness, and his work consistently reflected the discursive strategies of a nationalist ideology that condone violence and war as the necessary conditions of modernization, liberation, and self-expression. See also Henry Em, “‘Overcoming’ Korea's Division: Narrative Strategies in Recent South Korean Historiography,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 1, 2 (Fall 1993): 450-85.

⁵⁹ Park Chunghee, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology and Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Hollym, 1970).

⁶⁰ Although the origins of the *hwarang* are obscure, they were said to be comprised of healthy, unmarried sons of aristocratic families. Initially formed as a social group for the purpose of training minds and bodies through martial spirit and military skills, they were later converted into elite military units in 576.

Koguryō—the very kingdom that North Korea claimed for its own legitimization—foreshadowed the “triumph” of South Korea over North Korea.⁶¹ In prodding the historical memory of Silla, Park Chung-hee actively sought to forge a continuous link between glories of the past and his nation-state. This “martial spirit” also allowed Park Chung-hee to justify his regime’s military interference and violence as a legitimate means to secure the nation’s future.⁶² According to Park Chung-hee all “backward” and “barbaric” elements—communists, leftists, dissidents, and unionists—had to be battled out with force. Only then, Park Chung-hee seemed to propound, could the nation hope to finally attain its territorial completion and modern progress.⁶³

What often goes by unnoticed in Park Chung-hee’s appropriation of the ancient southeastern kingdom is the spatial dimension of this particular historical memory. In “Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory,” Jonathan Boyarin points out the close and logical connection between modern notions of space and time—as objective and separate—and the modern nation-state—as sharply bounded in one continuously occupied territory. The creation of national identities, he argues, has largely to do with the assertion of spatial boundaries and temporal origins: “States may be said to map history onto territory.”⁶⁴ When, in support of claims to independent nationhood, memory becomes grounded in the rhetoric of fixed spatiality and linear temporality, it encloses the nation into an effective boundary so as to reify the potent manipulation of the nation. It

⁶¹ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, “Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial,” 391.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 391.

⁶³ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *The Genealogy of Patriotism: Gender, Memory, and Narrative in Korea* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

⁶⁴ Jonathan Boyarin, “Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory,” *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-37, 16.

acts as an “intellectual fencepost”⁶⁵ that effectively expels, excludes, and demonizes Other memories—and identities—outside of its boundaries.

Restricting historical memory to the southern part of the peninsula enabled Park Chung-hee to impose a strong anti-North Korea and anti-communist sentiment without facing much resistance. Inculcated as an “other,” North Korea became a “them” different from “us”:

North Korean communists tried to create political instability *in the South* through propaganda. *They* caused a chain of riots and brought social unrest in many areas of *our nation*. . . . When the communists realized that South Korea would not fall through social disturbance, *they* resorted to a double-faced peace-war tactic—calling for peace outwardly and planning war inwardly. . . . Finally on June 25, 1950, at the dead of dawn, the communists *attacked from above* the 38th parallel. In spite of the surprise attack, South Korea, determined to defend freedom, fought bravely.⁶⁶

The geographical boundaries of memory are reiterated in the official discourse of textbooks, where North Koreans are identified solely as communists attempting to wreak havoc down south in “our nation.”⁶⁷ As a result, vast numbers of people are mobilized—nationalized—into remembering the event of division and the Korean War as a violent attack by “double-faced” northerners, who are conveniently always already communists.

⁶⁵ Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Cited in Jonathan Boyarin, “Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory,” 16.

⁶⁶ *Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe* (The National History Compilation Committee of the Republic of Korea), *High School K’uksa: Vol. 2* (Seoul: The Ministry of Education, 1974), 199.

⁶⁷ Several history textbooks existed until the *yusin* constitution in 1972 when textbooks fell under the sanction of the Ministry of Education. Since 1974, the Ministry of Education has permanently employed senior textbook specialists, and the Textbook Authorization Council, comprised of teachers, reviews the books—one textbook per subject for all textbooks used in elementary and secondary schools. The content must first conform to the “National Curriculum Standards” in order for textbooks to receive official authorization for publication, distribution, sale, and use in the classrooms. *Kuksa* (national history) textbooks are authored by the *Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe* (National History Compilation Committee). Established in 1949 under the Ministry of Education, the committee undertakes all research, compilation, writing, and publication of Korean national history. Since 2003, six privately published history textbooks are used in high schools in hopes of encouraging a more diverse interpretation of national history. This has come with a whole new set of issues, which I will touch upon in the conclusion of my dissertation.

Identities rhetorically invoked to legitimate the state's monopoly are bolstered by the spatiality of memory.

This narrative, however, offers too facile an explanation of the violence that was partition. It simply points to the “surprise attack” by “North Korean communists” as the cause of North-South antagonism without proper historicization. Such a cause-and-effect narrative assumes the nation as having an organic totality and construes the event as a violent interruption in the natural progression of the nation. Moreover, it acts as if partition did not deeply affect the central structures of society or the broad contours of history when, in fact, it gave rise to new social arrangements, new consciousnesses, and new identities.⁶⁸ The need for unity ends up silencing the people into accepting whatever history is given to them; they are offered no choice but to passively accept the history, the memory, and the identity prescribed by their nation.

However, as Gyanendra Pandey observes, in the example of Indian partition, people live with disturbing memories more uncertainly and continuously than nations, because while nations are able to “insulate themselves behind grand rhetorical propositions of national interests and national agenda,”⁶⁹ its people experience the breakdown more immediately—personally. For those with memories of family members left behind in the north, or of lives destroyed on account of nothing but their ideological and familial affiliations, the neat boundary distinguishing between “us” and “them” are less sharply defined.

Indeed, despite the force exerted upon them to believe in their national history, people were not able to set aside their memories quite so easily. While division had

⁶⁸ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

claimed large numbers of lives and destroyed the peace and well-being of innumerable individuals and families, unlike the official view, it had not been the sole misdeed of scheming communists from the north. Lingering memories of steely U.S. tanks clumsily rumbling into their tiny villages, blue-clad South Korean policemen beating and raping housewives, loud gunshots fired behind school walls, purple corpses piled along rice paddy levees, were testament to the excessive violence they had experienced and observed in their struggle to find new homes and new means of survival. Division had practically uprooted an entire nation; a neat line separating North and South hardly erased the complexities of such memories. As such, personal encounters open up the interstices of history and reveal its oppressiveness.

“Where history has failed (or refused) to address serious moments of dislocation in all their complexity and painfulness,” Pandey writes, “it perhaps has given an additional lease of life to memory.”⁷⁰ Theorizing on the function of memory, Allan Megill echoes Pandey when he posits that the act of remembering occurs most urgently when identities are called into crisis: “where identity is problematized, memory is valorized.”⁷¹ With state authorities enforcing nationalism, to remember differently from what had become an *a priori* discursive framework for interpreting historical events must have produced tremendous terror and anxiety: “to challenge, in Gramscian terms, the common sense, is to speak nonsense, to be considered recalcitrant toward reason itself.”⁷² The mere act of questioning is to fall out, to lose one’s place in the world, to not know who one is—resulting in a certain crisis in ontology. Although invalidated discourse,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁷¹ Allan Megill, “History, Memory, Identity,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11:3 (1998), 37-62.

⁷² Carter J. Eckert, “Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel’s Ghosts: Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea,” *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 363-78, 364.

memory has claims to an experiential reality and authenticity that history lacks; hence, when identities perceive themselves as threatened they turn to memory for support. And when other recollections reveal the ambiguity, tension, and the uncertainty of the time, the logic of unity reaches its limits and reveals itself as a fabrication.

What is “Partition” in Partition Literature?

The term “partition literature” is open to debate. It has many names—*pundan munhak* (division literature), “*yugi-o munhak*” (6·25 literature), “*pundan i-san munhak*” (division diaspora literature), and “*sirhyang munhak*” (literature of lost home)—that attests to the complexities and difficulties of writing on the nation’s traumatic divide. For some writers, division lives on as a date—June 25, 1950, as a turning point; for some, it connotes a diaspora; and, still, for others, it signifies a nostalgic longing and sense of un-belonging in a new place. The sheer diversity of terms also underscores the kaleidoscopic nature of the catastrophic event—as extending beyond political division and giving rise to wholly new social arrangements, new consciousnesses, and new identities.

While most literary scholars agree on “*pundan munhak*,” as in “division literature,” their boundaries remain divided. Paek Nakch’ōng classifies all postwar literature depicting elements of the Korean War under *pundan munhak*. Ha Ŭng-baek talks back at Paek Nakch’ōng: he finds the breadth of Paek Nakch’ōng’s definition pointless, defining *pundan munhak* as works that “deliberately focus on partition in order to probe the causes of partition, the fetters of life after partition, and the conflicts of

disparate ideologies.”⁷³ Kim Yunsik takes a middle-ground, limiting a particular generation of writers’ works as *pundan munhak*.

For Kim Yunsik, *pundan munhak* begins in 1973 with Kim Wõnil’s “Spirit of Darkness.” As mentioned earlier, it encompasses writers who, like Kim Wõnil, were born in the 1940s and narrativize the violence of the war and its legacy through the recollection of their own childhood memories, in the 1970s and 1980s. Their works are distinguished by a keen socio-historical critique, a responsible representing of history, and, most importantly, through the recollection of an innocent first-person child-narrator.⁷⁴ These authors also make up the first *Hangŭl* generation, writing without Chinese ideographs but solely in Korean. Thus, they witness the tumult of Korean history: born during the colonial period, they experienced the Korean War as children, witnessed the April 19 Movement as adolescents, and lived the dictatorial military regimes.

If postwar literature has, as Paek Nakch’õng suggests, almost always carried vestiges of the Korean War and partition, what, then, differentiates *pundan munhak*, like “Spirit of Darkness,” from other postwar literary works? And why do I choose to call *pundan munhak* not by its more conventional term “division literature” but “partition literature”? Narratives on division circulated in South Korea since the onset of the Korean War. Writers like Yom Sang-sõp and Kim Tongni, however, were unable to distance themselves from its immediate aftermath: war-zones, internment camps, makeshift accommodations, and evacuation trails were too much a reality for them. Their wounds were still much too visceral; they found writing about their experiences—with

⁷³ Ha Ũng-baek, “Jangja ũi sosõl, sosõl ũi jangja” [The Eldest Son’s Novel, the Novel’s Adult], *Sewõl ũi nõul*, 1996.

⁷⁴ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ũng eds., *Hanguk sosõlsa* [Korean Literary History], 473.

objectivity—not only daunting but near impossible.⁷⁵ Moreover, having been raised in the height of Japanese colonization, many writers in the early-1950s lacked fluency in the Korean language.⁷⁶ Their lack of command in Korean further challenged their putting into words—Korean—their experiences of the war. As the sun-soaked hopefulness of liberation proved to be short-lived, there came to linger a gloomy sentiment shadowing narratives of the 1950s with a stark pessimism. At the same time, as many literary critics point out, these writers had already made a career in writing before the war; they had already established their own literary style and philosophy, which they continued to explore even after the war.⁷⁷

For example, Yom Sang-söp opens his novel *Shower* (*Ch'üiu*, 1952) by writing, “On this side of the road, a dark shower falls heavy, on the other side, the sun shines bright. It is such a feeling. This catastrophe has left so great a stain on our minds, lives, and passions. I hope to draw this stain.”⁷⁸ In depicting the Korean War as an “ölluk,” “spot” or “stain” left by a passing shower—albeit ponderous—the war becomes an event in passing—it will pass so that life can go on. While touted for its departure from flat portrayals of the war as monolithically tragic or ideological, *Shower* fails to investigate fully the violence that so sullied the “minds, lives, and passions” of the nation. Workaday life continues as before so that the war becomes relegated to backdrop.

⁷⁵ Testimonies by Paek Ch'öl, *Munhak jasöjön* [Literary Autobiography] (1974), Ko Un *1950 nyöndaie* [The 1950s] (1989), Kim Tong-ni *Mildawon sidae* [Time of Mildawon] (1955).

⁷⁶ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-üng eds., *Hanguk sosölsa* [Korean Literary History], (Seoul: Munhak dongnē, 2000), 349.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁷⁸ Yom Sang-söp, Foreword to *Ch'üiwu* [Shower], *Chosun Ilbo* [The Chosun Daily], July 11, 1952.

Literary critic Kim Yunsik describes Kim Tongni's writing as "crippled."⁷⁹ Kim Tongni's "Evacuation at *Hŭngnam*" (*Hŭngnam ch'ölsu*, 1955) portrays the Korean War as a battle of ideologies between two foreign superpowers by focusing on the battles between the Allied forces and that of the Chinese. Pak Ch'öl, the protagonist, is a poet who sacrifices himself to help his family escape southward. In its portrayal of characters who are wholly devoted to familial love and in the stark contrast of egregious communists against well-meaning westerners, "Evacuation at *Hŭngnam*" thus reduces the complexities of the Korean War into mere ideological violence. Pak Ch'öl never questions or wavers in his beliefs; as a result, he seems "abstractly timeless."⁸⁰ For Kim Yunsik, then, he never participates within the specificity of the Korean condition. Kim Tongni's works adopt a fatalistic view toward war and treat it as a catastrophe beyond redemption. War as destiny.

If the literary terrain of the early-1950s can be determined by the continuity of Yom Sang-söp's works and the abstract timelessness of Kim Tongni's works, the late-1950s came to be known as the establishment of *chönhu munhak*—postwar literature. With the trauma of war etched deeply, narrative came to a halt—writers were unable to objectify their experiences. Nevertheless, new writers began to rebel against their predecessors. Abandoning blind ideology, they chose instead to investigate "objective reality."⁸¹ Pak Kyöngni's *Time of Mistrust* (*Pulsin sidae*) describes a young woman who, upon losing her husband during the craze of the September 28 Seoul Recovery, must now, at the end of the war, figure out a way to make a livelihood for herself. The violence of

⁷⁹ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ŭng eds., *Hanguk sosölsa* [Korean Literary History], (Seoul: Munhak dongnē, 2000), 355.

⁸⁰ Pan Söngwan and Yim Hŭngbae eds., *Lukács ilkki* [Reading Lukács], (Seoul: Simsöldang, 1987), 256.

⁸¹ Kim Yunsik and Chung Ho-ŭng eds., *Hanguk sosölsa* [Korean Literary History], (Seoul: Munhak dongnē, 2000), 355.

war has subsided and the violence of living—after the war has begun: real life presents problems of its own (e.g. a doctor’s misdiagnosis ends in the death of her only son), but she manages to fight through them. Such themes touting the strength of human will against adversity sprang up in Korean literature.

Korean literary critics mark the April 19 Movement of 1960 as the turning point in postwar Korean literature—coming to full bloom with Ch’oe Inhun’s *The Square* (*Kwangjang*, 1960).⁸² Ch’oe Inhun was born in the north, but escaped to the south during the war. Published in 1960, new hope brought on by the April 19 Movement opens *The Square*: “I could not have written this in previous times when freedom was hearsay, not lived. I feel proud to be a writer living in this new republic brought on by that brilliant April.”⁸³ The social backdrop against which Ch’oe Inhun wrote was one of a hopefulness unfelt since liberation almost fifteen years ago. Many studies have been made about Ch’oe Inhun’s narrative device of using space as a metaphor for ideology. Interior and exterior, private rooms and public squares, stand in for Korea’s ideological divide. Yet it is not as simplistic a binary as that found in earlier writers, such as Kim Tongni.

The Square’s protagonist Yi Myŏng-jun is a pensive intellectual—a student of philosophy—living in the South. His father, however, is a zealous communist who has defected up North, leaving his family to feel the wrath of his decision. Caught between two worlds, the family and the nation, Yi Myŏng-jun feels out of place in both the private space of the room, with his lover, and in the public space of the square, with his fellow citizens. As the two spaces spill over each other, Yi Myŏng-jun realizes that neither can

⁸² The April 19 Movement or April 19 Revolution was the popular uprising on April 19, 1960, led by labor and student groups, which overthrew the autocratic First Republic of South Korea under President Rhee Syngman. It led to the peaceful resignation of Rhee Syngman and transition into the Second Republic.

⁸³ Ch’oe Inhun, *Kwangjang* [The Square], (Seoul: Munhak kwa jisŏngsa, 1960, 1996), 19.

be defined or properly lived without the other. He imagines he will find one in the south and another in the north; however, no privacy is to be had in the south, and the squares of the north are filled with violence. Freedom, epitomized by the room, and equality, epitomized by the square, remain unfound. Hence, Yi Myōng-jun makes his way aboard a ship bound for neutral land, but is forced to end his life.

While one literary work can hardly represent an era, that *The Square* opened a new trajectory within the literary field in the 1960s cannot be disputed: Ch'oe Inhun successfully probed the larger questions of life firmly within the context of Korea's fraught history. Beginning with Ch'oe Inhun, writers for the first time wrote about their newfound freedom and its difficulties. Yi Myōng-jun's torturous dilemma over the tenets of freedom and equality that led to his eventual suicide brought to the fore themes and questions that writers would attempt to answer throughout the 1960s.⁸⁴ Such an investigation only expanded after Park Chung-hee's military coup d'état on May 16, 1961, and the advent of industrialization and dictatorial rule. Freedom became the literary anthem of the early-1960s, while equality dominated works of the late-1960s.

This movement is exemplified by the birth of two literary journals: *Sanmun sidae* (*Prose*) in 1962 and *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yōng* (*Creation and Criticism*) in 1966. *Sanmun sidae* was founded by a small group of writers who proclaimed to “find a new language” that would “bring light into the dark chaos of today.”⁸⁵ No matter the travail, they would

⁸⁴ Sō Kyōng-sōk, “60 nyōndae kaekwan” [Survey of the 1960s], *1960 nyōndae munhak yōnku* [Literature of the 1960s], (Seoul: Munhaksa wa bip'yōng yōnghoe, 1993).

⁸⁵ *Sanmun sidae* [Prose], No. 1: Summer, 1962, 2. By dedicating their inaugural issue to Yi Sang, *Sanmun sidae* pointed out the importance of language. Yi Sang, writing during Japanese colonization, in the 1930s, crossed—and blurred—the boundaries between poetry, fiction, and essay, and experimented in literary form and language. *Sanmun sidae* writers such as Kim Sūng-ok, in “Hwansang such'ōp” [Fantasy Notes] (1962), attempted to create a new sensibility combining “intellect and emotion.” See also Yu Jong-ho, “Kamsusōng ūi hyōkmyōng” [The Sensibility Revolution], *Hyōnsiljuūi ūi sangsangryōk* [The Real Imagination], (Seoul: Nanam, 1991), 86.

“never put down their torches lightly.”⁸⁶ It was a deliberate effort by a group of writers who wanted to create, in their works, a collective voice demanding freedom. On the other hand, *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* called for “*jisikin ūi ch’aekmu*,” intellectual responsibility. Lead by Paek Nak-ch’ŏng, a writer heavily influenced by the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* proclaimed the literati as intellectuals charged with the social responsibility to subvert the ruling-class and support the people. Paek Nak-ch’ŏng and his colleagues were determined to make literature the backdrop from which to examine the social, historical, and political realities of the nation.⁸⁷ Their objective was to implement the ideals of liberty and freedom through literature. Although critical exploration of such ideals would not be realized until the late-1970s, the publication of *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* did sow the seeds for a politics of literature in the Korean literary field.

With rapid industrialization in the 1970s, the narrative of progress began to command authority on all matters. Slogans such as “Miracle on the Han” and “National Revitalization” and headlines reading “Exports Total 10 Billion Dollars” and “GNP (Gross National Product) 10, 000 Dollars Achieved,” undermined the darkness beneath the glitz of modernization. Amid the squalor, writers found a new protagonist—the city laborer. This wave coincided with the creation of a new urban working-class and with the *minjung* (people’s) movement. Many authors wrote about peasants migrating to Seoul and navigating the difficulties of the city—the disillusion they experienced in the city or the estrangement they felt from their rural homes.⁸⁸ Whether writing about their success

⁸⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁷ *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* [Creation and Criticism], No. 1: Winter, 1966, 1-17.

⁸⁸ See Ch’oe Innam’s *Kyŏul naduri* [Winter Outing], (1973) and Kim Wŏnil’s *Noŭl* [Sunset] (1975). While Kim Wŏnil can be read alongside these authors writing about their no-return-home, as I will demonstrate

and subsequent guilt of having erased their rustic origins or of the miserable conditions of the factory worker, writers like Hwang Sŏkyŏng and Yun Hŭng-kil incorporated the gritty social reality of the 1970s into their fictional works.⁸⁹ Kim Yunsik argues that it was this time that a dichotomous ethics reminiscent of the 1950s were revived.⁹⁰ A clear-cut binary between the haves and have-nots ran parallel to that between north and south, conqueror and conquered.

With Korea's deployment in the Vietnam War, criticism of the United States also began appearing in literary works. Unlike writers of the 1950s such as Yom Sang-sŏp hailing American forces during the Korean War, postwar writers performed an acerbic critique of what they saw as American imperialism in their portrayal of young Korean men returning from Vietnam with post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹¹ They argued that the Vietnam War was a meaningless battle fought by a small third-world country against American imperialism where Korea was the poor mercenary sold at "forty dollars of blood money."⁹² That the majority of those who joined the dispatch to Vietnam were comprised of the undertrodden rural laborers and factory workers—the very lowest social denominator—or university students rebelling against the government further highlighted the economic power relations among the nations involved.

As writers began writing from the perspective of the marginalized and the oppressed, the literary terrain of the 1970s was very much about incorporating real-life—

further in this chapter, he veers from this category by portraying memories of the Korean War and its traumas in his narratives.

⁸⁹ See Hwang Sŏk-yŏng's *Sampo kanŭn kil* [The Road to Sampo], Yun Hŭng-kil's *Ahop kyŏlle ũi guduro namŭn sanae* [The Man Left in Nine Pairs of Shoes], and Yi Mungu's *Kwanch'on sup'il* [Kwanch'on Essay].

⁹⁰ Kim Yunsik, "1970 nyŏndae munhak ilkki."

⁹¹ See Song Kiwŏn's *Kyŏngwyesŏngsŏ* (1974), Hwang Sŏk-yŏng's *T'ap* [Tower] (1970), and Pak Yŏngha's *Mŏnamŏn ssongbagang* [SSongba River Far Far Away] (1977).

⁹² Chŏng Ho-ung, "Betŭnam minjok haebang t'ujaeng ũi an kwa pak" [The Interior and Exterior of Vietnam's National Struggle], *Oeguk munhak* [Foreign Literature], Spring, 1989, 29.

history—into literature. Writers believed they were fulfilling a *somyǒng*, calling, by pointing out the hypocrisy and denouncing the inequality of the nation—and the global world. It is not surprising, then, that major works on national division and modernization—historical events that gave rise to unprecedented shifts in politics, society, community, and history—witnessed a sudden surge. As writers struggled to work out the knots of their history, they began to write themselves into their works. Writers such as Yi Munyōl deliberately rebelled against placing reality in literature by separating the writer from the character: he believed the author was merely a “professional storyteller” trying to tell a story.⁹³ Nevertheless, more writers wrote as such. Moreover, as censorship became stringent with Park Chung-hee’s Yusin rule, authors began relying heavily on metaphors. It was a “poetics” of metaphor that verged on “prose.”⁹⁴

It is at this point that *pundan munhak*, what I term “partition literature,” appears prominently. Because my dissertation focuses on memories after the particular moment of rupture and genocidal violence, I have chosen to use the translation “partition literature” over the more conventional “division literature.” Owing to its association with the violent partition of British India, I find “partition” to resonate more intensely than “division.” Moreover, “partition” allows for a more comparative study against other nations, such as Ireland, Palestine, Vietnam, that share this momentous event. Even as the specifics of different partitions, and of the discourses surrounding each of these, require careful attention, I cannot overlook the ways formal colonialism and the Cold War contributed to the particular processes of nationhood, history, and society in all of these partitioned nations.

⁹³ Kim Yunsik, “1970 nyōndae munhak ilkki,” [Reading Literature of the 1970s], 464.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 465.

The complexities of Korea's partition necessitate a more careful exploration; however, a few of its striking features demand immediate notice—especially with regard to Korean literature. The violence stands out: several hundred thousand people were killed; unaccountable numbers kidnapped, imprisoned, killed, and strafed (by both North and South and particularly U.S. military forces); and many millions uprooted and transformed into home-less “refugees” as a result of the back-and-forth between North and South military forces.⁹⁵ It was simultaneously a proxy war between the Cold War superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union and a civil war between siblings. More notably, a demarcation had already been drawn around the 38th parallel (parting the peninsula) before “official” partition took place in 1953.⁹⁶

The division of Korea, and the establishment of two independent nation-states into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, occurred in a

⁹⁵ When the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, the capital city of Seoul fell in three days. The South Korean government feigned calm until the last minute, and fled to Pusan without warning its citizens, leaving thousands of people to die in the hands of the North Koreans. Three months later, the U.S. intervened, and under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, Seoul was reclaimed on September 28, 1950. With the involvement of the Chinese Army, however, Seoul fell once again to communist forces on January 4, 1951. The allied forces surged on, and Seoul would be reclaimed for the last time on March 19, 1951. In the span of nine months, Seoul had changed hands four times. The city was in utter ruins—war had ravaged the city, and the U.S. had blown up large portions of Seoul during the second evacuation so as to deny its use to North Korea—and its prewar population of 1.5 million had dwindled down to a meager 200,000—partly from mass killings and partly from fleeing refugees.

⁹⁶ At the close of World War II, even before liberation, Soviet Union and United States forces occupied the peninsula in accordance with an agreement put forth by the U.S. government to divide the Korean peninsula around the 38th parallel. Colonels Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel, after deciding in their 30-minute meeting that at least two major ports should be included in the United States occupation zone, had drawn the dividing line at the 38th parallel—using a National Geographic map for reference. The Soviet Union agreed to the 38th parallel being the demarcation partly to better their position in the negotiations with the Allies over Eastern Europe. This decision was made with neither consultation nor consent by the Korean people. Thus, the Soviet forces entered Korea on August 10, 1945, and remained north of the demarcation at the 38th parallel. A few weeks later, the American forces entered through Inch'ŏn and formally accepted the surrender of Japanese forces south of the 38th parallel on September 9, 1945 in Seoul. It was during American occupation that insurrections and guerrilla warfare broke out rampant, kindling the embers toward full-on war. See Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), Joseph C. Goulden *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (McGraw-Hill, 1983), Shannon C. McCune “Physical Basis for Korean Boundaries,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* No. 5 May 1946, 286-7.

manner that belied most anticipations of the immediate future.⁹⁷ It was a very short time from liberation to occupation to civil war. That is to say, from hopes of a new nation to debates over the demands of a nation-state as established in Seoul (South) or P'yŏngyang (North) to the outbreak of the war. Therefore, few had foreseen that this division of territories and power (so closely following the heels of colonial violence) would be accompanied by the bloodbath that actually eventuated. It would take an even swifter stroke—again at foreign hands—for official division to be realized with the armistice and demilitarized zone (DMZ). This boundary between the two new nation-states was barely known until after it had been formally proclaimed.⁹⁸ The character of the violence—the killing, kidnapping, snitching, imprisoning, and purging—that followed was also unprecedented, both in scale and method, as depicted in the pages of partition literature.

I refer to the dividing of the Korean peninsula across the 38th parallel as partition. However, it must be noted that there are several different conceptions of partition that make up the Korean partition. First, there was the (territorial) partition signaled by the division into North and South Korea by the Soviet Union and United States occupational forces. There was also the presidential election in 1948, electing Rhee Syngman in the South and Kim Il-sung in the North, the demand of separate political leadership, which would be articulated more and more forcibly over the following years. There was, also,

⁹⁷ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). The two independent nations were not recognized until after Soviet and American occupation took place. In December 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to administer the Korean peninsula under the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, as termed by the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers. It was agreed by the U.S. and the USSR, but not the Koreans, that Korea would govern itself independently after five years of international oversight. However, both the U.S. and the USSR approved Korean-led governments in their respective halves, each of which were favorable to the occupying power's political ideology. When the U.S. occupational government restored many Japanese colonial administrators and collaborators to their previous positions of power, Koreans responded with violent insurrections and protests in the South.

⁹⁸ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*.

the feared, and then dreadfully realized, partition of families and communities, whereby millions of people were torn from their ancestral homes, fields and fortunes, life-long friends and childhood memories, relatives and loved ones, the knowledge of the familiar and the comfort of the known—a partition that so many (survivors) speak of and keep within their memories (that we often do not get to hear).

It is on this last partition that I focus (even as it cannot be explained without the others). This explains why I choose to use the term “partition” in reading the memories of partition literature writers. While “division” is more commonly used to describe the two Koreas, I find “division” too broad and bureaucratic a term to fully describe the personal traumas that partition authors, like Kim Wönil, Pak Wansö, and Oh Junghee, painfully narrate. Frequently used to modify the nation—Korea as “divided nation”—“division” evokes the political (territorial) over the personal. Even as the personal and political are intertwined—division resulted in the breaking apart of lives, bodies, families, and homes—I use “partition” to emphasize the more personal and emotional fragments of memory in relation to the national pasts.

I question “partition” to emphasize that our choice of terms determines not only the images we construct but also the questions we ask about historical (and contemporary) events.⁹⁹ I find that partition captures the constitutional division, an agreed-upon partition of (geo-political) territories, and the victimization at the hands of hegemonic superpowers.

⁹⁹ James Young makes the point about the importance of naming in his discussion of narratives of the German Holocaust: “That events of this time [could] be contained under the rubric of [different] names like “Patriotic War” (in Russia), “Hitler-time” (in Germany), and “World War II” (in America) tells us as much about the particular understanding of this period by the namers as it does about the events themselves.” He continues, “the terms Sho’ah and churban figure these events in uniquely Jewish ways, which simultaneously preserve and create specifically Jewish understanding and memory of this period.” James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), 87. Likewise, the Korean War is called the “6-25 War” (in South Korea), “Fatherland Liberation War” (in North Korea), “Korean War” and “The Forgotten War” (in the United States).

It highlights partition and the Korean War as a civil war, recognizing that there were local forces on both sides and a concerted attempt to wipe out entire populations (kin) as enemies. At the same time, it emblemizes a sorrowful sundering of siblings that should never have occurred. Partition is all of that. But more importantly, the term “partition” captures the gravity—the enormity of the violence and the un-sutured wounds of trauma—that cannot be conveyed in the somewhat banal term “division.” In my posing the question of the adequacy of “partition,” I hope to rethink the meaning of its very historicity.

In this vein, my study of partition literature participates in the larger scholarship of trauma and memory.¹⁰⁰ Given the specificities of Korea’s history, however, the function—even value—of Korean partition literature is different from that of Holocaust literature. It is not primarily concerned with apportioning guilt on the opposing side or with defining a particular national or ethnic identity. Rather, it is aimed at subverting what is seen in the main as being a one-sided outbreak of violence, and at making a case against the nationalist ideology of unilateral progress. The singularity of Korea’s partition makes for a somewhat unusual account of violence and of the relation between violence

¹⁰⁰ Many scholars have investigated various dimensions of remembering and forgetting catastrophic events within different cultures and social contexts. They have attended to such issues as the manifest and repressive mediations of memories, the sundering of subject positions along which contestations over remembering and forgetting occur, and the hegemonic and contradictory processes of producing, distributing, and consuming knowledge about the past as they take place in institutions and at material sites. Works that have been or will be discussed in some detail in the main text include Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); articles that appeared in *Memory and Counter-Memory*, a special issue of *Representations* no. 26 (spring 1989), esp. Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” (7-25), Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), articles in *Women and Memory*, a special issue of *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26, no. 1 (winter 1990), dealing with the gendered dimensions of memory, esp. Elizabeth F. Loftus, Mahzarin R. Banaji, Jonathan W. Schooler, and Rachael A. Foste, “Who Remembers What?: Gender Differences in Memory” (64-85), and Jane Flax, “Re-Membering the Selves: Is the Repressed Gendered?” (92-110), Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996). See also Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*, Dominick LaCapra, et.al. [POSITION: move to Introduction]

and memory. Accordingly, partition literature provides an opportunity for an unusual exploration into the language and representation of violence—as filtered through memory.

What Yom Sang-söp and Kim Tongni could not achieve without temporal distance, what Ch'oe Inhun started in his exploration of a square where private and public can coexist, what Paek Nak-ch'öng and his colleagues at *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöng* found as their calling, and what Hwang Sökyöng began in his critique of U.S. imperialism in *T'ap* comes to fruition through partition literature. Accounts of shared experiences in the past make up the subject (boundaries) of history.

Remembering Partition: Kim Wönil's "Spirit of Darkness"

One of the seminal texts in partition literature, "Spirit of Darkness" (Ödum üi hon, 1973), is often considered the paradigm of partition narratives. A wide-eyed child narrator lives amid the violence of wartime; lacking the faculties to fathom ideology, he struggles to understand why his once happy family has disintegrated—his father missing, his mother undertaking manual labor, and his siblings starving. Told in retrospect by a now-adult narrator, the story ends in the present with a reconciliatory understanding of the father who had to sacrifice family for ideology. Much of existing critical literature reads "Spirit of Darkness" as the *bildung*¹⁰¹ of a boy in search of his lost patriarchal father. I argue against such readings that reduce the complexities of experience and memory into the dissolution of the family and, by extension, nationalist longing.

¹⁰¹ I take this term from the German term *bildungsroman*, which refers to a novel recounting the youthful development of a hero or heroine. It describes a progressive process by which maturity is achieved.

Focusing on the slippages between the child and the adult narrator, I argue that Kim Wõnil articulates fragments of repressed knowledge about the past through memory. The fluidity of memory creates a liminal memory-space where the present and the past, the living and the dead, the child and the adult converge. Considered mere memories of an innocent child, moreover, this memory-space becomes a device for circumventing stringent censors even as it acts a site for oppositional agency to exist. For it is in this liminal space that the repressed are given voice to speak. Kim Wõnil opens up a site for political and ethical critique in the trope of memory.

In that sense, I position my study as participating in what scholars, for more than two decades now, have been doing: deploying the concept of memory to expand the horizons of history. Memory enters the enterprise of history-writing, and public interest in history, at those points where historical events and circumstances intersect with personal and emotional experiences—elements that often disrupt the dominant narratives of history. Yet, as Maurice Halbwachs reminds us, memory does not exist outside the boundaries of history; socially constructed historical narratives often define the shape of individual memories.¹⁰² Accordingly, I try to reconceptualize history by claiming memory as an integral part of historical production. I ask: How does memory intervene in the process of historical construction? How do the tensions between history and memory figure each other?

Kim Wõnil, who was born in 1942, experienced firsthand the turbulent times of postcolonial Korea: liberation, occupation, partition, and war. He was barely eight years old when his father, a fervent leftist intellectual, defected to North Korea at the onset of

¹⁰² Maurice Halbwachs, “The Social Frameworks of Memory,” *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 37-192.

the Korean War.¹⁰³ Yet, being the eldest son, he had to assume the heavy responsibility of supporting his family. Confronted with an overbearing mother, abject poverty, hunger, social discrimination, and political persecution, Kim Wõnil spent most of his childhood relying on the charity of close relatives and neighbors. While supplicating for food should have been humiliation enough for a young boy, he had to suffer additional chagrin as the “son of a *ppalgaeng-i*,” a title that would follow him for the rest of his life.¹⁰⁴

In the immediate postwar years, Kim Wõnil made his living through a series of odd jobs. Being his father’s son permanently, and literally, marked him: a red line across his name in the government census registry always already stigmatized him as a “communist offspring.” Leading a normal life under the stalwart anti-communist regimes of Presidents Rhee Syngman and Park Chung-hee proved to be immensely difficult. Within a discursive framework that blatantly excluded him, he sought to sublimate his marked status by writing his experiences—by finding a voice for his own memories. In 1966, he won the Spring Literary Contest with “1961-Algeria,” a short existentialist exploration into the destructive potential of ideology within modern quotidian life. It was eagerly welcomed by the politically oriented literary circle that was just coming to life in

¹⁰³ Kim Wõnil’s father was a well-educated left-wing intellectual who left for North Korea (*wõlbuk*) in 1950, abandoning the young author to care for his mother and two younger siblings—and to political persecution from the anti-communist South Korean government. This family structure—absent father, bereft mother, eldest son, and two younger siblings—can be found in many of Kim Wõnil’s works. While this hinted at his own father’s defection, it was not until 1988 that Kim Wõnil admitted, openly, that his father was, indeed, a *wõlbukja* [one who crosses over to the North], by describing his father as a *chigõp ppalgaeng-i* [professional communist]. In *Mal, salm, gũl*, he confesses that he had tried to “veil his father, depicting him as, at times, dead, at others, missing.” Yet, in writing *Madang kip ’ũn chip* [*House with the Deep Court*], he “felt at peace conceding that my father had *wõlbuk*-ed. See Kim Wõnil, “Pundan sidae rũl magam hamyõ” [Closing the Period of Partition], *Dalmajikkot* [*Evening Primrose*] (Seoul: Jungwõnsa, 1988), 6, and Kim Wõnil, *Mal, salm, gũl* [*Word, Life, Writing*] (Seoul: Yõlũmsa, 1990), 96.

¹⁰⁴ The word *ppalgaeng-i* can be translated as “Red Communist.” [Kim Wõnil’s dedication to writing about partition stems from having had a *wõlbuk* [voluntary defecting to North Korea] father. This is why, in spite of having written other stories, novellas, and essays that encompass other aspects of Korean life, from colonialism to contemporary events, Kim Wõnil is best known (categorized) as a *pundan chakka* [partition author]. See Oh Saeng-gũn.]

the mid-1960s, and established Kim Wŏnil as one of the leading literary persons of the time.

Kim Wŏnil carefully etches his own childhood experiences into his semi-autobiographical, first-person narratives. Still haunted by his father's decision to abandon the family for the cause, he attempts to understand the effects of an ideologically divided and ideologically strained nation upon its individuals. Through the pale tears and innocent voices of his child narrators, Kim Wŏnil exposes the futility of privileging ideology and the violent (and still painfully present) legacy of partition. His stories call into question official narratives of the nation-state that repress alternative memories, privilege one monolithic history, and affect peace after partition. At the same time, his stories attest to his own conflict of living in the fetters of ideology and of wanting to heal those wounds. Nevertheless, his purpose is to testify to truths and speak for those who, like him, were denied dissension, banished into absolute silence, in the postcolonial, postwar period: "I strain my ears to hear their moans. I put pen to paper to alleviate their pain. And, mine as well."¹⁰⁵

In search of answers to his past, so began Kim Wŏnil's life-long foray into partition literature.¹⁰⁶ As his first publication "1961-Algeria" attests, however, Kim Wŏnil did not first begin writing about partition. Ha Ũng-baek detects three phases in Kim Wŏnil's oeuvre: romanticism, realism, and humanism. Kim Wŏnil's romantic-phase

¹⁰⁵ Kwon Oryŏng, *Kim Wŏnil kipi ilkki* [Close Reading Kim Wŏnil] (Seoul: Munhak-kwa chisŏng Publishing, 2002). Kim Wŏnil writes: "The partition of our nation is the most acute issue of our era. That is why I keep coming back to it. Until the day of unification, as a Korean living in partition, I am positive that there is no other real matter of importance as partition." Kim Wŏnil, "Pundan sidae rŭl magam hamyŏ" [Closing the Period of Partition], *Dalmajikkot* [Evening Primrose] (Seoul: Jungwŏnsa, 1988), 6.

¹⁰⁶ Kim Wŏnil is known as a very prolific writer. Since his first publication in 1961, he would go on to write sixty novellas and short stories and nine novels, and two historical novels, known as "taeha sosŏl" meaning "grand novels." See "Introduction," *Kim Wŏnil jung-tanpyŏn jŏnjip* [The Complete Novellas and Short Stories of Kim Wŏnil] (Seoul: Munidang, 1997).

includes his early works, mostly short stories, that deal with the unknown, the exotic, and the grotesque. For instance, in “1961-Algeria,” a sailor lands in Algeria, has an affair with an Algerian prostitute, and becomes enamored by jazz. Fantasy figures heavily in these early works, which Ha Ŭng-baek likens to the author’s own desire to repress his past.¹⁰⁷ Kim Wŏnil’s second phase marks his obsession with the subject of partition—producing works that will establish him as the leading writer of partition literature. His most renowned works, “Spirit of Darkness” (Ŭdum ũi hon), *Sunset (Noŭl, 1977)*, and *House with the Deep Court (Madang kip ’ŭn jip, 1988)*, make up this period, when he began to gather “sources” from the recesses of his own childhood memories.¹⁰⁸ It is at this time that the first-person child narrator first enters his literary terrain. The last phase marks his most current works, such as *The Swell of Time (Sewŏl ũi nŏul)* in 1986 and *Prison of the Heart (Maŭm ũi kamok)* in 1990.¹⁰⁹ In these works, Kim Wŏnil breaks away from semi-autobiographical narratives remembering partition and moves to a more piquant critique of contemporary social events.

“Spirit of Darkness” was first published in the politicized journal *Wŏlgan munhak* [*Literature Monthly*] in 1973.¹¹⁰ In the story, set shortly after liberation amid the tumultuous times leading to partition and the Korean War, a young boy named Kap’ae struggles to survive yet another day of hunger and destitution when he learns of rumors

¹⁰⁷ Ha Ŭng-baek, “Jangja ũi sosŏl, sosŏl ũi jangja,” *Sewŏl ũi nŏwul*, 1996.

¹⁰⁸ Kim Wŏnil, “Pundan sidae rŭl magam hamyŏ” [Closing the Period of Partition], *Dalmajikkot* [Evening Primrose] (Seoul: Jungwŏnsa, 1988)

¹⁰⁹ Literary critic Ryu Posŏn disagrees with Ha Ŭng-baek with regard to Kim Wŏnil’s bibliography. In “Kim Wŏnil muhak ũl ponŭn tugae ũi sisŏn kwa apŭro ũi kwaje” [Two Perspectives on Kim Wŏnil’s Literary Works], Ryu Posŏn writes that Kim Wŏnil’s works can be divided as, on the one hand, “stories around the Korean War,” and, on the other, “stories about the present-now.” See Ryu Posŏn, “Kim Wŏnil muhak ũl ponŭn tugae ũi sisŏn kwa apŭro ũi kwaje” [Two Perspectives on Kim Wŏnil’s Literary Works], *Jakka segye* [Literary World], Summer 1991.

¹¹⁰ Kim Wŏnil actually wrote “Ŭdum ũi hon” [Spirit of Darkness] in 1961, while still a student at Sŏrabŏl University (present-day Joongang University).

that his father has been captured by the police and will be executed in the evening. Led by the eyes and voice of young Kap'ae, we walk with him through the alleys of his poverty-stricken village in search of his father.

Kap'ae, who repeatedly receives compliments and encouragement for being a good student, sits in the garden memorizing English vocabularies, gently stroking his growling stomach. Roughly eleven, he is old enough to realize the gravity of his situation but not quite old enough to comprehend its meaning. All Kap'ae knows is that his father, an intelligent man, educated in Japan, has been captured and will die: "Father will die for sure because seven other young men who did the *same thing* as father had already been shot to death."¹¹¹ Even after so many months spent listening to his father creep in at night, seeing his mother beaten and bruised, awaking to surprise police raids, Kap'ae remains incapable of knowing the "thing" his father does. For he has more pressing concerns: he is hungry.

Initially, Kap'ae's response to his father's capture is overshadowed by his own hunger. The resentment he feels for his father and the "thing" he does is that it has left Kap'ae, his mother, and his two sisters, hungry: "I shiver in much greater pain—hunger. I am hungry. I am dreadfully hungry. But we've borrowed so much from everyone. How will we repay them? He is a useless father, but once father dies, who will pay the debt? Ah, I shall be a fatherless child! Why does father do that? I don't know why father must do what everyone else seems to hate and be scared of."¹¹² Sitting with his sisters, waiting for their mother to return with rations, Kap'ae wonders how he will ever be able to pay his neighbors back. The agony of hunger turns to an overwhelming sense of burden; as

¹¹¹ Kim Wõnil, "Spirit of Darkness," 327 (my emphasis).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 328.

the eldest and only son, he knows it will be his responsibility to take care of his family. In this sense, hunger is the trope with which Kim Wõnil depicts survival in rupture.

Even now, Kap'ae finds himself frustrated with his mentally retarded sister, Punim, who wails loudly nearby. Seeing his younger sister, Punsõn, patiently consoling Punim, agitates him further: "*Nuna* (older sister) keeps screaming. Like someone died. Punsõn looks to me. I really hate *nuna*'s cries."¹¹³ What actually annoys Kap'ae about his sister's cries is his realization that he can no longer cry: he reminds himself time and again that he, the son, must not cry. Finding it difficult to sit still with his burden, Kap'ae "turns [his] back," slowly, guiltily, "closes his eyes on Punsõn's fearful eyes,"¹¹⁴ and walks out into the streets. Out by the well, women mindlessly, almost cheerfully, chatter over their washing. Upon hearing them talk so carelessly of his father, Kap'ae, for the first time feels genuine sorrow and sympathy.

Kap'ae's mind soon wanders to happier times. One sunny fall day, following liberation, Kap'ae had gone to the ancestral burial grounds with his father and his sisters. Hand-in-hand with Punsõn, they had chased after squirrels, picked wild berries, and ran along the verdant hills. His father had been talking about his grandfather, when, uninterested, Kap'ae had turned to his father and posed a riddle popular among his schoolmates:

I asked, "Father, do you know what came first—the chicken or the egg?" Father seemed perplexed at my bold question. He thought for a while. Then, looking at me with a blank expression, he said, "The answer is simple: no one knows. No one in the whole world knows." I was disappointed at his answer. But he continued to speak with strong conviction: "If you trace their ancestors for more than a billion years, you will come to know that there was a time when they were both in one. . . . Not knowing is the correct answer." Still disappointed, I retorted, "Not knowing is not an answer." Father replied, "Do you think an

¹¹³ Ibid., 333.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 335.

answer must always be right or wrong? That's not right. Only not knowing is the right answer. You will realize this when you grow up. This world is a riddle. Too often, not knowing is the right answer."¹¹⁵

Kap'ae does not dwell on this memory any further, but he does feel a sudden longing for his father. When the village drunk denounces Kap'ae's father for "leaving behind his family for a cause like some crazy Bolshevik,"¹¹⁶ resentment toward his father fades into compassion; however, realizing his lack of power, he resigns himself to the hope that when the day comes for him to understand his father's chicken-egg answer, he too will understand his father.

Entering his aunt's pub, the sweet savory smell of rice wine stings his nose, and hunger overtakes Kap'ae. At the end of the room, he sees his mother wiping tears, lamenting her misfortunes, and calls out to her. Reprimanded for leaving his sisters home alone, Kap'ae finds solace in his aunt's offering of soup and rice. Only after satiating his hunger, and at his aunt's request, does Kap'ae head for the police station to inquire after his father. On his way, he displays, for the first time, an overwhelming passion for his father: "All I could think of was father. All I wanted to do was to see father. Poor father!"¹¹⁷ His longing, however, comes too late; a young police officer derisively tells Kap'ae that his father has already been executed. Then, led by his uncle toward the back of the station, Kap'ae sees his father for the last time—a purple body rotting amid other frozen dead bodies.

Kim Wönil's "Spirit of Darkness," from the outset, depicts the senselessness of ideology. For the narrator and other people in the rural village, ideology has no real value; in fact, it warrants no term, always described as a nameless "thing." People are more

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 337-8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 340.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 347.

concerned with the basic necessities of life, food, clothes, jobs; they are neither aware nor preoccupied with ideology. Interestingly so, “Spirit of Darkness” avoids speaking of ideology directly. Through young Kap’ae, innocent of ideology and unable to ask his absent father, the “thing” is left open to imagination. For the simple-minded villagers, it provides for shamefully fun gossip. For Kap’ae, who likens his father to a magician mysteriously appearing and disappearing from behind the heavy curtain of darkness, it is a mystery: “It is father’s magic trick, and no one understands.”¹¹⁸

The pathos of the narrator is magnified precisely because the “magic” and “riddle” that brings forth such tragedy, to ultimately culminate in civil war, cannot be fully grasped by anyone. In Kap’ae’s conversation with his father, about the chicken and the egg, Kim Wõnil illustrates this difficulty of comprehending partition—especially as a neat line pitting kin against kin as official narratives prescribe. The exchange between father and son offers a blatant critique of the *yusin* regime that erased any space for alternative narratives. For nothing can be always right nor always wrong, and to violently insist on one perspective only effects tragedy. While his father’s answer poses more questions for Kap’ae than the riddle itself, it offers a glimmer of hope that he will come to understand his father sometime in the future; it presents the responsibility of making sense of partition as a burden that Kim Wõnil and his generation, like Kap’ae, must shoulder.

Hence, the point Kim Wõnil raises with the chicken and the egg is not merely about multiple, competing perspectives on ideology. The question is a more pointed one: is Kap’ae (and by association Kim Wõnil) capable of this responsibility? Can (t)he(y) heal the wound left in the form of unanswered questions? What is called into question is

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 328.

not only the fitness of the living, but also whether father can acquire meaning for his actions, and, if so, how and who can confer it? Is there some way to offer agency to father and those faceless, nameless bodies who lie with him?

Written as it was in the context of intense repression under the *yusin* constitution, “Spirit of Darkness” creates a space for oppositional agency through the trope of memory. It is within Kap’ae’s memories that his father, a fervent leftist intellectual, is given voice to speak directly of his unrequited grievances. One of Kap’ae’s earliest memories of his father is a story about individual valor in the face of insurmountable obstacles:

I believe I was eight. Father and I went for a walk along the hills. ... Picking up a small shiny tree frog onto his palm, father told me, “This little fellow tries to jump higher and higher every single day. On the first day, he manages to jump half an inch, but the next day he jumps a whole inch. The day after that, one and a half inches, and the day after that, he jumps two inches.” I asked: “Will he reach the sky, father?” “No, he’ll try to reach the sky but he will never be able to reach it. The sky is endless.” “So he just jumps until he dies?” “That’s right.” “He’s a sad frog!” “No, he jumps because he wants to jump.” “Why does he jump?” “That, I don’t know.”¹¹⁹

Father’s purple corpse is presented as having fought to the death, undeterred by the bleakest of circumstances. Achieved in the absence of support, in the presence of repression, his valor seems particularly poignant. Moreover, as suppressed grievances are heard, through the medium of childhood memory, the fear and guilt of the living is simultaneously sublimated.

What Kim Wõnil evokes is a connective power of memory that transcends the barrier between the present and the past, the living and the dead. The fluidity of memory allows Kap’ae to traverse freely between these two separate spaces. In the narrative, the center of gravity occurs in the present, while memory is used as an alternative space in which social and political issues are reenacted. The two spaces, however, are not so

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 329.

clearly demarcated, and they appear simultaneously so as to converge as one in the final pages of the story.

The quivering silhouette of a tall poplar tree across the river reminds me of father. Does it beckon me over? How often father and I had treaded this path by the river! Never again. “Like the river that flows without stopping, you have to keep growing,” he had said. Suddenly father’s death struck me as with a sharp knife piercing my heart. I start to shiver. . . . When I think back on father’s life, a life that left me with a big riddle, I tremble from an unknown fear. At that moment, I knew it. I could not explain the feeling, but it was a hopeful one: I have to be brave to live and overcome all pain and sadness. Veiled in a thin layer of fog, the world is mysterious. As I tread along this puzzling world, I must be strong. I am the pillar upon which my family stands. Such determination is what I felt warming my heart and consoling my tears.

The year father died, the 6-25 War broke out. By the time the war was put on hold, uncle was no longer of this earth. Even when I had finally grown up, I could not ask uncle why he had, under that purple twilight, shown me father’s dead body.¹²⁰

The epilogue reveals the narrator to be an older Kap’ae recalling his memories as a young boy. Slippages in the narrator’s temporal positionality, shifting from present to past tense, demonstrate that the past is not a stable object that exists divorced from the present time and location. The past is always already mediated by the present—through experiences, dreams, and even absence of knowledge.

Kap’ae’s memory mediates his own subjectivity and the ghastly incident he has survived. He attempts to “overcome all pain and sadness” by imagining his father; only then can he find closure to heal the wound. Father and the other dead teach Kap’ae about a past filled with adversity, devotion, and sacrifice. In constructing father upon Kap’ae’s memories, Kim Wõnil not only intimates fragments of repressed knowledge about the past, but also unifies all those who remember. Remembering is, thus, subversive. It brings to the fore questions with profoundly moral and political implications. It also places

¹²⁰ Ibid., 350-1.

under scrutiny the hegemonic order by exploring alternative systems of thought beyond what the nation-state propounds. Finally, it reveals the dialectical interplay that links acts of memory, experience, and history.

Father's history, however, is not without consequences, as conceived in terms of disruption and destruction of ordinary lives. Interestingly, destruction comes in the form of the dissolution of the family—the most basic Confucian unit. Whether in the form of Kap'ae's mother, constantly beaten and questioned by the police, Kap'ae's two sisters, crying from want of subsistence, or Kap'ae, trembling under the covers during late-night police raids, all of the family's troubles stem from the father, or, rather, the absent father. For it is in father's absence that Kap'ae, who is keenly aware of the patriarchal Confucian *jangja* (eldest son) ideology, assumes the privileged, albeit burdensome, role of the household head. When Kap'ae speaks as an adult, he has clearly assumed the role successfully. In a story that, perhaps not coincidentally, opens and closes with the word “father,” even the disintegration of patriarchy affirms rather than negates male power. Even as “Spirit of Darkness” subverts one hegemonic order by recognizing those silenced, marginalized lives, it leaves another, the patriarchal Confucian ideology, intact.

It is not surprising, then, that many Korean literary critics read “Spirit of Darkness” as a coming-of-age tale which acts as an allegory for the nation—the search of a lost father figure and progression into maturity (development).¹²¹ Even though he was writing against the anti-communist perspective on national division and the Korean War as

¹²¹ See Kim Yunsik, “Pundan sosöl üi jönke,” Kim Wön-u, “Pamnat öpssi ilman hanün na üi hyöngnim,” Kwön Oryöng, “Gaein üi söngjang kwa yöksa üi kongdongchewa,” Oh Saeng-gün, “Pundan munhak üi hwakjang kwa hyönsil insik üi simhwa: Kim Wönil-ron,” Ha Ŭng-baek, “Jangja üi sosöl, sosöl üi jangja,” Pak He-kyöng, “Siljon kwa yöksa, kü sosöljök nömnadüm üi sege,” Hong Jöngsön, “Kiök üi kulle rül pötnün t'ongkwa jeüi,” Söng Min-yöp, “Pundan sosöl kwa pokhab sosöl,” and Yi Ch'ang-ki, “Sosöl sokesö üi sangsangryök kwa kü künwön.”

promoted by the Park Chung-hee regime, Kim Wŏnil's "Spirit of Darkness" remains a nationalist re-writing. His politics remain bound in the logic of nationalism.

As seen from the previous section, the majority of recollections of division and the Korean War were written by men. Only a handful of women writers, such as Pak Wansŏ, Pak Kyŏngni, and, later, Oh Junghee took up the topic. In this sense, remembering partition has been, for a long time, a masculinist project in South Korean literary history. As captured in the final scenes of "Spirit of Darkness," the act of remembering, the memory of national history, falls on the boy—preferably the eldest son. Seeing his dead father, with his mouth agape, as if having something left to say, registers an everlasting impression on Kap'ae—written in the present tense, the memory is seared as a permanent-present. It is up to him, as "the pillar upon which [his] family stands," to rescue persons like Kap'ae's father, to restore their meaning to generations.

Accordingly, in such a masculinist recovery of the past, there is no agency on the part of the female characters. Hence, Kap'ae's mother, a bereaved wife, chastely and dutifully awaiting her husband's return, and his sisters, a crying, cumbersome lot, will both depend on Kap'ae. This reinscribes women as bound to ideologies of nationhood—they remain as functions of restoring unity to the divided Korean nation. Therefore, in the following chapters, I will read two female authors, Pak Wansŏ and Oh Junghee, to demonstrate how women authors recover women's memories of the war and interrupt the patrilineal transmission of national memory.

Chapter III

Shattered Speech and Broken Bodies

*I couldn't express the horror I felt. I felt as if my body would be mangled by Joe at that very moment. Like my brothers, I thought I would be hacked to pieces, drenching the bed with my blood.*¹²²

Traumatic Memory

Scholars have discussed, exhaustively, the ineluctably thwarted task of re-presenting traumatic memory. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth asserts the collapse of understanding in the face of trauma.¹²³ She proposes that the “widespread and bewildering experience of trauma” in our century—both in its occurrence and in our *attempt* to understand it—prohibits us from understanding—and knowing—based on simple models of straightforward experience and reference. All modes of referentiality, including language, have become suspect. Hence, through the notion of traumatic

¹²² Pak Wansö, *Namok* [*The Naked Tree*] (P'aju: Segyesa, 1995; originally published 1970), 211 (all translations are my own).

¹²³ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). In her wide-ranging discussion, Caruth engages Freud's theory of trauma as outlined in *Moses and Monotheism* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; the notion of reference and the figure of the falling body in de Man, Kleist, and Kant; the narratives of personal catastrophe in *Hiroshima mon amour*, and the traumatic address in Lecompte's reinterpretation of Freud's narrative of the dream of the burning child. Caruth further declares that Freud turned to literature to describe traumatic experience because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing; and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet. Emphasizing Freud's turn (from psychoanalysis) to literature to describe traumatic experience, she further declares that literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing; and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the theory of trauma (tic experience) and the language of literature meet. See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1-13. Based on Caruth, I use the term “trauma” to mean an experience that effectively annihilates any possibility of language—one that cannot be known—understood—within the conventional framework of intelligibility.

memory, we come to a new understanding where immediate understanding is impossible. At the same time, Caruth expresses concern that the narrative of trauma should not lose the shocking force of its impact: “The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much.”¹²⁴

Even as language collapses in the face of trauma, witnessing—testifying—becomes further complicated by what Jacques Derrida calls the “internal split” of witnessing. He claims that “every witness statement is internally split.”¹²⁵ On the one hand, each statement is entirely unique and irreplaceable, since the witness is the only one to have experienced the narrated events in a particular way (regardless of his role within his own story.) On the other hand, every witness statement must be articulated using general concepts—universally understood linguistic and narrative models in order that it might fulfill its social obligations (as testimony). In that sense, all representation—and articulation—of trauma risks the accusation of losing the specifics of an event in a generalizable condition. As such, narratives on trauma call for us to think through the hiatuses and dislocations which necessarily inhabit trauma.

Similarly, Shoshana Felman, building on Caruth and Derrida, writes that what is most important in the process of testimony—of remembering and speaking the traumatic event—is the discovery of knowledge—its evolution and its very happening.¹²⁶ For Felman, it is in the process of testifying—in the *act* of re-collecting memory—that the

¹²⁴ Ibid. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 154.

¹²⁵ Jacques Derrida. *Demeure. Fiction et temoignage* (Paris: Galilée) pp. 109-113 in Jan Ceuppens, “Tracing the Witness in W. G. Sebald,” *W. G. Sebald and the Writing of History*, eds. Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long (Wurzburg, Germany: Verlag Konigshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2007), 59-72, 62.

¹²⁶ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

witness *knows*, for the first time, about the experienced event. Testimony, then, is not simply about formulating and articulating a statement about a particular event from the past; rather, testimony is a process that does not possess itself as a conclusion. It is not a verdict and it does not carry what Felman calls “the self-transparency of knowledge.”¹²⁷ As such, testimony cannot be familiar; for it does not *report facts* but encounters—and lets encounter—*strangeness*.

Taking into consideration Caruth, Derrida, and Felman, how then does any re-presentation of trauma, whether history or fiction, begin to utter itself, all the while retaining “strangeness”? Especially when such re-presentations exist in publication to be articulated and read over and over again? How do writers of trauma, like Pak Wansō, overcome such (ethical) dilemmas of representation? How does Pak Wansō retain strangeness amid repetition? What in the end is lost, and how do we recover that which is lost in the internal split between the specificity of trauma and a universal language?

Further complicating Felman, Giorgio Agamben, reading Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*, asserts that testimony depends on an asymmetrical dialogue between the survivor, who can speak but has not fully experienced, and the dead, who has the experience but can no longer speak.¹²⁸ The crux of Agamben’s argument is that the witness does not only testify to historical facts, but also to *someone* who can no longer speak or to *something* that can no longer be spoken. Thus, for Agamben, two different kinds of impossibilities—the impossibility of experience and the impossibility of speech—collide—splitting the monolithic idea of (trauma’s) “unspeakability.” That is, the language and act of giving testimony does not simply falter and stammer in the face

¹²⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

of the unspeakable event (trauma), but rather expresses the silence of another human being. Agamben finds a relationship between the speaker-survivor and the mute-dead.¹²⁹

Finally, Elaine Scarry argues that pain is inexpressible in language, for pain shatters language.¹³⁰ Thus, for Scarry, the morally imperative endeavor to represent the body in pain is confounded by the very unrepresentability of the pain language seeks to represent. According to Scarry, one of the effects of pain is to efface its own witness. Pain is not only inexpressible in language, but the event of pain ineluctably destroys language itself. (Pain is the ultimate differand: it cannot be deconstructed, even as it shatters all.)¹³¹

From Caruth to Derrida to Scarry, the problems raised by remembering and representing trauma are inherently literary: they have to do with language—its referentiality, its narrativity, and its representability. As these scholars assert, since trauma is unknowable through traditional frameworks of knowledge, it cannot be referred to, narrated as, or represented by conventional narratives in an objective mode without omitting all that is most significant to understanding its power over the present.

Consequently, literature has been marked and changed by its encounter with trauma.¹³² From non-fiction to fiction alike, writers frequently demonstrate how the affect of trauma can only be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms—collapsing

¹²⁹ Ibid., 37-9. Agamben explicates this idea in his interpretation of Primo Levi's relationship to the boy Hurbinek.

¹³⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹³¹ In addition to Caruth, Derrida, Felman, Agamben, and Scarry, see also Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Lenore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990); Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996); and Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹³² Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

temporality and chronology, narrativizing by repetition and indirection.¹³³ Such narrative devices can establish expectations in audiences and be antagonistic to the ways in which writers bring narratives of trauma into language; repetition effectively erases trauma's "strangeness."¹³⁴

There is, then, a fundamental ambivalence to trauma's language. Trauma is beyond language; language fails to articulate trauma; trauma mocks language's insufficiency. Yet, at the same time, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. Dori Laub insists that trauma has not truly existed, not been "truly witnessed yet," until it can be articulated (re-visited, re-collected, and re-presented) and heard by a sympathetic listener.¹³⁵ In this light, language is, at once, that which can realize—heal—trauma even as it is theorized as that which fails in the face of trauma—an impossibility.

Against such dangers, it becomes necessary to attend to the specific formulations of trauma and to the particular contexts in which they emerge. In the case of South Korea, it was the legacy of partition—its enforced amnesia and its unhealed trauma—that impelled writers to explore new modes of referentiality that would best express their erased/shattered postwar reality. What emerged, by means of figuration and indirection, was an amalgamation of fiction and non-fiction—writers began to write themselves into their fictional works. As Michael Rothberg writes, faced with "the demands of extremity," writers of trauma push the realist project to its limits, not because they have given up

¹³³ I am particularly reminded of W. G. Sebald's works, such as *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*.

¹³⁴ Shoshana Felman. In teaching a class on memory and testimonial literature, my undergraduate students brought this to my attention by complaining that, in spite of its differences, "every text seemed to kind of read like the other."

¹³⁵ Dori Laub, M.D., "Trauma and Testimony," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. (New York: Routledge, 1992).

knowledge but in order to suggest that traumatic knowledge cannot be fully communicated or retrieved without distortion.¹³⁶

No one plays with autobiographical fiction better than Pak Wansŏ. Since her first publication in 1970 with *The Naked Tree* (*Namok*), Pak Wansŏ continues to test the limits of autobiography by inserting her lived experiences, whether that of living as a *sin yŏsŏng* (new woman) in colonial Korea, of working as a salesgirl at the U.S. Army PX during the Korean War, or of surviving as a Korean woman in modern Korea, into her fictional works.¹³⁷ This is, not unlike Kim Wŏnil, Pak Wansŏ's bearing witness to histories seemingly on the verge of erasure. It is her effort to trace the past so as to find a place in history where her story can stand. This, of course, raises the intractable question: How—can—memory and imagination combine to form a historical record? Where does one draw the line between the real and the imaginary? And what are the ethics of such a representation?

At the same time, Pak Wansŏ inserts herself into her writing, I believe, for two other reasons: First, to question where harm done in the past ends. As Pak Wansŏ ceaselessly writes in her forewords and essays, even many decades after the war, even as everybody else seemed to let go of the past and move forward, she simply could not do so: “All memories are bound to retreat with the passage of time to become a distant scenery, but my memories of the Korean War still follow me close on my heels.”¹³⁸ In this sense, Pak Wansŏ's autobiographical fictions, like *The Naked Tree*, can be read as an

¹³⁶ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 14. See also Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*.

¹³⁷ See Pak Wansŏ's *Ōmma ūi malttuk* [*Mother's Stake*], *Kū mant'ŏn sing-a nūn nuga ta mŏggŏtsŭlkka?* [*Who Ate all the Singa?*]. Pak Wansŏ writes about these experiences in non-fictional essays as well. She confounds genre because she, as Pak Wansŏ, and characters based on herself show up doing the same things in both her non-fictional and fictional works.

¹³⁸ Pak Wansŏ, “Munhak kwa kyŏnghŏm,” [Literature and Experience].

exploration into trauma's power to outlast the duration of its infliction. That is, they are Pak Wansō's attempt to contain her trauma into narrative—into language. It is her attempt to probe the wounds left by trauma.¹³⁹

Second, Pak Wansō writes—straddling the bounds of fact and fiction—to break from trauma's incapacitating grasp. Pak Wansō writes: "I am sick and tired of my memories, but I cannot do anything about it. I cannot look at the whole picture, so obsessed am I with my personal experiences. And yet I think writing about it has had curative effects on me. My secret darkness! It was an unhappiness, which could not be easily described; it was a sense of guilt that I had survived when others had died; and it was a hatred directed at myself for living. Only by writing, by asking why, and by asserting the dignity of individual life, for no life should die such a wrongful death, could I break free of the lonely darkness, the prison of my heart. It may be very ambitious of me, but I dream that my stories have healing effects on my readers, too. I can write because of this dream."¹⁴⁰ In writing, publishing, and finding a willing listener in her readers, Pak Wansō manages to find her way of "moving on," if not "letting go."

However, as mentioned earlier, if narrating trauma is always already fraught by its complicated relationship with language and memory, how does Pak Wansō overcome this to produce *The Naked Tree*? More precisely, how does she do so as a woman? This chapter explores the ways in which Pak Wansō, through her protagonist Kyōng-a, in *The Naked Tree*, tries to remember, in spite of memory's and trauma's obstacles, her past to

¹³⁹ As mentioned earlier, Dori Laub, writing about trauma generally and the Holocaust specifically, argues that telling—to an other sympathetic listener—is crucial in healing the wounds of trauma. He claims that trauma has not happened in the same ways to someone before and after she or he can organize the story in narrative terms and recount it successfully. Narrative not only contains trauma in this formulation, but is itself an experiential category. Laub recognizes here the pain of storytelling but also privileges narrative over experience.

¹⁴⁰ Pak Wansō, "Munhak kwa kyōnghōm," [Literature and Experience].

find her place in history (which excludes her by “treating [her life] in a wholesale manner”); narrativize, ethically and morally, her trauma; and, heal—*herself* as well as others. I argue that Pak Wansŏ achieves this by way of enacting, in her narrative, the very processes of loss and recovery—from experiencing to remembering to narrativizing to healing trauma.

Pak Wansŏ’s *The Naked Tree*

When Pak Wansŏ set out to pen *The Naked Tree* in 1970, the Korean War was fast becoming a past that modern South Korea was eager to leave behind. Screened through a myopic nationalist lens, both judgmental and pervasive, the Korean War became a mere reminder of the havoc wreaked by communist North Korea,¹⁴¹ masking South Korea’s own incompetency, brutality, and destructiveness. It preyed on memories of the War, even as it denied others. For Pak Wansŏ, however, the Korean War had been a “vicious loss that had shattered the coils of [her] life.”¹⁴² She could not forget how the South Korean government had abandoned its citizens, leaving them to suffer in enemy hands, then, upon recovering Seoul three months later, had exercised an even more violent form of policing than its northern counterpart.

Personally, for Pak Wansŏ, the Korean War signified the death of her beloved older brother, who, after being tortured by both sides, was eventually shot and disposed of, and the life-crippling despair of her mother upon the death of her only son, which forced a twenty-year-old Pak Wansŏ to support her family as a lowly salesgirl at the U.S.

¹⁴¹ The Korean nationalist master narrative aligned itself to the present imperatives of international politics by fitting the problematic of the Korean peninsula into the American struggle against global communism.

¹⁴² Pak Wansŏ, “Puchŏnnim kūnchŏ” [In the Company of Buddha], *Pukkŭrŏum ūl karŭch ’innida—Pak Wansŏ tanp ’yŏn sosŏl chŏnjip 1* [Teaching Shame and Other Stories: Pak Wansŏ Short Story Collection, Volume 1] (Seoul: Munhak Tongne, 1999), 121.

Eighth Army PX.¹⁴³ Its deeply personal meanings, its profound sense of rupture, its pain still lived on in her; yet these aspects of the Korean War found little reflection in national history. Neither nationalistic nor ideological, her memories had no place to stand, to collect its shards, within this history; it was a history that did violence to her memory and, by extension, to her very being.

It is my contention that Pak Wansŏ insists on writing her memories so as to recuperate her place in history. Where little room remains for a spectrum of shades and colors, she valiantly attempts to locate multiplicities, exceptions, and ambiguities; she talks back to hegemonic history with personal memories.¹⁴⁴ Even as her texts take place within easily identifiable historical contexts, be it the colonial or Korean War periods, her stories are not of heroes and traitors, victims and perpetrators; they neither bestow valorizations nor mete out condemnations. There are no momentous upheavals dictating the plot, only the mundane everyday—of girls, wives, and mothers coping with the daily routine of living with the past. Pak Wansŏ cares about what comes after the event: the

¹⁴³ Pak Wansŏ, “Nae insaeng, nae munhak—Na ege sosŏl ūn muŏtsinka” [My Life, My Literature: What the Novel Means to Me], *Uri sidae ūi sosŏlga Pak Wansŏ rŭl ch’ajasŏ* [In Search of Pak Wansŏ, Novelist of Our Time] (Seoul: Woongjin, 2002), 21-3.

¹⁴⁴ Formulating questions of history in terms of memory has become a primary concern in recent studies across diverse disciplines. For memory, with its claims to an experiential authenticity, validates those experiences located at the margins and reveals the ways in which institutionalized history has misrepresented ordinary people’s experiences. Viewed in opposition, however, memory faces the danger of being treated as a second-rate history, written without “objective” evidence. Moreover, in that dominance is itself sustained by a selective, highly ideologized form of recollection, as in the case of South Korea, memory, at times, brackets as much as it restores. Memory in opposition to history is a false dichotomy. The production of knowledge about the past, whether in the form of memory or history, is always enmeshed in the exercise of power and is always accompanied by elements of repression. In this dissertation, I understand memory as deeply embedded in and complicitous with history in fashioning accounts of the past. Important writings that have influenced my thinking on historical memory include Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); articles in *Memory and Counter-Memory*, a special issue of *Representations*, no. 26 (spring 1989), especially Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” (7-25); Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); and *Women and Memory*, a special issue of *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26, no. 1 (winter 1990), especially Elizabeth F. Loftus, Mahzarin R. Banaji, Jonathan W. Schooler, and Rachael A. Foster, “Who Remembers What?: Gender Differences in Memory” (64-85).

drifts, disappointments, and compromises that seem, for her characters, to constitute the legacy of unmourned memories. In their wavering between the responsibility to remember and the need to forget, her characters evince the vicissitudes of memory. So that reading Pak Wansŏ begs the question: how is one to live within a history that excludes one's memories and experiences—when the mere act of remembering constitutes a perilous act?

This chapter explores traumatic memory at the juncture of broken, inadequate language and the gendered body in *The Naked Tree*, Pak Wansŏ's first autobiographical novel. Based on her experience of working at the U.S. Eighth Army PX upon the death of her brother, *The Naked Tree* depicts life in the wake of devastating personal loss. It tells the story of twenty-year-old Kyŏng-a as she attempts to maneuver the drudgery of work, the wounds of war, and the ambivalence of existence following the death of her twin brothers. Underscoring life after the event, Pak Wansŏ pays painstaking attention to minute details that suggest rather than explain Kyŏng-a's loss. Her quotidian quibbles, accompanied by the notable absence of direct mention of the Korean War, even suggest a semblance of normalcy.

Yet a pall of oppressive gloom hangs over the gray winter landscape of the novel, hinting at the weight of what remains hidden—unspoken—beneath the façade of routine. Pak Wansŏ leaves this aura of gloom oblique, for it is the very repression—unspeakability—of the past that paradoxically allows living in the present. I identify how language, in *The Naked Tree*, is always already inadequate; words never say what they mean. Yet Pak Wansŏ and, by extension, Kyŏng-a ceaselessly attempt to exhort words from the speechless landscape of grief—to excavate (remember), articulate (narrativize),

and mourn (heal) memories of the past. I examine how Pak Wansŏ addresses an experience that annihilated any possibility for language when language is always already a point of ambivalence and hesitation so that the body speaks. At once an epitaph, elegy, and testimony, *The Naked Tree* enacts the very process of loss and recovery.

The Naked Tree opens, in *medias res*, at the PX, where Kyŏng-a attempts to coax an American soldier into purchasing a tawdry portrait scarf.¹⁴⁵ Kyŏng-a's attempt to make a sale, trying to keep up a conversation in her broken English, reveals a cynicism unbecoming of her young age. From the outset, it is clear that Kyŏng-a finds working among lowly painters and *yanggongjus*¹⁴⁶ at the service of crass American soldiers to be beneath her; yet she toils at it, checking her contempt for daily profit margins. Kyŏng-a passes time, mindlessly, listlessly, like an automaton, at the PX. Insulated within its walls, locked in repetition, time loses meaning at the PX: there is no past or future, only the present.

Kyŏng-a is shaken out of her routine by the arrival of a new painter, Ok Hui-do. Tall, rugged, soft-spoken, and genteel, Ok Hui-do strikes Kyŏng-a as different from the other painters. His "wild eyes" and "melancholic silence" impress her, and she decides, almost immediately, to like him.¹⁴⁷ At first glance, it seems Kyŏng-a feels an affinity for Ok Hui-do because he emblemizes her ideal of the responsible father-figure: in spite of

¹⁴⁵ A portrait scarf was a cheap imitation silk scarf, as commissioned by American soldiers to Korean painters at the PX, on which portraits of their loved ones, wives, families, back in the United States were drawn. Soldiers would sometimes have their own portraits painted and sent home.

¹⁴⁶ Literally translated as "Western princess," *yanggongju* is the highly derogatory name used to describe Korean prostitutes servicing American soldiers by the U.S. military bases. It is a derivative of the more common *yanggalbo*, "Western whore," which affixes *galbo*, slang for whore, with *yang*, the Chinese ideograph for West/Western. Both terms are still used, albeit to a much lesser degree, to pejoratively label Korean women with foreign men. Katherine H. S. Moon explains how the branding of these women became instrumental in the promotion of both the U.S. and South Korean governments' bilateral security interests in the 1970s. See Katherine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korean Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁷ Pak Wansŏ, *The Naked Tree*, 9.

having been a successful painter in the North, Ok Hui-do resigns himself to painting portraits at the PX to make ends meet. He does for his family what neither her father nor her older brothers did for hers. Their deaths left Kyōng-a sole caretaker to her mother—bound by her daughterly duty to work a drab job. While Kyōng-a undeniably projects her paternal fantasies onto Ok Hui-do, her affection is one of commiseration. Kyōng-a notes, time and again, how Ok Hui-do stares, day after day, at the tattered gray curtain hanging in the portrait booth. In his quiet, intent gaze, Kyōng-a recognizes her own yearning—for color, for vibrancy, amid the oppressive grayness of the present.

For grayness abounds in Kyōng-a's life, from the streets of Seoul to the ruins of her house to the despair of her mother. The moment she takes leave of the brightly lit PX, Kyōng-a steps into a desolate city, where once crowds of people had thronged, now only “a monstrous collection of unlit buildings with their tops blown off and only their façades intact” stand.¹⁴⁸ Even though the grotesque ruins and dark corners terrify her, Kyōng-a spends much of her time ambling about the city, keenly observing life between its piles of wreckage. Through Kyōng-a's eyes, Seoul's dynamism protrudes almost in spite of itself: tearooms with their colorful wallpapers, taverns wafting delicious aromas, Clark Gable smiling unctuously on movie posters, make wartime seem far away. What little joy Kyōng-a musters from her walk home, however, is cut short by the glimpse of her house,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 15. Pak Wansō sets most of *The Naked Tree* in the period following the second reclamation of Seoul. When the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, the capital city of Seoul fell in three days. The South Korean government feigned calm until the last minute, and fled to Pusan without warning its citizens, leaving thousands of people to die in the hands of the North Koreans. Three months later, the U.S. intervened, and under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, Seoul was reclaimed on September 28, 1950. With the involvement of the Chinese Army, however, Seoul fell once again to communist forces on January 4, 1951. The allied forces surged on, and Seoul would be reclaimed for the last time on March 19, 1951. In the span of nine months, Seoul had changed hands four times. The city was in utter ruins—war had ravaged the city, and the U.S. had blown up large portions of Seoul during the second evacuation so as to deny its use to North Korea—and its prewar population of 1.5 million had dwindled down to a meager 200,000—partly from mass killings and partly from fleeing refugees. It is within this milieu that Kyong-a's narrative unfolds.

a statuesque, traditional building with one of its eaves blown off. Once a happy home, it is now where her mother, with unkempt graying hair, toothless wrinkles, and deathlike silence, awaits her. Her first glimpse of the house always causes a palpable but unexplained fear, forcing Kyōng-a to run home with her eyes closed.

The novel changes in mood when Ok Hui-do leaves the PX to focus on his painting. Hurt by his departure, Kyōng-a finds an expedient substitute in T'aesu, an awkwardly sweet and woefully conventional electrician, and GI Joe, a brazenly candid and insatiably lascivious American soldier. Her interactions with T'aesu and Joe reveal a playful, if selfish, capricious, and naïve side to Kyōng-a. While Kyōng-a finds T'aesu's affections endearing, she is incapable of reciprocating his sentiments; guided by a sense of feminine duty than of passion, her relationship with T'aesu culminates in a meaningless, disappointing kiss: "All I experienced from my first kiss was that it was cold."¹⁴⁹ With Joe, Kyōng-a experiences, for the first time, an almost animalistic desire, and she contemplates life as a fallen woman, serving the carnal needs of the GIs. However, at the moment Kyōng-a embarks on bodily violation/transgression with Joe, she imagines her body being brutally broken, causing Kyōng-a to unleash her (heretofore unspoken) memory in the novel's most powerful scene.

Kyōng-a's flashback takes place during the three months between the onset of the Korean War in June and the reclamation of Seoul in September of 1950.¹⁵⁰ As the war inches closer to home, Kyōng-a's mother decides to protect her sons by sending them

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵⁰ The period when the North Koreans controlled Seoul; they conscripted young men remaining in Seoul (either because they could or did not flee south) into the North Korean Army, and imprisoned, kidnapped, and killed those suspected as ideologues (against North Korea's communist ideals). Seoul was captured in three days; it was only after three months, with the aid of U.S. and Allied forces, that Seoul was reclaimed by South Korea.

down south. The boys, unaffected by and unconcerned with the war, take leave in front of the neighbors with boisterous gaiety—making jokes, munching on snacks, “as if leaving for a hiking trip”—only to return home in the dead of night.¹⁵¹ They had made so many detours, bidding farewell to friends, that they failed to cross the river before the bridge was destroyed. They thus end up hiding in the attic; their hiding, while restless, unfolds peacefully, until their uncle and cousin come seeking refuge, and Kyōng-a suggests moving her brothers from the attic to the servant quarters because “it would be safer.”¹⁵² That night, Kyōng-a wakes to the sound of explosions and shattering glass, runs outside, and finds her brothers’ broken bodies, writhing in a pool of red amid the white of freshly starched sheets. Her mother, upon waking from her delirium and seeing Kyōng-a, laments, “Why did the girl have to live?”¹⁵³

The narrative returns to Kyōng-a running out of the hotel and making her way home. Overcome with hatred for her mother, however, Kyōng-a heads to Ok Hui-do’s instead, and rests for the night under Mrs. Ok’s tender care. The next morning, walking toward her old house, Kyōng-a, for the first time, looks unflinchingly at the shattered roof, the gaping hole, the ragged eaves, and asks, hesitantly but aloud, “Was it because of me?”¹⁵⁴ Recognizing a poignant beauty in the weathered dignity of her house, seeing it stand magnificently despite its war wounds, Kyōng-a resolves to be more generous toward herself. Her feelings for her mother, however, remain unchanged—wavering between hatred and devotion—until her mother’s death.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 217.

¹⁵² Ibid., 222.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 230.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 243.

The Naked Tree closes in on Kyōng-a as a middle-aged woman—wife to T’aesu and mother to two rosy-cheeked children—living a seemingly comfortable and familiar life. Her old house has since been renovated in a “practical, sturdy Western style” save for the ginkgo trees in the back yard; she had doggedly insisted that the ginkgoes remain, for she “still needed, from time to time, their light, their whispers, and their cries.”¹⁵⁵ Kyōng-a chances upon an article announcing Ok Hui-do’s posthumous exhibition and, with T’aesu by her side, visits the gallery. From the entrance, her eyes search for one painting, a small canvas depicting a bare tree and two women underneath. She had seen that very painting at Ok Hui-do’s house almost thirty years ago, and its barren hopelessness had petrified her. Now, however, Kyōng-a sees in the naked tree a dignified, patient, tenacious yearning for spring. She sees Ok Hui-do’s belief in spring: “In the face of all his misfortunes, when all of his country lived joylessly, he had lived like the naked tree.”¹⁵⁶ Pak Wansō’s own work of art, *The Naked Tree*, however, does not conclude on the same hopeful note. Abruptly shifting from the past to the present tense, Kyōng-a grabs T’aesu by the face and kisses him, unable, unwilling, to bear any longer her sense of isolation.

From Living to Writing: Translating Experience/Pain

Within Kyōng-a’s memory narrative, that is *The Naked Tree*, language appears to be always already inadequate. Words are never what they seem; incommunicability and miscommunication abound amid the din of cacophonous voices. Not only is language challenged in the aftermath of trauma, it effectively fails to be the monolithic mode of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 280-81.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 285.

signification and process of knowing.¹⁵⁷ By virtue of its lack, language acts as, at once, a trickster playing to confusion, a medium for cheap exchanges, and the very site at which it falls upon itself. Yet, at the same time, language possesses immense power: words can wound and heal, contradict and affirm, engender and destroy. I examine how Pak Wansŏ addresses an experience that annihilated any possibility for language even as it demands its recovery when language is always already a point of ambivalence, hesitation, and misapprehension.

From the start, language manifests itself as always already inadequate in *The Naked Tree*. Constantly in want of “the right words,” Kyŏng-a exhibits difficulty in articulating herself. Whether calling painters by the derogatory “*kanp’anjaeng-i*,”¹⁵⁸ bandying words with her cousin, or confessing her affections for Ok Hui-do, Kyŏng-a reveals a hesitant language—one particularly disconnected from affect:

I just said nasty things to relieve my own irritation. My boss often scolded me for referring to them so condescendingly. I wasn’t contemptuous of them. I just couldn’t find the right words... I just said I missed her. But in my heart, a nasty thought swirled. ... I had no choice but to emphasize the word love, but I felt we needed another word to describe our feelings. Sad, strong words that no one had used before.¹⁵⁹

Although fully aware of her emotions, Kyŏng-a cannot properly verbalize what she feels. If speaking implies knowing, that is, if speaking is to bestow reference on something and make it commensurate with something else, Kyŏng-a shows her emotions to be wholly

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche expands the conception of language to include the notion of knowing, that is, language as an institutionalized process of knowing, which is consequently also subject to historical transformation rather than just a means to record history. As a product of “ongoing institutionalization, language enforces, cajoles, and convinces, but its power is also more insidious because it lurks in its concepts, in the very matter of thought.”

¹⁵⁸ The term “*kanp’anjaeng-i*” can literally be translated as “bill-board painter.” It originates from the practice of having painters (who were already deemed to compose the lower class) drawing and coloring posters and billboards. Here, Kyŏng-a adds insult to injury by adding the suffix “jaengi,” which describes, quite derogatorily, a person in a particular occupation.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 25, 103.

incommensurate with extant forms of representation. They lie outside the discursive framework of intelligibility, and, as such, cannot be articulated. Her frequent use of the qualifier “just” points to not only this very predicament but also to the very instability of language. For *ppun*, “just” in Korean, is a grammatically dependent noun. *Ppun*, on its own, is without meaning; only when incorporated into a positional verb (in the stative aspect) does it offer referentiality. Thus, Kyōng-a’s repeated recourse to *ppun* suggests a lack of agency on her part. Extant words are inadequate, but Kyōng-a, lacking the right words, must depend on—make do with—them. As language is destabilized into lack—as *just* uttered indeterminately rather than referentially meant—Kyōng-a remains powerless in its face.

Despite its inadequacies, however, language plays substitute to Kyōng-a’s emotions: banal greetings veil nasty thoughts and nasty words veil irritation. Language, by virtue of its lack, effectively conceals her true feelings and, in doing so, proffers her living. Her verbiage, with all that it fails to actually convey, acts as compensation for all that remains unsaid—because they cannot be said and because they will not be said. In this sense, then, powerlessness and willingness exist simultaneously in Kyōng-a’s use of language. So it is that even as Kyōng-a finds her emotions ineffable, she ceaselessly desires to speak and write them. She needs language as much as she despises and mistrusts it.

I wanted to talk to somebody, so I answered the letter promptly. I stopped writing to massage my aching shoulder and back, and continued. . . . I had a terrible feeling that I was living all alone in this great, old, broken, haunted house. I tried to appease myself by remembering that people lived outside of this house. I pondered a dialogue with one of them. I pulled out some writing paper and a fountain pen. I wrote, “To my beloved . . .” and considered whose name I should

put in the blank. I want to write a letter that doesn't solicit a reply. I want to write a letter without the anxious anticipation of a reply.¹⁶⁰

Kyōng-a sublimates her irrepressible desire to speak through writing. Her inability to speak to anyone brings her to write—through physical pain. Without hesitation, Kyōng-a assumes writing to appease her lonesome/solitary survival—her trauma. Rather than exchange words with those around her, knowing so to be a thwarted act, Kyōng-a resorts to an imaginary dialogue *via* writing.

I find that this scene illuminates how the breakdown of one form of communication opens up the possibility of another form of transmission. The sudden change in tense, from the past “I wanted” to the present “I *want*,” signals a sense of urgency: she needs to do so *now*. Yet, even without the anxiety of an audience or an answer, Kyōng-a goes on to fill her letter with nothing but lies. There will be no working-through of affect [pain] in writing either. Language is still inadequate. So why, then, does Pak Wansō, in reconstructing a life scarred mute by traumatic loss, emphasize this need to write? What does this dialectic between the possibility and impossibility in/of language signify? How does Pak Wansō, as a writer, participate in a very precise linguistic economy, when meaning can, at best, be grasped through the mediation of countless descriptions and qualifications that are themselves no less linguistic and, therefore, inadequate?

Korean literary scholars tend to see Pak Wansō's semi-autobiographical writings as akin to the psychoanalyst's notion of revisiting the past as a form of working-through.¹⁶¹ Pak Wansō herself has written extensively about its healing effects.¹⁶² I,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 54-5, 93, 106, 168.

¹⁶¹ Kim Yunsik, “Pak Wansō ūi kŭlssŭgi” [Pak Wansō's Writing], *Munhak kwa chisŏng* (April 2002), Kim Kyōngsu and Hwang Togyōng, “Kaesŏng kwa chŏmun nal ūl kŏnnŏ onŭn sosŏl ūi chinggŏm tari” [From

however, see Pak Wansō in closer proximity to Agamben, than Felman, in that she postulates the existence of a lacuna in the very notion of language. This gap, for Pak Wansō, is necessary to transmit an experience that eludes language. That is to say, it is not that she asks for more exacting words but that we need new communicative ways to get beyond the impasse of representing and articulating trauma—to recognize the very constitutive nature of aporia.

The magnitude of trauma that Pak Wansō feels perhaps lies at the heart of what makes fiction an appropriate medium for the expression of her experiences. Trauma theory shows how fiction might be the place where the dynamics of traumatic memory are reproduced in writing itself.¹⁶³ Laub's claim that "the knowing of the event is given birth to" at the moment of the narration of the experience points to literature's potential for exploring the wounds of traumatic memory.¹⁶⁴ Whether it does so while "preserving the uniqueness of the experience and the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt at its interpretation"¹⁶⁵ remains to be seen. Nevertheless, I find a discussion that reflects upon the relation of lived experience to fiction to language, as well as the crucial role of memory in this dynamic, will be an important contribution to studies of memory, trauma, and language.

Gaesōng to the End of Days—Crossing Over the Stepping Stones of the Novel], *Munhak chōngsin* (November, 1991), Kwon Myung-a, "Mirae ūi haesōk ūl hyanghae yōllin uri sidae ūi kojōn" [Classic of Our Time: Towards a Future Interpretation], *Uri sidae ūi sosōlga Pak Wansō rŭl ch'ajasō* [In Search of Pak Wansō, *Novelist of Our Time*] (Seoul: Woongjin, 2002).

¹⁶² Pak Wansō, "Munhak kwa kyōnghōm."

¹⁶³ Ferran, Ofelia. "Memory, Trauma, and Writing in the Work of Jorge Semprún," *MLN* - Volume 116, Number 2, March 2001, 266-294.

¹⁶⁴ Such a rethinking of the ways that literature might play out the dynamics of traumatic memory has spawned an entire literary tradition on the Holocaust. However, Holocaust survivors simultaneously harbor a mistrust of fiction. Fiction, in this context, is seen as a medium that might betray the horror of the [singular] experience and somehow universalize an irreducibly unique event by giving a meaning to an experience that shattered all possibility of stable meaning. Elie Wiesel, for example, has said: "If it is a novel, it is not about Auschwitz, and if it is about Auschwitz, it is not a novel." Yet Wiesel has himself written novels about Auschwitz.

¹⁶⁵ Dori Laub, *Testimony*, 73.

Like the *Fort-Da* game of Freud's grandson, Pak Wansŏ's writing of her painful experience of partition can be seen as an attempt to gain some mastery over a situation which, by its very nature, robs her of any sense of control over her life. This, of course, explains the staggering need that survivors often have to talk, write, and express what they went through and, at the same time, the hazards that such an enterprise entails, for it means reliving what was impossible to live through the first time. Many, like Levi, did not manage to survive such "reliving" of traumatic memories that their work involved; even more never took up the risk and kept their memories in silence. Perhaps this dangerous aspect of writing hints at why it took more than twenty years for Pak Wansŏ to write her past—as fiction.

Pak Wansŏ has written (and spoken) quite extensively about how she began writing *The Naked Tree* as a biography of her friend, the renowned painter Pak Sugŭn. She had been living as an ordinary housewife when she chanced upon a posthumous exhibition of Pak Sugŭn. Reading about his accolades, seeing people crowding his exhibition, Pak Wansŏ found herself "swept by an incomprehensible confusion—a mixture of fury, sadness, and joy."¹⁶⁶ For Pak Wansŏ, having worked with him at the U.S. Eighth Army PX, had known his hardships, the trials and tribulations he had had to overcome; the sudden fawning, by the art world, over Pak Sugŭn's artistic genius felt disingenuous, not to mention greedy. Such feelings gradually developed into "a passion that [she] wanted to bear witness to how he had lived."¹⁶⁷ However, in writing Pak Sugŭn's biography, Pak Wansŏ found herself seeping in, talking about her own stories. She confesses she "felt no enthusiasm" upon excluding her stories: "It was impossible to

¹⁶⁶ Pak Wansŏ, "Nae insaeng, nae munhak" [My Life, My Literature], 14.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 15.

give up on the pleasure of lying and the desire to express myself. The stories, so far suppressed inside me, began to clamor as if they had found an outlet.”¹⁶⁸

It is this “pleasure of lying” and “desire to express” that impels Pak Wansō to write *The Naked Tree* as an autobiographical fiction. By having to relive the trauma in writing perhaps the non-fiction writing proved more dangerous than therapeutic. A fictitious doubling or parting of identity allows Pak Wansō to articulate her experience. Pak Wansō’s *The Naked Tree* (and other autobiographical novels about her experience of the war), in its very origin, demonstrates the workings of trauma. By making her traumatic memory recur, *The Naked Tree* becomes the site that re-produces trauma, and which, despite its dangers, attempts to write trauma.

For Pak Wansō, then, fiction is deemed the necessary site for such a perilous venture as trying to articulate the real-life experience of trauma. Even within *The Naked Tree*, there are examples of fiction, what Pak Wansō calls the “free rein of imagination” coming to the aid of Kyōng-a in difficulty, for example, reading Hans Christian Andersen, lying in her letters, lying to Mrs. Ok. (Self-)Invention is what Pak Wansō must enact to survive the account of her real story. *The Naked Tree*, a novel about a real historical event and personal experience, thus puts into play this amalgamation of fiction and history—the pleasure of lying and desire to express.

Much like Pak Wansō, Kyōng-a, from the very start, uses memory to recreate her experience and to reposition herself in a situation of mastery—trying to prove she possesses a control that is not so evidently in her hands. Yet, in contrast to Pak Wansō, the author, who can, and does, move relentlessly forwards and backwards in time as she tells her story, Kyōng-a displays an utter inability to remember and articulate herself. In

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

The Naked Tree, memory teeters precariously as it is produced by one, Pak Wansŏ, who commands memory, and another, Kyŏng-a, who struggles to narrate it. Of course, no matter how closely we may associate Kyŏng-a with Pak Wansŏ, from the moment that we meet Kyŏng-a in the pages of *The Naked Tree*, she is a fictional character. This, in turn, shatters the unified sense of autobiographical narration. Any illusion of linearity, like Kim Wŏnil's *bildungsroman*-esque "Spirit of Darkness," or neat closure to the memories is thwarted.

Broken Languages

The Naked Tree as a whole reconstructs a life scarred by a traumatic loss that at the same time finds the possibility of survival: although Kyŏng-a lost her brothers, and lived, as her mother daily reminds her, in their stead, this loss is also the reason for her survival and her ability to speak at all. Here, Pak Wansŏ seems to ask: *The Naked Tree* can be read as a novel about the fragility of language—the very difficulty of speaking via language. The irony, of course, is that to convey this argument, Pak Wansŏ uses this very fragile language. What, then, does it signify for a writer, writing about her own lived experiences, to emphasize the need for language even in the face of such linguistic inadequacies? How does the language of the writer Pak Wansŏ illuminate the (inadequate) language of the character Kyŏng-a? That is to say, how does the genre of non-fiction play out in Pak Wansŏ's fictional work that is the novel *The Naked Tree*?

Kyŏng-a's ambivalence toward language plays out most pointedly—and poignantly—during her deliberative walks. These unmapped detours open up a peculiar lostness; not knowing which streets may turn out to herald shelter, warmth, or danger,

Kyōng-a is most self-aware meandering the city, lost in its winding streets, than she is elsewhere. Thus, having unwittingly stumbled upon a cathedral, Kyōng-a betrays her vulnerability for the first time. Caught up in her own emotions, her wish to speak (out) almost in spite of herself reveals a [tired] desperation:

Alone in the darkness, once again, I stood still, wanting to pray for anything. But nothing came to mind. ‘Maria, who would know it but you.’ Something seemed to burst forth from within me. ‘Maria, only you would know...’ A sense of innocent longing shrouded my frozen body. ‘Maria, who would know it but you. Maria, only you would know... What came next...’ Suddenly I realized I was trying to remember the words to a poem I used to recite. Parroting the poet, borrowing his feelings, killed the fun. Without pretenses, I was left with only that which was mine—feelings of fright and coldness. They were all I felt, incredibly vivid and strong. I broke into a run down the dark streets. Repeating “I’m scared, I’m scared” I fled as if pursued by them.¹⁶⁹

Staring at the awesome edifice, Kyōng-a finds herself in want of a prayer; her slow utterance brings forth an unexpected surge of emotion, one that seems to beg release and seek solace.¹⁷⁰ At the moment her memory fails her, at the moment she is unable to remember the words, Kyōng-a realizes she is imitating the words and feelings of another, and ceases to speak altogether. Left with nothing but her own raw feelings, without the buffering effect of another’s words, her emotions leave her without so much as the ability to translate them into words. Fear overwhelms memory, and Kyōng-a is silenced to the

¹⁶⁹ Pak Wansō, *The Naked Tree*, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Taking into account Freud’s understanding of trauma as based on a system of fortification, I find Myōngdong Cathedral, to which Kyōng-a returns repeatedly, serves as a defense or screen memory for Kyōng-a. Freud describes trauma as an extensive breach in the defensive wall surrounding the psyche. The subject’s defenses are weak if he has not built up a layer of anxiety prior to an unexpected event. The repetition-compulsion seeks to achieve a retrospective mastery over the stimulus that has breached the defense by developing the anxiety which was previously missing. By continually returning to the traumatic situation, the individual can master the amounts of stimulus which have broken through by binding them together and simultaneously construct a protective shield against trauma after the event. As such, during the course of the novel, the cathedral serves as a defense or screen memory, which conceals behind its awesome stone structure the similarly stoned, fear-inspiring walls of her shattered house—the site of Kyōng-a’s trauma. The cathedral forms an objective correlative for Kyōng-a’s trauma, mirroring the internal defensive walls that she has constructed in order to protect herself from anything connected with her moment of trauma. Paradoxically, such defenses, although constructed as a protective layer, serve to isolate Kyōng-a from those around her. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

point of literal muteness; the nameless dread translates into an attack on memory and language.

Yet the question remains: Why does Kyōng-a purposefully abandon speech at the very moment she finds herself imitating the words and feelings of another? She had recited the poem enough that it spontaneously came to mind; now, however, reciting has become both pretentious and fearful. Moreover, while she had had no trouble spouting words in lieu of displaying her emotions, Kyōng-a finds borrowing words of another so as to parrot abominable. Kyōng-a cannot bring herself to “borrow” that of another so as to “parrot” his words.

Moreover, Kyōng-a’s abrupt shift, from slight euphoria to fearful silence, begs the question: What is it that only the Virgin Mary would know? What lies so deeply buried within Kyōng-a that left with nothing but her own raw feelings, without the buffering effect of another’s words, her emotions leave her without so much as the ability to translate them into words? And while it had been easy for Kyōng-a to spout anything in lieu of her real emotions, she cannot bring herself to “borrow” that of another so as to “parrot” his words. This passage raises the question: how does one ethically speak for and about trauma?

Utterly conditioned against voicing her feelings, Kyōng-a finds herself mute, unable to choose her words—even in the face of another’s raw emotions:

When [Misuk] had wanted to share her distress, I had ignored her plea, an act I now regretted. I tried to think of something that would help her, but nothing presented itself. It was not that I couldn’t remember a few famous maxims. I simply wasn’t sure that I could utter them with a serious expression on my face. For want of the right words, I had to nod.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Pak Wansō, *The Naked Tree*, 91.

Again, the notion of parroting another's words displeases Kyōng-a so that she chooses physical actions—nodding, here, walking and writing, elsewhere—to assert herself over speech. Moreover, Kyōng-a displays a keen vigilance in choosing her words—with all those around her.

The Naked Tree goes so far as to dismantle the very idea of language as a stable entity. After a particularly exhausting day at the PX, Kyōng-a saunters over to the toy store, where, with a throng of onlookers, she stares at a wind-up chimpanzee, whose mindlessly repetitious actions, fast then slow, vigorous then lifeless, bring tears to Kyōng-a's eyes; feeling faint, Kyōng-a finds herself in front of the cathedral again. Kyōng-a averts her eyes to the steeples, and suddenly words, as mindlessly empty and hollow as the chimpanzee, flood her:

I remembered the poem I had forgotten at this spot. The words came as clear as day. Before I knew it, I was already reciting the poem: "Maria, only you would be merciful to us. We were born of your blood. Maria, who would know better than you the pain of longing." I had spoiled our precious moment, and I didn't know why. We started walking again down the hill and around the corner.

"Are you cold?"

"Yes, very."

"Today is Small Cold, isn't it?"

"It's strange that Small Cold is always so much colder than Big Cold."

"That's a trick our ancestors played on us. You know how Autumn Begins always falls in the middle of the hot spell? Our ancestors thought they could alleviate the cold or heat by the use of language."

We regained our composure by exchanging more meaningless pleasantries. Finally, unable to find the words that could transport us back to the moment beside the cathedral, we said goodbye.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Ibid., 128-9. The terms "Small Cold" (*sohan*) and "Big Cold" (*taehan*) are taken from the 24 seasonal division points by which the solar year is divided under the traditional lunar calendar according to the sun's movement on the ecliptic, with the Vernal Equinox marking 0° on this imaginary line and each of the 24 points spaced by 15° from the next. As does Yu Young-nan, translator of *The Naked Tree*, I translate literally from the Chinese epigraphs, "so," meaning small, "tae," meaning big, and "han," meaning cold, to get "Small Cold" and "Big Cold."

Kyōng-a's untimely outburst demonstrates how, in *The Naked Tree*, words and emotions are incompatible/incongruous with one another. Words that had escaped her, when she had needed them most, now inundate her; thus, words never seem to manifest as intended. Furthermore, Kyōng-a's inability to explain her behavior emphasizes the inadequacy of language—it is always already—merely—a substitute for both what is spoken and unspoken. That is to say, language is not whole; it is neither monolithic nor essential nor self-referential. At best, language is merely a substitute, even for what is uttered/spoken: it can never fully be but only approximate what is spoken. To say that language is a substitute for what is unspoken is to posit that language is the very site upon which what cannot be uttered manifests itself. Her words, as such, echo with a false ring, and upset our trust in her words, and narrative, pointing to something untold, silenced, violently erased.

The following exchange, or lack thereof, between Kyōng-a and Ok Hui-do further reiterates the unreliability of language. Language constantly fails Kyōng-a by usurping, fleeing, or interrupting her so that she is relegated to simulating fluency, parroting words, or exchanging banalities. While intended to mute her pain, Kyōng-a's repeated attacks on her memory lead to the loss of language; repression of memory results in the paralysis of her linguistic faculties. Hence, she is “unable to find the words,” and must resort to pointless chatter—about the trickery of language, no less. Her smattering of words is a substitute, compensatory memory filling up the void of her memory receptacle so as to keep the unspoken memory buried.

That Kyōng-a is incapable of speaking is ironic, however, since she has wanted to speak Korean all day: “I realized I hadn't spoken any Korean today. All of a sudden I

was seized with a hunger to speak my mother tongue. I mumbled something under my breath. The words were Korean, but they were not mine. I was aching for words to describe my feelings. If not in words, I yearned to express myself in a cry or a gesture.”¹⁷³ Torn between wanting to speak and needing to remain silent, Kyōng-a’s dysfunction in expressiveness can be read as a symptom of her struggle to remember and will to forget. Her contradictory desires hint at a secret that is paradoxically both kept and revealed in language. In this sense, then, Kyōng-a’s inability to find the words reveals the indelible mark repressed memory has left on affect and its expression in speech.

While Kyōng-a’s painful memory prohibits her from speaking, there is a sense of deliberateness to her silence. Kyōng-a clearly chooses not to speak about the past. Overly sensitive to (others’) words, Kyōng-a chooses her own words carefully and deliberately. Her silence contrasts with that of her mother’s. Her mother “lives because she cannot die.”¹⁷⁴ She has died with her sons, and the voices of the dead ring hauntingly hollow.

What does it mean when the narrator refuses to speak? I find that in Kyōng-a’s willed silence, Pak Wansō suggests that the possibility of [textual] articulation emerges from the impossibility of speech. Ineffability is the very condition of writing. In *Language and Silence*, George Steiner explores the different ways in which silence might be the most eloquent response to radical experiences of the inhuman, such as the Holocaust. Trauma, according to Steiner, is an experience that tests memory because it will be impossible to recall in its plenitude.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid., 124-5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷⁵ George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

If silence is the language of trauma, both Kyōng-a and her mother have learned it well. While “finding voice” has long been a trope in liberatory agendas that place speaking—and writing—as crucial for moving away from silences that imply consent to subjugation, I find such a rhetoric perpetuates an overly simplistic binary and locates speech within a Western philosophical tradition that posits speech as synonymous with agency. While silence admittedly presents practical agential difficulties, it is not enough that any silence be replaced with any speech. Rather the question should be: Whose speech? Whose silence? Since both silence and speech occur in very particular ways, we must be vigilant to the kinds of meditations that transpire in the process of finding voice. Kyōng-a’s deliberate self-silencing possesses its own agency; her silence warrants reflection.

Kyōng-a’s silence complicates Pak Wansō’s writing endeavors. Her silence raises the issue of mastery. Does Kyōng-a control her memories, or do they control her? The question is all the more important as the memories she is evoking are those of her experience of absolute loss of control. Kyōng-a’s silence shows both a firm control and a lack of power over her memories. When the memories do come flowing back to her, they acquire a force of their own. As a consequence of the effect and weight of these memories, Kyōng-a cannot stop them. Her linguistic faculties break down, farther beyond silence, into incomprehensible cries.¹⁷⁶

Kyōng-a’s interactions with the Americans are sporadic, shallow, and limited at the portrait booth: she spends most of her time with the Korean painters, and what little

¹⁷⁶ Leigh Gilmore discusses how the flashback makes it impossible to tell where the hurt is occurring, for the flashback appears as both memory (it happened) and as a repetition in the present (it is happening now / again). For Gilmore, flashbacks represent not only a disorientation in time, but also indicate a dissonance within the self that can represent memory. See Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

conversation she musters with Americans falls within the confines of her elementary English. When Diana Kim requests Kyōng-a's help in writing a love letter, in English, to her American lover, to elicit promises and gifts, Kyōng-a does so by using the same words of flattery that she uses with her American customers. Diana Kim, moreover, seeks Kyōng-a's assistance because of a lie: "Trying to hide my embarrassment, I told her that spoken-English was much different from what I had learned at school. I wanted Diana Kim to know that I was not ignorant. Sensing her interest in my excuse, I lied that I had been an English literature major at E University before the war broke out."¹⁷⁷ The lie is an outward verbalization of Kyōng-a's wishing she were pursuing something more impressive than selling portrait scarves at the PX. In compensating her chagrin of not having attended university by claiming mastery of English, however, Kyōng-a becomes relegated to lying for Diana Kim. In *The Naked Tree*, English, as such, becomes indexed as the medium of cheap, meaningless exchanges. Emptied of all substance, what it provides is mere opportunities to cheat each other, and it finds no proper place outside of the PX.

Miscommunication abounds as the two languages, Korean and English, collide at the PX. Kyōng-a fails to understand Joe's Korean: "His pronunciation was so awkward, I assumed he was using very difficult English words, and I kept asking, "*ai begŭ yuŏ p'adŭn.*" After a while, I realized he was saying "*tongbang yeŭi chiguk.*" Even so I was still unclear what he meant."¹⁷⁸ Kyōng-a misconstrues Joe's badly pronounced Korean for English and responds, ironically, with her own badly pronounced English. Her misunderstanding suggests not only the inadequacy of language, but also the

¹⁷⁷ Pak Wansŏ, *The Naked Tree*, 32.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 181. Rather than writing "I beg your pardon," I chose to romanize what Pak Wansŏ, in her text, writes in Korean—the phonetics of "I beg your pardon" as pronounced with a heavy Korean accent.

inconceivability of speaking Korean to GI Joe. English is so undoubtedly the *lingua franca* of the PX that even after Kyōng-a recognizes the Korean words, she cannot comprehend them. Language creates confusion, miscommunication, and ambiguity, so as to shatter the seemingly unequivocal demarcation of differences.

Such a shattering happens quite literally when Kyōng-a meets with Joe at the Kyōngsō Hotel. The red lamplight bathes the white bed sheets in red. The pool of red shadow finally opens up Kyōng-a's unspoken memory—the trauma returns, in stark fashion, from its repressed repository. With the return of the repressed comes the dissipation of language. Near raving mad, Kyōng-a screams, unintelligibly, in her broken English, “*P'ūrijū, p'ūrijū! P'ūrijū ton būreik'ū mi!*”¹⁷⁹ To a shocked Joe, she cannot articulate or explain herself. Joe, unable to make sense of her blathering English and primal screams, can only ask, to no avail: “What's the matter with you?” Kyōng-a imagines her own broken body superimposed upon her brothers' broken, mutilated, bloodied bodies; as Kyōng-a's body nears breaking, her memory returns—at the price of fractured, unintelligible words. The painful operation of memory comes into play when her psyche confronts the pain in her body—so that the body speaks.

My memory dashed into the past like water flooding down from a broken dam. The yellow ginkgo leaves. The yellow ginkgo leaves dropping endlessly to the ground. The splendid yellow, beautiful to the point of sorrow, couldn't manage to stop my memory going back.

Like a smack on the face, I encountered the memory that I thought I had forgotten, that I thought I had been avoiding so skillfully. I then accepted this memory, giving in like a person cornered in the dead end of an alley.

The ghastly blood stains on the bright white sheet that my mother had so carefully beaten to a stiff smoothness with her ironing bats, the young bodies so mercilessly ripped. Those gruesome bodies that showed in full horror how tender young bodies could be mangled before their souls departed, the crimson blood, still warm, which had flowed from those horrible bodies. I had seen them.

¹⁷⁹ Pak Wansō, *The Naked Tree*, 212. Again, romanization of “Please, please! Please don't break me!”

I couldn't express the horror I felt. I felt as if my body would be mangled by Joe at that very moment. Like my brothers, I thought I would be hacked to pieces, drenching the bed with my blood.¹⁸⁰

Kyōng-a's memory moves from an abstraction (color red), to a bodily image (brothers' broken bodies), to a material body (her own body). The memory also comes physically—"like a smack on the face." The reality of war, as her brothers' deaths, is not simply referred to but is rather written directly into these various narrative breakdowns. What is represented, endlessly repeated in these various collapses is the traumatic experience of the loss of power and control and meaning inherent in this experience of the disaster. What, then, is the relation of returned memory, broken language, and the (material) gendered body?

Engendering Memory: The Gendered Body

Kyōng-a's trauma appears to lie in the death of her brothers. And her guilt—so oppressively debilitating—stems from her having participated—unwittingly—in their deaths. Yet her memory reveals her "true" trauma rests on her gender—her gendered body. Upon finding her sons dead, Kyōng-a's mother exclaims:

"The gods are cruel. Why did they take my sons? Why did the girl have to live?"

I scrambled to my feet. I managed to slide the door open and went out. My eyes grew fuzzy and dim. I blinked, trying to remove the hazy blinders in front of my eyes. For the first time I saw the ginkgo trees, the dazzling yellow. They were splendid. Why did the girl have to live? The words rang in my ears like a horrible curse.

"Stop it! Stop it!"

I shook my head over and over again. When that was not enough, I rolled over and over.

I avoided my mother as much as possible. Whenever I saw her, I felt so guilty about being alive that I shrank away. I was cultivating a hatred for my

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 211.

mother without knowing it. Her eyes always inspired fear and hatred in me. I began to mumble excuses. I had to make excuses, feeling embarrassed about my survival.¹⁸¹

Mother, upon waking from her delirium, sees Kyōng-a and laments, “Why did the girl have to live?” In stark contrast to the possessive “my sons,” Kyōng-a becomes, simply, “the girl.” Here, the mother’s words carry immense power. They become, indeed, “a horrible curse” that violently marks Kyōng-a as (a generic) female. From this point onward, Kyōng-a is no longer her parents’ “beloved youngest daughter” or her brothers’ “baby sister” but simply “the girl.” Mother never even calls Kyōng-a by name, instead addressing her with a generic address, such as “hey.”

It is not that her brothers died because of the Korean War, it is not even that she unwittingly participated in their deaths. Rather, it is that Kyōng-a survived, as a female, in their stead—that she must go on living as “the girl”—that traumatizes Kyōng-a to the point of muteness. With her “blindness” brutally removed, Kyōng-a can only “mumble excuses.” Compelled by the need to “make excuses” for her existence as “the girl,” Kyōng-a loses her grasp of speech/language; she becomes relegated to simulating fluency, parroting words, or exchanging banalities.

According to Felman and Laub, most survivors of catastrophic/traumatic events experience complex feelings of guilt: they struggle with the burden of having been too much victim and not victim enough. They feel they can only live in *the place of* another. Here, guilt becomes further complicated by gender—which is, in turn, accompanied by feelings of shame. Kyōng-a’s guilt at having survived her brothers is further compounded by her shame of having survived them as “the girl.” And as “the girl” she can never take *the place of* her male brothers; her gender marks her as forever lacking.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 230-1.

It must be noted that earlier on Kyōng-a had tried to use her body to give herself some semblance of order and power. As if to fill the emptiness she feels for herself, she decides to engage in a sexual relation with Joe: “In his hunger I saw myself, and I interpreted it in my own way. Did I need to be the victim in his love affair? I could be a co-conspirator. I could conspire in a fantastic love affair with him. I could enjoy conversation with him, and better yet, I could listen to music, looking into his eyes. Sitting by a warm stove, listening to stories of his childhood. My own childhood would make him laugh.”¹⁸² Her brief fantasy of romance as portrayed on the covers of Joe’s adult novels, however, quickly succumbs to destruction. Kyōng-a’s decision to meet with Joe at the Kyōngsŏ Hotel is her way of breaking herself. She knows fully that meeting Joe will cast her away from *tongbang yeŭichiguk* to *yanggongju* in the eyes of others.

It is significant, then, that in Korean, to be a “fallen woman,” is to be a “*manggajin yŏja*,” meaning a “broken” or “damaged” woman. Previously, Kyōng-a spoke about her desire to succumb to Joe as “breaking”:

Held captive under his brazen, sensual gaze, I felt all the joints holding my body come apart; he could so easily break me now. I was neither scared nor sorry to imagine myself broken, damaged. It wouldn’t be my fault if I were broken. I didn’t care that I might be broken, damaged. All I cared about was that it was not my fault. It was all because of Ok Hui-do. Nothing like this would have happened if only he had been with me.¹⁸³

So what does it mean that she sees herself—as broken—in the broken bodies of her brothers? The body can hurt itself to speak the pain; it can waste away to speak the wish to die—in trauma. Kyōng-a uses her body to uphold her sense of control over a life torn apart, but even her body betrays her: it loses the capacity to guarantee any semblance of control, for it, too, gets destroyed in the very act of her control. The use of her female

¹⁸² Ibid., 199.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 201.

body—and its imagined breaking—to help cope with the loss (of her brothers, of her father, of her mother, of Ok Hui-do, and of her gendered self) she feels and its subsequent failure imply that the difficult gap to bridge between the overwhelming experience and the attempt to live through it is literally embodied. Just as one cannot escape one's body, her story, her memory, is also impossible to escape from. The remembered female body shatters; it is no longer whole.

The Naked Tree does not end in reconciliation with the past, but rather with a sad sense of resignation and lack of closure. Kyōng-a has just come out from Ok Hui-do's posthumous exhibition. Seated with T'aesu, now her husband, at the Park at Tōksu Palace, the park's peaceful veneer of children playing badminton, lovers on leisurely strolls, makes Kyōng-a uneasy. Even as she embraces the ginkgo leaves falling by her side, even as she notices people—and T'aesu—around her, she feels an unbearable sense of isolation. Kyōng-a knows she will not forget, but there are perils to remembering. In this isolation, we realize that her profound sense of loss will never be resolved.

These ginkgo trees are, of course, reminders of Kyōng-a's trauma—she had buried her pain amid their fallen leaves after hearing her mother's curse for the first time. Years later, at T'aesu's suggestion that the old, traditional house be demolished, Kyōng-a acquiesces on condition of keeping the ginkgo trees: "There was no cause for objection. It was the practical thing to do. The demolition was quick. I watched the old house crumble with agonizing pain. It soon emerged in its now pragmatic, sturdy, boxy, bright form."¹⁸⁴ Here, Pak Wansō critiques the modernizing policies of the Park Chunghee

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 280-81.

regime.¹⁸⁵ In accordance with its wholesale reinvention of the nation, spaces underwent significant alterations: old buildings were demolished, lands were razed, as new buildings began sprouting in the form of sturdy, boxy skyscrapers and apartments. The ravages of urban renewal erased relics of the past. It redefined memories through spatial containment, rendering any wounds invisible, inviting a visual amnesia, lulling everyone into a kind of forgetting.

Kyōng-a's insistence to keep the ginkgo trees reveals her fear that dissipation of even ruins may portend the total annihilation of memory. Thus, she needs, at times, "their light, their whispers, and their cries";¹⁸⁶ last vestiges of the old house, the ginkgoes sustain Kyōng-a's memories. Yet there is something grotesque about the trees that are so big for the new garden that they cast a shadow over the new house. It is a jarring vision of a dark past obscuring a bright present. Here, Pak Wansō seems to problematize, beyond whether Kyōng-a should retain memory, remember the past, how she should remember. The ginkgo trees, for Kyōng-a, signify an authentic past. It was underneath those ginkgo trees that Kyōng-a, blanketed in their golden leaves, had attempted to assuage her pain. They seem to act as (material) evidence that destruction actually occurred once upon a time in that very spot. In that sense, her tenacious holding onto the ginkgoes might be interpreted as a way of proving the reality of her own life, of demonstrating that Kyōng-a—and Pak Wansō—had survived, not unscathed, but alive.

¹⁸⁵ After the Korean War, economic aid from the United States jump-started South Korea's plan toward economic recovery. It was not until the early-1960s, when Park Chunghee implemented, not without a little force, his series of five-year economic plans promoting industrialization, that South Korea experienced extraordinarily rapid industrialization. Industrial development concentrated initially on light manufacturing of export-oriented items, especially in labor-intensive industries such as textiles and apparel, footwear, and foodstuffs. Beginning in the early 1970s, emphasis was placed on heavy industry and construction, with which came developments in urban renewal.

¹⁸⁶ Pak Wansō, *The Naked Tree*, 281.

The incongruity of the ginkgo trees in the garden also shows how remembering—as allegiance to the past—varies accordingly. T'aesu, devoid of any ties to the house, expeditiously puts the past behind for pragmatic reasons and proceeds forward; he typifies the postwar spirit of national revitalization and economic progress. Kyōng-a, on the other hand, pauses, contemplates, remembers; she embodies recollections, stories, as told by the likes of Pak Wansō herself.

That Pak Wansō, in writing the scene at Tōksu Palace, abruptly shifts from the past to the present tense further underscores how unquestioned optimism, like that of Ok Hui-do's, cannot be envisioned. Kyōng-a's syntax only knows the past and present tenses. Kyōng-a is like Benjamin's angel of history: even while she is carried forward in time “by the storm of progress,” her gaze is directed to the past and its accumulating wreckage in the present.¹⁸⁷ This gaze cautions against an uncritical celebration of progress; she would rather live with the broken and shattered.

This sense of fragmentation only comes to the fore in the final chapter, when Kyōng-a's remembrances are shown to occur across several time frames. One is the present, the testimonial time in which Kyōng-a senses the urgent need to recollect those shards of her past; another is the past-present, the tumultuous time following the death of her brothers—when most of the action occurs; and the last is the past, that time of trauma as remembered from the past-present. The narrative proceeds chronologically—fluidly—through each of the three temporalities, suggesting an elasticity of time—a simultaneity of past and present—so that the past, and its loss, seem near-recoverable. Beginning in

¹⁸⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257-58.

medias res, ending on a perpetual present, Pak Wansŏ clearly resists thinking from an originary point. The circuitous structure of the novel—performing Kyŏng-a’s ambles around Seoul—and the abrupt shifts in narrative—enacting Kyŏng-a’s splintered reminiscences—further refuse a linear narrative that would make the end point seem inevitable. By insisting on time at odds with the linear temporality of history, Pak Wansŏ makes us consider, critically, how the present is situated vis-à-vis its own historicity; she enters into a struggle over the politics of knowledge.

Traumatic memory is not exclusively personal; it always exists within complex histories that combine harm and pleasure, along with less inflected dimensions of everyday life. Remembering trauma entails contextualizing it within history. Insofar as trauma can be defined as that which breaks the frame, rebuilding a frame to contain it is as fraught with difficulty as it is necessary. Pak Wansŏ demonstrates the power of recollection and the uses to which it can be put if properly channeled. For partition literature authors, their unfinished business with history fuels their continuing dialogue with it, which might be what takes them back into the past to break its hold on the present.

Narrating one’s own experiences of trauma, whether in speech or in writing, is inextricably tied to the constitution of a narrator’s subjecthood. The conventional discursive setting of partition literature subjects writers to the truth paradigms within which they speak and produce them as victims. Writing about a particular historical event, they are always already constituted as historical subjects. Pak Wansŏ challenges this very one-dimensional speaking subject. For Kyŏng-a, her ontological relationship to the Korean War—as victim/survivor—is not prioritized over other social relationships and positions; rather, they are complicated, broken apart, by her relationship with her mother,

by her gender, by her social status, and by her positionality. All who lived the same timespace of the Korean War, Kyōng-a, T'aesu, Ok Hui-do—experienced it differently. As such, Pak Wansō intervenes in the process that interpellates singularly.

Viewed through the prism of memory, Pak Wansō shows that past experiences and events do not automatically manifest themselves and their meanings prior to discourse. Thus, we are forced to reconsider what is at stake in remembering and forgetting past events in certain ways over others. Pak Wansō, in her strict recounting of the pasts and their irreversibility, questions the conventional inclination to move forward, and she writes against the victors of history and the incomprehensible violence inflicted on those who stand against that side of power. Yet, consolation is forever deferred, her estrangement signals a sense of insufficiency about the present.

Chapter IV

Embodied Memories

*I took off my clothes and stood in front of the mirror.
Reflected in the mirror were my bulging belly and folded crotch.
Looking blankly, I began to sob.*

*In the dead of night,
a mournful wail erupted from the main house.
The daughter died. She bit off her tongue.¹⁸⁸*

A Woman in a Man's World

In Pak Wansö's *The Naked Tree*, Kyöng-a struggles to free herself from the fetters of being simply “the girl,” only to end up a grown-up version of “the girl”—“the wife” and “the mother.” While her detachment from her husband and children and her insatiable yearning for color may hint at an as yet unfinished resistance, there is, nevertheless, a sense of despaired defeat in Kyöng-a. Perhaps this speaks to Pak Wansö, who, while one of the earliest women writers in South Korea to foreground, and problematize, women's realities as different from men's, remains quite tethered to her gendered position.¹⁸⁹

Hence, *The Naked Tree*, even as it unsettles and interrupts prevailing notions of memories, remains ambivalent: Kyöng-a's memory fails to offer neither resolution nor resistance. Compared to Pak Wansö, Oh Junghee (sixteen years Pak Wansö's junior)

¹⁸⁸ Oh Junghee, “Yunyön üi ttül” [Garden of Childhood], *Yunyön üi ttül [Garden of Childhood and Other Stories]* (Seoul: Munhak kwa jisöngsa, 1981, 1998), 50 (all translations are my own).

¹⁸⁹ Pak Wansö has often spoken, and written, of herself as a *chubu chakka* (housewife-writer) who “do[es] not write with the intent of doing feminism.” Pak Wansö, “Peminijüm munhak kwa yösöng undong” [Feminist Literature and Women's Movement], *Yösöng haebang üi munhak [Literature of Women's Liberation]* (1987), 22.

displays a more pronounced sense of resistance in her short story “Garden of Childhood” (Yunyŏn ūi ttul, 1980). More specifically, she does so by anchoring memory in the material—gendered—body. In this chapter, I examine the myriad bodies populating “Garden of Childhood” to show how Oh Junghee challenges, at once, a nationalist production of memory on the Korean War as seen in national history and a masculinist reading of memory on the Korean War as found in literary history.

Oh Junghee first entered the South Korean literary scene in 1969 with the publication of her short story “Toy Store Woman” (Wangujŏm yŏin, 1969). She wrote prolifically in the 1970s and 1980s when the literary terrain, while still dominated by men, was beginning to show signs of change. Several factors directly connected to Korean women’s realities profoundly influenced the development of women’s literature. From the entrance of women into the industrialized workforce to the establishment of women’s studies at universities, from the emergence of middle-class women to an increasing female readership, from the equalizing opportunities for education to a movement for women’s liberation—all represented transformative moments for female agency.¹⁹⁰

Accordingly, women’s writings found themselves extricated from minority status—from *yŏryu sosŏl* (feminine fiction) to *yŏsŏng munhak* (women’s literature)—in

¹⁹⁰ Ch’oe Yun, “Late Twentieth Century Fiction by Women,” *A History of Korean Literature* ed. Peter H. Lee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 481-496. Many women writers active in the 1970s and 1980s received their education at the same time—that is, in the new environment described above. These women were compelled to raise new questions about their own economy from within the participatory whirlwind of the time. Oh Junghee was a sophomore in college when “Toy Store Woman” was selected for publication by the *JoongAng Ilbo* (*JoongAng Daily*)’s *sinch’un munye* (New Writer Selection). And while in college, she studied under eminent Korean writers and critics, such as Kim Tongni and Pak Mokwŏl; she claims to have been interested in the poetry of Ezra Pound and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Oh Junghee, “Chasul yŏnbo” [Self-History], *Oh Junghee kip’i ilkki* [Close Reading Oh Junghee], ed. Wu Ch’anje (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 2007), 494-523.

the 1980s.¹⁹¹ Kim Yangsŏn notes that, in fact, the predominantly male literary field, “as if atoning for past exclusions,” welcomed women—both as writers and subjects—with open arms.¹⁹² Thus, women writers like Oh Junghee, and Pak Wansŏ before her, were given rein to write as women on women. However, as John Guillory warns us, inclusion, without critically assessing the forces that worked to exclude in the first place, only offers a symptomatic relief.¹⁹³ Despite such developments, therefore, women writers were obliged to lay their concerns once again on dead ground, subsumed in the national cause of fighting against the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo Hwan.

Writing against this volatile but burgeoning backdrop, Oh Junghee’s short stories, from “River of Fire” (Purŭi kang, 1977) to “Chinese Street” (Chunggugin kŏri, 1979) to “Garden of Childhood” (Yunyŏn ŭi ttŭl, 1980) to “The Evening Party” (Yahoe, 1981) depict women on the verge—perhaps like its literature. Whether a quiet madness lurking within an ordinary housewife, the glitzy-appearance of *yanggongjus* (western princesses) in the Chinatown district of the port city Inch’ŏn, a little girl’s obsession with the grotesque, a mother contemplating infanticide, there skulks, beneath the veneer of normalcy and routine, a glimmer of violence, perversion, and madness.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ *Yŏryu* means feminine tendency; it was used to describe works by women that (literary critics felt) exhibited a sensibility wholly unique to women. Use of the term *yŏryu* has since dwindled—replaced by *yŏsong chakka* (women writer)—due to the condescending nuance of the term marking women’s writing as a space outside of modern Korean literature

¹⁹² Kim Yangsŏn, “Waegok kwa ch’im-muk ŭi sŏsa esŏ chŏngch’esŏng kwa palhwa ŭi sŏsa ro ŭi kin yŏjŏng: kŭn hyŏndae munhak e nat’anan yŏsŏng munje insik ŭi pyŏnmo yangsang” [The Long Journey from Silence to Identity: Transformations of Women’s Consciousness in Modern Literature], *Munhak sasang* [Literary Thought] (April 1994).

¹⁹³ As John Guillory discusses on the literary canon, inclusion is crucial in giving voice and authority to a community previously excluded; however, without critically assessing the forces that work to make certain literatures exclusive, inclusion only offers a symptomatic relief for discrimination. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁴ Oh Junghee’s writing style is almost a study in opposites from Pak Wansŏ’s rolling, rhythmical narrative, reminiscent of storytelling. As I will show in the following sections, tenses are jumbled, pronouns and adverbial markers lack clear antecedents, and ideas jump in fragments, faltering the narrative. Additionally, her writing relies not so much on action verbs but a plethora of adjectives that appeal to the

From the outset, critics lauded Oh Junghee for her descriptive, often haunting, depictions of women's psychological interiors. Particularly in the literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, much attention is paid to Oh Junghee's portrayal of alienation as a modern effect and to her mode of writing.¹⁹⁵ Since the 1990s, however, feminist critics have begun to turn to her works for a more pointed critique of patriarchy and to envision emancipatory possibilities for women.¹⁹⁶ To note, much work has been done on Oh Junghee's representation of female madness—either as disillusion experienced by women of the neo-Confucian patriarchal order¹⁹⁷ or as a refusal of motherhood.¹⁹⁸

Reading Oh Junghee's literary works altogether, there is no doubt that she contends over Korean women's lives as specific to South Korea. I find such a politicized reading of Oh Junghee necessary, for it provides a platform from which to imagine—

five senses. For example, in "Garden of Childhood," Oh Junghee dedicates line after line to the odor of sweaty armpits, the gentle plopping sound of ripe persimmons falling, the messily kept garden, the sticky tactility of rice, and the sweet taste of candy.

¹⁹⁵ Yi Sang-kyōng, "Yōsōngsōng ilkki" [Reading Femininity], *Hanguk munhak kwa yōsōng* [Korean Literature and Women], ed. Tongguk University Center for Korean Literature (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 2000). Oh Junghee's detailed psychological descriptions of the interior lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading. She has, thus, been translated quite widely in French and German.

¹⁹⁶ See Kwon Yōng-min, "Oh Junghee sosōljōk yōljōng" [Oh Junghee's Narrative Passion], *Sosōl ūi sidae rŭl wihayō* [For the Era of Fiction], (Seoul: Yi-u Publications, 1983); Kim Byōng-ik, "Sōngjang sosōl ūi munhakjōk ūimi" [The Literary Value of the *Bildungsroman*], *Segye ūi munhak* [World Literature] (Summer 1981); Kim Sūng-hwan, "Oh Junghee-ron: Oh Junghee-jōk cha-a ūi chonjae yangsang-e daehayō" [On Oh Junghee's Self-Identity], *Hanguk hyōndae chakka yōnku* [Modern Korean Writers] (Seoul: Minūmsa, 1989); Oh Saeng-gūn, "Oh Junghee munhak-ron: hōgujōk salm kwa pigwanjōk insik" [Fictional Life and Pessimism] *Yahoe* [The Evening Party] (Seoul: Nanam, 1990) and "Chip, kajok, kūrigo kaein: Yi Ch'ōngjun kwa Oh Junghee ūi Kyōng-u" [Home, Family, and the Individual in Yi Ch'ōngjun and Oh Junghee's Fiction], *Hyōnsil ūi nonri wa pip'yōng* [The Logic of the Real] (Seoul: Munhak kwa jisōngsa, 1994); Yi Namho, "Huhwasan ūi naepu" [Interior], *Munhak ūi wijōk 2* [Literary Merits] (Seoul: Minūmsa, 1990); Chōng Chōngsuk, "Yunyōn ch'ehōm ūi sosōljōk pyōnhyōng: Oh Junghee-ron" [Fictional Changes in Childhood Experience], *Hansōngō munhak* [Hansōngō Literature] May 1997.

¹⁹⁷ Kim Kyōng-su sees an "ontological madness" in Oh Junghee's works. He interprets it to signify the disillusion by women of the patriarchal order and the sexual roles proffered by this very patriarchal order. See Kim Kyōng-su, "Yōsōngjōk kwangki wa kŭ simrijōk wōnch'ōn: Oh Junghee ch'ogi sosōl ūi chaehaesōk" [Female Madness and Its Causes: Re-reading Oh Junghee's Early Works], *Chakka segye* [World of Writers] (Summer, 1995) and "Yōsōngsōng ūi t'amgu wa kŭ sosōlhwa" [Search for Femininity and its Narrativization], *Munhak ūi p'yōn-gyōn* [Prejudices in Literature] (Seoul: Segyesa, 1994).

¹⁹⁸ Sim Chin-kyōng, "Oh Junghee ch'oki sosōl e nat'an an mosōngsōng yōngu" [Representations of Motherhood in Oh Junghee's Early Works], *Hanguk munhak kwa mosōngsōng* [Korean Literature and Motherhood] (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1998).

recover—agency—as a Korean woman and as a Korean woman writer. As numerous feminist thinkers have pointed out, nationalisms often point to the importance of women in their rhetorical appeals even as their regimes of power perpetuate conditions of social, economic, and political gender inequalities.¹⁹⁹ In the case of South Korea, military dictatorships under the aegis of the United States combined with traditional Korean neo-Confucian patriarchy to construct modern South Korea as an androcentric nation.²⁰⁰ This hyper-masculinist brand of nationalism, with its unifying impulse, homogenizes the nation—producing a totalizing memory—and controls the women so that women properly belong to the patriarchal order.

Like Kim Wönil and Pak Wansö before her, Oh Junghee writes “Garden of Childhood” from a double context: remembering the 1950s as situated within the late-1970s and early-1980s. Unlike Kim Wönil, who properly belongs—and writes—to the patriarchal framework of both Korean history and literature, and more so than Pak Wansö, who seems to retreat back—if unhappily—to masculinist or patriarchal notions, Oh Junghee shows, in her writings, an agency that rejects the limitations both on memories of the 1950s and on writing in the 1970s. Oh Junghee’s female characters are purposefully (on her part) and perpetually anxious; they demonstrate subtle strategies of resistance for survival.

¹⁹⁹ Anne McClintock writes, “No nationalism in the world has ever granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state.” Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,” *Transition* 51 (1991). bell hooks also argues that women of the colonized nation are doubly colonized by the colonizers and by men of the same race. She asserts that colonized males adopt the stance of the colonizer as a way of recuperating their masculinity. In the process of mimicry, colonized Korean men not only deny feminine subjectivity but oppress Korean women, to shed their emasculated and infantilized image and prove their masculinity to a degree of exaggeration that may include violence against women. Thus, under the auspices of anti-colonial nationalism, the object of which is often to restore national masculinity, women of the colonized nation are doubly oppressed. See bell hooks, “The Imperialism of Patriarchy,” *Ain’t I a Woman* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

²⁰⁰ Seungsook Moon, “Begetting the Nation: The Androcentric Discourse of National History and Tradition in South Korea,” *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 33-66.

Ha Ŭng-baek argues that while Oh Junghee's female characters are not submissive—women take action; they lead the family in the absence of the father²⁰¹—they do not manifest agency because “their resistance remains enclosed within the interiority of the characters.”²⁰² I agree with Ha Ŭng-baek that Oh Junghee's women do not display an outwardly (exteriorized) resistance. Nevertheless, I find the quiet but persistent anxiety within, a perpetual restlessness always at the tipping point, subversive—worthy of exploring. The importance of reading Oh Junghee is, for me, not so much to find out whether her female characters have agency, but how they recover a place where they can begin to consider agency. This space, I argue, is the remembered female body.

The Lost Garden

Oh Junghee's “Garden of Childhood” tells the story of a seven-year-old girl and her family navigating life during the Korean War—as seen through the girl's eyes and told in the girl's words. Narrated as the recollection of the girl as an adult, the action of the story takes place within the present of the girl-narrator—*na* (I) or *Norangnuni* (Yellow-Eyes) as she is called by her family. *Norangnuni* and her family are refugees: they fled from the war in Seoul and arrived at a small village down south; while fleeing, Father²⁰³ was drafted into the South Korean army. When the story opens, some time has passed since

²⁰¹ Korean feminist scholar Cho Hye-jŏng argues that women who fill the position of the father in his absence in wartime perpetuate rather than subvert patriarchy since their role is understood to be temporary and substitutive. I argue against this notion in the following sections. See Cho Hye-jŏng, *Hanguk ũi yŏsŏng kwa namsŏng* [*Men and Women in Korea*] (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1988), 104-16.

²⁰² See Ha Ŭng-baek, “Jaki jŏngch'esŏng hwakin kwa mosŏngjŏk jip'yŏng,” *Jakka segye* (Summer, 1995) and Yi T'aedong, “Yŏsŏng jakka sosŏl e nat'anan yŏsŏngsŏng t'amku: Pak Kyŏng-ri, Pak Wansŏ, kŭriko Oh Junghee ũi kyŏng-u,” *Hanguk munhak yŏnku* (March 1997), 39.

²⁰³ As told from the narrator's point of view, all of her family members are called, not by name, but in familial relation to the narrator, e.g. Father, Mother, Older Sister. Not until the very end of the story, when the school principal utters her sister's name do we learn anything about the narrator's family name.

Norangnuni and her family—Grandmother, Mother, Eldest Brother, Older Sister, Older Brother, and Baby Brother—have lived, without Father, in a small, dingy room belonging to a crippled one-eyed carpenter (*oenunbagi moksu*) and his shrewish wife.

The one-eyed carpenter and his wife live in the main house—across from the detached-room rented by Norangnuni and her family. Between the main house and the room lies a small, unkempt yard. In this yard stands a persimmon tree, tempting Norangnuni and her siblings with its round vermilion-red persimmons, and rows of traditional crock-pots.²⁰⁴ Near the crock-pots is the outdoor kitchen, with its fireplace and wooden-bolt doors. Finally, on the far corner of the yard, underneath the persimmon tree, is the toilet-shed. The nominal garden of the title is, then, ironic. No Edenic “garden” exists in “Garden of Childhood.”²⁰⁵

Rather, the garden is a space of decay, violence, and surveillance. With delicate rose moss petals and persimmon leaves messily strewn about, the small yard lies between the one-eyed carpenter’s main house and Norangnuni’s quarters. From her small entrance, Norangnuni likes to stare out into the yard, waiting for a persimmon to drop, even as she keeps an eye out for the carpenter’s wife, lest the wife catches her glancing, hungrily, toward the fallen persimmons. The carpenter’s wife, too, looks out from the porch of the main house toward Norangnuni’s family—with condescension and suspicion.

The day we arrived, Mother had warned us, Don’t touch their things.
Don’t even look at them, don’t even point at them. They’re such wicked people,
testing you. We’re outsiders, refugees, no better than thieves and beggars.

...

²⁰⁴ In olden times, crock-pots performed the task of storing foods. They contained sauces, pastes, and delicacies forming the basis of Korean cuisine, e.g. soy-sauce, soybean-paste, chili-paste, and *kimch’i*.

²⁰⁵ The Korean *ttul* may be translated as “garden,” “yard,” or “ground.” Traditional Korean houses, enclosed structures as they were, had courtyards and backyards, but not gardens in the Western sense of the word. Nevertheless, the nuance of the title calls for “garden” even as it is more a “yard” within the text.

The fallen persimmons rolled by our feet. Instantly, we would steal a glance toward the main house. And there, always, was that squinty glimmer of the wife's eye, looking out from the small piece of glass she had stuck on the door. Our eyes met. There was no avoiding her gaze.

Your children aren't too much trouble, the wife said smugly.

Mother responded politely, but there was a hint of a smirk on her face.²⁰⁶

Interaction between the two families is one of reciprocal surveillance. The carpenter's wife gazes out—from inside—through a small piece of glass—to control the “outsiders.” She brings to mind Foucault's idea of the Panopticon: from the enclosure of her room, hidden from sight, she watches—she becomes but one gazing-eye. Her vision, too myopic, she fails to control. Norangnuni, on her part, learns upon observing the wife's eyes ways to circumvent them—she kicks the persimmons toward the toilet-shed. Hence, Mother mocks the wife's unfounded smugness.

The yard, adjacent to the kitchen, is also a site of both sustenance and decay.

Inside the rotund crock-pots, from which Grandmother rations food for the family, there is always a thin layer of “white bubbling mold.”²⁰⁷ While these foods are meant to ferment inside the crock-pots, the mold is unusual. Grandmother cannot make sense of the situation: “Where is this mold coming from, Grandmother clucked her tongue.”²⁰⁸ One of the early scenes in the story introducing the family and its environs, the mold hints that all is not well inside. Something amiss is “bubbling” inside, waiting to be let out.

What erupts from the interior is violence. From both homes, whether Norangnuni's rundown room or the one-eyed carpenter's hardy house, violence finds shape through the men—the figures of patriarchy. In the narrator's home, Eldest Brother

²⁰⁶ Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 19. Oh Junghee does not use quotation marks in her text; I have kept to the original punctuation and translated accordingly.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 14.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 15.

assumes the position of the patriarch—in the absence of their father. He, however, wears it too much: “overly self-conscious of his role as the head of the family,” he becomes a “little tyrant bastard”²⁰⁹ who tries to exert his power by threats and thrashes. Eldest Brother’s violence is painfully real, but he is, in actuality, utterly impotent. Although chagrined when Mother takes to working nights at a downtown pub, he is wholly dependent on the very capital that Mother makes as a “barmaid” (*chakpu*).²¹⁰ Hence, he cowers in her presence; the only protest he can muster is to call her an “old whore” (*nūlgūn kalbo*)²¹¹ under his breath. Like a bully, his pent-up anger at his uncontrollable mother gets deflected unto those weaker than him:

On nights when Mother failed to come home, Eldest Brother beat Older Sister. His beatings were terrifying. He was becoming a little tyrant bastard. Time had passed since Father left, and Eldest Brother’s body had grown big—enough to fill Father’s empty space. Eldest Brother manifested his taking of Father’s place with violent beatings.

Eldest Brother was overly self-conscious of his role as the head of the family that he had petrified into an unnatural state of anxiety and gloom. It took its toll, stunting his desire, stunting his sadness, stunting his rage, so that he could only resort to a grotesque display of cruelty and violence.

That is why Eldest Brother, despite his big, sturdy frame, always looked like a weak and troubled child to me.²¹²

Even at seven-years-old, Norangnuni feels pity for her brother’s “grotesque” act of masculine-compensation. Such is the masculinist disciplinary process; such is the future-patriarch of the nation—stunted, violent, and pitiful. Here, then, is Oh Junghee’s critique of the hypocrisy of patriarchy, the impotence hidden beneath its “big, sturdy frame.” In her “Garden of Childhood,” patriarchy benefits no one, not even its supposed agent and

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 27.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

²¹¹ Ibid., 52.

²¹² Ibid., 27.

beneficiary—the eldest son. The “Father’s place” is always already an “empty space” (*pin konggan*).

Across the yard, at the main house, patriarchal violence lurks within as well. Inside a heavily bolted room, Pu-ne, the youngest and most beautiful of all the one-eyed carpenter’s seven daughters, lives as a hostage in her own home. Pu-ne, we are told, had run away into town, upon falling in love, only to be caught by her father, hauled home by the ends of her hair “like a dog,” violently shorn of her long silky hair, stripped naked—in the yard—and locked in with a “heavy bolt that bulged like a testicle.”²¹³

Whether poor, peripatetic, and seemingly-broken, or affluent, landed, and seemingly-whole, whether a dilapidated room or a main house, neither family nor home offers any stability or solace in “Garden of Childhood.” They are both dysfunctional. The violence enacted in the name of the family, within the walls of the home, frustrates the normative idea of home as a space of security (material and emotional). Moreover, as refugees, the concept of home holds out a paradox—it precludes any secure, comfortable habitation in the first place. Thus, there is no belonging to be felt here—particularly for the women. In fact, in “Garden of Childhood,” the home is inhabited by idle, violent men. Eldest Brother sits in a corner, repeating the same old English phrases day after day, dreaming of being adopted by an American family. The one-eyed carpenter spends his days lazily dozing on the front porch; villagers gossip, with envy, that he “can leave his bag of tools hanging on the wall”²¹⁴ because his six daughters work in town. Hence,

²¹³ Ibid., 20.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

Norangnuni finds home, “filling with oppa’s growing body,”²¹⁵ suffocating and claustrophobic; she constantly takes leave of the home.

As such, the gendered distinction between exterior/public/male space and interior/private/female space proves to be more complicated in “Garden of Childhood.” Again and again, women, like Mother, Older Sister, and even Norangnuni, keep spilling out into town—despite, or perhaps due to, Eldest Brother’s (ultimately empty) threats. The women cannot be contained—if not for a bulging lock. If, as Anne McClintock contends, “nations are figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space,”²¹⁶ in “Garden of Childhood,” the space of the family/home effectively defies such inscriptions—as found in the masculinist nationalist history of South Korea. Families and their homes in “Garden of Childhood” problematize the imperative to cohesive, exclusionist national identification in this history. In resisting the domestic space, the women refuse re-inscription into the nationalist discourse.

Instead, they figure themselves as subjects in another—the history of Korean working women. Norangnuni’s memory of her forays into town in the 1950s reads as Oh Junghee’s politicization of women’s work in the 1970s.²¹⁷ Norangnuni lives in a village in the process of modernization. In the village are carpenters, blacksmiths, and itinerant-markets; across the bridge, however, a small town has sprung up, replete with a booming nightlife, commerce, and capital, as exemplified by the taverns, motels, hair salons, and bus stations. This town is where Mother works; where Eldest Brother roams around—

²¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

²¹⁶ Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race, and Nationalism,” *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89-112.

²¹⁷ Jin-kyung Lee discusses the issue of women’s industrial labor with Oh Junghee’s “The Chinese Street” in Jin-kyung Lee, “National History and Domestic Spaces: Secret Lives of Girls and Women in 1950s South Korea in Oh Chŏng-hŭi’s ‘The Garden of Childhood’ and ‘The Chinese Street,’” *Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (fall 2004), 61-95.

under the guise of keeping an eye on Mother; where Older Sister, despite Eldest Brother's threats and thrashings, continues to frequent; where Norangnuni situates her fantasies—where she finds sweets. It is a nascent space, a liminal space, and a transgressive space.

From taverns to motels to hair salons to general stores, it is the novelty, a heretofore unknown commercial and consumer culture, that draws men, women, and children alike into the brightly lit space of town. For the women, this nascent culture is quite contentious. Mother, for instance, works the night-shift at a tavern downtown; her bartering of her body, however, allows her to support her big brood and exercise a quiet power within the family. So that Grandmother always speaks to Mother “with a tint of flattery, blushing like a morning-glory”²¹⁸ and Eldest Brother is relegated to impotent displays of verbal rage and physical violence toward his younger siblings.

Moreover, women who trade their bodies, like Mother, seem to revel in its pleasures. The town is a space rife with sexual bodies: not simply between adults at the taverns and motels, but also between pimply teenage boys, like Eldest Brother, and prepubescent girls, like Older Sister, on the newly-paved asphalt streets.

In the evening, Eldest Brother and his friends flocked into town.

Girls, prim in their stiffly starched uniforms, passed by coyly, at whom the boys cried out vulgar catcalls.

By the bus station, mechanics bared their muscles. Some whistled, some sat idly by knocking around long steel pipes—clang, clang. Women in short skirts slowed their steps, glanced back at the guys, and giggled.

Older Sister sat in the shadows, away from Eldest Brother, with her girlfriends. They sang gleefully and laughed at the catcalls.

Night in town was always fun. Against the evening heat, I hiked up my skirt. Quiet as a mouse, I wedged myself in between Older Sister and her friends. I breathed in the air, its sticky fever and torrid sweetness.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 31.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

There is a sense of giddy glee exuded by the schoolgirls, the young women (likely returning home from work), Older Sister, and even young Norangnuni. They may not return the male gaze, but they enjoy it. Thus, the seven-year-old narrator participates in this “fun” economy by “hik[ing] up [her] skirt.” Older Sister goes further; she shows an obstinate, almost perverse, joy, continuing to venture out while knowing she will pay dearly for her excursions—with a bloody nose courtesy of Eldest Brother.

Moreover, there is something liberating about the lack of totalizing coherence found in town. Amid the throng of women, men cannot distinguish prim schoolgirls from prostitutes and unruly women brazenly laugh back at them. These women refuse control; they resist categorization. Mother works simultaneously in the public space of town and in the private space of home.²²⁰ Mother barter her body, but she is not technically a prostitute; she provides as a mother should, albeit detachedly, for her family, but she is also a home-wrecker.²²¹ Additionally, Mother’s labor betrays a hypocritical immorality on the part of the men: her male customers participate in the objectionable economy of bodily transaction even as they assume the moral force at home. For Eldest Brother, it is precisely this hypocrisy that strips him of any vestige of authority.

²²⁰ I take this liminal status of the prostitute from Judith Walkowitz’s study of the history of sexuality through the figure of the prostitute. Walkowitz writes that “the woman in public” were “bearers of meaning rather than makes of meaning,” positing the prostitute as a surface upon which discourse inscribes its unequal stand of power. She also examines the liminal status of the prostitute who defied control: she was at once working in a public space (the streets) and in a private space (clients’ homes); she was simultaneously detested as a social plague and protected as a moral weakness; she was under service to all classes but belonged to none. What modernity etched on the urban landscape, its multifarious changes as well as its angst and instability, were simultaneously inscribed on the body of the prostitute. Much like London, the city she inhabited, the prostitute was an enigmatic and contested site. Hence, in spite of the proliferation of policing discourses, in the form of novels, melodramas, press circulations, as well as medical and legal studies, all circulating at the dizzying speed of modernity, both in reality and in representation, the more the prostitute was enforced, the more she resisted being controlled, classified, and contained. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²²¹ Throughout “Garden of Childhood,” villagers gossip about Mother’s affairs after-hours. At the end, we learn that she has, indeed, been having an affair with the village butcher. She is admonished for her actions, not by Eldest Brother, but by the butcher’s wife—dragged by the hair around town—like Pu-ne.

In the town's dark alleys, Eldest Brother has his first sexual encounter—with Söbun, another of the one-eyed carpenter's daughters. Söbun, a maid with an American family in town, entices oppa with empty promises; she fuels his unwarranted desire to live in the United States. In this sense, although Eldest Brother's sexual act occurs of his own volition, it is, at the same time, a transaction—sex in return for a possibility. By participating in the very economy he so despises, this “overly-conscious” patriarch-in-training, thus, cannot take pleasure in his sex act: he “prowls in secretly,” “creeps in quietly” after meeting with Söbun, and “reddens down to his neck” at the mention of her name.²²² He displays a shame that Söbun (or, for that matter, his mother) does not. Rigidified patriarchy renders him sexually impotent as well—he cannot keep up with Söbun. This impotence shatters any semblance of authority he enjoyed:

When Mother did not come home for two nights, Eldest Brother made Older Sister's nose bleed. Until then she had borne his beatings, cowering on her belly; now she held up her head stiffly and screamed, That tramp lied to you. I know what you did with that bitch. I know your dirty deed!

The mirror shone haughtily. In it—a thin girl with blood trickling down her scabbed face and a sixteen-year-old boy broken from sadness, hatred, shame. Eldest Brother scowled at the mirror then kicked it. In a flash, the room filled with strings of light reflecting off the fragments. Mother's made-up face shattered into a million little pieces. As if bidding farewell to those million little pieces, Eldest Brother, his shoulders miserably drooped, stared blankly.²²³

Older Sister talks back to him. Eldest Brother, catching himself in the mirror, does not respond. This mirror, “the only thing perfectly whole”²²⁴ in their squalid room, had once been Mother's dowry, but is now where Mother sits every late-afternoon, primming herself for the tavern. Looking at it shine “haughtily,” Eldest Brother, the proxy-patriarch, knows he is defeated. His final action, therefore, is to break—violently—the mirror that,

²²² Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 55.

²²³ Ibid., 58.

²²⁴ Ibid., 10.

like a palimpsest, seems to contain Mother's made-up face. It is as if her image, her reflection has set in. When the mirror shatters, the small room that had felt so claustrophobic from Eldest Brother's "big, sturdy frame" fills, instead, with pieces of Mother's made-up face. Mother has reclaimed the home—on her own terms. Never again does Eldest Brother speak English; never again does he beat his sisters. (Wholeness succumbs to fragments.)

Through the Looking Glass

Many of Oh Junghee's works feature a mirror.²²⁵ O Saeng-kün argues that Oh Junghee uses the mirror as a literary device "to reveal a shameful side that the one reflected within wants to hide."²²⁶ In her autobiographical essay, "In Front of the Mirror" (Köul ap'esö),²²⁷ Oh Junghee, however, claims that, for her, the mirror is not a conscious device, but simply a fond object of memory—it was her "childhood playmate."²²⁸

Oh Junghee opens "In Front of the Mirror" with her looking into a mirror in a foreign city. Seeing her familiar reflection amid unfamiliar environs, she is reminded of a visit she once made to an old man suffering from Alzheimer's. All the mirrors in his room were camouflaged in wallpaper. Upon asking his caregivers why, Oh Junghee learned that it was because the old man kept trying to enter the mirror. He had even hurt himself several times. Yet even after the mirrors were covered, the old man did not cease

²²⁵ See Oh Junghee's "Chunggugin kōri" [Chinese Street], "Pomnal" [Spring Day], "Ödum ūi chip" [House of Darkness]. In "Chunggugin kōri," the female protagonist catches her lover's reflection and sees him for the first time; in "Pomnal," a young housewife weeps upon seeing her "aged, tired face" and "ugly, faded eyes" in the mirror; in "Ödum ūi chip," a middle-aged housewife realizes her miserable life through "the surface of the mirror that reflected nothing but its deep darkness."

²²⁶ Oh Saeng-kün, "Oh Junghee munhak-ron: hōgujök salm kwa pigwanjök insik" [Fictional Life and Pessimistic Consciousness] *Yahoe* [Evening Party] (Seoul: Nanam, 1990), 411.

²²⁷ Oh Junghee, "In Front of the Mirror" (Köul ap'esö)," *Taesān munhwa* [Taesan Culture] Winter, 2005.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

searching for them; in fact, unable to locate them, he became further disoriented. Oh Junghee decides that this old man's behavior is not a symptom of Alzheimer's but rather a display of "a regression instinct": "We all pass through the looking glass, like Alice in Wonderland, dreaming and imagining a world within; only then do we emerge as adults."²²⁹

Oh Junghee then goes on to recount how, as a child, she, like Norangnuni, had played in front of a mirror.²³⁰ For reasons beyond her adult's recollection, she had enjoyed carrying it on her back. Then, one day, she fell and broke the mirror; she was badly hurt by the shards, but from fear could not spare a single tear. From that day onward, she was nicknamed, "like an American-Indian, 'Girl who Carried a Mirror on Her Back and then Broke it.'"²³¹ Oh Junghee continues, with a hint of nostalgic sentimentality, that whatever literary critics may make of the mirror, for her, it will always stand for "an unfamiliar and scary but beautiful and strange world, a dream of a place that [she has] left behind and to which [she will] perhaps return."²³² She concludes "In Front of the Mirror" lamenting that her days as "Girl who Carried a Mirror on Her Back and then Broke it" are long over—her scars from those days have since "disappeared without a trace."²³³

I find in Oh Junghee's autobiographical essay, a yearning for the past—to regress. Yet it is a move backwards in order to move forward. The old man's persistence to enter the mirror suggests as much. Alzheimer's, of course, is curious in that the erasure

²²⁹ Ibid., 3.

²³⁰ Oh Junghee discusses the mirror of her childhood in almost the same way as she does the mirror in "Garden of Childhood." The mirror was, like Norangnuni's mirror, the one nice object among their refugee belongings; it had also been part of her mother's dowry. Ibid., 4.

²³¹ Ibid., 5.

²³² Ibid., 6.

²³³ Ibid.

of memory occurs backwards—from the recent to the ancient. Helpless without his memories, the old man searches for an entryway to the past; when the entrance is blocked, he becomes further disoriented. It is as if he is trying to go back to the past so as to re-collect—and hold on—to what he knows will soon dissipate. Without access to the past, however, there is only loss.

Oh Junghee's mirror, then, differs from Lacan's concept of the mirror stage.²³⁴ Whereas Lacan's mirror-image is a fantasy construction, an ideal figure of bodily unity with which the child identifies, allowing the child to conceive of his or her identity in fictional terms, Oh Junghee's mirror is a palimpsest. That is, it is a multilayered surface that reveals and hides at the same time. It reveals the now; it hides the then. The then that lies underneath can be recovered by moving back in time—by re-collecting. The mirror, then, as memory.

The notion of the palimpsest offers an alternative to modern conceptions of time as horizontal and continuous. Benedict Anderson, quoting Benjamin, observes that the “homogeneous, empty”²³⁵ time of modernity is the time of the nation and that subjects of the nation are constituted within the horizontal simultaneity of this national time. Oh Junghee's mirror, with its palimpsestic temporality, critiques modern notions of history and offers a way out of such a conception. Only upon entering the mirror does one “emerge as an adult.” Only in looking to the past can there be real progress.

Moreover, the past, for Oh Junghee, should not be erased but remain in the present—as a trace. Lamenting that the scar from her past as “Girl who Carried a Mirror

²³⁴ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror State as Formative of the Function of the ‘I’ as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

²³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 263. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 24.

on Her Back and then Broke it” has disappeared “without a trace,” Oh Junghee insists on remembering—and pointing out—its absence. A new skin has camouflaged the wound, but she knows it is there. She is like the old Alzheimer’s patient who, knowing his mirrors still exist, ceaselessly searches for them. The absence must be found. For Oh Junghee, then, the mirror is not simply a literary device used to veil and unveil a character’s “shameful side.” Rather, it is the frame through which she articulates the multiple configurations of memory, yearning, and imaginary projection—the very frame through which traces of lost narratives, shards of potential narratives are re-collected.

It is not surprising, then, that Oh Junghee opens her own memory narrative, “Garden of Childhood,” with a mirror—the very mirror that Eldest Brother will later shatter.

The mirror had been Mother’s dowry. It was the only thing perfectly whole in our dingy room. Among the squalid mess, the mirror stood tall, shining brightly. Perhaps it was this difference that made it look so much bigger in our eyes than it actually was.

Inside the mirror—our small room. Always.

Whether playing house, waking from sleep, fighting with each other, or eating our rations, our eyes would catch the mirror in unexpected moments, and it would reveal everything. We looked unfamiliar; from shame, we would step aside and gaze into our reflections as if they were someone else.

Depending on how we leant the mirror, we would look small, big, long, or short. The mirror showed us in all shapes and sizes.²³⁶

Here, the mirror is quite ambiguous. It can reveal the family in all its squalor, evoking shame, and it can also distort shapes, showing the reflections—the surface—to be illusory. In framing a family narrative like “Garden of Childhood” through a shape-shifting mirror, Oh Junghee seems to overturn prevailed readings of “Garden of Childhood” as a little

²³⁶ Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 10-11.

girl's loss and search of the father (*abi ch'atki*).²³⁷ We are asked to read beyond the surface of the text, to look more carefully into what lies beneath.

Since formations of modern nation-statehood are articulated through tropes of family, the normative (nuclear) family, as a signifier of modernity, serves as a structure enabling the coherence of modern, national subjects. Not surprisingly, South Korea, since the 1950s, but most vigorously from the 1960s through the 1980s—when Oh Junghee was writing and mothering—implemented numerous policies to discipline women's bodies under the aegis of population control.²³⁸ Norangnuni's family is not this normative family. An unrelated grandmother (before the war broke, she was a concubine to Mother's father), an absent—and forgotten—father, a whoring, uncaring mother, and a violent good-for-nothing eldest son—as captured in the mirror—do not quite fit the nationalist model of cohesion. They belie a historical narrative of progress that posits the family as the site of projection for fantasies of future fulfillment.

²³⁷ Due to its simple-minded child-narrator, "Garden of Childhood," like Kim Wõnil's "Spirit of Darkness," is often read as a little girl's search for the father—faced with the dissolution of the family in the absence of the father.

²³⁸ Pae Ũn-kyõng argues that family planning actually began in postwar 1950s, much before strict government initiatives by the Park Chung-hee regime in the 1960s. According to Pae Ũn-kyõng, as men returned from the war, the Rhee Syngman government promoted having more children as a patriotic contribution and a traditional virtue for women. Hence, South Korea witnessed a baby boom between 1953 and 1960. See Pae Ũn-kyõng, "Ch'ulsan t'ongjewa p'eminsit'ũ chõngch'i" [Birth Control and Feminist Politics], *Mosõng ũi tamnon kwa hyõnsil* [Motherhood—Discourse and Reality] (Seoul: Nanam, 1999). From the 1960s to the 1980s, alongside its policies, the state disseminated a number of innocuous-sounding public service campaigns/slogans. In the 1960s: "Childbirth within measure; Immoderate births lead to life of penury"; "Birth control does both the child and parent good." In the 1970s: "Son or daughter, just two without discrimination"; "Family planning today, a richer life tomorrow." In the 1980s: "One good daughter outshines ten sons"; "Fewer children, healthier mother, better children." M. Jacqui Alexander claims, "We now understand [that] sex and gender lie, for the state, at the juncture of the disciplining of the body and the control of the population and are, therefore, constitutive of those very practices." For Alexander, the very assertion that notions of femaleness and femininity are rooted in national imperatives such as the control of the population situates women's bodies as a site of political struggle at the state level and suggests that those same bodies play an equally crucial role in mediating political struggle. See M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State-Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy," *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 63-100.

For Norangnuni, personally, the mirror is an object of feminine fascination. Whether making faces—distorting her face purposely—or playing with Mother’s empty make-up containers, she spends countless hours in front of the mirror. Moreover, from Mother’s bright red lipstick to Söbun’s high-heels to the town- women’s short skirts, Norangnuni takes great pleasure in objects of femininity—and beauty. She, herself, however, is always raggedly dressed and unattractively-obese. Thus, as Norangnuni plays in front of the immaculate wholeness of the mirror, her image, in turn, creates a jarring sense of disparity. Henceforth, Norangnuni tries to confront this gap—by vigilantly observing Pu-ne.

Bodies of Dis-identification

The first-person narrator of “Garden of Childhood” is without a name. She is, when narrating the story, *na* (I), and when called upon by her family, *Norangnuni*, meaning “Yellow Eyes.” While without a proper name, she does have a multitude of names, being called differently by different people: her sister, when not calling her Norangnuni, calls her *mǎngch’ǒng-i* (idiot); others in the village call her by pejorative terms describing her bodily exterior, such as *ttungbo* (fatso) and *motnani* (ugly). As such, she is wholly identified by her body: eyes and body—part and whole.

Her nickname “Yellow-Eyes” brings attention to two things. Narrated by a protagonist wholly identified by her eyes, there is a privileging of the visual in “Garden of Childhood.” Hence, rather than presenting a coherent and progressive narration of the self, articulations in “Garden of Childhood” appear like fragmented vignettes. This, of course, has to do with “Garden of Childhood” being framed as a memory-narrative;

memories, after all, appear as kaleidoscopic images not as coherent stories. It also has to do with Norangnuni's attention to detail. Whether idling by the yard or wandering around town, Norangnuni is an observer. And the narrative moves with her peripatetic gaze. In that sense, she is a bit of a voyeur—taking pleasure in being the distanced observer with stories of scandal and intrigue to tell. She even walks in that leisured and observant gait of the *flâneur*, revealing dissolving ideological notions of fixity and homogeneity.²³⁹

The problem with a narrator who is more an observer than a participant is that Norangnuni rarely reveals her feelings—or her self. Based on what others say (which she often overhears), Norangnuni seems very simple-minded. She still wets her bed at seven and is almost perversely immune to criticism from others (she never reacts to people calling her fat or ugly). She, however, is not purposely naïve like Kim Wõnil's Kap'ae; she is acutely aware of her surroundings. Nevertheless, on the surface, she appears so dull that even her mother, who rarely concerns herself with her children, worries that she might be dumb. Interestingly, the word Mother uses to describe Norangnuni is “*mojara*,”²⁴⁰ which means stupid, but also means lacking, deficient, not quite full. Like her epithet, “Yellow-Eyes,” she is but a part—not whole.

Not surprisingly, Norangnuni is never full. A compulsive eater, she is overly concerned with food, especially those of the sticky, sweet variety—rice, sweet potatoes, persimmons, and candy. Most of her reveries in the yard involve waiting for a ripe persimmon to fall—plop, plop; her biggest delight in town is the general store with

²³⁹ I am aware that the *flâneur* has too long and too privileged a history as a bourgeois gentleman figure to be so readily appropriated. Nevertheless, I use the term to suggest a sense of amiable walking, through the variety of the city, that allows us to look at the city and unpack what lies buried or anaesthetized. See Walter Benjamin, “The *flâneur*,” *Charles Baudelaire, a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁴⁰ Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 32.

its big round sweets. She even resorts to stealing—food and money—to satiate herself, but to no avail. Food always leaves her wanting more, especially when there is so little of it. Thus, Norangnuni, at times, ends up eating horrid things—an unripe persimmon, stolen from the garden, so bitter it causes tears to well.

Living in times of war, there is, of course, a real physical hunger. However, Norangnuni most yearns for food when fearful—of Eldest Brother’s beating Older Sister or Eldest Brother and Mother sitting silently—suggesting an emotional hunger. Yet her body belies any kind of hunger: her big round stomach and thick thighs run counter to the emptiness she feels inside. Grandmother even comments, “You’d think I’m starving her. She eats more than the big ones. Look at her body, she’s fatter than anyone.”²⁴¹ Again, there is a discrepancy between the exterior and the interior, this time, of the body.

Moreover, Norangnuni never speaks. She does not have any friends, always playing in front of the mirror or wandering the streets on her own. Rarely does she strike a conversation with anyone—even her family. The only word she utters at home is as a whisper to a mouse scurrying in the kitchen: “Go away. There’s nothing here for you.”²⁴² Exchanges appear to occur with strangers, but ultimately end up as words cried by her or barked at her unilaterally: Norangnuni yells, “Here’s the money!” to the store owner then leaves hurriedly, lest the store owner discover that she has stolen an extra candy; the old cotton-candy maker curtly tells a fascinated Norangnuni to “bring money if you want one”; the orphan girl lures Norangnuni with powdered milk, then cries, “Buzz off, fatso.”²⁴³

Norangnuni’s ruminations are aplenty but unable to find voice outside. Who,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

²⁴² Ibid., 34.

²⁴³ Ibid., 41-43.

after all, will listen to her? Her world is populated by a violent brother, a selfish mother, a ruthless one-eyed carpenter, and a money-hungry candy-maker, all to whom she is just a *mojaran* (lacking) *mǒngch'ǒng-i* (idiot). Hence, there is a sense of auto-didacticism in Norangnuni's silence. She follows her sister into town from a few steps behind "quiet as a mouse,"²⁴⁴ she rummages the kitchen pantry for hidden food "like a mouse,"²⁴⁵ and she sits in silence between Eldest Brother and Mother. Living in a world of surveillance, violence, and decay, she has learned to be silent. It is how she gets her way.

As a keen observer (of others) who does not speak, Norangnuni makes understanding her difficult. It is only in thinking about Pu-ne, the most beautiful of the one-eyed carpenter's daughter, locked inside her room, that Norangnuni betrays what she is feeling within. In her thoughts, then, she allows both herself and Pu-ne to materialize. They are kindred spirits, disallowed from speaking but speaking out nevertheless. Yet, in that Pu-ne is, in Norangnuni's imagination, all that she is not, even as Norangnuni has never met or seen Pu-ne, it is hard to define their relationship. The two are seemingly opposed and yet meld into one another—in Norangnuni's memory.

Pu-ne appears to take her name from the traditional Korean mask-play. Of the masks, Pu-ne, with her crescent-shaped eyes, pert nose, and small red lips, emblemizes ideal feminine beauty, and is the object of affection for two men. Like her namesake mask, Pu-ne, in "Garden of Childhood," is effectively hidden. Locked within the home, she never once appears in the text; her presence is only as wisps of memory as told by gossipy village women—and Norangnuni. Although having never seen Pu-ne, Norangnuni, who earlier showed great interest in objects of feminine beauty, is much

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

taken with Pu-ne. She lingers in front of her locked room, stares with piercing eyes, as if trying to see beyond the door, and imagines Pu-ne based on tidbits she knows. In this sense, Pu-ne's entire being—especially her beauty—is wholly constructed out of words. This, in turn, makes Pu-ne an unstable, difficult object of affection.

Pu-ne seems to possess an ethereal, even haunting, beauty. More than once, she is described through the simile “*kūisin ch'ōrōm*,” which literally translates as “like a ghost.”²⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, Pu-ne has a haunting presence throughout the narrative. Moreover, as imagined by fat, ugly Norangnuni, there is an almost hyperbolic emphasis on Pu-ne's femininity—her beauty, her sexuality, her once long shiny black hair, her translucent skin. Pu-ne pervades, almost invades, the scene of “Garden of Childhood” as a proliferate system of gendered signs. The excessivity of Pu-ne's gendering in the context of Norangnuni's self-representation, not to mention our mistrust in her jaundiced vision, casts Pu-ne's reality into doubt. A gendered object in a hyperreal sense, she is almost a phantasm.

For someone so constructed in and by words, Pu-ne, like Norangnuni, never speaks. In fact, what made for such “sensational gossip” among the villagers was that, as Pu-ne was being hauled from town “like a dog” by her father, she did not utter a single word.²⁴⁷ Not one cry for help, not one cry from anger, not one cry for forgiveness; she was “completely silent all throughout.”²⁴⁸ The talkative villagers cannot account for Pu-ne's silence; hence, they talk incessantly about her. The moment when Pu-ne is dragged home by her violent, one-eyed father is the point when Pu-ne's body becomes, quite

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

literally, “the body in pain”²⁴⁹—her feminine body shatters language. She will no longer speak in the name of the father.

For words have destroyed Pu-ne: when she set up house with her lover in town, hiding from her father, it was words, in the form of village gossip, that enabled her father to find her. Even after she is locked up, words continue to define her: she is said to be pregnant, deathly ill, and mentally insane. Without recourse to speak for herself, Pu-ne becomes all of those. In this sense, there is a kind of violence in the villagers’ articulation, misarticulation, and rearticulation of Pu-ne, which points up the materiality of language. That is, the way language bears upon the body, inscribes the body, constructs the body, and makes the body seemingly knowable. Pu-ne’s body is so saturated in this very language; her ultimate rebellion is, thus, to kill herself by biting her tongue.

Unlike Pu-ne, whose body depends upon an interpretive context of physical beauty structured through a significant physical absence, Norangnuni, obese and heavy, is all physicality. In spite of her overweight body, however, Norangnuni likens her body to “a thin and transparent shell,”²⁵⁰ much like the ghostly, ephemeral masked Pu-ne. As I already mentioned above, the narrator discloses what lies within her only in remembering Pu-ne. And, in doing so, Norangnuni seems to meld her body to that of Pu-ne’s. Her affinity to Pu-ne is so strong that thinking of Pu-ne leads to herself.

Towards the end of “Garden of Childhood,” on a dusky autumn evening, Norangnuni stares at Pu-ne’s room—per usual. For some reason, however, she feels an “inexplicable sorrow.”²⁵¹ She imagines hearing a faint song or a muffled cry from Pu-

²⁴⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁵⁰ Oh Junghee, “Garden of Childhood,” 33.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

ne's room. Suddenly, she feels a "wet warmth" draping her body, making it supple.²⁵² She goes into her room, stands in front of the mirror, and looks at herself. That same night, Pu-ne commits suicide.

I came into the room, took off my clothes, and stood in front of the mirror. Reflected in the mirror were my bulging belly and creased crotch. Looking blankly, I began to sob.

In the dead of night, a mournful wail erupted from the main house.

The daughter died. She bit off her tongue and committed suicide. She was already dead when they found her.²⁵³

Here, Norangnuni shows her body for the first time. Until then it had always been inscribed on her by others, as Yellow-Eyes, fatso, ugly—as she does for Pu-ne. It is quite a contrast to the way that she describes Pu-ne. All the pleasure she felt as she stuffed her face with food, sucked on her sticky candied fingers, making her belly protrude, fades upon looking at the mirror. Seeing her "bulging belly" and folds of creased fat, brings her to cry.

The sorrow Norangnuni feels upon looking at her body, in particular, her "bulging belly," can be interpreted as a fear of heterosexual relations and a distaste for motherhood that heterosexual relations normatively prescribe. Earlier, she had described the lock on Pu-ne's door as both a "heavy bolt that bulged like a testicle"²⁵⁴ and "a bulging belly of a lock."²⁵⁵ The violence of patriarchy that ultimately results in Pu-ne's suicide is likened to at once a male sexual organ and a pregnant belly. For the term "bulging" (*paega purŭn*) also means to be pregnant/impregnated. Norangnuni had always admired Grandmother's soft and smooth belly because "Grandmother had not undergone multiple childbirths like mother had, so her belly was empty of ugly scars; it was

²⁵² Ibid., 50.

²⁵³ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 14.

radiantly soft and smooth.”²⁵⁶ Grandmother was also a concubine. Normative sexuality and motherhood becomes a heavy lock that not only silences but also kills.

For Norangnuni, then, her body is at once the site of pleasure and pain. The pleasure she feels as she fills her body—letting her belly protrude—becomes pain as she sees its rotundity. The pleasure she had felt at being so different from Pu-ne, that emblem of feminine beauty and its consequence under patriarchy, by virtue of her ugliness seems thwarted. The mirror reveals Norangnuni’s future-femininity. She will not be any different from Mother, with her multiple childbirths, who now sits assiduously in front of the mirror preparing to submit herself to this very sexual economy. Norangnuni, therefore, despairs: the lives of women in the world she inhabits—both inside at home and outside in town—do not paint a rosy picture; rather, they seem associated with violence, humiliation, and death.

Norangnuni takes measures to remove herself from such a fate. She does so by rejecting the father. While she cannot remember her father very clearly, he appears in her memory from time to time. Father’s first appearance in her narrative is as a nauseating stench of sordid greasy hair triggered by a visit from the village’s traveling barber.

There were all sorts of things inside the barber’s bag: combs, blades, scissors, soap. I stared at the barber’s swiftly moving calloused hands. From his hands and from his bent head came the thick stench of hair-grease. I breathed in deep. It was a nauseating but familiar smell. How did I know this smell? But it was buried deep somewhere within the currents of time past; I could not remember.

Suddenly I could remember. That familiar stench of the barber, it was the very smell of father’s hair.

The wind brought in the stench of manure. Summer had arrived.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 17-8.

Memories of her father make Norangnuni feel nauseated. Although she breathes in the stench of hair-grease, as if missing her father, she immediately connects his scent to that of manure. She does not linger on her memories of her father. There is no naïve sentimentality as exuded by Kim Wõnil's Kap'ae to be found in "Garden of Childhood." Rather, memories of Father bring in so nauseating a stench that she ends up rejecting the father—bodily.

This is never more apparent than at the end of the story, when Father actually returns from the war. Spring has come and Norangnuni has entered elementary school. From her classroom window, she spots "a beggarly man" nearing the school gates, "dragging his limp leg."²⁵⁸ She is then called into the principal's office, and given notice that her father has returned. With the return of the father, we, for the first time, learn Norangnuni's family name—Kim.

[Your] father has come. Please escort him home.

Father was waiting beyond the school gates. Older Sister was running.

I took the cake out of my pocket and bit in. As soon as I had finished, I felt my stomach churn. I could not bear it. I threw up—crumb after crumb. The sweet cake rode up my throat and relieved itself endlessly, endlessly. For some reason, an immense sorrow swept over me. Tears kept pouring down my face.

I placed my head between my legs and vomited into the manure bucket.

From somewhere, a sliver of light shot through the dark bucket. My eyes, hazy from the tears, barely made out something bubbling moldy. Within, something was bubbling up with a cry.²⁵⁹

Here, Norangnuni, again, fills her body. This time, however, unlike the sweets she enjoyed previously, her body rejects the cake. It will not stay down. She rids whatever fills her belly into a bucket of manure—that which exudes the horrendous stench associated with Father and all that he represents. From this bucket of manure, as with the mold in the crock-pots, something seems bubbling up. This, Norangnuni knows, is the

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

²⁵⁹ Oh Junghee, "Yunyõn ïi ttül," 63-5.

reclaimed patriarchy. Her body will be rid of it—its “bulging belly.” Her act of purging is how the rhetoric of masculinist patriarchy decomposes into a bucket of manure.

If one of the major ways in which women participate in the production of nationality is their role as “reproducers of the boundary of the national group,”²⁶⁰ young Norangnuni’s vomiting is symbolic of an agential resistance. Rather than be contained, satiated, she rejects it. Her ridding of her belly frustrates the possibility of her falling back into the fold of national patriarchy.

“I” am Without a Name

We learn, in the final pages of “Garden of Childhood,” that Norangnuni’s family name is Kim, perhaps not coincidentally the most common of Korean last names. Upon hearing it, Norangnuni vomits into a pail of manure. Until then, Oh Junghee leaves her narrator—and most of the other characters—completely without a proper name. The narrator is called by many names, most of them pejorative, but she does not have a proper name. How are we to read political intentions with a nameless subject?

A name identifies a person, a family, and a history. In that sense, it has a stabilizing function. It also focuses attention on the gendered body to which it refers.²⁶¹ A name is not only an identity—a life to which one lays claim, but through which life and family—and nation—also claims one. That is, it interpellates one. In this sense, for some, a name can be, at times, more burdensome than comforting. Accordingly, it is significant that in writing a family-narrative such as “Garden of Childhood,” Oh Junghee leaves her protagonist-narrator nameless. Moreover, by holding off on the family name,

²⁶⁰ Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race, and Nationalism,” 90.

²⁶¹ Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988).

she removes her protagonist from ties to the family as well as from the naturalized implications of familial belonging. Oh Junghee's omission, then, can be seen as a refusal or obliteration. That is, an attempt to destroy the claims made upon a name by family, history and, by extension, the nation. In "Garden of Childhood," the absence of a name, therefore, does not signify lack, but rather a successful evasion of the fixity implicit in naming—and in taking the name of the father.

Curiously, while the bodily narrator does not have a name, the ephemeral (bodiless) Pu-ne has a name. The problem of knowing Pu-ne's name has much to do with the problem of not knowing the narrator's. Judith Butler, in *Bodies That Matter*, re-reads Lacan to explain the relation between names and the body. Butler writes: "For Lacan, names, which emblemize and institute this paternal law, sustain the integrity of the body. What constitutes the integral body is not a natural boundary or organic telos, but the law of kinship that works through the name. In this sense, the paternal law produces versions of bodily integrity; the name, which installs gender and kinship, works as a politically invested and investing performative. To be named is thus to be inculcated into that law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law."²⁶²

Butler reminds us to remember how a name is linked to kinship, and how this very linking of names to kinship structures makes legally binding ties from arrangements like marriage, which this construction controls and violates. As such, the call for names is less about establishing referentiality than the kinship structures and juridical discourses that follow from them. After Pu-ne commits suicide, her parents marry her off—to a crippled young man; they wed as straw effigies. Pu-ne's status as a fallen woman makes her an improper national subject—in the eyes, or rather eye, of her one-eyed father, who

²⁶² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.

thus restores her propriety through remarriage. Even in death, poor Pu-ne is reconstituted back into the social order of patriarchy. The one-eyed carpenter constructs this façade of belonging in order to maintain his image as a heroic national male subject.

Hence, the namelessness of Norangnuni is significant. Since names belong to an order of signification that is a social order, to resist these names is, at the very least, to resist that social ordering. Thus, in the absence of a patrilineal name the body breaks down—she is Yellow-Eyes. This, in turn, makes possible the emergence of an altogether different bodily coherence. As Norangnuni, the narrator has a name that is part of a body from which all other bodies may be re-imagined, re-collected, re-membered.

After Pu-ne's coffin is nailed shut—by her father, the carpenter—the narrator realizes she can no longer re-collect Pu-ne. Memory combines with grief to produce a discourse in which the partial presences in memory combine with the imagination.

My memory failed to recollect whether Pu-ne was locked in before or after we arrived in the village. I seemed to remember seeing the lock the day we moved in; upon closer deliberation, I could see Pu-ne, her neck limp, dragged over the bridge by her father as if it had just happened yesterday.²⁶³

A mistrust in memory allows memory to go beyond reporting the past, the real, and become self-invention. The ambiguity of absence and presence (of names, of bodies, of memories) becomes the occasion for remembrance. For Oh Junghee, then, memory is the trope of bodily coherence that incorporates violent dismemberment but also permits the pleasure of putting the body back together again. Parts and functions of the body become occasions for meditations upon loss without the prospect of reconstruction. The expansive and fictive desire for limitlessness that namelessness has signified through the

²⁶³ Oh Junghee, "Garden of Childhood," 21.

text allows for a particular inquiry into the limits of intelligibility within the representation of identity.

Oh Junghee's use of memory in "Garden of Childhood" is central to her critique of patriarchy—both in its historicizing of the nation's memories and of the literary textualization of the nation's memories. The nameless, outsider, daughter reclaims and reinscribes both memories and shows their fragility. Moreover, her memory, especially of her father, necessarily frustrates the linearity of nationalist history and the full recovery such a history assumes to possess: "I wonder if the real me remains a broken feeling within the sorrowful recollections of a distant fragment of memory. Like father. For aren't all my memories just a product of my imagining a far distant dream?"²⁶⁴ Fragments arise from the narrator's act of re-collection and complicate the totality of the past's recovery. Moreover, it destabilizes the notion of politics from the logic of nationalism.

Moreover, Oh Junghee's attempt to re-collect the lost narratives of women in 1950s South Korea destabilizes the very foundation of the totalizing universalist project of nationalist historiography. For who is to mourn the likes of Pu-ne? Where in the grand narratives of national liberation catered toward each side of the partition line is there space for a mother who would rather sit with men than watch over her children? It is Oh Junghee's foregrounding of women's memories of women's bodies that bring unnarrated histories out through the looking glass. She explores the possibility of reconceptualizing women as the subject of history and literature.

That Norangnuni and her family are refugees and outsiders—from broken families no less—the concept of home-as-nation/nation-as-home holds out a paradox:

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

they are precluded a secure habitation in the first place. They are perpetually homeless. As such, they also make apparent the fact of fracture, the immense fissure opened up by partition. For while the conception of mass migration, or diaspora, seems to affirm unity, it was, in fact, an unimaginable dislocation and relocation for many. Thus, Father disappears even as Grandmother, heretofore a stranger, becomes family. “Garden of Childhood” shows the instability of the concept of family: it is not a stable one but rather one that has been revolted against, broken up, transformed, and critiqued through social and political changes. Oh Junghee, in “Garden of Childhood,” deconstructs the basis for articulating a stable vision of what “family” might look like—dispels the rhetoric of the nation as an inclusive “home.” In doing so, she speaks back to androcentric notions that subsume women and families into the nation. It contests the discreteness of national identification and the easy certainty of its articulation. Such a recollection imbues these actions and events with a contemporary vitality, even as its transgression of historiographical conventions draws critical attention to its own constructedness as well as the naturalized deployment of the past in other accounts.

Chapter V

Conclusion: Beyond Survival

On November 17, 2008, the *International Herald Tribune* featured an article titled “History Textbook Causes an Uproar in South Korea.” The story detailed the ongoing controversy over the government-mandate that particular histories “hurt[ing] national pride” and “undermin[ing] the legitimacy of the South Korean government”²⁶⁵ be expunged or revised from the six official modern Korean history textbooks.²⁶⁶

From the early-1960s onward, South Korea used a single government-issued history textbook, *Kuksa (National History)*. In 2003, under the auspices of President Roh Moo-hyun, the government approved six privately published history textbooks for high school use—to encourage a diverse interpretation of national history. Since its distribution in 2003, these textbooks have drawn virulent criticism from conservatives, who claim the textbooks “are left-leaning,” “inspire a ‘masochistic’ view of Korean history,” and “teach patricidal history.”²⁶⁷ While such complaints were brushed to the side by the liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration, the current conservative administration under Lee Myung-bak has fed the fire by joining in the debate.

²⁶⁵ Ch’oe Sang-hun, “History Textbook Causes an Uproar in South Korea,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 17, 2008.

²⁶⁶ For example, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has demanded that the Institute for Better Education’s descriptions of former-President Rhee Syngman as a ruthless autocrat who suppressed dissent in the name of anti-Communism be revised to read: “He did his best to contain Communism.” Similarly, it has demanded that the Kūmsōng edition reporting Park Chung-hee as a Japanese Imperial Army Officer-turned-dictator who imprisoned and tortured political dissidents in the 1970s be re-written as “a president who contributed to the nation’s modernization.” See *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

The resurgence of this familiar discourse as driven by a renewed conservative administration has naturally met with fierce resistance. Liberal oppositions rightly voice concern that the government's attempt to censor textbooks raises the specter of past dictatorships. That this government-mandate came off the heels of a book-ban issued by the Ministry of Defense²⁶⁸ earlier that year and that a young blogger was prosecuted in January 2009 for spreading "false information" that posed "a clear and grave influence"²⁶⁹ on the nation's credibility within the foreign exchange market give chilling credence to such oppositional claims.

For me, one particular image of the history textbook controversy remains particularly haunting: ultra-conservative columnist Cho Kap-je shouting, "We lived in a turbulent era. No one could be completely innocent, no one could live by law alone then. We shed our blood, sweat, and tears, so that our children don't have to!" to the thunderous applause of elderly South Koreans.²⁷⁰ As the camera panned the wrinkled faces of those who had, unlike the young liberal-minded teachers they had gathered to denounce, lived through that "turbulent era," I was perplexed.

Cho Kap-je and his ardent elderly audience were speaking against a younger generation through a rhetoric that clearly privileged lived experience. For them, it was the fact that these teachers, from the so-called "386 Generation,"²⁷¹ had no memory of—had

²⁶⁸ In July of 2008, the Ministry of Defense banned twenty-three so-called "seditious books" (*puron sŏjŏk*) from military barracks on the grounds that the nation's security was threatened by these "pro-North Korea, anti-government, anti-American and anti-capitalism" works. Included were two books by Noam Chomsky. The irony is that once the "seditious books list" was leaked and quickly circulated via the Internet, sales of those twenty-three books soared, landing them on the bestsellers list.

²⁶⁹ Yi Sang-rok, "Minerŭba Pak-ssi kusok" (Minerva Park Indicted), *Dong-A Ilbo* (*Dong-A Daily News*), January 23, 2009.

²⁷⁰ "Chwap'yŏnhyang kyogwasŏ sujŏng nollan" (Left-Leaning Textbook Revision Controversy), *MediaDaum* (online video). Cho Kap-je has also written/blogged vociferously on this issue.

²⁷¹ The term "386 Generation" was coined in the late-1990s, and refers to a particular generation—those in their 30s (at the time the term was coined), schooled in the 80s, and born in the 60s. Generally, it applies to

not witnessed—either the Liberation Period (1945-50) or the Korean War (1950-53), that caused such ire. Had the teachers lived through the “turbulent era,” “shed [their] blood, sweat, and tears” they would not so readily embrace North Korea—Cho Kap-je and others seemed to assume. Here was a moment wherein the hackneyed motto “Lest We Forget” seemed to be usurped; the uncritical use of memory to sustain a problematic master discourse had troubling effects.

For too long, official history has masked South Korea’s history of aggression, incompetency, and brutality during the period from liberation to division, culminating in the image of postwar South Korea as victim to North Korea’s attacks. This, in turn, cohered South Korea’s postwar image as a resilient, progressive nation—burgeoning from the ruins of war into a worldly power. Cho Kap-je’s testimony is jarring because his words of recollection appear to function only to reinforce and naturalize—again—this very dominant ideology and national imagination.

Although division remains a reality in the Korean peninsula, the end of the global Cold War coupled with the election of the first civilian president created a sense of freedom heretofore un-witnessed in South Korea. While dissolving that once ardent collective desire for action and protest. In the face of such changes, grand nationalist rhetoric, teleological historical narratives, also, began to crumble. Finally, decades-long struggles by historians and writers, to voice social concerns, to offer a pluralistic (if fragmented) view of the nation, through the tempestuous 1970s and 1980s seemed to culminate in peaceful prosperity. Such social change affected literature: contemporary Korean literature witnessed a sharp turn away from politics—into an aesthetic of

those university students who spilled out onto the streets of Seoul to participate in mass pro-democracy demonstrations during the 1980s.

consumption, desire, and alienation. For this very reason, literary works since the 1990s have been called “literature of disillusionment.”²⁷²

In light of current events, literature’s continued turn away from politics raises alarm. Confronted, once again, with the appropriation of memory for the political purposes of the nation, I am reminded of Benjamin’s historical materialism. If knowledge about the past is to be relevant—in a critical sense—to our present (and future) concerns for social change, we need to know not only what actually happened in the past but also explore the possibilities and alternative historical trajectories that were never realized. Hence, we need more counter-hegemonic discourses, whether as literary works or literary studies, that challenge the existing order of historical knowledge, that refuse appropriation by statist ideology, that complicates reinscription into the particularity of experience. It is, therefore, imperative to reconceptualize the notion of the political in and around literature, as I do in my dissertation, to re-introduce political urgency.

I hope that my dissertation has shown some ways in which various memory narratives on partition have unsettled and transformed knowledge about both the past and present. In any exploration of the past, the aspects chosen to illuminate it are determined not only by the past but the present as well. In the case of South Korea, the parochial manner in which the history of partition has been examined has permitted only certain aspects of the past to become visible. It has been my contention that Kim Wõnil, Pak Wansõ, and Oh Junghee offer up their memories in their literary works to envision the past, present, and future in a more complex manner—to begin to envision at all.

²⁷² Kim Myõng-in, *Hwanmyõl õi munhak, paeban õi minjuju-õi* (*Literature of Disillusionment, Betrayal of Democracy*) (Seoul: Humanitas 2006).

Accordingly, their memory narratives demonstrate that memory can be a site of contention—as articulated in terms of differentiation, such as gender—through which the structures of power are manifested. Their memories provide not only a different perspective on the history of partition and on the history of partition literature but also establish these very histories as processes, continuing histories, which live on in our lives in a variety of unresolved and fractured ways. In that sense, the partition works of Kim Wõnil, Pak Wansõ, and Oh Junghee impel us to consider different strategies of survival. That is, they render in their writings ways (however incomplete) to survive the constraints of gender, of nation, and of history; they ask us to consider at what cost and for what greater purpose one survives. Hence, our reading of partition literature explores the possibilities for effecting political, social, and personal change.

The recent controversy over South Korea's history is not simply about the recovery and suppression of memories; rather, it is more concerned with problematizing the very subject of remembering, that is, with analyzing from whose perspective and for whom remembering is urgently required. Insofar as nation-states continue to exist as institutional entities, and their apparatuses of knowledge continue to interpellate their subjects, nationalization remains a powerful force in shaping our memories, knowledge, and representation. Vestiges of the history of partition are constantly in danger of being re-recovered for the (re)establishment of coherent national narratives and identities. Nevertheless, these fragments of memory, as traces, also carry the power to obstruct that same process. Countering and deferring the processes through which nationalizing and renationalizing take place, partition literature offers tactful strategies of critical remembering, of piecing together the fragmented past.

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