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Lee, Julie

Publication Date

2017-04-01

Undergraduate

따뜻한 서러움 (Warm Grief):
Uncanny Narratives of Trauma and Kinship
in Oh Jung-hee's *The Yard of Childhood*

Julie Lee

University of California, Berkeley

Independent Senior Thesis

Mentor: Professor Kwon Youngmin

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* This is a draft. Gray text denotes areas of incompleteness.

“you are the audience
you are my distant audience
i address you
as i would a distant relative
as if a distant relative
seen only heard only through someone else’s description.

neither you nor i
are visible to each other
i can only assume that you can hear me
i can only hope that you hear me”

– Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Audience Distant Relative*

Introduction

According to the author herself, Oh Jung-hee's 1981 short story collection 『유년의 뜰』 (*The Yard of Childhood*) “took the form of a novel sequence” when she rearranged eight of her previously published stories by protagonist age (U 2007: 514). The sequence, however unplanned, elegiacally traces the compressed post-war development of South Korea from the 1950s to the '70s in chronological order—while each story's nonlinear, retrospective narrative reveals how the traumas of the Korean War have destroyed the protagonist's sequential perception of time. Tension arises between Oh's gesture toward historical delineation (corresponding with time as a social construct) and her proclivity for flashbacks (reflecting the subjectivity of time perception). This temporal disjunction disorients Oh's protagonists, whose struggles to communicate their internal experiences through speech alienates them from the spacetime of their immediate families and contemporary society. Even with the temporal distance of retrospection, they cannot re-present their traumatic past as a whole, raising doubts about their narrative reliability. In this way, *The Yard of Childhood* can be read as a work of trauma fiction, grappling with the paradox of narrativizing “an event or experience that... resists language and representation” (Whitehead 3). The title also signals Oh's characteristic attention to interactions between space, time, and affect.

Oh was born in Seoul on November 9, 1947, roughly two years after Korean independence from Japanese colonialism and three years before the Korean War. Her parents had defected from Haeju, a port city from the southwest of what became North Korea, just months before the birth of their fifth child. After her father was drafted into the South Korean army in 1951, Oh's family of ten fled further south to a small village in South Chungcheong Province, where they lived as refugees for nearly five years (U 2007: 494). Oh says she mistook her earliest memories—“of being trapped

in a dark cave with multiple people... of a thick, sticky hand covering [her] mouth... of a person groaning in pain”—for scenes from a dream or figments of her childhood imagination (U 2007: 31). Oh’s recollection illustrates the dissociative and prolonged effects of trauma, as well as the complex relationship between trauma and language. The “groaning in pain” in particular demonstrates how pain exists outside or even *before* language, returning us to the pre-linguistic stage of vocalization.

Yet the human impulse to communicate, to bear witness to pain and injustice, persists. Though words may continue to fail us in daily conversation, novelists have been experimenting with form, or “[d]isorders of emplotment... mimicking the traumatic effect,” over the past century (Luckhurst 88). Drawing equally from literary and psychoanalytic theories, early literary trauma theorists examine how the psychological process of reparation re-presents inflexible, repetitive traumatic memory as variable, improvisational narrative memory (Whitehead 87). Narrative memories are sustained by the intimation of *an unknowable violence* that compels anxious meaning-making from formal disfiguration. In her influential 1996 book *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth posits that “[w]hat returns to haunt the victim... is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known”—reintroducing ghosts as the spectral metaphor for trauma (6). Fittingly, Oh has said her earliest memories, perhaps “the protoplasm of [her] literary sensibilities,” subconsciously appear transfigured in her works, which make regular mention of ghosts (U 2007: 31).

The traumas haunting *The Yard of Childhood* involve death, physical displacement, and linguistic erasure as interrelated consequences of war. In the two decades following the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, South Korea underwent foreign and domestic military rule, along with severe industrialization and urbanization resulting in geographically uneven development (Kim 2013;

Seo 2005). Dramatic changes in living conditions evidenced national transformation at the personal level, as newly middle-class families moved from refugee towns to high-rise apartment complexes. Indeed, the first and last stories of the collection, 「유년의 뜰」 (“The Yard of Childhood”) and 「어둠의 집」 (“The House of Darkness”), manifest this spatial shift in their titles alone. Even the vague descriptor for the house feels appropriately ominous; the rural-urban exodus not only necessitated the construction of new homes, but also a new style of homemaking to reflect the rapid changes in family size, division of labor, material culture, and so forth—altering social norms about gender and sexuality (Lee 1997: 74-75). The social instability of the 1960s-70s further contextualizes the protagonists’ shared anxiety about impermanence beyond abstract, existential concern. “The war may have ended, but these were dizzying times,” a housewife involuntarily recalls of her youth, triggered by the discovery of her daughter’s birth control pills. “Men and women who met at night parted by morning” (Oh 257).¹

Such an *involuntary* memory recall disrupts the housewife’s experience of time and space, transposing her from the animated here and now to the transfixed then and there. Likewise, the seven other protagonists in the collection show signs of this repetition compulsion: a neurotic defense mechanism through which a survivor *relives* the traumatic event “in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” in an unconscious attempt to rewrite the past (Caruth 11). It is this *doubling* impulse of Freudian repression—to simultaneously enfold and to unfold time in relation to the self—that characterizes trauma, which then creates psychic spaces “where uncanny sensations of repetition or correspondence make themselves felt” (Hartman 546). For a narrative to be uncanny, then, it should

¹ Original text: “전쟁은 끝이 났어도 어지러운 시절이었다. 밤에 만난 남녀가 아침이면 헤어졌다.”

inspire a sense of estranged familiarity, a kind of strange recognition. Kim Chi-soo observes that even as their living spaces change, Oh's protagonists "experience not the unfamiliarity of the new space in its totality, but the familiarity," particularly through olfaction, under "conditions that thwart logical reasoning" (1998: 277).² Oh achieves this effect through retrospective narrative, which itself is an attempt to rewrite the past; then the nonlinearity foils any attempt to overwrite the past, creating an uncanny *copy*.

This uncanniness, filling a supposed lapse of empirical reason marked by a heightened sense of smell, prompts deep ambivalence in Oh's traumatized protagonists. In his highly referential 2003 book *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle writes that "[s]mell has an uncanny duplicity: it can in a split-second drop us out of the erstwhile familiarity of our present into the *strange, painful and/or pleasurable, impossible* country of the past; and yet a smell resists being recalled, in reality, even for a moment" (Royle 140, emphasis mine). For example, the narrator of "The Yard of Childhood" describes the stench of oily hair on the traveling barber's hands as "a vomit-inducing, familiar smell" before suddenly drawing a connection to "the oily smell exuding from Father's head" (Oh 17, 18).³ Only later does she recount the overlapping memories of her father routinely giving her a ride on his shoulders after dinner, detailing how holding onto his head left "sticky hair oil... smeared on [her] hands" (47). In this way, the narrator is upset by the familiarity of the strange man: a strange familiarity that reminds her own numb reaction to her father's absence. Kim Hwa-young explains

² It is worth considering the distinct etymologies of "낯섦" and "unfamiliarity," understood to be stable translation equivalents. The English noun "unfamiliarity" combines prefix "un-" ("not"), adjective "familiar" ("intimate," derived from the Latin *familia* "household servant/family"), and suffix "-ity" (used to form abstract nouns from adjectives); the Korean noun "낯섦" is much more visually metaphorical without the familial connotation, combining noun "낯" ("face") and verb "섦다" ("to be unripe").

³ This adjective order, perhaps seemingly a bit strange, is intentionally faithful to the grammar of the original text: "구역질 나는, 익숙한 냄새였다." It is significant that the smell is *first* vomit-inducing, *then* familiar; the reverse order implies a familiarity that was *already* disgusting, vis-à-vis the disgust that inspires Yellow Eyes' belated recognition.

that “unfamiliarity does not cease as mere shock, but spreads into fundamental disorientation” (2007: 342); Kim, without employing the Freudian term, makes it clear that the disorientation does not come from unfamiliarity itself, but its unexpected familiarity. Notwithstanding shock and disorientation, the narrator eagerly consumes the vomit-inducing familiarity by “slurp[ing] up the air” (Oh 17). U Chan-je articulates the apparent self-contradiction that Oh tends “to be drawn to the odors of a nauseating life, but also to constantly seek to escape from that olfactory sense” (1995: 65). Agreeing with U’s observation, I further contend that ambivalence—unsettled and unsettling—is precisely what animates Oh’s protagonists and defines their subjectivities.

The narrative tone seems to resist simple denunciation through its own internal contradictions, as demonstrated above. Though the recollections that constitute the narrativized space of “The Yard of Childhood” are striking in their undignified specificity, their incidental aporia compromises the narrator’s credibility. Several questions arise from the narrator’s description of the single room in which her entire family eats and sleeps next to each other: “Amidst the sound of ferocious teeth-grinding, the smells we each emitted—the smell of sweat, the smell of skin dandruff falling, the smell of puffy farts being released, the smell of fishy, shameless lust—all these smells of us, alive, boiled up insidiously” (Oh 34).⁴ The heightened animacy of these bodily functions transfigures sleep not as a passive act of rest, but as her family members’ individual contributions to their collective life; the narrator, who was then awake, impossibly includes herself in the sleeping, snoring, farting “we.” Highlighting the odors’ libidinal charge and the bodies’ “animality,” Han Kyung-hee resolutely states that the narrator rejects such “animal desires” for perpetuating the cycle of human suffering through sexual reproduction (101).

⁴ Original text: “맹렬히 이빨 가는 소리 속에 우리들이 저마다 뽀어대는 땀 냄새, 떨어져내리는 살비듬내, 폴씩폴씩 튀어대는 방귀 냄새, 비리고 무구한 정욕의 냄새, 이 모든 살아 있는 우리들의 냄새는 음험하게 끓어올랐다.”

If the narrator rejects lust on the basis of its reproductive capacity, what about non-reproductive sexuality, including masturbation and homosexual acts? Such lustful excess—that is, from the framework of biological reproduction—constitutes anti-social behavior, affirming “queerness as the dark landscape of confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness” (Halberstam 97). However, the negative charge of queerness does not faze Oh’s protagonists, who reject life’s endless suffering by counterintuitively engaging with death in the likewise endless realm of fantasy. In “The Yard of Childhood,” the narrator’s older siblings cast her as a patient in their unscripted yet rehearsed play; her role is to receive medical attention, die, and ascend to heaven. By repeating this fatal but relatively hopeful plot, her brother and her sister take an active part in the unpleasurable situation of illness and death as doctor and angel, respectively; their role-playing helps them cope with the real-life tragedies of war, which includes their sickly younger brother’s (foretold) death. The older siblings take the narrator’s prolonged (fake) death, then, as a sign that she is “too fat to fly” and “stupid” (Oh 11, 12). Reflecting on her “small scheme” of silent resistance, the narrator reveals that “playing dead... was far more fun than flying with the angel” because she herself could defer the play’s conclusion (Oh 12). In this way, the narrator’s deviance lends itself to a narrative of “queerness as social refusal” (Ellis 98).

Social refusal, however agential, still comes at a cost. Just as the narrator remains silent, never defending her actions to her siblings or even her mother who make their own assumptions, the narrator risks being misread. Reflecting a historical pathologization of deviant behavior, one literary critic simply states that “the protagonists’ kleptomania, gluttony, homosexuality, etc. are signs of a developmental disability” (Park 2008: 91); this homophobic and ableist position casts queers as *disabled* “people without a future... promised by heterosexual temporality” which developmental

markers hinge on biological reproduction (Muñoz 2009: 98). Elizabeth Freeman exposes the failed logic of heteronormativity, for simultaneously dismissing non-reproductive desire as excess (i.e., beyond the sexual acts necessary to sustain civilization) and queers “as people who had not yet arrived to civilization and/or individual maturity” (2010: xx). Accordingly, heteronormativity misreads the *queer rejection* of heterosexual temporality only as *heterosexual failure*. More recently, however, some queer theorists have embraced this sort of antirelationality; Lee Edelman’s 2004 book *No Future*—most famously arguing that queer theory should embrace homosexuality’s negative associations with death—uncannily resonates with the narrator’s “small scheme” of prolonging fake death. Without explicitly applying Freudian concepts such as the death drive, Han Kyung-hee also observes how Oh’s characters pursue the “self-effacing pleasure” of homosexual acts as a substitute for death, the only escape from life’s familiar cycle of suffering (83).⁵

However, this paper does not simply delineate lesbian encounters as they have appeared in Oh’s work since her 1968 debut short story 「완구점 여인」 (“The Toyshop Woman”). Contrary to the enduring pathologization of queers as sexual perverts, these kin relations that I deem “queer” rarely entail *homosexual* desire, much less intercourse.⁶ Allan C. Simpson clarifies that “queer is... not necessarily a matter of non-normative sexuality or gender but can involve any diversion from the hetero-patriarchal bio-family model” (Simpson 2016: 3). Oh’s female protagonists admire the beauty of useless, socially dead women—their female bodies unmarked by labor. Their disgust for biological reproduction leads them to seek an alternative grammar of kinship untranslatable to the language of consanguinity, or “혈족” (blood relations). Thus queer kinship can be read in numerous

⁵ Translator’s note: “self-effacing” does not quite capture the Sino-Korean adjective “몰아(沒我)적,” which means “to forget about oneself” and evokes an image of a person drowning into oblivion. Han also distinguishes “몰아적 쾌락” (the distinctly physical pleasure of homosexuality) from “미적 쾌감” (the more affective aesthetic pleasure of reading) through the subtle differences between “쾌락” and “쾌감.”

⁶ The fourth section on language contemplates the cultural translatability of *queer* (as well as *trauma*) into Korean society.

variations throughout the collection, from a prepubescent girl's obsessive concern-turned-identification with her next-door neighbor locked in a room to a middle-aged housewife's lifelong guilt for occupying a house whose former owners died in an explosion as refugees. Overcoming great spatio-temporal distance, Oh's protagonists form attachments that transcend the socially legible bounds of biological kinship.

This thesis, then, serves as a discursive space for queer, often intertextual, correspondences. For example, the melancholic girl of "The Yard" and the melancholic woman of "The House" bear an uncanny resemblance in their shared attachment to the spatialized memory of "home." The girl, whose family moves after the war, cries when she sees the new occupant renovating her old house; the woman, to her family's dismay, refuses to move fearing exactly that: the act of moving on. In an industrializing society that wants to move on from destruction and tragedy, such rejections of "development" appear pathological—deviant—*queer*. Perhaps disappointingly to some, Oh never intervenes as author to provide a better alternative; the collection ends, in fact, with the woman catching a glimpse of the cold, mask-like faces of the future tenants who will casually paint over her stains, her memories, and her proof of existence. Hardly triumphant, *The Yard of Childhood* still gestures toward queerness, "that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (Muñoz 2009: 1). Just as the utopian potential of this gesture permeates the time, space, kinship, and language of trauma, Oh leaves the reader with ambivalence, her final transmission.

It is in this spirit that I superficially divide "따뜻한 서러움 (Warm Grief): Uncanny Narratives of Trauma and Kinship in Oh Jung-hee's *The Yard of Childhood*" into four major sections, arranged to commune with each other in ghostly ways and arouse a sense of uncanny kinship.

Literature Review and Context

Who will read this undergraduate thesis? No, really—self-deprecation aside, I have sustained this question of “intended audience” (and, in turn, have been sustained by it) since realizing my reckless desires to write about a not-yet-translated work of Korean literature in English and to engage with western critical theory without overwriting the “Koreanness” of Oh Jung-hee’s work. My initial intention was innocuous, as I only wanted to participate in the lively, decades-long conversations on Oh; however, I soon sensed an unknowable depth of ethnolinguistic difference that left me floundering over nomenclature and context-dependent information. Finding that the notions of “common knowledge” and convention simply do not exist across my bilingual, multidisciplinary fields of interest, I considered appropriating the privilege of assumption by simply pretending as if Korean literary criticism written in English and in Korean have the same intended audience. Then it occurred to me that this simplistic “solution” would actually be a disservice to Oh, whose oeuvre I consider to be, ever so paradoxically, a revolutionary product of the Korean literary tradition. Under these circumstances, I decided to take a less conventional approach to my literature review by dividing it into three broad surveys of literary trauma theory, Korean literary history from 1945 to 1981, and Oh Jung-hee studies. The three finally converge in my consideration of Oh as a writer of trauma fiction and *écriture féminine*.

Literary trauma theory

Literary trauma theory grapples with its basic aporia that trauma evades, problematizes, and destroys the very medium of literature: language. It asks: How does one represent the unrepresentable? More specifically, how does one narrate what resists narrativization? What formal

qualities, or *symptoms*, do works of trauma fiction share? Who can narrate whose traumatic experiences?

Notwithstanding these generative questions, the definition of trauma itself is highly contested and continues to adapt to new forms of violence, such as nuclear war and climate change, obviously not considered in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic conceptualization of trauma in 1920. Published two years after the end of World War I, Freud's controversial essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* juxtaposes the "traumatic neuroses" of shell-shocked WWI veterans and his nephew's fascination with the game of "fort-da." Within these examples, he identifies the human compulsion to repeat unpleasant actions as a response to traumatic experience and revises his earlier theory of instincts to include one toward death, or the death drive. Repetition compulsion manifests as a constant reliving of the trauma, often involving dreams, as a way for the subconscious mind to resolve the source of its suffering and to seek pleasure. Drawing from Freudian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, Cathy Caruth's 1996 book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* then applies literary criticism to trauma studies. Caruth, along with other Yale School theorists such as Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and Shoshana Felman, consider how traumatic memory becomes narrative memory under Modernist influence in Holocaust literature. Felman, teaming up with psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub, takes an explicitly interdisciplinary approach in their 1991 book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* to describe how testimony developed legal, clinical, political, literary, and ethical dimensions as both act and document during the Nuremberg trials (Felman and Laub xvi).

Moreover, I cannot stress enough the dynamism of trauma studies as a continuously expanding, contentious, multidisciplinary field. The project of decolonizing literary trauma theory,

for one, challenges the assumptions that constitute the prevailing model of “individual, temporal, and linguistic” trauma and calls for “pluralistic models... [with] a greater consideration of the social and cultural contexts of traumatic experience” (Rothberg 2008: 228, Balaev 3). Michael Rothberg’s 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, true to its title, provides a new framework of political remembrance to replace the “competitive memory” that conceptualizes collective memory as limited real estate (Rothberg 2009: 2). Rothberg considers the traumas of two seemingly distinct groups such as Jewish and African diasporas in relation to one another, tracing historical solidarity and the transmissibility of trauma. I also acknowledge Joy DeGruy’s 2005 book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing (PTSS)* that attends to inter- or transgenerational traumas that define a collective Black identity in non-essentialist terms.

Korean literary history (1945-81)

It is certainly no accident that the second volume of 「한국현대문학사」 (*The History of Korean Modern Literature*) begins with the end of Japanese colonialism and the consequent restoration of the Korean language and press freedom in 1945. Eager to purge colonial influence and establish a new culture of national independence, intellectuals engaged in a fierce debate over the future direction of Korean national literature.⁷ The left, inspired by Soviet literature, advocated proletarian literature written for and by farmers and progressive intellectuals; the right, likewise in favor of Korean independence, believed that literature should be “pure” of ideology. In 1949, literary critic Kim Dong-suk derided Kim Dong-rhee, a young novelist who came to represent the right, as a

⁷ Most often translated as “Korean national literature,” 민족문학 relies on the culturally specific concept of *minjok* that blends race, ethnicity, and nationality. The third section on kinship historicizes the (ab)uses of this ideological framework.

“tadpole writer” whose sophomoric escapism prevented him from “evolving” into a frog of letters (Kwon 50). Notwithstanding both sides’ uncompromising positions, the rise of Rhee Syngman’s anti-communist regime soon prompted the left to flee to the north, dissolving the debate without ceremony. The 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement then reified the psychogeographic division of the peninsula, and the 38th parallel border continues to serve as the basis of **분단문학** (division literature), now a six-decades-old genre.

Considered the first “stage” of division literature, **전후문학** (postwar literature) attends to the chaos, paranoia, and pessimism of the years immediately following the war, in part incited by the rigged presidential election of March 1960. Oh, then thirteen years old, cracked her knee after running out to watch the student-led April democratization movement, sustaining a lifelong scar (U 2007: 497). In November 1960, Choi In-hun published 『광장』 (*The Square*), a novel hailed as the quintessential work of division and postwar literature for its examination of ideology through the experiences of a young, male, disaffected philosophy student who traverses the two Koreas and eventually chooses a third option—death—by throwing himself off a boat headed to India (Kwon 225). Then Major General Park Chung-hee’s 1961 coup d’état, itself initially believed to be a revolution, crushed the mobilization of political discontent and launched Park’s eighteen-year autocratic rule as strongman-turned-president. In turn, Choi In-hun squarely placed himself on the side of **참여문학** (participation literature) in a familiar debate against **순수문학** (pure literature), best articulated by poet Kim Su-young’s provocative 1968 essay 「시여, 침을 뱉어라」 (“Dear Poem, Spit”) urging writers to “participate” in political movements through social realism (Kwon 198). Literary critic Lee Uh-ryung responded by criticizing Kim Su-young’s conflation of writing with

political action. In October, Oh's youngest brother was struck by a bus, and he died in her arms on their way to the emergency room (U 2007: 498).

It is during this extreme socio-political instability and personal tragedy that Oh came of age and began writing fiction. Oh remembers herself as “a relatively precocious girl” who was regularly punished for skipping school to read various literary magazines featuring short stories by Yi Kwang-su, Park Gyung-ri, Oh Hye-ryung, Hwang Sun-won, and her future mentor Kim Dong-ri, as well as the translated works of Hermann Hesse, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, W. Somerset Maugham, Rainer Maria Rilke, and André Malraux (Oh 2006: 159). However passionate, Oh grew insecure about her literary prospects as a student of creative writing at Sorabol Arts College, given her poor grades and financial constraints. After barely mustering enough confidence to submit an old first draft that she revised for a month, Oh won a prestigious competition for aspiring writers sponsored by the daily *JoongAng Ilbo*, making her literary debut with 「완구점 여인」 (“The Toyshop Woman”) in 1968 as a college sophomore. Though the two other judges shared their concerns about her amateurish “naïveté,” Kim Dong-ri—the writer who had been accused of being a tadpole at age 36—strongly advocated for his student as “a person who will write well in the future” (U 2007: 507). Excepting the still-taboo lesbianism in “The Toyshop Woman,” Oh's contemporary themes of alienation, modernity, and loss reflected the literary trend of French existentialist influence during Park Chung-hee's authoritarian regime.

The exponential postwar economic growth, commemorated as the Miracle on the Han River, was not only a product of industrialization, but the exploitation of human rights in exchange for the unprecedented hope of financial stability.⁸ Millions of urban migrants moved into identically

⁸ Evaluations of Park Chung-hee's highly controversial rule is polarized by generation and region. Those who suffered through the Korean War tend to credit him with economic growth, especially those in Daegu, Park's hometown that benefitted most from the uneven “national” development.

cramped apartment complexes, earning the belittling label *소시민* (“small citizen,” borrowing from the French *petite bourgeoisie*) with their apolitical, singular interest in self-preservation. Writers critiqued the two seemingly paradoxical causes for the loss of personal identity in modern society: one, the feeling of alienation resulting from urban industrialization; two, the consumerist collectivism of mass culture resulting from extreme population density. As a result of mass consumerism, Choi In-ho became the first “full-time novelist” of South Korea, whose novel sequence 『총독의 소리』 (*The Governor’s Sound*) attracted critical attention to the narrative form (Kwon 2002: 272). The novel sequence took on as a popular formal genre in the mid-1970s when writers, increasingly interested in social realism, began to favor the expansive, versatile form over the “unity and unifaciality” of short stories (Kwon 321).⁹ In fact, Cho Se-hui’s 1978 novel sequence 『난장이가 쏘아 올린 작은 공』 (literally “The Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” translated *The Dwarf* by Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton), famous for its social criticism on behalf of the laborer, was one of the first books to sell a million copies in Korea. Yet Cho was propped up against the more “commercial” Choi—again, as if the two genres of 대중문학 (popular literature) and 노동문학 (labor literature) could not coexist in the market, much less the same writer (Kwon 292). The debate over subject matter resurfaced to distinguish “the public” from “the people.”

Meanwhile, 이산문학 (separation literature) emerged as a popular subgenre of division literature in the mid-1970s, shifting focus from an explicit engagement with ideology to the trauma and loss experienced by families separated by war. Such works “show, along with the dissolution of division ideology, the attempt to recover the damaged minjok homogeneity through the reconfiguration of blood relations” (Kwon 301). In other words, these works highlight the border’s

⁹ The short story form is esteemed as part of a Korean literary tradition dating back centuries, in contrast to the prestige of the Anglo-European novel.

arbitrary nature to remind South Korean readers that they are, in fact, blood-related to the subjects of their state's political enemy—that reunification quite literally means a family reunion to an entire generation.¹⁰ This historical fact contributes to the convincing conceptualization of the Korean War as a fratricidal conflict, which then falsely corroborates the origin story of a “pure” Korean bloodline with dangerous implications: the familial metaphor aligns the structure of the nation with the patriarchal structure of the family, thereby configuring a nationalist subjugation of women; the conflation of a woman's sexual “purity” with the nation's “pure bloodline” normalizes xenophobia toward mixed-race children and misogyny toward their Korean mothers. For example, the titular character of Jeon Sang-guk's 1979 novella 『아베의 가족』 (*Ah-be's Family*) is born out of a gang rape by G.I.s, and Ah-be's mother decides to leave her developmentally disabled, half-Black child in Korea before attempting to lead a new life in the U.S. with her second husband and their “full-Korean” children. The narrator, Ah-be's half-brother, returns to Korea as a G.I., but fails to find his abandoned kin. Jeon addresses, but falls short of condemning, the very premise of Korean essentialism that justifies the exclusion of people who do not meet a certain standard of “Koreanness.”

Oh, who happens to be Jeon's contemporary, resists the privileging of blood relations by writing about orphans, runaways, and non-reproductive women. Her female protagonists also provide alternatives to masculinist accounts of war “rooted in ‘homonational misogyny,’ which displaces male resentment and powerlessness against foreign dominance onto women” (Jeong 74). Rather than allegorizing the experiences of sexual assault victims into narratives about a war-torn land, Oh preserves their humanity by delving into her characters' complex interiorities.

¹⁰ The immense popularity of the 1983 KBS Special Live Broadcast 《이산가족을 찾습니다》 (*Finding Dispersed Families*) evidenced the sheer volume of people, estimated around 10 million, who had been suddenly and forcibly separated from their family members.

Oh Jung-hee studies

Despite the long-standing tradition of Korean male poets assuming a “feminine” voice, male-dominated literary circles did not embrace female writers with equal enthusiasm. The moniker *여류작가* (“lady writer”) was widely accepted through the mid-1980s, as male critics continued to ghettoize the “trivial” domestic matters of women’s literature. Oh and Park Wan-so received attention as women writers who outgrew their “ladylike” tendencies, though Oh credits her seniors Park Gyung-ri and Park Wan-so for breaking stereotypes about “lady writers” first (Oh 2006: 165). Han Kyung-hee notes that even the praise for Oh—that she raised the quality of women’s literature through “the intensification of ‘interiority’”—relies on gender essentialism, equating “interiority” with womanhood (Han 1). I add that the so-called compliment functions at the expense of other women writers, as if women writers could only compete among themselves. Nevertheless, contemporary critics agree in identifying Oh and Park Wan-so as the first “women writers” who inspired the current generation of women writers such as Han Kang, Bae Suah, Gong Ji-young, and Shin Kyung-sook who now dominate the mainstream literary scene (Fulton and Kwon xvi).

It is important to remember that this culture of recognition did not exist when Oh began writing. When she was in her early twenties, “a woman writing a novel was like standing naked at an intersection” (Oh 2006: 164). Early (male) critics such as Kim Hyun, Kim Chi-soo, Kim Byung-ik, and Kwon Youngmin focused on Oh’s “dark” and “frightening” themes of death, alienation, and sexual transgression, in conjunction with the her specificity of language and ambiguity of meaning (Park 2001: 5).¹¹ Oh became known for her “narrative strategy that reveals an awareness of reality”

¹¹ As translators Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton later expressed, Oh’s “use of interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness technique, in which multiple voices appear in the same long paragraph, undistinguished by

and “spell of tidy and restrained language”—yet some critics still claimed that her works, “narrow” in scope, lack historical and social context (U 2007: 407; Oh 2006: 169). The latter position appears to be a gendered critique, considering the historical dismissal of women writers for “their refusal to take part in the discourses concerning wider society, and of their desire to ‘wallow’ in issues that concern exclusively women” (Elfving-Hwang 55). In the hot summer of 1980 during which she wrote “The Yard of Childhood” and “The House of Darkness,” Oh was specifically criticized for not writing about the May 18 Gwangju Massacre shortly following the assassination of Park Chung-hee in October 1979 (U 2007: 513). I first defend writers’ right to choose their own subject matters, but further argue against a certain characterization of Oh’s work as “bourgeois” in its supposed self-indulgence and escapism (Oh 2006: 169). Han Kyung-hee, citing Kim Yoon-shik, asserts that Oh, having “laboriously internalized” the Korean War, instills realistic anxiety and fear in her characters (Han 12-13). Park Hye-kyung also speculates that Oh may have returned to her childhood traumas out of the despair and pessimism she felt about the present state of affairs in 1980 (2011: 99).

After the popularization of women’s literature in the 1980s, many literary scholars embraced feminist theory in the 1990s, particularly western gynocriticism derived from second-wave (i.e., white) feminism. The most heavily cited text seems to have been Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s highly influential 1979 book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, censured by postcolonial feminist scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985.¹² Many scholars such as Kim Hye-soon, Kim Kyung-soo, and

quotation marks from narrative, poses a challenge to the Korean reader, not to mention the prospective translator” (1999: 47).

¹² I would like to contextualize—not justify—my disproportionate citation of non-Korean feminist and queer scholars to discuss the lived experiences of Korean women. While there have been enduring generations of feminist and queer activism, the scarcity of PhD programs in gender and women’s studies (and a total absence of LGBTQ departments) has flattened the production of original theory; queer scholar-translator **루인** (Ruin), based in Seoul, remains a notable exception. Fortunately, there appears to be a growing community of transnational scholars at the intersection of queer

U Chan-je have considered the relationship between female identity and “feminine” writing in relation to Oh. More recent criticism reflects an explicit turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis, and some consider the subject formation of Oh’s female protagonists as anti-Bildungsroman narratives. From “The Yard of Childhood” to “The House of Darkness,” the collection can be read as a coming-of-age story, from girlhood during the Korean War to motherhood in the early 1980s, that comes to represent the “average” experience of a generation, as Kim Chi-soo put it (1998: 270). However, Oh’s meticulous portrayal of a traumatized female subjectivity queers the collection’s superficial linearity; Park Chun-hee writes that her protagonists resist growing *up*, but develop in “spiral patterns” that do not conform to the patriarchal order of subject formation (2008: 91).¹³

Here, I invoke Jeremy Kasten’s yoking of feminist literary criticism and the psychoanalytic perspective on reparative narrativization: “the language of trauma—along with *écriture féminine*—are examples of textual violence that serve as an instrument to fracture the hegemonic patriarchal dominance over discourse... for women to rewrite themselves back into the history from which they had been systematically marginalized” (2). Kasten writes that both traumatic and “feminine” discursive logic are associational, rather than sequential; I then suggest that Oh can be read as a writer of trauma fiction and *écriture féminine*, also recognizing that the word *trauma*—or 트라우마, as it is most often transcribed into Hangul—does not appear in any of Oh’s fiction. Without a Korean equivalent for trauma, terminology varies widely and inconsistently; scholars tend to use the transcribed term when referring to psychoanalytic theory or metaphorize the symptoms, such as 정신적 외상 (“psychic wound”), in lieu of a single word. Even so, Korean literary critic Choi

and Korean studies, as evidenced by the seminar “Clash or Coalition? Queer Korean Activism and Academic Research” co-hosted by Queer Asia and the Centre of Korean Studies at SOAS University of London in October 2016.

¹³ Park’s dissertation precedes Kathryn Bond Stockton’s 2009 book *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*.

Sung-shil's description of Oh's protagonists existing in "the time of the everlasting 'present'" clearly resonates with American psychologists' specification of unnarrativized traumatic experience as "being in the ever present 'Now'" (Choi 284; Bloom and Reichert 119). The prominence of traumatic experience in Oh's fiction, illustrating the role of trauma in female subject formation, resists claims of gender essentialism.

In sum, Oh Jung-hee's 1981 short story collection *The Yard of Childhood* works with and against three major literary trends, as it falls under the categories of separation literature (but deemphasizes consanguinity), the novel sequence form (but queers the linear narrative), and women's literature (but resists gender essentialism).

Translator's Note

This thesis uses the Revised Romanization of Korean, which has officially replaced the McCune-Reischauer romanization system since 2000 in all areas with academia as the notable exception. Considering the rather self-involved process of analyzing one's own translation, I have included the original text by Oh in footnotes for the sake of transparency and accountability. The fourth section on language incorporates my personal reflections on translating Oh at greater length.

I. Time: Recalling the Uncanny Childhood

In “The Yard of Childhood,” an unnamed first-person narrator recalls a year of her childhood—incidentally the final year of the Korean War—spent sharing a room with five family members in a refugee town near an orphanage. The military draft has suddenly and forcibly removed her father from the family unit, setting off a chain reaction of transgressions: the grandmother’s self-justified thievery, the mother’s rumored sex work and affair, the older brother’s escalating violence against the older sister as a surrogate for his quasi-Oedipal rage, and the older sister’s unsupervised nightly outings downtown. Meanwhile, the narrator’s younger self (nicknamed “Yellow Eyes”) acts out by compulsively eating and stealing.¹⁴ However poor her family may be, Yellow Eyes’ pathological behavior is not motivated by hunger, greed, or malice; this is evidenced by the unappetizing foods that she eats: unripe, unpeeled persimmons; a boiled sweet potato gone a bit sour; and a few slices of a cream-covered cake surrounded by flies. Kim Yoon-shil underscores Yellow Eyes’ subconscious motivation “to fill something” within her unfulfilling life through compulsive consumption (2006: 19). Her indiscriminate theft also stands in contrast with her grandmother’s habitual killing of loitering, supposedly “ownerless” chicken to make soup for the family (Oh 45). Yellow Eyes transgressive behavior is triggered randomly and often, corresponding with the comings and goings of refugee families and the distant booming of cannons.

Compulsive Relief

¹⁴ While her nickname most likely refers to her jaundice symptomatic of malnutrition, “Yellow Eyes” also denotes alternative (in)sight. The “yellow” of libidinally charged odors color and cloud Yellow Eyes’ perception as a fog of effused ambivalence.

In fact, the narrator indirectly admits to eating for anxiety relief by correlating her oral fixation with fear. After mentioning the “baby graves” frequently found in nearby fields, she states matter-of-factly that her family predicted the death of her sickly younger brother and intimates her retrospective knowledge that he “one night... would be carried out like a small bundle” (Oh 29). The narrator, returning from a past speculative future to the present narrative past, recalls: “The dark room was scary. My hands kept straying to the brass rice-bowl. As long as the sickly sweet taste of the rice kernel remained in my mouth, *I could forget about my fears*” (29, emphasis added).¹⁵ In addition to anxiously observing her own family dynamic, Yellow Eyes extends her concern to Bu-ne, her next-door neighbor whose father—according to neighborhood gossip—stripped her, cut off all her hair, and locked her in a room after she eloped with a man downtown.¹⁶ Fixated on Bu-ne’s presence/absence, Yellow Eyes remains distressingly vigilant throughout the night with her usual coping mechanism: “Is Bu-ne also sleeping. As I lie awake alone on a dark night, only scary thoughts arise, one after another. Though I chewed for a long time, conserving every kernel *in order to forget about my fears*, a handful of rice vanished like a lie” (30, emphasis added).¹⁷

It is worth noting that the stolen rice comes from the dinner that her grandmother prepared and saved for her mother, who works late hours as a bar hostess downtown. Still unsatisfied, Yellow Eyes takes a bite of the sweet potato that her grandmother boiled and hid in a pot for her younger brother (30). The narrator later recounts how her grandmother, who also cooked chicken soup for

¹⁵ Original quote: “어두운 방은 무서웠다. 자꾸 주발로 손이 갔다. 밥알의 들큰한 맛이 입에 남아 있는 동안은 무서움을 잊을 수 있었다.”

¹⁶ The bustling downtown area represents a space of darkness—of a certain lawlessness and threats of violence, but also of erotic tension and “fun” (Oh 25). During occasional outings led by her older sister, Yellow Eyes observes how easily the flirtations of young men can turn into predatory street harassment. Still, she admires the skirt-clad, hips-shaking women’s public display of glamour and identifies her gendered fate in their ambivalent status as objectified subjects who are sexualized yet still agential.

¹⁷ Original quote: “부네도 자고 있을까. 어두운 밤 홀로 깨어 누워 있으면 무서운 생각만 잇달아 떠오른다. 무서움을 잊기 위해 한 알씩 아껴가며 오래도록 씹었는데도 한 움큼의 밥은 거짓말처럼 없어졌다.”

the family, routinely “placed the chicken’s legs and gizzard on top of Older Brother’s rice bowl” before the children had a chance to fight over the coveted parts (45). In this way, Yellow Eyes’ primary caretaker wittingly disregards her as the middle child who also happens to be female.¹⁸ Even worse, the narrator clearly remembers lying awake on the floor of their shared room when her mother came home “reeking of spoiled alcohol,” muttered that Yellow Eyes “for some reason doesn’t feel like a child [she] gave birth to,” and suspected the seven-year-old’s limited verbal communication, apparent gluttony, and continued enuresis as signs of a developmental disorder (31, 32). Rather than disclosing the psychological impact of her mother’s drunken words, the narrator itemizes the various physical sensations she was silently enduring in that same moment: her foot stubbed on the door threshold, hands sticky from a partially eaten boiled sweet potato in her pocket, heart pounding and racing, and lower stomach cramping from a desperate need to urinate (30-31).

This dislocation of narrative emphasis registers the narrator’s emotional disengagement from trauma-induced sensory overload. Soon after, she reveals that her “stubbed foot was already no longer hurting” and that she “knew well what anxiety was making [her] unable to fall asleep” (34). Corresponding with Caruth’s claim about trauma’s unknowable violence, the narrator still provides no explanation for why she “grimaced and grimaced again” while clutching her foot (34). This performative gesture, in addition to her mother’s earlier comment about how the child “doesn’t laugh and doesn’t speak,” suggests that Yellow Eyes struggles with emotional expression (32).

¹⁸ Son preference corroborates the single, undisputed narrative of patrilineality maintained by the patriarchal values of the dominant kinship system in Korea since the late 14th century. The Korean state codified, amidst postwar political chaos in 1958, traditional Confucian values of assigned hierarchy to “build[] a strong authoritarian state... with a tightly structured system of kinship and political relations designed to promote stability and loyalty to a series of nested corporate groups—the household, the lineage, the state” (Chung and Gupta 4). Such an ideology praises sons for their exclusive right to carry on the family name and practice ancestor worship, while condemning daughters as ungrateful and disloyal for *having to* leave home to serve their husband’s parents. That said, cultural values regarding marriage have shifted greatly since the 1970s as a result of urban industrialization.

Accordingly, her disconnect from verbalized language can be read in conjunction with her emotional disengagement from the embodied subjectivity of pain.

Attraction-Identification

Contrary to her own emotional estrangement, Yellow Eyes hardly lacks empathy; her anxious concern is only directed *elsewhere*—not toward her mother, but another woman whose physical absence asserts a strange psychic presence. Rumored to be pregnant, leprous, or simply “crazy,” Bu-ne is an outcast who was literally cast out of public life to be forgotten (Oh 22). The narrator cannot remember when she saw Bu-ne last or whether she ever did catch a glimpse of the woman “said to be as pretty as a ghost” (20). Notwithstanding, Yellow Eyes curiously feels the socially dead figure’s unarticulated pain hidden behind closed doors:

Bu-ne—it seemed like I’d seen her at least once, but also like I’d never seen her. Yet whenever I thought of her breathing on the other side of the changhoji-thin door, I did sink into a strange fear and a sorrow as if a corner of my heart were collapsing. As if to comfort these feelings, I picked up another unripe persimmon and bit into it. The bitter and sweet taste filled my throat with the damp warmth of a consolation, and tears pooled up without reason. (23)¹⁹

Strange, bitter, sweet, and without reason. Yellow Eyes’ reaction to the persimmon, inextricable from her affective relation to Bu-ne, is ambivalent at best. Even so, the narrator still remembers how she habitually “walked in the shade of the persimmon trees”—passing Bu-ne’s room—on her way to the outhouse in their shared yard (18). Mysteriously drawn to her neighbor, Yellow Eyes cannot help but disobey her mother’s explicit orders to never “stare or point at other people’s property” by

¹⁹ Original text: “부네, 나는 그녀를 한 번쯤 본 듯도 하고 전혀 본 적이 없는 것 같기도 했다. 그런데도 창호지 한 겹 너머 문의 안쪽에서 숨쉬고 있는 그녀를 생각할 때면 이상한 두려움과 가슴 한 귀퉁이가 무너져내리는 듯한 슬픔에 잠기곤 했다. 나는 이러한 감정을 달래듯 풋감을 또 하나 주워 씹었다. 떫고 단맛이 위로처럼 따뜻하고 축축히 목 안으로 차오르고 까닭 모르게 눈물이 고여왔다.”

eating unripe persimmons off the ground (19). This inexplicable amalgam of attraction, affection, and attachment to Bu-ne appears as an extension of Yellow Eyes' compulsive eating and stealing. Furthermore, the adverb in the question "Is Bu-ne also sleeping," stated seemingly without affect, intimates a sort of identification compatible with attraction (30).

To clarify, the etymologies of attraction and identification accentuate their key difference: to attract is to meet as distinct entities; to identify is to homogenize through perceived sameness.²⁰ Understanding attraction as a *liking* and identification as a *likening*, I abstain from further dissection in order to attend to the amalgam in its illegibly complex entirety, rather than to perpetuate Freud's "false dichotomy between desire and identification" (Muñoz 1999: 13). Such a suspension of logocentrism helps in understanding the oxymoron of Yellow Eyes' involuntary self-alignment with Bu-ne, imbued with a spooky, spectral quality. The symptoms of trauma are particularly evident when the narrator recalls the night before she hears the news of Bu-ne's suicide through neighborhood gossip:

Soon enough Bu-ne's door, soggy under the pale sunlight, was sinking gradually. Looking at Bu-ne's room, quieting as if to sink, I felt *an unexplainable grief* filling up inside me.

Suddenly it sounded like someone was singing from the inside the closed door. Maybe like a feeble sigh, or like a muted moan.

Aaaaaah.

Aaaaaah.

At some point the door's yellowed paper began billowing, and it seemed like I caught a glimpse of a shadow also wavering from within.

Aaaaaah.

That sound was never heard again. Only the sunlight falling lightly like loose powder. I didn't know if what I heard was *an auditory hallucination*. But I could feel that a feeling, warm and damp like the inside of my mouth, was enveloping my

²⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *attraction* is a figurative interpretation of a medical term for bodily absorption—while *identification* encompasses both the "treating one thing as identical with another" as well as the "being or feeling oneself to be closely associated with a person, group, etc., in emotions, interests, or actions."

body—that a warm grief had flooded my entire body and was subsiding like the surface of the sea.

Was it the moment in which a drifter red dragonfly, as if to briefly brush against the water, dipped its tail in and out. (49-50, emphases added)²¹

The discovery of Bu-ne's corpse the next morning confirms that the disquieting noise was not, indeed, just a random hallucination. That said, Yellow Eyes' aural experience verges on the tactile with a dual emphasis on *feeling* as related to touch and affect; a "sense of eeriness in the ear, the 'eariness' of the uncanny" emerges as sound-feelings intensify like the yellow of libidinally charged odors (Royle 136). To explain this strange, *unexplainable grief*, Han Kyung-hee claims that Yellow Eyes, feeling trapped in her lowly life, "identifies" with the young woman who chooses death over the extralegal punishment of indefinite solitary confinement (Han 102).²² Oh's original phrase "a grief-like desire" ("a warm grief" in the second edition, as quoted above) further illustrates how identification can be also a sort of attraction (Han 102). As she compulsively bites into unripe persimmons, Yellow Eyes registers the bitter taste as grief, overwhelmed by her melancholic desire for Bu-ne.

Even so, mourning proves to be an especially difficult task for the narrator because trauma inextricably binds the death of her childhood innocence to Bu-ne's willful death. Evoking "a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening, as in the figure of the double," the doubled

²¹ Original text (slash indicates paragraph break): "어느새 부네의 방문은 얇은 햇빛에 녹녹히 잠겨 들고 있었다. 나는 물에 잠기듯 잦아드는 부네의 방을 보면서 이유를 알 수 없는 서러움이 가슴에 차오르는 것을 느꼈다. / 불현듯 닫힌 방문의 안쪽에서 노랫소리가 들리는 듯했다. 어쩌면 약한 탄식 같기도, 소리 죽인 신음 같기도 했다. / 아아아아아아. / 아아아아아아. / 어느 순간 방문의 누렇게 찌든 창호지가 부풀어오르고 그 안에서 어른대는 그림자를 얼핏 본 것도 같았다. / 아아아아아아. / 그 소리는 다시 들리지 않았다. 분가루처럼 얇게 떨어져내리는 햇빛뿐이었다. 내가 들은 것은 환청인지도 몰랐다. 그러나 입 안쪽의 살처럼 따뜻하고 축축한 느낌이 내 몸을 둘러싸고 있음을, 내 몸 가득 따뜻한 서러움이 차올라 해면처럼 부드러워지고 있음을 느낄 수 있었다. 그것은 떠돌던 고추잠자리가 잠깐 물에 스치듯 공지를 담갔다 뻗 순간이었을까." Translator's note: After months of deliberation, I chose "grief" over "sorrow" to convey 서러움. Though sorrow is the Korean-to-English dictionary definition and also vaguely sounds like *seoreoum*, I wish to highlight grief's connotation of loss, as observed in the popular idiom "나라 잃은 서러움" ("the *seoreoum* of having lost one's country").

²² See Footnote 13. Han's chosen word "동일사" is closer to the first definition of identification.

loss memorializes Bu-ne as “an ambivalent being who simultaneously arouses curiosity and fear” in the narrator (Royle 2, Ji 263). A frightening beauty glimmers in a counter-reading of Bu-ne’s tongue-biting/self-silencing as a final demonstration of unapologetic resistance, of never once asking for her father’s forgiveness. Without romanticizing suicide, Ji Ju-hyun instead focuses on Bu-ne’s posthumous influence, as her death “settles as yet another trauma for [Yellow Eyes] who is, little by little, coming to realize her female identity under patriarchy” (Ji 264). In other words, Bu-ne transmits her trauma of patriarchal oppression to a girl who is forbidden from her only medium of correspondence: persimmons.

With an especially bountiful harvest left to rot on the ground, Yellow Eyes and her siblings pick them up, ignoring the blank stare of Bu-ne’s traumatized mother. The price of thievery, as it turns out, is constipation: “All autumn long, we made considerable efforts to poop hardened stool and stained blankets and clothes with drab-red persimmon juice, for which Grandmother scolded us” (Oh 55).²³ Consider, then, the melancholia of constipation: If the bitterness represents grief, then consuming unripe persimmons is a way of *processing*, as one does with food and feelings; constipation occurs when an excessive serving of grief blocks the digestive process of mourning. Anne Anlin Cheng points out that “Freud describes melancholia as a kind of consumption... [an] apparently abnormal way of digesting loss” (8). Moreover, Diana Fuss’ revision of Freudian identification likewise speaks of consumption: “Vampirism is both other-incorporating and, self-reproducing... where the desire to be the other (identification) draws its very *sustenance* from the desire to have the other” (quoted in Muñoz 1999: 13, emphasis added). It also bears repeating that Yellow Eyes chooses to walk alongside the persimmon trees and Bu-ne’s room on her way to the

²³ Original text: “가으내 우리는 굳은 똥을 누느라고 애를 쓰고 이불이며 옷에 불그죽죽한 감물을 들여 할머니에게 혼이 났다.”

outhouse. The narrator again focalizes physical pain in lieu of her emotional trauma perhaps perceived to be ineffable.

“Crises of Witnessing”

Finding the enigmatic attraction-identification explanation unsatisfactory, one may wonder why *Yellow Eyes* is so susceptible and empathetically receptive to a particular person’s unspoken pain. I borrow my subheading from Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s 1992 book on Holocaust testimony and literature “as a precocious mode of witnessing—of accessing reality—when all other modes of knowledge are precluded” (xx). I organize the problems related to *Yellow Eyes*’ attraction-identification into the non-exclusive categories of *effability*, *credibility*, and *transmissibility*.

Effability

In politicizing pain, Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* elaborates on the difficulty of bearing witness, even to the embodied event that is one’s own pain: “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability... Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language” (4). Trauma’s ineffable reality presents another predicament: even if we could, should we capture experience in language, or allow ourselves to be captured by language? Even more serious ethical concerns arise when attempting to capture the pain of others in one’s own language. *Yellow Eyes*, for example, “suffers from the traumas of herself and others,” as she is haunted by the unmourned dead (Ji 264). Is it then the narrator’s responsibility to tell Bu-ne’s story? It seems that “The Yard of Childhood” represents the narrator’s attempt to textually bear witness to Bu-ne’s pain and process her own grief after an

unspecified amount of time, which lapse prompts the narrator to renounce her narrative authority. Nevertheless, any attempt to narrativize trauma in its illegibly complex entirety results in disorientation on either end of the transmission.

In doing so, the narrator transmits the anxiety of uncertainty to the *reader* as well—and the clutter of memories, both “real” and “imagined,” disorients readers in the way that firsthand trauma affects survivors. However true this comparison may actually be, the rhetoric of transmission can lead to a slippery slope of over-identification and appropriation of trauma by which the reader becomes a “surrogate victim,” as Dominick LaCapra puts it (quoted in Whitehead 14). I also consider the role of trauma in identity politics, invoking James Baldwin’s imagined “kind of solidarity which is a kind of identity,” the problematic implications of solidarity-as-identity arise from its unilateral praxis—akin to the reader’s relationship as the subject to the text-object (quoted in Ellis 87). Even the narrator’s tenderly earnest approach to solidarity cannot overcome alterity because, cynically speaking, the narrator’s one-sided relationship with Bu-ne has no social bearing and thus renders her grief socially illegible. Yellow Eyes herself realizes their distance, as she comes to read her prepubescent body as a failed copy of Bu-ne’s: “Gazing at the swollen stomach and the small wrinkled crotch in the mirror, I sobbed loudly as if to choke” (Oh 50).²⁴ This reading does not, however, account for the near-telepathic connection suggested by Yellow Eyes’ distance felt on the night that Bu-ne kills herself.

Credibility

²⁴ Original text: “나는 방으로 들어와 옷을 벗고 거울 앞에 섰다. 거울 속의 불룩 튀어나온 배와 작고 주름진 가랑이를 물끄러미 보며 나는 흐득흐득 흐느꼈다.”

The narrator constantly undermines the vivid details of her memories by doubting her ability to distinguish reality from fantasy. This is captured in the tension between the first clause's disclaimer and the adverb's certainty: "*As far as I can remember*, that time of day was *always* like that" (Oh 9, emphases added).²⁵ In particular, her descriptions of Bu-ne do not help her credibility, as she claims that "Bu-ne is crying, silently" without any visual access (35).²⁶

And then they all forgot about Bu-ne. From the moment the door to the backroom shut, the moment the lock was suddenly hung with a clunk, Bu-ne had crossed over to an entirely different world. Perhaps the lock had been secured long before she was dragged over, and it was that she, having become as light and clear as air, had permeated the paper door. (Oh 21)²⁷

With her socially dead status and haunting presence, Bu-ne is indeed like a ghost. Yoon Hye-shin, writing about ghosts in classical Korean narratives, states that ghosts occupy "the territory that cannot be totally codified into language" (143).

Even the narrator's spectral communion cannot clear the haze of trauma, hallucination, imagination, and dreams, further estranging her from the reality in which she and her family live: "Sitting outside to look at Bu-ne's room in the middle of the night—maybe it was too quiet—the events of the day always felt very faint and distant, like events in a dream... Maybe the real me remains as a fragmentary feeling, in the spaces between a distant memory that I fumble with regret" (47).²⁸ In this way, first-hand experience fails to evidence reality for the narrator, as her senses are

²⁵ Original text: "내가 기억하는 한의 그 시간은 늘 그랬다."

²⁶ Original text: "부네가 울고 있다, 소리없이."

²⁷ Original text: "그리고 그들은 부네를 잊었다. 골방의 문이 닫히는 순간, 자물쇠가 덜컥 걸리는 순간부터 부네는 완전히 다른 세계로 넘어가 버린 것이다. 자물쇠는 혹시 그녀가 끌려들어오기 훨씬 전부터 완강히 채워져 있었고 그녀는 공기처럼 가볍고 투명해져서 창호지 가는 올 사이로 스며들어가버린 것은 아닐까?"

²⁸ Original text: "한밤중에 이렇게 나와 앉아 부네의 방을 바라보면, 너무 조용하기 때문일까, 낮의 일들이 꼭 꿈속의 일처럼 아주 몽롱하고 멀게 느껴지는 것이었다... 진짜의 나는 안타까이 더듬어보는 먼 기억의 갈피째에서 단편적인 감각으로 남아 있는 것이 아닐까?"

heightened and overwhelmed to a state of surreality. This permeability—of reality, of dreamscape, of imagination—primes the narrator to receive various affective transmissions.

Transmissibility

Just as Yellow Eyes fails to identify with her mother over a stranger, she does not mourn her father's absence. The narrator wonders if the remaining family members had chosen to “rather remember him fondly and wait without hope that he would never return,” casting doubt upon what few memories of him she offers (48-49).²⁹ The father does not represent some fantasy of prewar innocence, as Yellow Eyes speculates that “Father will have changed, too” (48). I highlight Lee Myung-ho's assertion that the father's return cannot recover the mutated state of patriarchy, while most critics fault the disruption of the old family order.

Yellow Eyes' cynicism is substantiated by the misdeeds of her father's uncanny double: her sixteen-year-old brother, whose voice has yet to drop, but whose height reportedly bears their father's resemblance. The older brother beats the sister for going downtown where he himself loiters, and the narrator interprets this violence as directed at their mostly absent mother. He also enters a brief sexual relationship with Seo-boon, Bu-ne's eighteen-year-old sister—and when his sister retorts that she knows about his “dirty deed,” he kicks the full-length mirror, their mother's most prized possession, shattering it and “Mother's face... into a thousand pieces, into ten thousand pieces” (58). The narrator extends her likely retrospective sympathy for the teenage boy who, “hyperaware of his status as the family patriarch,” had to preemptively bear responsibilities

²⁹ Original text: “아버지 역시 달라져 있을 것이다... 차라리 그림고 정답게 아버지를 추억하며 희망 없는 기다림으로 우리 모두 아버지가 영영 돌아오지 않기를 바라거나”

prescribed by his gender (27). Notwithstanding, she ultimately cannot identify with his acts of violence.

Consequently, when her father does return at the end of the war, she literally does not recognize his face and mistakes him for potentially drunk “beggar” on her way to school (63). Watching her sister run across the field toward the school entrance where their father was waiting, Yellow Eyes takes a bite out of the cake she steals from the principal’s office and shoves in her pocket. The father’s return is “an alien emotion difficult for the refugee family to digest,” and this is later literalized in the compulsive eater’s uncontrollable vomiting and crying (Lee 2014: 298). The story ends with a description of a ray of light in the bucket toilet and sees “something boiling up cloudily” through her tears (Oh 65). In contrast to the rise of the spectral object, “[t]he seven-year-old girl’s body remains as a lowly chunk of desire boiling in the bucket toilet, unable to transform into a beautiful woman’s body created by the patriarchal symbol of order” (Lee 2014: 298-99). Yellow Eyes thus rejects both the proxy wartime patriarch and the return of the old patriarch defamiliarized by temporal displacement. No (per)mutation of patriarchy seems capable of providing a physically inhabitable future for anyone, especially this melancholic girl.

II. Space: Occupying the Uncanny House

In “The House of Darkness,” an air-raid blackout drill interrupts the evening routine of an unnamed housewife, merely identified as “the woman” through third-person limited narration.³⁰ Her two-story house, including a spare room used for storage and a modestly sized private yard, evidences an upper-middle-class lifestyle of material comfort that emerged in the 1970s. Alone in the dark and silent house, however, the woman feels restless with unstructured time; she attempts to preoccupy herself with laborious household chores, but continually finds herself psychically transported back to various site-specific memories. For one, the secret excitement of planning her husband’s surprise party rouses the “breathlessness and tension” of playing hide-and-seek in their first shared home, where she would catch glimpses of the previous occupants—his distant relatives who were killed in an explosion as refugees—in and around the dilapidated house (Oh 246).³¹ The military-enforced blackout also triggers her to recall, shortly after discovering her daughter’s birth control pills, how the woman herself was gang raped as a young girl in her own home by the same Soviet soldiers who had claimed her hometown as their base. Even in a different house twenty years later, the woman struggles to suppress her paranoia regarding an intruder-surveillant, an uncanny combination of her childhood violation and adult guilt. Such ghastly paranoia resonates not only *affectively* but *sonically* across time, occupying a psychic space of defiled domesticity.

Unhomely Sounds

³⁰ The 1970s electricity sector expansion, “greatly facilitated by the adoption of nuclear power,” transformed South Korea’s newly industrializing society under Park Chung-hee’s authoritarian regime (Byrne et al. 497). The woman’s reaction to the air-raid blackout drill encapsulates the oversight of militarism: the aggressive enforcement of public safety causes unease.

³¹ According to Korean marriage customs, the groom’s parents provide the newlyweds’ first home, and the bride’s parents furnish it. This particular couple’s first home is especially symbolic, serving as a remnant of war and familial trauma.

Sound, like smell and memory, cannot be contained—yet it lingers, occupying space. The woman’s house likewise cannot claim or *possess* the memories that it houses, even as said memories haunt and disturb its inhabitants. Stating that “[t]he uncanny is a crisis of the proper,” Royle points to the etymology of *proper*, which entails *ownership*: “proper (from the Latin *proprius*, ‘own’), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property” (Royle 1). The woman’s literal private property, then, feels uncanny because the civil defense drill furtively dispossesses her of the time and space within her own home by way of intrusion and surveillance. In fact, it is specifically *an unfamiliar voice* that interrupts the woman’s intradiegetic reading of hair dye instructions, at once penetrating the private boundaries of the brightly lit home:

The woman, squinting at the fine print [of the instructions], turned on the gas with one hand. Those with sensitive skin or allergies. Turn off the lights.

The air-raid siren rang abruptly after short sharp whistles, impatient cries, and bouncing footsteps had shaken up the alley.

From the whistles ricocheting between houses and alleyways—they sounded like the call-and-response signals of a gang infiltrating a peaceful village—and the urgent, disorderly footsteps, the woman realized that the speakers hung on the hill behind her house last week had made several broadcasts during the day to announce the nighttime blackout drill. (Oh 243)³²

Sound replaces light and sight, as the woman follows the disembodied orders of a civil defense personnel kicking her front door. The unfamiliar voice “echoing in the dark, *as if it were not their own voices*,” sounds even more uncanny in Oh’s Korean, which forgoes pronoun antecedents and the distinction between singular and plural nouns (245, emphasis added).³³ However unsettling, this

³² Original text: “그 여자는 설명서의 잔 글씨에 바짝 눈을 들이대고 한 손으로 가스의 점화 스위치를 눌렀다. 과민성이나 알레르기성 피부를 가지신 분은. 불을 꺼요. / 짹고 날카로운 호각 소리, 성마른 외침, 골목을 뒤흔들며 튀어오르는 발소리에 이어 느닷없이 공습 경보가 울렸다. / 집과 골목의 사이사이에서 산발적으로 튀어오르는 호각 소리—그것은 마치 평화로운 마을에 잠입한 비적떼들의 서로 부르고 응답하는 신호처럼 들렸다—어지럽고 다급한 발소리에 그 여자는 집 뒤 야산의 전주에 달린 스피커가 낮 동안 몇 차례 방송한 것이 야간 통화 관제 실시를 알리는 것이었음을 깨달았다.”

³³ Original text: “어둠 속에서 울리는 목소리는 평소 그들이 알고 있던 자신들의 목소리가 아닌 듯”

voice also prompts a tender rememory of sharing secret love stories in her high school dormitory around the end of the Asia-Pacific War. No longer seventeen and in the company of her friends, the woman characterizes the dark as an unexpected “guest” or intruder, herself “seized by the sense that someone had already entered the house and was spying on every one of her actions” (245, 251). As she sinks further into anxiety, the woman experiences the uncanniness of finding her house having become a liminal space with meaningless boundaries: “It seemed like someone was standing outside the fence. Or maybe they’ve already come inside the house” (265). Ultimately, the woman’s uncertainty—her disturbed “sense of what is inside and what is outside,” or inability to ascertain the difference between the world and her home—causes more unease than the intrusion itself (Royle 2).

As her paranoia crescendos, the woman loudly and repeatedly states that “[t]he dark will end soon” like a mantra of self-consolation that admittedly backfires, reanimating her “ridicule, contempt, and the like towards the world” (251, 259). Her own reassurance of finite darkness uncannily echoes her internal monologue from three decades ago, just before a group of Soviet soldiers looted her home and gang raped her:

It was common sense that females, old or young, should paint their faces black and avoid stepping out the door. Whenever any sign of life could be sensed outside, the woman’s mother would shove her daughter inside the attic. The Roseuke³⁴ are coming.

What she must guard was not life, but her virginity. What these large men with white skin and red hair from a cold northern country, said to drink fiery-strong alcohol, what they wanted were watches and women. Even while wearing five or six watches per hairy arm, they never stopped holding out their hands.

Dawai, dawai.³⁵

What broke into the dark of that day—was it seven men, or was it eight men.

³⁴ Translator’s note: 로스케 is the Korean transliteration of р у с с к и й (pronounced “ruskiy”), which is Russian for “Russians.” Rather than using the English version, “Ruskies,” I decided to preserve the Korean pronunciation of the Russian original.

³⁵ Similarly, 다와이 is the Korean pronunciation of Д а в а й, which is Russian for “Come on!” or “Give me [the object]” and romanized as “daváj.” Soviet soldiers were known for their obsession with wristwatches, a practical invention popularized during World War I.

Releasing a strong smell of booze with every cackle, they exchanged words that she would never know. Even then the woman had opened her eyes wide and clenched her jaw. *Everything is bound to come to an end, anyway.* (259, emphasis added)³⁶

This involuntary recall draws a parallel between the soldiers who invaded her home and the civil defense personnel who kicks her front door, contextualizing “the unexplainable panic” through a sonic double (245). Consequently, the woman finds herself immobilized when her teenaged son, recognizable by his footsteps, returns from tutoring earlier than usual and begins yelling for her while ringing the doorbell and rattling the door. His boyish impatience takes on a sinister inflection, considering the woman’s recollection of a dinner party at which she tipsily explained why she never answers the door, not even for the milk deliveryman: “It’s not that I’m afraid of thieves…… Well, it probably sounds funny that a woman past fifty is afraid of rape” (263).³⁷ The disembodied sounds distort her beloved son into yet another man posing a sexual threat, only moments after she tears up at her intensely intimate body memory of being pregnant with him.

Such uncanny resonances between sound-feelings, blurring the spatio-temporal boundaries between the woman’s past and present homes, estrange her from her own son as an extension of her body. This doubled violation of home and body, resulting in psychic trauma, immobilizes her: “Though the house was familiar as her own body, she somehow could not take a single step” (258).

³⁸ Perhaps the source of the woman’s unease was hidden in plain sight, just as repressed as her

³⁶ Original text: “늙은이거나 어린애거나 여자라면 얼굴에 검댕이를 칠하고, 문밖 출입을 삼가야 하는 것이 상식이었다. 바깥에 인기척만 나면 그 여자의 어머니는 딸을 다락에 밀어넣었다. 로스케가 온다. / 지켜야 할 것은 목숨보다 정조였다. 피부가 희고 이 붉은, 불같이 뜨겁고 독한 술을 마신다는 북쪽 추운 나라 거구의 사내들이 원하는 것은 시계와 여자였다. 털이 수북한 팔뚝에 대어섯개씩 시계를 차고도 그들은 끊임없이 손을 내밀었다. / 다와이, 다와이. / 그날 어둠 속에 난입했던 것은 일곱 명의 사내였던가, 여덟 명의 사내였던가. / 킁킁대는 웃음 끝에 독한 술내를 풍기며 그들은 알지 못할 말들을 주고받았다. / 그때도 그 여자는 눈을 크게 뜨고 이를 악물었다. 모든 건 어차피 끝나게 마련이다.”

³⁷ Original text: “도둑이 무섭다기보다는…… 하긴 쉰 살 먹은 여자가 강간을 무서워하다니 우습게 들리기도 하겠지요.”

³⁸ Original text: “자신의 몸처럼 익숙한 집이면서도 어쩐지 한 발도 내밀 수 없었다.”

memory through translation, as the source word of *uncanny* is the German *unheimlich*, “the opposite of *heimlich*... meaning ‘familiar,’ ‘native,’ ‘belonging to the home’” (Freud 1911: 2).

Precarious Homemaking

In reaction to the repeated violation of her home and body, the woman turns to housework as a coping mechanism—or as she considers it, “salvation” (249). The physical maintenance of her house, then, is coextensive with her psychic reparation of home as a spatialized memory. Unfortunately, the woman struggles with both, attributing the “natural” deterioration of the building and that of her nerves to the “linear” passage of time. It has been a decade since her husband’s last promotion to department head, when the family moved into the titular two-story house. Considering the serious roof leak and their financial ability to relocate, the woman’s husband and two young adult children have demanded for years that they move to a new house and simply move on with their lives. The woman, in turn, wordlessly clears the melting snow off the roof, even as the leak begins to interfere with the electrical current and creates a short circuit:

The electrical current, never seen, is whirling and flowing around the house like water.

Even this morning, her daughter was turning on the sink water when—The electricity is running!—she let out a cry of fright as if thrown into convulsions. The entire house was besieged, defenseless against the active current.

She could still hear the water dripping. (250)³⁹

In the way that the literal electrical circuit facilitates abnormal connections, to *short-circuit* in the idiomatic sense is to *bypass* or *frustrate*—not unlike how institutional power allows military personnel to bypass social norms and laws concerning private property and frustrate a sense of personal

³⁹ Original text: “전류는 결코 보이지는 않으나 물처럼 집 안을 휘돌며 흐르고 있다. / 오늘 아침에도 딸애는 세면기의 물을 틀다가, 전기가 와요, 자지러지는 비명을 질렀다. 온 집 안이 흐르는 전류에 무방비 상태로 포위되어 있는 것이다. / 물 떨어지는 소리는 계속 들렸다.”

autonomy. The active current *besieging* the house completes the intrusion parallel, down to the mother-daughter relationship. Accordingly, the uncanniness of boundaries made obsolete quite literally runs through the house.

The woman, having long arrived at the conclusion that “the only way to escape the *unknowable anxiety*... was to cling to labor” as the cost of living, does exactly that (250, emphasis added). However, her “makeshift measure” against the water leak—to merely wipe away the excess moisture with a stick wrapped in cloth—speaks to the inefficacy of her anxiety management and trauma treatment (250). The repetitive motion of cleaning, not unlike Yellow Eyes’ compulsive eating, are meant to (pre)occupy the psychic space of her mind, but the woman knows well that her gestures are “like the powerless and meaningless resistance of a person fallen in terror against an irresistible and incomprehensible force” (252). Though her paranoia amplifies to include physical symptoms such as clammy hands and chest pain, the narration occasionally intimates brief moments of self-awareness: “The indoor temperature was not cold enough to freeze her hands. The woman was well aware that it was due to anxiety” (248).⁴⁰ Even so, the woman promptly scans the living room to find convenient scapegoats in her potted flowers that she suddenly alleges suffocate her by “releas[ing] carbon dioxide at night” and “eat[ing] up all the air in the room” (248-49).⁴¹ She grows similarly distrustful of other familiar objects like the electric rice cooker, while realizing her absolute reliance on such household appliances.

In this way, Oh simultaneously acknowledges and critiques the prevalence of new products marking the sudden (and total, in urban areas) transition into mass consumerism, from wood-burning stoves to gas ranges, floor tables to dining room sets, underfloor heating to boiler

⁴⁰ Original text: “손이 시릴 정도의 실내 온도는 아니었다. 긴장 때문이라는 것을 그 여자는 잘 알고 있었다.”

⁴¹ Original text: “식물은 밤에는 탄산 가스를 내뿜는다는데..... 저것들이 방안의 산소를 모조리 잡아먹기 때문에 숨도 못 쉬겠어.”

rooms, and so forth. Her husband and son—who “did not complain about the light control” as long as it did not conflict with their plans to watch the boxing match on their 14-inch television—exemplify how the pursuit of material comfort, inextricable from electricity consumption, incentivizes and normalizes political quietism (Oh 245). It is true that the woman’s preoccupation with housework, aligning with traditional gender roles, may not appear to be as transgressive or pathological as Yellow Eyes’ compulsive eating and stealing; however, their pursuits of anxiety relief are similarly ineffective. The woman’s house repairs fail to repair her psyche and fall into the trap of repetition compulsion, just as Yellow Eyes’ compulsive eating could never sate her emotionally.

Haunting as Kinship

Despite her traumatic history, the woman is undoubtedly privileged, having the means to send her daughter to nursing school and her son to private tutoring, as well as the leisure to dye her graying hair and even throw a surprise birthday party for her husband. However, her socioeconomic status does not and cannot protect her from having to endure painful flashbacks, or involuntary recurrent memories of her own traumas. That said, the notion that one can “own” trauma seems spurious at best, especially when the woman’s traumas concern the invasion, violation, and *dispossession* of her home and body. The traumatic recreation of uncanny liminality between possession and dispossession, private and public, past and present, presence and absence can be felt at the narrative level with hazy scene transitions. As the woman enters the living room to plan a surprise party for her husband’s fiftieth birthday, she recalls the hollow, sobering silence that follows dinner parties; “the tipsy ambience lingering like heavy cigarette smoke... its bravado, boisterous

laughter, friendly and polite whispers”; an imaginary conversation (about her insomnia, her husband’s probable affair, her sexual fantasies about Clark Gable, her fear of rape, a children’s song that once made her husband cry while drunk, etc.) between the woman and the guests who had already left, performed by the woman before the cluttered table and empty bottles of alcohol—abruptly returning to the presently dark living room, as the distant audio speaker announces the end of the drill (261-62).⁴² The disembodied voice deems the drill “successful” with a few burned cars and damaged homes, but no casualties “because the well-trained citizens fled... in advance” (264). To put it simply, the narration makes sense until it doesn’t, because the woman’s compelling stream-of-consciousness is *made* disorienting by an external force.

The external force is, of course, state violence; the result is at least one house made unhomely. Homi Bhabha’s 1992 essay “The World and the Home,” expanding on Freud’s theory of the uncanny, considers the uncanniness of colonial displacement and estrangement, observing that “the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (141). On a similar note, Park Hye-kyung praises how “The Yard of Childhood,” a story set in 1952-53 and published in 1980, connects the authoritarian regimes of Rhee Syngman and Park Chung-hee through “the common denominator of a tragic and abysmal state of affairs” (Park 2011: 99). By articulating this historical correspondence, Oh draws attention to the militarism and violation of human rights eclipsed by the highly conspicuous economic growth and urban development of the 1970s. I further submit that “The House of Darkness” achieves the same uncanny effect intratextually by tracing the continuity of a character’s trauma(s) through the most intimate of spaces: home. Indeed, the woman recalls how Soviet troops—stationed in the northern

⁴² Original text: “독한 담배 연기처럼 아직 머물러 있는 취기, 취기의 허장성세, 낭자한 웃음 소리, 친밀하고 은근한 속삭임들을 되살리려는 공연한 노력으로 귀를 기울이거나 거울을 향해 활짝 웃으며 우아하게 손을 내저어보였다.”

part of the Korean peninsula after the end of World War II and the fall of the Empire of Japan—had claimed the woman’s hometown as their base while her family was seeking refuge elsewhere during the Japanese colonial rule. To clarify, it is not homelessness that results in unhomeliness, but rather the sudden displacement and violation that threatens to destroy one’s faith in justice. The final blow comes from the realization that the boundaries of the home cannot protect anyone from the dangerous world and that there is nowhere else to go.

In addition, the uncanny dispossession of one’s “own” traumatic experience leaves one vulnerable to the possession of traumas directly experienced by others. This possession is actually the opposite of “owning” someone else’s trauma; it entails *being possessed*, or haunted. The woman had learned this as a newlywed, living in an abandoned house whose owners “only returned as a rumor that they were killed in an explosion” (Oh 246); not only are they dead, but they return *aurally* through the words of others to haunt her for the next two decades. Left alone in the dilapidated house of her husband’s dead relatives during the workday, the woman “fell into the sense of unreality that she had maybe caught a slight glimpse of the billowing white sleeve of the people who lived in this house long ago” (247).⁴³ Additionally, their belongings left around the house serve as a constant reminder that her first house was someone else’s last and that her marriage began after numerous lives had ended prematurely. Even after moving to the two-story house, the woman continues to commune with the dead, or those who are physically absent:

It seemed as though one could hear *the chatter of people murmuring* under their breaths from the inside of the closed bedroom door. Sometimes the woman would recall the chatter, laughter, and small happenings of the people who lived in this house before her occasionally echoing in the empty house, and she would shudder. When the woman’s family moved in, *the lives of the people who lived before them*, as if covered by high-quality paint, neatly vanished under her family’s daily routines—but in her time

⁴³ Original text: “오래 전 이 집에 살았던 사람들의 너울대는 흰 옷자락을 한 끝 흘끗 본 듯한 비현실감에 빠지곤 했다.”

spent alone they came alive again, vividly, in the empty house. The woman, after the children went to school, would thoroughly ransack the house, searching for the whereabouts and *traces of that sound*. Whenever she discovered *a faint stain or crack* in some unnoticed corner of the house, the woman felt the furtive excitement of a criminal boiling up inside her. (260-61, emphases added)⁴⁴

Like the narrator and Bu-ne, the never-seen neighbor in “The Yard of Childhood,” the woman and the deceased occupants seem to share an unexplainable, uncanny connection that transcends blood ties, or biological kinship.

This connection to the forgotten, then, explains the woman’s ambivalent obsession with playing hide-and-seek, a children’s game of being lost and found, with her husband as newlyweds. While the game may temporarily alleviate her fear of being forgotten like the deceased, the woman’s past trauma of hiding in the attic and being found by Soviet soldiers lingers. After grappling with the tension between “the fear of being found, the desire to be found,” the woman reclaims a sense of agency decades later by complicating the game and assuming both roles: *hiding* her plans for her husband’s birthday party and *seeking* the thrill of seeing his surprised reaction (247). Another example of reparative play can be observed in her children who engage in “ghost-play” by pulling the woman’s “old skirt” over their heads, not unlike the older sister in “The Yard of Childhood” who plays the role of the angel, “wrapped... in Grandmother’s skirt” (251, 11). Like the woman, Yellow Eyes also reclaims agency by changing the ending to her older siblings’ play.

The woman’s symptomatic response to these various traumas is more complicated than just guilt. She is *implicated* in the previous owners’ traumatic deaths as someone who materially benefitted

⁴⁴ Original text: “안방의 닫힌 문 안쪽에서 소리 죽여 소곤대는 사람들의 말소리가 들리는 것 같았다. 그 여자는 가끔 빈집에서 울리는 말소리, 웃음 소리, 이 집 안에 먼저 살았던 사람들의, 일상적으로 일어나게 마련인 작은 사건 따위를 떠올리며 진저리를 치곤 했다. 그 여자의 가족이 이사오자 앞서 살았던 사람들의 생활은 마치 질 좋은 도로로 가리워지듯 그녀 가족들의 일상에 의해 말끔히 사라졌으나 혼자 있는 시간이면 그것들은 빈집에서 생생히 되살아났다. 그 여자는 아이들이 학교에 가고 난 뒤면 그 소리의 소재와 흔적을 찾아 집 안팎을 살살이 뒤지곤 했다... 눈에 잘 띄지 않는 곳에서 희미한 얼룩, 흙집 따위를 찾아낼 때마다 그 여자는 마치 범죄자의 그것같이 비밀스러운 흥분이 끓어오름을 느끼곤 했다.”

from the unclaimed house. Her awareness haunts her, making her a recipient of the transgenerational transmission of trauma. In the 2014 book *The Future of Trauma Theory*, Michael Rothberg revises trauma theory's prevailing model of perpetrators, victims, and less often, bystanders: "we are *implicated subjects*, beneficiaries of a system that generates dispersed and uneven experiences of trauma and wellbeing simultaneously.... neither simply perpetrator nor victim, though potentially either or both at other moments" (2014: xv). It is this relational aspect of victimhood that Oh's story captures with a truly chilling final image:

Idly, the woman turned on the light switch. In that split second or two, or perhaps an even shorter moment before the light entered, the woman saw something pass through the darkness like a flash. It was also the sensation of something cold, sharp, and alien having pierced through her whole life. Was it a friend who's been probably by her side all along.⁴⁵ It was, in fact, the people who had spent their lives laughing and breathing and chattering in this house before her—no, the people before them—as well as the people of the future who will have completely erased the woman's traces, vague anxiety and rage, anguish, grief, and the like with one coat of paint and will live on impassively. It was their faces, cold-blooded and pale like a mask. (265)⁴⁶

In identifying with the victimized dead, the woman imagines her own future obsolescence, as if she were *fated* to suffer. Trauma feels as inescapable as the nightly fall of darkness—and the offering of this haunting awareness is how Oh concludes her collection.

⁴⁵ Translator's note: "Friend" is too bland of a translation for "벗" (pronounced *beot*), but there is truly no English equivalent for this nonsexual relationship between two similarly aged people. I further discuss the cultural specificity of *beot* in the next section on kinship.

⁴⁶ Original text: "그 여자는 느릿느릿 마루의 전등 스위치를 올렸다. 불이 들어 오기까지의 일 초나 이 초, 혹은 그보다 짧은 순간 그 여자는 어둠 속을 섬광처럼 지나치는 무엇을 보았다. 그것은 무언가 차갑고 날카로운 이물스러움이 그녀의 생애를 꿰뚫고 지나간 느낌이기도 했다. 아마도 일생을 동반해온 벗이었을까. 그것은 바로 그녀보다 앞서 이 집에서 웃고 숨쉬며 떠들며 살아갔던 사람들, 아니 그들보다 앞서 살았던 사람들, 또한 그 여자의 흔적, 비탄, 막연한 불안과 분노, 비애 따위를 한 번의 페인트 칠로 말끔히 지우고 천연덕스럽게 살아갈, 미래의 사람들의 가면처럼 냉혹하고 창백한 얼굴들이었다."

III. Kinship: Forging Uncanny Relations

The first two sections of this thesis examine intratextual resonances between Yellow Eyes and her next-door neighbor Bu-ne in “The Yard of Childhood” and the woman and the previous occupants of her house in “The House of Darkness.” In turn, this third section on kinship enunciates some of the intertextual correspondences between “The Yard” and “The House” in hopes to share the deeply uncanny experience of reading the collection and reflect upon its echoing implications. I return to the idea of *sound-feeling* and its corresponding metaphor of *resonance*, both sonic and affective, which limns the sensory overload of trauma through synesthetic description. In turn, I compare these intertextual correspondences with the literary transmission of trauma (as discussed in the first section’s “Crises of Witnessing”) to posit that the uncanny experience forges a kind of relation between reader and text. Lastly, I consider the social legibility of this forged relation.

Intertextual Correspondences

Borrowing from literary trauma theorist Geoffrey Hartman’s description of trauma as the “uncanny sensations of repetition or correspondence,” I turn my attention to *correspondence* as both a relation of similarity and a mode of communication (Hartman 546). At the risk of mixing metaphors, I use this word to consider the sonic-affective resonances, or “sound-feelings” felt between Oh’s characters, as nonphysical and extralinguistic forms of letter writing, or communication. American poet Nathaniel Mackey states that letter writing evokes “the sense of being in conversation with the dead, the sense... that one is writing beyond one’s self... forging a connection between the present and the future” (quoted in Ellis 168-69). This physically impossible

connection, I argue, can be sensed between the uncanny characters of “The Yard” and “The House.”

Between Melancholic Women: Yellow Eyes and The Woman

Yellow Eyes, sharing a room with her entire family and a yard with a neighboring family, is a compulsive eater who gets a cheap haircut from a traveling barber; the woman, living in a two-story house with a spare room and private yard, barely finishes her dinner before experimenting with an at-home hair dye kit. Such superficial yet extreme differences between the two protagonists make them rather unlikely candidates for comparison. Yet the melancholic girl of “The Yard” and the melancholic woman of “The House” bear an uncanny resemblance in their shared attachment to the spatialized memory of home.

Yellow Eyes, whose family moves after the war, finds herself wandering back to the refugee town and cries when she sees the new occupants renovating her old house: “There was no trace of our ever having lived there. Watching the hole in the center of the room grow deeper from the man’s forceful shoveling, I cried with unknowable shame and sorrow” (Oh 61).⁴⁷ The narrator foretells that the new owner will unearth “ash-covered chicken feathers” (from the grandmother’s stolen chicken) and “broken mirror shards... jumbled with dirt” (from the brother’s violent destruction) as evidence of her family’s wartime immorality (61). The woman, to her family’s dismay, refuses to move because she does not want her life to be overwritten by the next occupants of their house. The story ends with the woman catching a glimpse of the cold, mask-like faces of the future tenants who will casually paint over *her* stains and *her* existence—but in an industrializing society that

⁴⁷ Original text: “우리가 살았던 자취는 어디에도 없었다. 나는 사내의 힘찬 삽질에 의해 점차 깊어지는 방 가운데의 구덩이를 보며 알 수 없는 부끄러움과 서러움으로 눈물이 들었다. 새 주인의 삽질에 의해 뜰의 어느 구석에서인가 재 묻은 닭털이 끌려나오고 부서진 거울 조각들이 흙과 뒤섞일 것이다.”

wants to move on from destruction and tragedy, it's *her* rejection of “development” that appears pathological.

Though physically separated by nearly three decades and different buildings, the woman psychically inhabits the refugee camps of the Korean War, when and where Yellow Eyes is. “Father was digging a corner of the yard. Near him, *porcelain and glass plates* were stacked abundantly. After burying the plates deep to prevent breaking, he said we were to leave somewhere” (37). “In the empty house to which the owner will never return, the *porcelain plates* they buried deep in the ground away from artillery fire and other hands pushed through the dirt as broken shards leaving several years” (247).⁴⁸

Between Non-Reproductive Women: Yellow Eyes' Grandmother and The Woman's Daughter

While Yellow Eyes' grandmother and the woman's daughter have received very little consideration in critical analyses of each text, they are nonetheless fascinating minor characters. In “The Yard,” Yellow Eyes' grandmother—or rather, the elderly woman with whom she lives and calls “Grandmother”—is actually the mother of neither her father nor her mother, but the kept concubine of her mother's father who never gained the legal and social legibility of (step)motherhood; Grandmother's life as a *kisaeng* is not unlike Bu-ne's scandalized elopement.⁴⁹ Yellow Eyes admires Grandmother's nude body, despite her foot shedding its skin from a shrapnel burn mark, focusing on “her stomach, without the ugly wrinkles of labor like Mother's” (40). Grandmother's name was Bong-ji (meaning bag or bud), and because she was pretty, she was called

⁴⁸ Original text: “주인이 돌아오지 않는 빈집에 그들이 포격과 남의 손을 피해 땅속 깊이 묻고 떠난 사기 그릇들은 사금파리 조각으로 몇 해를 두고 흙을 비집고 나왔다.”

⁴⁹ Intriguingly, *Bu-ne* is the name of a traditional Korean mask worn in shamanistic ceremonies, a kind of exorcist play. Of the 12 character masks, Bu-ne represents a beautiful seductress who is the object of the *Joong's* sexual depravity and sometimes appears as a widow or a *kisaeng* (a female entertainer of the court).

“Kkot Bong-ji” (flower bud). Citing Hyun Hyo-min, Han Kyung-hee suggests that Oh’s plant imagery generally represents self-sustaining, nonviolent “regeneration and transcendence” (Han 18). In “The House,” the woman suspects that her daughter, a nursing student, has fallen in love; she notes that “[t]he scent of a mature woman felt fishy inside the room” before finding birth control pills in her overnight bag (255).

“The tightly braided, thin coil of hair drooped at once to the small of her back... shined with a black gloss” (36).⁵⁰ “The daughter took frequent baths and entered almost every dawn these days with her hair wet and loose. Her wet hair looked even more blue-black than usual and her skin fresher” (255).⁵¹

“Because the old habit is left..... Acting pitifully, what else. Not that there’s even an old man to bed.....” (36).⁵² Watching “her daughter with contempt as she primped her hair,” the woman thinks that her daughter is “[a]cting just as if she’s in the company of a man” with such gestures (256).⁵³

Minjok’s Foundlings

Considering how literary transmission complicates the model of intergenerational trauma based on biological kinship, I return to separation literature’s impulse toward “minjok homogeneity,” as discussed in my literature review (Kwon 2002: 301). 민족주의 (literally “minjok-centrism,” most often translated as “Korean ethnic nationalism”) is based on the culturally

⁵⁰ Original text: “할머니는 흐르는 물을 한 번 더 손으로 휘저어 검불과 풀잎들을 떠내려보내고는 비녀를 뽑았다. 쫘쫘 딸은 가느다란 머리 타래가 단번에 등허리로 늘어졌다... 기름에 절어 자주 멍기는 검은색으로 윤이 났다.”

⁵¹ Original text: “방안에서는 성숙한 여인의 체취가 비리게 느껴졌다. 그 여자는 자신의 순간적인 이런 느낌을 나무랐다... / 목욕이 잦은 딸은 요즈음 거의 매일 새벽마다 젖은 머리칼을 늘이고 들어섰다. 머리는 젖어서 더욱 검푸르고 피부는 싱싱했다.”

⁵² Original text: “옛날 버릇이 남아서..... 청승이지 뭐냐. 잠자리 되실 영감님도 없는 터에.....”

⁵³ Original quote: “꼭 사내 앞에서처럼 구는군. / 그 여자는 머리를 매만지는 딸의, 멧을 잔뜩 부린 손놀림을 못마땅하게 바라보았다.”

specific concept of 민족 (minjok) that conflates race, ethnicity, and nationality and serves as the foundation of a “pure” Korean bloodline origin story. Like other nationalisms, minjok-centrism simultaneously normalizes and valorizes xenophobia, misogyny, and heterosexism. Why, then, is something so evidently harmful is so enduring in its popularity?

The one-bloodline myth of Korean essentialism, in short, has provided a stable collective identity throughout the nation’s turbulent history of Japanese colonialism, U.S. neo-imperialism, domestic authoritarian regimes, and compressed industrialization. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of strategic essentialism, “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest,” as a temporary tool to inspire solidarity, belonging, and identity to a group, presenting them as a powerful unit and mobilizing toward social action (Spivak 2006: 205). Strategic essentialism presents the ethical problem of determining who *can* actually engage with potentially harmful stereotypes, raising questions about belonging and legitimacy. I argue that minjok-centrism is a Korean form of strategic essentialism which fictive roots have been conveniently forgotten to justify arbitrary exclusion. Kahn Ryu observes how “the Korean national consciousness proactively endorses subjects who have sexual orientations and consumptive inclinations that contribute to the country’s national future” (5). More specifically, 혈연의식 (“blood-relation consciousness”) refuses to recognize non-biological forms of relationality. Addressing how the language of diaspora such as “blood, kinship, and lineage... invoke biological reproduction,” Jeeyeun Lee advocates for “[q]ueerly diasporic narratives of homelands that rupture how community is naturalized as heterosexual reproduction” (195).

In contrast, queer kinship imagines family not as a hierarchy, but a *community*. In a 2008 interview, Oh asserts, “Now we must pick up even the family member thrown away by others.”

Through this awkward translation, I wish to emphasize how Oh describes people as if they were abandoned objects or trash, while simultaneously asserting that the Other's family member is already "our" family member. Earlier in the same interview, she said:

Blood relations are inevitable, but it seemed like a mature person could overcome that wall. According to how you think, the range of acceptability can be as wide as possible. Through stories about foundlings, I wanted to make people think about what would happen if one is abandoned and people looked the other way. (Du)⁵⁴

Her investment in affective relations are particularly striking in the context of separation literature championing biological kinship. I observe the pursuit of a different kind of relationality in *The Yard of Childhood*—subverting the nationalistic ideology of blood-relation consciousness.

Reading to Belong

Elizabeth Freeman, writing about queer belonging, beautifully articulates the desire "to 'hold out' a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one's own time" (2007: 299). This seems like a literary or (pro)creative impulse indirectly corroborated by "Benedict Anderson's powerful assessment of the role of print culture in the formation of national senses of belonging" (Freeman 2007: 302). Nealon also suggests the literary quality of "affect-genealogy"—related to the notion of "feeling historical," "living historically," and "affective histories"—created through the act of reading. Characteristically resisting simple denunciation, queer kinship upholds the value in *feeling* one's genealogy. Queer kinship's rejection of a linear, reproductive futurity allows for alternative forms of *felt* affinity and belonging across time and space.

⁵⁴ Original text: "혈연주의는 어쩔 수 없지만, 성숙한 사람이라면 그 벽을 뛰어넘을 수 있지 않을까 하는 생각을 했어요. 생각에 따라서 받아들일 수 있는 폭이 얼마든지 넓을 수 있거든요. 또 업동이 이야기를 통해서 버려지고 외면한다면 어떻게 될 것인가? 생각하게 하고 싶었어요."

Heather Love, reading Nealon, writes that “[f]oundling texts... are structured by a particular kind of temporal desire and take on their full meaning only with the emergence of a particular kind of reader” (88). Uncovering such affective histories can work against the limiting narrative of the always already tragic narrative of queer exile and premature death. Through the re-collection of small kinship gestures, we can resist the dominant ideology that their narratives are *only* tragic, that the non-normative is *always* tragic.

IV. Language: Translating the Uncanny Other/World

In May, I thought that translation would be an incidental part of my project for the simple reason that *The Yard of Childhood* has yet to be fully translated into English.⁵⁵ I accepted this challenge, being the novice that I am, underestimating the sheer difficulty of analyzing a work of literature that does not correspond with the language of analysis. Proper literary analysis, of course, presents textual evidence to support its claims by including quotes, or fragments of the original text. This is precisely why I had written all (but one on the avant-garde writer Yi Sang's *Crow's Eye View* as a preparatory experiment) of my Korean literature papers in my recovering Korean. Without that option, however, I worried that I had trapped myself in an ethical nightmare—for translation is itself an interpretation, and I had no desire to participate in such a high-stakes game of telephone. I kept thinking about how aphasia, or the loss of language, is an extreme symptom of trauma; how Oh belongs to the first Hangul-educated generation of writers after the Japanese colonial period; and how I did not want a carelessly faulty translation to replicate the linguistic erasure of colonialism. The best I could do, it seemed, was to make the original text readily available for comparison.

English, Estranged

I began my first translational project in May, a week after *The Vegetarian*, Deborah Smith's English translation of Han Kang's 「채식주의자」, had won the 2016 Man Booker International Prize. It was a celebratory time. I could not enter any bookstore in Seoul without first seeing a huge display of Kang's oeuvre. "An author recognized by the world!" a banner read. This was the cultural mood in which I read Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, in which she discusses a letter written by Freud

⁵⁵ As leading figures of the first generation of Korean-to-English translators, Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton translated three out of the collection's eight stories, which appear in their 1989 anthology *Words of Farewell: Stories by Korean Women Writers*.

to his son in 1938, just before he fled from Nazi-occupied Austria to England. Caruth points out how “the last four words—‘to die in freedom’—unlike the rest of the sentence, are not written in German, but rather in English” and characterizes Freud’s linguistic transfer, prefiguring his physical journey, as a liberatory departure (1996: 23-24). Strangely enough, I was reminded of the older brother in “The Yard of Childhood” who loudly recites an old English textbook in hopes that Seo-bun’s employer, a white American man named Harrison, would send him to America where he can make enough money to provide for his family back in Korea. There is dissonance, of course, in comparing a famous Austrian psychoanalyst who made it to England with an impoverished Korean boy who is ultimately rejected by Seo-bun and Harrison. For the Korean boy in 1953, English was a language of privilege and denied access. I wondered what English meant to me, a Daegu-born English major from Berkeley in 2016.

Then I found postcolonial translation theory, which questions “the respective power relations between the languages being translated” and compares the relation between translator and original text with that of colonizer and indigenous culture (Young 2015: 161). Under a colonial hierarchy of nations and languages, “the colonial copy becomes more powerful than the indigenous original that is devalued... claim[ing] that the copy corrects deficiencies in the native version” (Young 2003: 140). Under global capitalism, power relations appear less overtly violent, and “English is no longer regarded as a colonial language but operates as the accommodating lingua franca in which all cultures meet” (Young 2015: 160). With this in mind, I returned to “The Yard,” which begins with the older brother reading his textbook out loud: “**찾 아 유 두 잉? 당신은 무엇을 하고 있습니까? 아임 리딩 어 북, 나는 책을 읽고 있습니다**” (Oh 9). The literal translation would be “What are you doing? What are you doing? I’m reading a book. I’m reading a book,” as Oh

transcribes the heavily accented English into Hangul and then provides the translated meaning in Korean without quote marks or italics. Baffled, I set this passage aside for months. It wasn't until October—when I happened to come across Simpson's transcription of the Korean-pronounced English words relating to sexuality after reading E. Patrick Johnson's proposal of *quare* as an alternative to *queer* in response to the white domination of queer theory—that I found a way to translate Oh's passage: “Hwat a yu du ing? What are you doing? A-im ri-ding eo buk. I'm reading a book.” Re-romanizing the Korean transcription of English estranges the English language from itself, which was precisely what Oh had achieved in her story. In this way, transcription accentuates, if not *exaggerates*, the “foreignness” of the source language; translation *represses* it.⁵⁶

A work of translation, then, could be understood as an uncanny double—or a lesser copy, depending on the power relations involved—of the original text. For bilingual readers, the meaning is familiar, despite the visual and sonic unfamiliarity. Advocating cross-linguistic permeability, Walter Benjamin argues for the “innermost kinship of languages... [that] are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express” (255). Oh makes a similar claim in her essay, “On the Translation of Korean Literature,” that great works of translation move readers not through cultural difference, but “the universal truth of human life contained within” (Oh 2006: 199).

The Ethical-Erotic

Benjamin writes about translation in sensuous terms, in a way that reminds me of sound-feelings: “the *harmony* of the languages is so profound that sense is *touched* by language only

⁵⁶ What cannot be “translated” are names, like 오정희, which I have romanized as Oh Jung-hee. I follow translator Jenny Wang Medina's lead in avoiding the McCune-Reischauer romanization system, which converts Oh into... O Chŏnghŭi. I cannot be the only person who finds this to be a truly unsettling sight, deep inside the uncanny valley of languages.

the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind” (262, emphasis added). Spivak, too, discusses “the intimacy of cultural translation” as a means for practicing solidarity among women marginalized by masculinist and eurocentric discourse—but also uncovers the violence of translating Third World texts into English while “insisting on your version of solidarity” as an imperial practice of gender essentialism (1993: 192). The act of translation, inextricable from national and linguistic power relations, calls attention to the ethical issue of the Self’s reflexively unilateral relation to the Other. While the active preservation of discursive space for the Other’s (linguistic) existence may seem like the obvious countermeasure to epistemic violence, Spivak adds that “[t]he object of ethical action is not an object of benevolence” which is emotionally detached and condescending in its reinstatement of power structures (Spivak 1995: 384). According to Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, the Spivakian proposal is to approach “the ethical relation as an embrace, an act of love, in which each learns from the other” (Spivak 1996: 5). Furthermore, Spivak’s act of loving the Other seems to resonate with Bhabha’s idea that the unhomely may also produce “a kind of self-love that is also the love of the ‘other’” through its dissolution of boundaries between the world and the home (Bhabha 151). Learning from Spivak and Bhabha, I analogize that the boundaries between Self/home and Other/world.

While both scholars negate the distinction between ethical action and love, Spivak especially recognizes that this love is not always reciprocal. “We have to turn the other into something like the self in order to be ethical. To surrender in translation is *more erotic than ethical*” (Spivak 1993: 183, emphasis added). In this erotic surrender, Spivak does not advocate the pornographic subjugation of women, but something that resonates with Audre Lorde’s consideration of the erotic as a mode of powerful interpersonal communion. Lorde makes her distinction between the erotic and the

pornographic quite clear: that using is different from sharing, and that “use without consent of the used is abuse” (Lorde 90).

Textual (S)kinship

Are South Korean academics *sharing* through or *being abused* by the standardized practice of transcribing western terminology (e.g., trauma, queer) into “Korean” words (e.g., 트라우마, 퀴어)? Can 트라우마 can be considered a Korean neologism, specially as a signifier independent from its western etymology?

In August, I said, “By distinguishing 트라우마 from trauma, I seek to articulate what is ‘Korean’ about 트라우마.” Because trauma is a medical condition with legal definitions, I found that its usage is more restricted. By September, I brainstormed ideas to “make” a Korean word, which, in retrospect, was completely misguided for two reasons: First, I was using *hanja* (Korean transcription of Chinese characters) to make meaning out of four characters, so it would not have been “purely” Korean, whatever that means. The Korean term for “purely” Korean words is 순우리말 (literally “our pure language”), but even that word uses the Sino-Korean 순(純). Second, is it Korean if I, no longer a Korean citizen, “make” it? Setting those matters aside, I suggest a different solution that borrows from the previous exercise of estranging English from itself by re-transcribing the transcription: teurauma. I do not italicize to visually mark its foreignness, but intend it to be untranslatable like a name; there will always be an acknowledged gap between trauma and teurauma. Though I still see Black queer studies more often than Quare studies, I also wonder if Kwieo studies could likewise denote Korean queer studies.

The Korean neologism 스킨십 (skinship), combining “skin” and “relationship,” describe affectionate forms of tactile communication. I want to propose “textual skinship” as the kinship felt between a body of flesh and a body of text, articulating the relationship between sexuality and textuality.

Conclusion

Trauma fiction puts much at risk because the reader, conditioned for empathic identification, may come to claim a pain that is not (perceived to be) one's own. The challenge, then, is to figure out *how* one can “acknowledge the passionate, suffering, affectional side of human nature without sympathy turning into over-identification” (Hartman 545).

As someone two generations and a continent removed from Oh, I began to wonder to what extent I can truly empathize with her stories and whether I could claim *her* memories as *my* history. In this way, trauma's transmissibility complicates the assignment and claiming of pronouns. If I figuratively feel *your* pain as *my own*, is it then *our* pain? Can I write *your* pain in *my* words? But isn't that just translation?

My proposal, then, is to return to the epigraph to this thesis and feel the pain of others as if they were those of our distant relatives, as does the speaker of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poem “Audience Distant Relative.” In this way, we may remain skeptical of our ability to really hear and understand each other, even as we pursue communion. I cannot offer practical guidelines beyond this simple conclusion, as queer kinship moves beyond the memorized script of familial obligation. Kinship in its ideality is not only reciprocal, but improvisational.

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