

READING SURREALISM IN CHO SE-HŪI'S *THE DWARF* AND OTHER
WORKS OF MODERN KOREAN FICTION

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines surrealism in works of modern Korean fiction, focusing on Cho Se-hŭi's novel *The Dwarf* (Nanjangi ka ssoaollin chagŭn kong, 1978) and nine other works published between 1936 and 2011. Primary objectives are (1) to observe and analyze elements of surrealism in the various works under review, and (2) through that, noting the nature of surrealist fiction writing in modern Korea. A preliminary finding—based on the works discussed here—is that surrealist fiction in modern Korea generally and over time has become less political and more focused on exploring the subconscious. I examine elements of both political and literary surrealism. Focusing on elements of surrealism in the works lends itself to a comprehensive study of the texts. I take a postmodern approach, suggesting that each work is amenable to multiple, varied, and perhaps even contradictory interpretations. In looking at surrealist elements in these works, I hope to offer a distinctive focus for the critical study of modern Korean fiction.

Surrealism in general and in the works analyzed in this thesis can be seen to function in a variety of ways. I argue the following: in the political and social sphere it highlights historical dehumanization and disenfranchisement of the oppressed and the working classes and proposes revolution against the transgressors; and in the literary realm, surrealist writers are experimental, subversive, and employ techniques aimed at uncovering the subconscious. Surrealism claims to enhance our awareness of the subconscious through such elements as dreams, humor, absurdity, and objective chance, inspiring us to revisit our vision of reality and to be informed to a greater extent by the subconscious.

The analysis of *The Dwarf* in the first chapter and of the other works in the second chapter indicates that ideas, themes, and styles related to surrealism have persisted in Korean fiction from the first half of the 20th century up until contemporary times. The surrealist elements in these works also serve, among other purposes, to highlight relevant issues, some of them revolutionary, in the Korean social, political, and literary realms from the period of the Japanese colonization until the present day.

Preface

I use the McCune–Reischauer (M-R) system of Korean romanization in this thesis. Several of my sources romanize in different ways. I have made corrections where appropriate; names of authors of papers published in Korean have been recorded in the M-R system, and I have supplied the M-R romanization equivalent in brackets for at least one word (Cho) in the quoted material where potential for confusion existed. Some non-M-R romanizations persist, namely when a primary source lists a secondary source using another method of romanization.

In East Asia, family names come before given names, and so they do in this thesis. Any translations provided are my own unless otherwise noted. They are to the level that would be expected of someone who has studied literary Korean for some five years.

This thesis is solely my own work, and it has not been published elsewhere. As is the case with perhaps many master's theses, ideas and material in this thesis were drawn from other papers I have written during my academic career.

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1. Introduction

This thesis examines elements of surrealism, both political and literary, in modern (post-1905) Korean fiction, with the intention of complementing the existing English-language literature, which tends to emphasize the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical background of the works more than their literary style. Elements of political and literary surrealism are discussed. I base this thesis on the idea that surrealist fiction in Korea may be usefully analyzed within the primarily Western discourse on surrealism in literature. Evident in Cho Se-hŭi's *The Dwarf* (Nanjangi ka ssoaollin chagŭn kong, 1978) and the works discussed in chapter 3 are surrealist themes, concepts, and stylistic characteristics. These have generally persisted in Korean fiction from the first half of the 20th century until contemporary times. Exploring these surrealist elements may also serve to highlight issues, some of them revolutionary, in the Korean social, political, and literary realms from the period of the Japanese colonization of Korea to the present day. Analyzing these works in terms of surrealist elements seems to offer the potential for a comprehensive analysis of many things, such as literary style, society, and history. I observed a general chronological shift in focus in the works analyzed in this thesis from the political to the potentially social and to the purely surrealist (focus on the subconscious). Finally, I take a postmodern approach to the works discussed, suggesting they reveal multiple, varied, and perhaps even contradictory readings.

Surrealism in Korean fiction at times performs a political and social function in highlighting dehumanization and disenfranchisement of the oppressed and the working classes and advocating resistance, even revolution, against the transgressors. In the literary realm, Korean surrealist fiction experiments with and/or rejects convention.¹ More generally, surrealist writing seeks to highlight the existence of an aspect of reality beyond our immediate conscious awareness, prompting readers to question their own vision of reality.

This first chapter includes an introduction to surrealism, notes on the movement in literature, a review of some of the literature available about the major work examined—Cho

¹ See the subsection titled “Surrealist Novels?” in this chapter for a discussion of this idea (experimentation; disregard for convention). Note also that other ideas and phrases expressed here and throughout this thesis may be attributable to other people/works; such ideas will be discussed throughout.

Se-hŭi's *The Dwarf*—and a critical look at genre and structure as they pertain to surrealism and fiction writing.

Chapter 2 consists of an in-depth analysis of *The Dwarf*, split into two sections: elements of political surrealism and elements of literary surrealism. Both are present in surrealist art, and the distinction is useful for conceptual organization.²

Chapter 3 discusses surrealist elements in nine other works of Korean fiction: “Wings” (Nalgae, 1936, by Yi Sang), “Phantom Illusion” (幻視記, Hwansigi, 1938, by Yi Sang), “The Haunted House” (凶家, Hyungga, 1937, by Ch’oe Chŏng-hŭi), “Poems of John the Baptist” (Yohan sijip, 1955, by Chang Yong-hak), “Another Man’s Room” (他人의房, T’ain-ŭi pang, 1971, by Ch’oe In-ho), “Conviction” (Hwakshin, 2003, by Ch’oe Such’ŏl), “Corpses” (Shich’etŭl, 2004, by P’yŏn Hye-yŏng), *Habiro* (2004, by Yi In-hwa), and *Another Man’s City* (Nanigŭn t’ain tŭl-ŭi tosi, 2011, by Ch’oe In-ho). I provide context regarding literary and historical trends contemporary to the works.

The title of this thesis strongly implies a generic³ assignment. But as Chŏng Wŏn-jae notes, while “modernism is strict about generic divisions, ...”, postmodernism takes a more open approach, allowing for various genres to exist in a single work.⁴ Indeed, Chŏng writes, “the anti-generic aspect of *The Dwarf* can be thought of as related to characteristics of postmodernism” (466).⁵ Therefore, in analyzing surrealist elements in *The Dwarf* and the other texts discussed, and in seeking to highlight such surrealist aspects as concern with the subconscious, I am *not* suggesting that these works should only be approached only from the perspective of surrealism.

Several Korean-language sources address surrealism in modern Korean literature. For example, Ko Myŏng-su’s master’s thesis seems to provide a general overview of the movement in Korean literature prior to 1987, when his study was published. Comparatively little on the subject is available in English, however.

² Dr. Fulton suggested this method of organizing ideas. I do not recall seeing this particular distinction anywhere else.

³ Note that I often use *generic* as an adjectival form of *genre* in this thesis.

⁴ “모더니즘이 장르의 구분이 엄격하다면, 포스트모더니즘은 장르 사이의 명확한 구분이 사라지는 것을 특성으로 한다.”

⁵ “... <<난장이>>가 보여주는 탈장르적 측면은 포스트모더니즘의 특성과도 연결 지어서 생각해 볼 수 있다.” It is unclear to me whether Chŏng is speaking more of form (poetry, prose, etc.) or mode/genre (tragedy, magic(al) realism, surrealism, etc.). Refer to 466-7.

Ample criticism is available in Korean on *The Dwarf*. I provide a few examples here. These include viewing the work as a labor novel (Sim Chi-hyŏn), examining in it Barthes's concept of the reality effect (U Ch'an-je), and looking at stylistic pluralism and aesthetic innovation⁶ in the text (Chŏng Wŏn-jae). Indeed, some of the ideas raised in these articles relate to surrealist theory and accordingly to my analysis.

Sim Chi-hyŏn calls *The Dwarf* a work that “embodies the realities of laborers who are thoroughly neglected ... during the rapid growth under the leadership of the government in the 1970s” (207).⁷ The “narrative strategies of labor novels inherent in [*The Dwarf*]”⁸ include the naming and modeling of the laborers,⁹ their state of living¹⁰ (such as comparing the haves and the have-nots in terms of educational opportunities), and literary style and point of view.¹¹ Indeed, such research strengthens my analysis of the elements of *The Dwarf* that seem to manifest political tenets of surrealism.

Another approach relevant to an examination of surrealist elements in *The Dwarf* is U Ch'an-je's analysis of the reality effect in the novel.¹² He writes that *The Dwarf* “continually aimed at and sought a new reality, having rejected the reality from which it departed, that it is ... successful in preserving the soul through its anti-realist form, ... [and] that it is a text that embodies the meaninglessness of the novel form, which permeates and is woven into itself, hanging between reality and fantasy, the concrete and the abstract” (179).¹³ He also

⁶ “*Nanjangi ka ssoaollin chagŭn kong e nat‘anan sŭt‘ail ūi tawŏnsŏng-kwa mihakchŏk hyŏksin* [Stylistic pluralism and aesthetic innovation in *A little ball shot up by a dwarf*].”

⁷ “... 1970 년대 정부 주도하의 고속성장 속에서 노동생산물로부터, 노동활동으로부터 나아가 보편적인 인간 존재의 가치까지 철저히 소외당하고 있는 노동자의 현실을 형상화한 조세희의 연작소설 <난장이가 쏘아 올린 작은 공> ...”

⁸ “작품에 내재된 노동소설의 서사 전략” (212). This and the following three footnotes are headings in the paper, but for easier reading, I have not capitalized them or put them in quotes in this sentence.

⁹ “노동자의 전형과 명명법” (213).

¹⁰ “노동자의 생활상” (215).

¹¹ “시점과 문체” (219).

¹² The reality effect refers to the existence of non-essential, non-referential elements in a text that have the effect of enhancing the sense of reality in the text. One example that Barthes gives comes from Flaubert's “A Simple Heart;” in which “an old piano supported, under a barometer, a pyramidal heap of boxes and cartons” (qtd. in Barthes 141). The barometer appears to have no purpose whatsoever in the novel's plot (for example, as a symbol), and as such is completely extemporaneous (Rancière 1; Rancière draws from Barthes). However, Barthes suggests, “the useless detail says: I am the real, the real which is useless, meaningless, the real which proves its reality out of the very fact that it is useless and meaningless” (Rancière 2; paraphrasing Barthes). By being assigned to the narrative element “reality effect,” such details function structurally, and as such the assignment represents a structuralist approach to literature.

¹³ “이 분석적 연구를 통해서 필자는 조세희의 <난장이가 쏘아올린 작은 공>이 리얼리티에서 출발하되 있는 리얼리티를 거부하고 있어야 할 새로운 리얼리티를 끊임없이 지향하고 추구한 텍스트라는 것,

provides references to several useful academic works that address “one of the oft-pointed out facts in the existing debate on *The Dwarf*,” that “this text contains both realist and anti-realist tendencies”—a characteristic germane to the focus of this thesis (162).¹⁴

Also useful among Korean academic literature on *The Dwarf* is Chŏng’s discussion of stylistic pluralism and aesthetic innovation in the novel. Chŏng addresses (1) the universal applicability of *The Dwarf*, (2) “the realization of simultaneity through transformation of space time and Cubist linguistic expressions,” (3) “inorganic imagery and the aesthetics of ugliness,” (4) “signs of the dissolution of dichotomous perceptions, and anti-generic tendencies,” and (5) “acceptance of modernity and the double-sided nature of criticism” (448).¹⁵ Points 2 and 4 appear to be of particular interest to a study looking at surrealist elements in *The Dwarf*. I will explore related points when discussing surrealism below, including generic (genre) subversion and experimentation, and themes of timelessness and spacelessness. Like U’s bibliography, Chŏng’s constitutes a good starting point for Korean scholarship on *The Dwarf*.¹⁶

엄정한 리얼리즘 정신에서 비롯되었으되 그것을 초극하는 탈리얼리즘 형식으로 그 정신을 담는데 성공한 텍스트 중의 하나라는 것, 현실과 환상, 구체와 추상을 넘나들며 서로 스미고 짜이게 하는 소설 형식의 비의를 체현하고 있는 텍스트라는 것 등을 거듭 확인할 수 있었다.”

¹⁴ “<난장이가 쏘아올린 작은 공>에 대한 기존 논의에서 자주 지적된 것 중의 하나는, 이 텍스트가 리얼리즘적 경향과 반리얼리즘적 경향을 함께 지니고 있다는 것이었다.” U refers to works by Yi Chae-sŏn, Kwŏn Yŏngmin, Kim Pyŏng-ik, Yang Ae-gyŏng, and Kim Yun-sik and Chŏng ho-ung in his footnote to this sentence. In a different work of Kwŏn’s than what U cites in his footnote here, Kwŏn ties the linked-story format to the concept of reality and antireality, writing that “the shifting of the narrators’ viewpoints and situations is in harmony with the linked-story format describing present-day reality and antireality using a unique sentence style” (“Late” 477).

¹⁵ These are discussed in various sections of the paper and are quoted here from the table of contents. They are listed there thus: 1) “<난장이가 쏘아올린 작은 공>의 당대성과 현재성,” 2) “시공간 변형을 통한 동시성의 구현과 큐비즘적인 언어 표현,” 3) “비유기적 형상화와 추의 미학,” 4) “이분법적 인식의 해체 징후와 탈장르적 경향,” and 5) “모더니티 수용과 비판의 양면성”.

¹⁶ Chŏng even cites U’s article.

Relevant among English-language criticism is Marshall Pihl's essay conceptualizing *The Dwarf* as work of "Korean literary nationalism" (336). Pihl writes that *The Dwarf* "certainly deserves the characterization 'revolutionary'; and we can understand why O Se-yeong would assert that 'Jo's [Cho's] . . . response to the call of his imagination moves him beyond classical realism and places his work in the dimension of a neorealism" (345). Pihl discusses several ideas that I also discuss in my thesis, such as his comments on Cho's narrative structure and style, his (Cho's) use of symbols, and the significance of Cho Se-hŭi in modern Korean literature. Despite the similarities between Pihl's article and my thesis, he doesn't go so far as to call *The Dwarf* a surrealist work.

Surrealism and Critical Theory

History of and Description of Surrealism

Here I briefly discuss the history of surrealism, both generally and in Korea. I also describe surrealism by discussing its ideological background and many of the elements that characterize it. Topics in the body of the paper correlate fairly well to material presented in this Introduction. As such, I expect the reader to refer to this portion when necessary to recall how topics and points presented in later chapters relate to surrealism.

Surrealism began in the 1920s under the leadership of André Breton, an ex-medical and psychiatry student who became interested in pursuing subconscious reality. "Surrealism was one of the most highly disciplined and tightly organized artistic schools that ever existed," Shattuck writes (13). Hopkins calls surrealism "Dada's artistic heir," the former soon eclipsing the latter (xiv). Dadaism and Surrealism "shared the defining avant-garde conviction that social and political radicalism should be bound up with artistic innovation" (Hopkins 3).¹⁷ Of a few of the differences between the two movements, Hopkins writes, "Dada . . . often revelled in the chaos and the fragmentation of modern life, whilst Surrealism had more of a restorative mission, attempting to create a new mythology and put modern man and woman back in touch with the forces of the unconscious" (xv). He also writes that

¹⁷ Hopkins writes, "By mid-1922 Paris Dada, the final full-blown incarnation of the movement, had become mired in its own negativity. . . . Accusing Dada of 'insolent negation' and a taste for 'scandal for its own sake', [Breton] seized the opportunity to reorientate avant-garde priorities. The way was prepared for surrealism" (16).

“Dada is seen as iconoclastic and confrontational; Surrealism as similarly anti-bourgeois in spirit but more deeply immersed in the bizarre” (xiv-xv). Surrealism was “much more of a ‘movement’ in the sense that the word implies direction,” Hopkins adds, crediting Breton’s “organizational proclivities,” which may in part explain why it continued in various forms beyond the lives of its originators (28).

Dada emerged after World War I,¹⁸ and surrealism developed out of Dada. Surrealists explained the War by saying “that the Enlightenment’s emphasis on rational thinking, while repressing the irrational elements of human nature, made [it] possible” (Rankin 700). Starting in Paris, the movement engaged with “organized leftist politics” for many years (roughly 1924 – 1939), and by the 1930s and 1940s had spread across the globe; “surrealist groups emerged in other cities threatened by fascism—particularly Prague, Bucharest, Tokyo, and London” (Eburne 1377-79). This, indeed, would have been around the time that Yi Sang wrote works now associated with the movement, and suggests that the movement to Korea came via Japan.

Surrealism was first introduced in Korea in December 1929 by Yi Hayun (Mun 45). By the mid-1930s several writers, including those associated with the literary magazine *Samsamunhak* (三四文學)—Yi Si-u, Sin Paek-su, and Chŏng Hyŏn-ung, as well as Yi Sang—were incorporating surrealist elements in their work (45). Ko writes, “Their [presumably Yi Sang, *Samsamunhak* members, and perhaps other Korean surrealists of the time] works shows the desolated spiritual climate of those days (under the rule of Japanese imperialism) and the will to escape from that” (sic) (56). Of the movement in Korea, Mun writes: “The surrealism of Chosŏn [Korea] was different from the West in that it lacked a direct connection with Dada and was also unrelated to [disconnected from?] political activities”¹⁹ (43). Surrealism and the surreal have been used to describe works after this period, especially poetry, such as that of Kim Ku-yong and, especially, Cho Hyang. Ko writes that Cho Hyang, considered “the godfather of surrealism in Korea,” revived the

¹⁸ Of Dada’s political ideology regarding WWI, Eburne writes, “Parisian Dada became the gathering place for a contentious group of young poets galvanized by their contempt for France’s postwar efforts to return to bourgeois normality and in particular for the resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia in Europe” (1378).

¹⁹ “조선에서의 초현실주의는 서구와는 달리 다다이즘과 직접적인 연관이 없고 정치적인 활동과도 무관하다는 것이다.” It is unclear to me whether Mun is suggesting that surrealism in Korea stayed out of the realm of politics altogether or merely avoided political *activity*. Political surrealism plays a very significant role in many of the works examined in this thesis.

movement in the 1950s after a long period of inactivity during the latter part of Japanese colonialism. As a result of Cho's reintroduction²⁰ of surrealist theories, surrealism has had a wide influence "in Korean literature both the field of poetic imagination and techniques" (sic) (56). By the 1960s, surrealism had been "internalized some extent" (sic), as evidenced by the poets Kim Ku-yong and Mun Tök-su (57). Pak writes that Cho continued to participate in surrealist activities and "regularly pursued surrealism ... " until his death in 1984. It is not unreasonable to guess that surrealism continued to influence modern Korean poetry—and other literature—after Cho's death and into the present day. Back in the West, the Parisian surrealist group "officially disband[ed] in 1969 ... " just a few years after Breton's death (Eburne 1379). Nevertheless, some surrealist groups exist around the globe today (as of 2012, the publication date of the encyclopedia containing Eburne's entry) (Eburne 1377).²¹

Surrealist activity continues today. Rankin writes, "Surrealism's historical desire to abolish capitalism largely forgotten, writers, artists, filmmakers, and (perhaps most importantly) advertisers continue to use surrealist techniques in the early twenty-first century ... " (700). Eburne writes:

Alternative modes of surrealist activity continue to permeate the arts throughout Europe and Latin America, particularly in countries previously under authoritarian regimes. With a particular focus on anticolonial struggle and independence movements, the various incarnations of surrealism have remained committed to a political poetics: as Breton famously put it, "Beauty will be convulsive or it will not be" (1379).

There are arguably two types of surrealism, a sort of "capital-S" surrealism with strong connections to Breton and/or the movement itself, and a less dogmatic surrealism of technique and worldview—one that focuses on mining the subconscious, for example, without concern for politics. Eburne writes of "two major poetic inclinations" denoted by the word *surrealism*, and these, perhaps, could be used to differentiate the official movement from something more general and encompassing (1377). Eburne writes:

²⁰ Cho uses the word "introduce," but I use *reintroduction* instead, considering that the movement had been introduced into the Korean literary scene before.

²¹ Eburne writes: "In spite of its predominantly Fr[ench] origins, active surrealist groups developed—and, in some cases, continue to exist today—throughout Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and North Africa, as well as in the U.S. and Japan" (1377).

It refers, first, to the active, organized network of friends and collaborators who contributed to surrealist periodicals, met regularly in cafés, and signed the group's political tracts. At the same time, [it] also signifies a more general tendency in poetry, plastic arts, and thought associated with experimental techniques such as automatic writing, collage, the game of "exquisite corpse," and the analysis of dreams. (1377)

Aside from perhaps Yi Sang, I am unaware of any of the authors whose works I analyze in this paper being called Surrealists, and most of the works here are, at best, surrealist in the sense of Eburne's second definition. This broad second definition certainly allows for the type of analysis of surrealist elements in modern Korean fiction attempted herein, regardless of any official or unofficial ties to the movement itself. The liberal definition of *surrealist works* that I use in this thesis refers to those that contain significant elements of surrealism as informed by the (mostly) Western scholarly literature on the topic.

Surrealist activity involves attempts to explore and understand both the conscious and sub- or unconscious in human experience. Rosemont writes that "surrealism aims to reduce, and ultimately to resolve, the contradictions between sleeping and waking, dream and action, reason and madness, the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and society, the subjective and the objective. It aims to free the imagination from the mechanisms of psychic and social repression" (1). Gershman writes, presumably paraphrasing the First Manifesto of Surrealism, "Surrealism's goal, to paraphrase Breton, is to let the Unconscious express itself, free as far as possible of the normalizing restraints of the Censor." Techniques historically aimed at accomplishing the surrealist purpose include "drugs, dreams, mediums, imitation of the writings of psychotics, inspiration, love, group collaboration in some verbal or pictorial game ... " (36).

Ideologically, surrealism is a violent reaction against ruthless capitalism and the resulting dehumanization. According to Rosemont, it "is an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom, and misery" (1). This dehumanization, according to Breton, can at times be linked to fascism, which is characterized, among other things, by a despotic union of government and national economy. Breton calls fascism " ... a frightful disease, a disease inevitably followed by denial of all rights" (*What Is Surrealism?* 114). Revolutionary

methods deployed against such a system and the dehumanization that resulted from it include knowledge of oppression and/or skepticism of power systems, a love that is aware of and strives for fairness, and violence against the system.²² The ultimate goal of surrealism is the *rehumanization* of man, brought about first by his physical liberation, and next by the liberation of his mind.²³ “The mere word ‘freedom’ is the only one that still excites me,” Breton says in the First Manifesto of Surrealism (“Surrealism” 308). Such ideas and themes emerge in many places in the textual analysis below and provide insight into Korean history and society.

Likewise, more than once I refer to subversion as a characteristic of surrealist art, and I discuss various types of subversion in works discussed herein. Surrealists were “[l]ooking to subvert the ordering principles of the rational mind (and bourgeois society) . . . ” according to one source (Beinecke 9). The subversion in works analyzed in my thesis relates primarily to challenging political, religious, social, and literary norms.

Inspiration for surrealists is that which leads them to subconscious discovery. Among others, two related sources of this inspiration are love²⁴ and certain people. As Shattuck writes, “surrealism holds at all costs to the possibility of communion between minds, between persons, with forces outside us. Love thus claims its central role” (29). Love (regarding the meaning that is in opposition to hate or apathy, such as in platonic love) plays a central role in *The Dwarf* and is discussed in chapter 2.

Shattuck points out that the surrealist conception of love (romantic love, it seems) appears dichotomous in that it touts both monogamy and sexual liberation.²⁵ In one surrealist work, *Nadja*, a woman by the same name becomes an inspirational figure for Breton, in large

²² I discuss ideas from this sentence, and source material for it, in more detail in chapter 2.

²³ Of these liberations, Breton writes, “the *liberation of the mind*, the express aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the *liberation of man*, which implies that we must struggle against our fetters with all the energy of despair; that today more than ever the surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution” (*What Is Surrealism?* 115).

²⁴ Whether surrealists made a distinction between platonic love and romantic love is unclear to me. While much of my discussion here (in the Introduction) seems to apply to the latter, I discuss both in later chapters of this thesis.

²⁵ Shattuck writes: “Breton reached the point of quoting [in *L’Amour fou*] both Engels and Freud in support of the institution of monogamy as the form in which love will make its truest contribution to ‘moral as well as cultural progress’ Yet it is worth remembering that [“the surrealist group”] reached this personal conviction while at the same time advocating a total sexual liberation” (24-5).

part because she seems to embody objective chance and logical absurdity.²⁶ She is a *femme-enfant*.²⁷ Speaking of her, Polizzotti writes

Everything about her – her unpredictable wanderings, her seeming obliviousness to money and accepted custom, and most of all her remarks, a disquieting combination of the frivolous and the extraordinary – responded to an ideal that Breton had only partially glimpsed before this, but that he now unhesitatingly labeled “the extreme limit of the Surrealist aspiration.” (xii)

Comparisons between Breton’s *Nadja* and characters in *The Dwarf* and “Phantom Illusion” appear in chapters 2 and 3, respectively.

One significant element of surrealism is *hasard objectif*, or objective chance. This idea—“the determining value of fortuitous coincidence”—is central in Breton’s *Nadja* (Polizzotti xxi). Shattuck writes that the surrealists “affirmed these moments [of objective chance] as the only true reality, as expressive of both the randomness and the hidden order that surrounds us” (21). For example, *Nadja*, the female protagonist, at one point compares the process of thought to the movement of water in a fountain; Breton records his response thus: “I exclaim: ‘But *Nadja*, how strange! Where did you get such an image—it’s expressed in almost the same form in a work you can’t have seen and which I’ve just finished reading?’” (Breton, *Nadja* 86). This sort of objective chance represents the *sur*-real aspect of surreality²⁸—in this case, the idea that something beyond Breton and *Nadja*’s immediate conception orchestrated the emergence or discovery of the same idea at the same time. Ray writes, “The examination of the nature of certain troubling events, of certain overwhelming coincidences, led to the development of the idea of objective chance ... ” (134). Due to the significance of objective chance in surrealist theory, this thesis will examine instances of it, among other things, in some of the literature it analyzes.

Dreams are another significant element of the movement and its art. Surrealists believe that unconscious desires, fear, and thought can be revealed in dreams or dream-like

²⁶ One of the most oft-quoted surrealist sentences employs both logical absurdity and objective chance. In it, Comte de Lautrémont compares, in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, a certain man’s beauty to “the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.” [“Il est beau ... comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d’une machine à coudre et d’un parapluie!”]

²⁷ *Femme-enfant* literally means “woman-child.” Creed describes the term when she writes, “For the surrealists the crucial aspect of the *femme-enfant* is her innocence. By virtue of her purity, she is able to make contact with the marvellous and enter the world of the surreal” (154).

²⁸ Breton mentions this word in a statement I quote in the next paragraph.

states. Breton writes, “Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought” (*What Is Surrealism?* 122). Especially in the early years of the movement, surrealists focused on tapping into the unconscious through “automatic texts, recital of dreams, improvised speeches, spontaneous poems, drawings and actions,” but as the movement progressed, “surrealist activity . . . came to consider these first results as being simply so much *material*, starting from which the problem of knowledge inevitably arose again under quite a new form” (117). Breton says that he “believe[s] in the future resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of *surreality* so to speak” (126). Many of the dreams from the works upon which this thesis is based will be discussed.

Humor also plays a role in surrealist art. Marco Ristitch in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* writes that surrealist humor is “an intuitive and implicit criticism of the mental process in its conventionality” (qtd. in Gershman 48). Humor in *The Dwarf* and “Another Man’s City” are addressed in chapters 2 and 3.

Surrealist humor relates to the surrealists’ use of bizarre metaphors. Citing Louis Aragon’s *Traité du style* for the second of the following statements, Gershman writes that surrealism “propose[d] a defense against the meaningless of it all, not a solution but a defense: humor. . . . Formed of an image and provoking a cataclysm of surprise—or laughter—humor has the supreme merit of clearing the land of all that is unpoetic” (74). The poetic, often illogical meshing of two completely disparate images or ideas into a single metaphor is a type of this surrealist humor. Metaphors are also discussed in the chapters that follow.

Genre experimentation also seems to be characteristic of surrealist literature—and one that several works examined in this thesis employ. Matthews writes, “[T]o the surrealist, formal classifications are less important than the spirit which infuses the completed work” (73). One method in determining the surrealist nature of a work, perhaps, is to look at how the author experiments with or even recreates generic definitions.²⁹

²⁹ Note that I take Matthews’ statement about the surrealist attitude to formal classifications one step further and suggest that experimenting with genre / generic definitions is an element of surrealism.

Style

The surrealist emphasis on automatism to probe the unconscious, together with the surrealist technique of automatic writing, raises a question of style: How can a surrealist work maintain artistic style and at the same time truly attempt to probe the unconscious?³⁰ Matthews writes that “authentic surrealism has always been fundamentally a matter of inspiration,” but form remains a necessity “in the effective communication of subject matter.” As such, Matthews continues, “the surrealist novel probes not only the potentialities of feeling and imagination, but also those of novelistic form” (6). As discussed, “automatic texts, recital of dreams,” and other methods are employed by surrealists to seek and record inspiration, but these are not necessarily publishable texts themselves (Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* 117). Ray writes, “The misunderstood and much-maligned technique of automatic writing—or automatism in general—was never intended as an end in itself; its only real purpose, Breton insisted, was to provide a means of eluding all those forces—logic, morality, taste—which stand watch over the unconscious to prevent its violent, destructive irruption into the normal, rational, bourgeois world” (134). Both narrative and technical style is evident in both works considered in the main portion of this thesis, and the very existence of that style—of careful composition and structuration—does not preclude us from calling the work surrealist, though a more proper term of classification for both may be “works of modern surrealism” or “influenced by surrealism”—terms that Mirsky uses in discussing the notion of calling Japanese author Murakami Haruki’s novel *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1994-5) surreal. According to Mirsky, “Modern surrealism classifies books (or any other works) that while rooted in the rational, extend branches into the world of the surreal.”³¹

Of style in surrealist literature, Gershman writes, “Surrealism, in this sense,³² is an *approach* to the unknown, a way of dealing with it; but both approach and technique must be molded by style, must be shaped to a given form before its spectrum can effectively overcome the reader’s resistance. Or as Aragon put it, ‘surrealism is not a refuge from style.’” (75). Certainly, the existence of style or a (mostly) unified grammar in a work does

³⁰ Ades and Gale state that automatic writing “precluded any preconceived subject or style (syntax, grammar, correction etc [*sic*]), to facilitate the flow of images from the subconscious” (Ades and Gale). This is why the question above may emerge.

³¹ Several works considered in this thesis arguably exemplify Mirsky’s definition of modern surrealism.

³² Presumably referring to Aragon’s stated belief in the necessity of style in surrealism—and thus relative strength of surrealist texts (Gershman 74-5).

not preclude it from being surrealist. Additionally, surrealists may play with style, grammar, etc., to subvert existing norms, as Michel Leiris does in his *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses* (Hale xii-xiii).

Surrealist Novels?

Three of the works examined in this thesis are novels: *The Dwarf*, *Habiro*, and *Another Man's City*. Breton expresses hostility against the form of the novel,³³ believing poetry to be a better medium for surrealist literature. This does not necessarily mean that there is no place for surrealist novels. Matthews discusses elements of surrealist novels in his introduction to *Surrealism and the Novel*. These elements include rejection of convention in technique or subject matter, or “even the same [“subject matter and techniques”], perhaps treated differently or utilized to obtain different results,” and imagination (4). Rejection of conventions in technique and subject matter is reminiscent of the genre experimentation discussed above. Matthews writes, “The surrealist hero ... stands at once for refusal to accept certain restraints and for the affirmation of certain liberties, considered in surrealism to be essential to the fuller development of man” (9). Certainly, as we will see, the dwarf's eldest son, from *The Dwarf*, is such a person. Matthews continues, writing that the novelist “becomes an ‘interrogator of enigmas,’ he seeks to ‘glimpse the other side of the coin.’ In an effort of this kind, respect for chronological time and for spatial imitations easily loses its meaning in the novels of Chirico, Desnos, and Leiris,” Matthews writes, quoting from Chirico's *Hebdomeros* (10).³⁴ Thus, elements of timelessness and spacelessness may exist in surrealist novels; indeed, they do in *The Dwarf*, *Habiro*, and “Conviction,” which is not a novel but a short story. Furthermore, Matthews writes that “the surrealist novelist shares with Gracq the wish to ‘carry conviction away’ under the pressure of an anguish ... which Gracq has likened to the state of a prisoner in a hermetically sealed room” (10). This theme calls to

³³ For example, Breton says, “the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, ... clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it ... An amusing result of this state of affairs, in literature for example, is the generous supply of novels.” Breton's major qualms include that little is left unknown in novels, images are ordinary, and the author uses clichés. He does, however, praise one novel, Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, which as Breton describes is “infused throughout with the presence of the marvelous” (“Manifesto”). Therefore, hope for the idea of a surrealist novel is not lost.

³⁴ Matthews also writes, regarding time and space, “We have to divest ourselves of our sense of the limitations of time and space and then accept that these are not proof against man's desire” (176-7).

mind at least one short story examined below: Ch'oe Such'öl's "Conviction".

Surrealist Criticism

Literary criticism focusing on surrealism, especially in fiction, seems to be in relatively short supply. This is perhaps due in part to a scarcity of literary works themselves that either claim to be surrealist or can be termed surrealist. The lack may also be due to Breton's hostility toward novels (particularly realist novels and prose) as well as academic scholarship. Breton stated this polemic against scholarship quite clearly in his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" when he said: "We combat, in whatever form they may appear, poetic indifference, the distraction of art, scholarly research, pure speculation; we want nothing whatever to do with those, either large or small, who use their minds as they would a savings bank" (*Manifestoes of Surrealism* 129). I contend that poetic deference does not equate to poetic indifference. Nevertheless, critical analyses of surrealist novels do exist, a few of which are referred to in this paper (the writing by Terry Hale and J.H. Matthews).

Surrealism and Magic(al) Realism

Surrealism differs from magic(al) realism³⁵ primarily in the latter's external focus and a textual assumption that magical elements in the novel are a normal part of everyday (real) society. In other words, there is no logical absurdity to magical events in a magic(al) realist novel, while the opposite could be true of a surrealist work.³⁶ Readers of or characters in a surrealist work may see humor, truths about reality, and/or existential meaning in absurd (magical?) occurrences (such as objective chance), but it seems that the same audience and characters in a work of magic(al) realism may accept such occurrences as aspects of the everyday (Bowers 131). Societal acceptance of supernatural events suggests magic(al) realism more than surrealism. Bowers' work supports this claim; she writes that "unless the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality throughout the text, the text cannot

³⁵ Maggie Ann Bowers, author of *Magic(al) Realism*, uses this "catch-all term" to refer to three similar literary schools: magic realism, magical realism, and marvelous realism (3). I also adopt this usage.

³⁶ Synonyms for *absurd* include *illogical* and *unreasonable*. Likewise, surrealism is described in *The Harper Handbook to Literature* as "originally, a French literary and artistic movement of the 1920s, aimed at liberating artistic works from the control of logic and reason" (Frye, et al. 449). Thus, absurdity lies at the core of surrealist ideology. I examine elements of absurdity in the works in chapters 2 and 3.

be called magical realist” (27). To distinguish the two systems, Bowers writes,

Surrealism is most distinct from magical realism since the aspects that it explores are associated not with material reality but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the ‘inner life’ and psychology of humans through art. ... The extraordinary in magical realism is rarely presented in the form of a dream or a psychological experience because to do so takes the magic out of recognizable material reality and places it into the little understood world of the imagination. (24)

Therefore, concern with the psychology of the characters, and especially their subconscious, suggests surrealism, not magic(al) realism. Another difference is that magic(al) realism tends to lack the political and/or social commentary common to surrealist art (24). These distinctions confirm the viability of seeing elements of surrealism in *The Dwarf*, but ambiguity persists.

Discussion of Genre

One could perhaps argue that the major subject of analysis in this paper—*The Dwarf*—belongs to surrealism and only surrealism, belongs to another established genre or other multiple genres entirely, is a confluence of more than one genre, seeks to avoid genre altogether, or seeks to establish its own genre. I contend that it contains very strong surrealist elements, but I do not argue that the author was a surrealist himself or that he intended the works to be surrealist. I do, however, see significant value in viewing the work as surrealist. I see value in other readings, such as especially the possibility of exploring allegory in the work, but I would not call it purely an allegorical work. Indeed, the inability to classify this work in a single genre heightens its appeal. This is a postmodernist approach.

Generic (genre) studies is a type of structuralist literary criticism. Scholes writes, “At the heart of the idea of structuralism is the idea of system: a complete, self-regulating entity that adapts to new conditions by transforming its features while retaining its systematic structure. Every literary unit from the individual sentence to the whole order of words can be seen in relation to the concept of system” (10). One type of system in the structuralist worldview is genre. “Genres are the connecting links between individual literary works and the universe of literature,” Scholes says, presumably drawing from Tzvetan Todorov’s

Introduction à la littérature fantastique (128).

Scholes suggests that reading and writing are “bound by generic tradition” (130). Whether s/he is aware of it or not, “[e]very writer works in a tradition . . . ” and likewise, the reader and/or critic is limited by his or her own awareness (and misunderstandings) of such elements as traditions and genres (Scholes 130).³⁷ Scholes also addresses the idea that critics often engage in “the establishment of false norms for the evaluation of literary works.” He presents two possible conclusions to the potential demise of literary criticism that could result from “unconscious monism in literary evaluation”: (1) deciding that the practice is meaningless (“Frye argues that all evaluative criticism is subject to distortion by personal prejudice and passing fashions in literary taste, and is therefore fraudulent or sophomoric”); or (2) “consciously try[ing] to guard against monistic evaluation by paying really careful attention to generic types and their special qualities,” as Scholes suggests (131). The existence of the present thesis necessarily requires us to adopt the latter response, and I invite readers to heed Scholes’s suggestion. Nevertheless, Frye’s response is significant, and sounds a bit like the theory behind Derrida’s deconstructive criticism,³⁸ that structuralism faced a rupture—to use Derrida’s word— “when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought” (Derrida). In other words, Derrida questions the foundations of the structuralist worldview. This calls into question the validity of structuralist criticism, and as such generic criticism and even the surrealist lens used in this analysis.

Furthermore, to descend to the structuralist sub-level of genre, the surrealist *system* is not without its own critics, including Freud and Sartre. Surrealist theory relies in large part on Freudian ideas,³⁹ but as Hopkins notes, all surrealists did not always wholeheartedly accept Freudianism (101). Freud did not necessarily see Surrealism as providing a proper artistic appropriation of his theories—indeed, Hopkins writes, “Freud in turn was skeptical about surrealism. Asked by Breton in 1937 to contribute to an anthology of dream accounts,

³⁷ Scholes quotes E.D. Hirsch, who writes, “an interpreter’s preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands, and that this remains the case unless and until that generic conception is altered” (130).

³⁸ Lodge and Wood define the aim of deconstructive criticism: “to show that any text inevitably undermines its own claim to have a determinate meaning, and licences the reader to produce his own meanings out of it by an activity of semantic ‘freeplay’” (89).

³⁹ When discussing the early history of the surrealist movement, Hopkins writes, “While serving as a medical orderly in the French army during the war, Breton had become acquainted with Sigmund Freud’s theories of the unconscious. The psychoanalyst’s works were first translated into French during the early 1920s, and Breton and his friends rapidly assimilated the scientific idea of the unconscious to their poetic interests . . . ” (16-7).

he refused on the grounds that the straight transcription of a dream without the associations of the patient would be meaningless for him. The Surrealists' poetic interests were far removed from the actual concerns of psychoanalysis" (101-2).

Sartre, too, was critical of surrealism. According to Shattuck,

Sartre refers to the 'surrealist quietism' that obliterates all categories of opposition and choice which render individual action possible. Yet the surrealists passionately asserted their individuality, social responsibility, and revolutionary activism. Sartre goes on to attack this 'confusion' by describing the surrealist position as a foundered synthesis, a 'flickering' or 'flitting' between these opposed points of view, with 'objective chance' providing a 'magic unity' that leaves mind undefined (28).

In response to Sartre's criticisms, Shattuck writes, "'Flickering' is not at all a bad word to describe the behaviour of a mind intent on registering a wide range of experience, a mind seeking both to be itself and to put itself in communication with other minds or forces" (29).

Bearing this introductory material in mind, we are prepared to consider surrealism in these works, with the result of both discovering recurring political and literary surrealist elements in modern Korean fiction and, enhanced through surrealism's revolutionary and subversive focus, highlighting a variety of aspects of Korean society contemporary to the works, such as class consciousness, political ideology, gender issues, and the effect(s) of modernization on the society and the individual. Indeed, working from the theory of surrealism has helped piece together an arguably more complete picture of modern Korean fiction and issues in modern Korean society.

In chapters 2 and 3 I discuss elements of political and literary surrealism in *The Dwarf* and the nine other works of Korean fiction, using as a foundation the material presented in this Introduction. It is primarily from this analysis that I will integrate some of the statements about surrealism in general and surrealism in Korean literature into my Conclusion. There I discuss trends of surrealism in modern Korean fiction, including noting its diminishing focus on political issues and increasing focus on delving into the subconscious, as well as ways in which surrealism functions in Korean fiction.

2. Cho Se- hŭi, *The Dwarf* (Nanjangi ka ssoaollin chagŭn kong, 1978)

Modern Korea has been characterized by swift changes in government leadership, national attitudes, international influence, and economic development. The 20th century saw the end of the centuries-long Chosŏn Kingdom, the rise and fall of Japanese imperial rule, a civil war, decades of rapid industrialization, and in South Korea the development of a modern nation with a robust economy and democracy.

Much of Korean literature in the 20th century documents the human side of the nation's political and economic changes. Bruce Fulton writes that due to many Korean writers having been educated in Japan after the Japanese annexation of Chosŏn [and until the end of WWII], “[t]here resulted an influx of Western literary models into Korea, primarily realism in fiction ... Korean literature after 1945 has to a large extent been conditioned by the realities of modern Korean history. Korean literati from premodern times to the present day have often felt a need to bear witness to the times, and authors from 1945 on have been no exception” (“Literature” 499-500). Fulton adds that writers born at the tail end of or after the Japanese occupation, including Ch’oe In-ho (b. 1945; two of whose works are discussed in the next chapter), “produced fiction and poetry that display a more free-wheeling use of language and a powerful imagination” (500). Cho Se-hŭi (b. 1942) would also fall into this group. Fulton continues his chronological assessment, writing, “The 1970s [when *The Dwarf* was published] brought to the fore a collection of powerful voices that exposed the social ills attending South Korea’s industrialization under President Park Chung Hee” (“Literature” 500).

The Dwarf (1978) is an extremely significant work of modern Korean fiction. Fulton calls it “perhaps the most important one-volume novel of the post-1945 period” in Korea (“Literature” 500). What’s more, Marshall Pihl writes, “Indeed, Jo’s [Cho’s] language and form has had such an epoch-making impact on contemporary Korean writing that Kim Yun-sik speaks of drawing a line between literature of the ‘pre-dwarf’ period and that which has followed: ‘If there is anything tantamount to a revolution in literature, the change triggered by Jo’s [Cho’s] stories may well be called so’” (345).

In *The Dwarf*, a collection of linked stories, Cho Se-hŭi writes of the effects on the lives of members of various socio-economic classes in Korean society of Korea's rapid industrialization under the leadership of Park Chung Hee. The novel is saturated with surrealistic ideas and characteristics, and it is quite a revolutionary work.

Political Surrealism

In *The Dwarf*, Cho depicts a ruthlessly capitalistic, borderline-fascist society (evident in the favorable images of postwar Germany in the "Spinyfish" story,⁴⁰ for example), and presents a surrealistic, revolutionary solution to depressed conditions. This solution emerges in the thoughts and actions of Cho's characters and the events that surround them.

Class Consciousness and Struggle

Awareness of class seems an implicit preliminary element of surrealist revolution. Breton makes references to the proletariat, which suggests Marxism and the necessity of class consciousness for proletarian revolution.

Cho depicts a highly stratified society, with a large gap between the rich and the poor. "[C]ompany people"⁴¹ "made more than ten times as much money as we did," explains Yŏng-su, a protagonist and the elder son of the eponymous dwarf (147). The result is tension between the laboring class and the factory owners/management and, in the end, an isolated instance of violent revolution of the former against the latter. It is clear who holds power in the system, evident especially in the fates of those in the working class. During the course of the novel, two girls from the dwarf's neighborhood, Myŏng-hŭi and the dwarf's own daughter, Yŏng-hŭi, both seem to prostitute themselves in some sense of the word. Likewise,

⁴⁰ I am indebted to Bruce Fulton for raising this point. Consider, for example, the following dialogue, wherein the son of the company CEO states the value of German industry:

"... I think I'll go to Germany pretty soon."

"What for?"

"That's where Krupp and Thyssen are located. I need to see how they do things. Father's dream now is to have an ironworks. When my brothers return, I'll have to go to Germany to study." (204)

Note also that I abbreviate story titles from *The Dwarf*, as I do here. "Spinyfish" refers to the story "The Spinyfish Entering My Net."

⁴¹ Cho also uses "Educated people," "Management," and "management people" when referring to the same group.

two disabled men from the same town make fools of themselves in a performance act with a tonic peddler to earn a living. All three of the dwarf's children work in factories at Ŭngang, yet their family still can't seem to make ends meet. Meanwhile, the CEO's family has plenty of money—enough for servants, a swimming pool, cars, and study abroad for their children. Clearly, there is a large divide between classes in the society Cho presents.

Such disenfranchisement of the laboring class appears to have continued for centuries, previously under the system of hereditary slaves. The dwarf and his wife were born of hereditary slaves, and though slavery had since been abolished, they remained for the most part unable to improve their education or social standing. Meanwhile, company managers are aware of the power structure and threats to their power, and they do what they can to prevent the laborers from gaining any more power than they have—by such means as limiting labor union activity and filling union posts with company people.

Given a few clues, it is fairly easy to identify to which class most of the characters in the novel belong. In addition to the above examples, consider Yun-ho, who appears to be part of a rising middle class, suggested by the fact that his father is a lawyer who moved next door to the CEO but cannot shake the CEO's hand, presumably due to class differences (105). Nevertheless, Yun-ho's father "brought home a beggar—or so Yun-ho and his elder sister had thought" by judging the man's attire—to be Yun-ho's tutor, suggesting that they are somewhat wealthy (34). Cho writes, "From the outset [Yun-ho's father] had tried to raise Yun-ho as a member of a completely different class" by paying for private lessons and the cram school, and encouraging entrance into a certain program at the best university (103). Furthermore, amidst descriptions of terrible conditions in Ŭngang, Cho writes that "Yun-ho was forever thinking about how his father was involved in something terrible," suggesting that his father's work pertained to inhumane factory management there (123). While many of the other characters in Cho's stories are quite clearly either from the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, Yun-ho does not fit into either. It is significant, therefore, that he considers suicide. Perhaps Yun-ho's undulating social status plays a role in his psychological distress.

Dehumanization

Disgust for dehumanizing factors in society is also an element of political surrealism and has been discussed in my Introduction. Clear illustrations of dehumanization in

industrializing Korean society abound.⁴² First, humans are compared to machines several times. For example, Yun-ho explains to one love interest, Kyöng-ae, the ignorant granddaughter of the owner of Ŭngang Textile, about the terrible working conditions that the factory worker Yöng-hŭi faces, saying, “She—a human being—was treated like a cheap piece of machinery” (114). This comparison is echoed in the story “City of Machines,” where working conditions are described. Furthermore, as factory workers spend so much of their time and energy with machines, “Thoughts, feelings—they’re lost to the machines” (107). This shows the devaluation of humans in their society—evidenced by the fact that their thoughts have no more societal value than (and perhaps less than) the machines to which they are subordinated.

Humans are also reduced by other comparisons. After Shin-ae and the dwarf come into conflict with a man from a plumbing shop in “Knifeblade,” Shin-ae compares herself and the dwarf to “chickens inside a prefab coop. She had seen a photo of breeders using artificial lighting to increase the hens’ production. The terrible ordeal those hens go through in their coop—the dwarf and I are undergoing the same sort of thing.” Cho continues: “all she could think of was that she and the dwarf, unlike the egg-laying hens, were being used in an experiment—an experiment to see how well they could adapt to a sharp disruption of their biological rhythms and to what extent they developed pathological symptoms” (30). As chickens are *used* for eggs and meat, the reduction is clear; the comparison suggests that so are these two people and masses of others used by corporations, government schemes, and/or society for their ability to produce a commodity, labor, and/or laborers (children who will work in the factories).

Additionally, consider the response of Yöng-ho’s friend (“the young assistant”) in “A Little Ball” to a sign at the General Tree Clinic—the place whence a tree doctor came to treat the press company owner’s trees at his home. The sign reads, “Valued Citizens—Are Your Trees Healthy?” Yöng-ho’s friend responds, “We don’t have any trees at home, and I’m not healthy,” suggesting inhumanity in the fact that human workers seem to be treated more poorly than trees. “Almost every day the young assistant had a nosebleed,” Yöng-ho adds,

⁴² Recall from my Introduction that Rosemont says that surrealism “is an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom, and misery” (1). Here and in other places in this thesis I also refer to this sort of reduction using such terms as *dehumanization* and *reduction of humans / human worth to market values*.

driving home the point—and stimulating empathy for the workers and disgust for the unjust in power (66).

Another reference to reduction occurs in the same story, when the three children of the dwarf drop out of school to help make ends meet at home. At this time, Yǒng-su compares their status in society—presumably in reference to the lack of governmental retribution for their, especially the younger ones, dropping out of school—to blacks in apartheid South Africa. “No one harmed us,” he says. “We received unseen protection. Just as aboriginal peoples in South Africa were granted protected status in designated areas, we received protection as a different group” (59). “Protected” status of minority or underprivileged groups is hardly ever an improvement to or protection of human rights, and South Africa is no exception. If Yǒng-su is referring to South African apartheid, he is only fooling himself by suggesting that they were protected—perhaps he was speaking ironically.

More than once, Cho compares the tools the dwarf uses to the man himself, emphasizing the dwarf’s utility (but not personhood), and even perhaps foreshadowing his death as at one point they are described as “probably rest[ing] quietly in the shadow of the brick factory’s smokestack while he sleeps” (28).⁴³ In society, like the South African blacks, he receives unequal treatment (presumably because he is a dwarf), evident by the fact that he hardly finds any work. Furthermore, consider the fact that Yǒng-su cannot consider his father either good or bad. At first, Yǒng-su calls his father a bad man, presumably because the latter cannot provide many things for them (like “clothes with pockets,” meat, etc.), but then he retracts that statement, saying, “Father can’t even be a bad guy. Bad guys have lots of money and stuff” (51). Not only does this show the reduction of humans to market values in that Yǒng-su is making value judgments about his father based on wealth, but in a way it indicates that Yǒng-su may not even see his father as a man at all—assuming that for Yǒng-su there are only bad men and good men, and if his father is neither, then is he a man at all?

Indeed, the reduction of human worth to market values is not limited to the lower classes. Consider first the example above. To Yǒng-su, a characteristic of bad men is monetary—they “have lots of money and stuff” (51). Furthermore, in “Spinyfish,” the son of

⁴³ These may foreshadow his death because the dwarf commits suicide by jumping off the brick factory smokestack—presumably landing in the shadows of the smokestack where his tools lay in this comparison.

the murdered *chaebŏl*⁴⁴ man bemoans his family's wealth as the root of at least some of his suffering, saying, "I wish we didn't have so much money" (184). This we learn is spoken in a tired voice, suggesting that having capital, rather than enhancing his life, has depressed it. Another place in the novel where this occurs is in "Knifeblade," when Cho describes neighbors who have many possessions, including a television; she says, "What's lacking in that family is one thing alone—a soul" (17). As the soul represents thoughts and human sentiment, this description illustrates another aspect of dehumanization that results when humans are reduced to market values.

Inadequate Human Rights

Those who revolt against any system are often fighting for basic rights—food, water, shelter, proper working conditions, and societal respect. Human rights violations are perhaps indicative of the attitude that those violated are not important enough to be ensured such basic rights, suggesting that they are somehow less human than the violators. Recall that Breton spoke of "the *liberation of the mind*, the express aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the *liberation of man*, . . . that today more than ever the surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution" (*What Is Surrealism?* 115). The recognition and resolution of human rights issues has surrealist implications in that the surrealist aim of "liberation of the mind" can only be achieved after the "liberation of man"—including his socio-political liberation.

Examples of human rights violations in *The Dwarf* abound, especially in the factories. In "A Little Ball," when the dwarf is unable to continue working, his two sons go to work in a print shop. The younger son, Yŏng-ho, describes conditions in the shop:

⁴⁴ According to the *Financial Times*, "Chaebol [*Chaebŏl*] [are] family-run conglomerate[s] in South Korea. Such groups have been at the heart of its rapid industrial development over many years, and tower over almost every area of business: from stockbroking to theme parks; from supermarkets to heavy weapons." What's significant, especially to this thesis, is the historical connection between such conglomerates and the government. The *Financial Times* continues, writing, "Enormous conglomerates were nurtured as national champions under the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, who ruled until 1979. That helped South Korea's warp-speed development" ("Chaebol"). In such a system, corruption seems nearly inevitable. Cho's portrayal of corruption in *The Dwarf* (and presumably the Korean society of the time) is discussed below. While in this thesis I use the term *corporation* to describe the major business entity in *The Dwarf*, conglomerate is perhaps a better term. I am indebted to Bruce Fulton for raising this point as well.

We were limited to thirty minutes for lunch. ... Everyone in the factory worked in isolation. ... Of the thirty minutes we had for lunch, they told us to spend ten minutes eating ... And we didn't have proper rest periods. ... We worked in the middle of the night in a stuffy, noisy environment. ... [Things] only grew worse. Our twice-yearly raises were reduced to one. The night-shift bonus was reduced. The workforce was reduced. The workload increased, the workday lengthened. ... Those who spoke up about the unreasonable treatment were fired ... (65)

These conditions are reminiscent of those in industrializing Britain or the United States a century before, which inspired works by such authors as Charles Dickens⁴⁵ and Upton Sinclair.⁴⁶ As characters describe factory conditions throughout the novel, it is clear that Cho is describing conditions in the Korea of his time. Compare Yŏng-ho's description of factory life with the following historical description:

[M]any incidents occurred in the early 1970s that showed the negative aspects of rapid industrialization. In 1971, Kim Jin Su, who was a union worker at Hanyoung Textile, was suspiciously murdered, and workers at Hanjin Corporation set fire to the Korean Air building owned by the company. ... These [one other incident is mentioned] incidents were preceded by the self-immolation of a worker named Jeon Tae Il, who had burnt himself to death in protest against the exploitation of labor and human rights abuse at the Pyeonghwa Market in November 1970. All of these revealed social problems hidden behind the process of industrialization and economic development. In this respect, the democratization movement of the early 1970s showed the fact that the movement dealt with social problems accumulated in the course of rapid industrialization in addition to resistance to the Park regime's dictatorial rule and attempts to prolong it. (Jung and Kim 6)

⁴⁵ For example, in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, the main character is "thrown away ... " and "became, at ten years old, a little laboring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby," who have a warehouse near the Thames in London for exporting alcohol. The working conditions are horrible; Copperfield describes the warehouse as being "literally overrun with rats" (154).

⁴⁶ In *The Jungle*, Sinclair writes of factory/slaughterhouse conditions in Chicago, including disgusting and unhealthy working conditions, hours, and expectations, unfair wages, and the formation (and repression) of unions.

In historical Korea as well as in the novel, one negative side-effect of rapid industrialization was poor working conditions, which in turn led to uprisings and revolution. The fact that in Yōng-ho's description of factory life regular and bonus pay was reduced while the workload and the working hours increased suggests a corporation that is seeking to cut down operating costs in order to increase profits that will be reinvested and/or shared among executives and stockholders. Therefore, economic value is placed above human value. Furthermore, that workers' rights were being stifled, such as the ability to protest poor conditions, suggests ineffective or corrupt labor protection mechanisms in government; most probably, it either indicates a weak government or a government that supports the print shop's capitalistic exploitation of workers. If this novel is to be read in a historical light, the latter is more likely.

Indeed, as the novel progresses it becomes increasingly clear that protests about inhumane corporate practices were rendered ineffective, thus reinforcing the perception of corrupt links between corporations and the government. In a description of the Ŭngang factory complex and the city in "City of Machines," Cho writes that the residents there "realized they were living under ecological conditions without precedent in the history of Ŭngang"; pollution from the factories created deplorable living conditions where, on at least one occasion, the winds failed to "carry the toxic gases and sooty smoke from the factory zone either to the ocean or inland" and instead brought these things into the residential area. Residents "had trouble breathing Their eyes smarted, their throats grew hot. Those who could not bear it ran out onto the streets. Fog settled over downtown and the residential areas; streetlights could no longer be seen. Chaos broke out and public order collapsed in an instant" (122).

Amidst these horrifying conditions, residents were unable to protest against the corporations for allowing this to happen or against the government for not regulating corporate emissions and thereby protecting its citizens. Cho writes, "The people of Ŭngang thought they could hold public meetings or even demonstrate if need be. They were left with mouths agape when they realized too late that this was impossible" (123). Apparently lacking the means to resolve their problems by legal means, it is no wonder Yōng-su felt stuck in a seemingly unchangeable system and thus resorted to violence in seeking to kill the CEO of the corporation.

Ironically, intimations of state corruption and state-*chaebŏl* cronyism emerge even at Yŏng-su's trial. Despite testimony refuting some of the charges brought against him in court, as well as Yŏng-su's admission of guilt only for the murder of the executive, he is convicted of all charges brought against him, suggesting corruption in the courts and/or class favoritism. That this corruption existed in Cho's reality outside of the novel may explain why Park Chung Hee is not mentioned in the novel and why Cho includes such things as the reference to the German city of Lilliput and the parable of the one-eyed king of the blind—to suggest respectively that life is better elsewhere and that people open their eyes and demand more of the government.

In a society with strong collaboration between corporate management and labor officials, some of the aforementioned injustices might have been resolved through state means. However, in the world of *The Dwarf*, corruption inhibited state intervention on the workers' behalf. For example, in "City of Machines," when Yun-ho asks Yŏng-su why seven workers were fired one day, the latter explains that though there is a labor union, union officials "work for management," which essentially prevents complaints from leaving the company offices (125). A survey of workers in the same story shows the distrust that must have resulted from such a set-up; 67.4% of workers surveyed noted that they think the system is corrupt to some degree⁴⁷ (124). Considering these facts, it is not hard to understand why Yŏng-su felt the need to take matters into his own hands, outside of the framework established for resolving corporate conflict.

God and Atheism

Beyond an individual factory, a corporation, or a society itself, surrealism finds fault with exploitative religious gods. Inviting revolution against this power, too, Breton writes, "Not only must there be an end to the exploitation of man by man, but also to the exploitation of man by the alleged 'God', of absurd and revolting memory" (*What Is Surrealism?* 211). Similarly, Cho asserts that even worse than being absent, God seems complicit in inflicting suffering on the working classes in this society. "The Fault Lies with God as Well," Cho titles a story in which Yŏng-su contemplates such ideas as a classed society, money, power,

⁴⁷ They are responding to the following survey question: "Do you think the Labor Union executives are company agents?" (124).

laws, human suffering, the costs of industrialization, his own lack of educational opportunities, injustice, and unfairness. In the end, Yǒng-su decides that the world has become largely loveless, and that “Everyone was committing sins—without exception. In Ŭngang not even God was an exception.” In the dwarf’s ideal world, “laws should be passed in order to punish loveless people,” and Yǒng-su decides that this principle is correct (158). But in the world of *The Dwarf*, neither government nor God punished the loveless.

At one point in the novel, Yǒng-su tells the minister his belief that men could “attain salvation for ourselves”—a blasphemy in mainstream Christianity that denies the necessity of a savior (163). Surrealism may concur. The surrealists see God as a dehumanizing being, like corporations; to them, God is “a complex of ideas born of the subjugation of man to nature, strengthening this oppression and deadening the class struggle” (Vladimir Lenin, qtd. in Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* 329). The surrealist artist Max Ernst painted *The Blessed Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus*, wherein he depicts Mary spanking Jesus the child, whose halo has dropped to the ground. Hers remains intact (MichaelCullenArt). If, as the surrealists say, God is dehumanizing, then so must his son be, and claiming the ability to save oneself would be equivalent to revolutionary subversion. Thus, in a significant way, Yǒng-su’s response reflects surrealistic ideas.

In religious history, God appears to act on eternal laws of love and fairness. Babylon was destroyed because of a law that the wicked (read: loveless?) are punished—and this destruction is a type of what Isaiah prophesies will occur in what Christians call the Second Coming: “... I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible” (*King James Bible*, Isa. 13.11). However, in Cho’s world, it seems that loveless people are not punished, but rewarded not only with money but also with respect and comfort. Thus, implicit in the title of this story, Yǒng-su not only blames the state for failing to inflict punishment on the factory owners who use and abuse workers for their own monetary gain, but also blames God, whom John called love, for not inflicting punishment on these wicked, loveless people himself (1 Jn. 4.8).

Fascism

The Dwarf depicts a society with fascist trappings. In both the novel and postwar Korean history corporations can be seen as elements of a fascist-leaning state controlled by Park Chung Hee. Leading the country under various titles from 1961 to 1979, Park is considered on the one hand to be responsible to a large degree for South Korea's economic development, but on the other hand to have suppressed individual rights in the name of economic progress. Whether he should be called a fascist is debatable. Chin writes,

If fascism has indeed ever existed in any real form in Korea, it can only have begun under the Park Chung-hee regime, but it would certainly be irrational to attempt to characterize the entire period from May 1961 to October 1979 as fascist. ... Given his educational background and mindset, it is evident that he was a fascist, whereas the actual conduct of his regime was clearly influenced by American liberal democratic principles, in conjunction with Japanese-style fascism (302).

As surrealism responds to fascism,⁴⁸ then it is worth hypothesizing that the Park regime exhibited fascist characteristics⁴⁹ and Cho's novel responds to that regime in a surrealist manner.

Elements of fascism emerge in Cho's stories insofar as the hand of government does not intervene to protect the rights of the factory workers. That is to say, government passivity with respect to workers' rights seems to reflect the government's fascist leanings. The strongest example of this is the ineffectiveness of labor unions in the press or in Ŭngang. When the dwarf's sons, along with the other workers, "stopped work together and decided to negotiate with the president ...", the two sons are the only ones who persist, and the company fires and blacklists them (71). Later, while working at Ŭngang, Yōng-su

⁴⁸ Recall from my Introduction the following of Eburne's statements, which suggests a link between surrealism and fascism: "During the 1930s and 1940s, surrealist groups emerged in other cities threatened by fascism—particularly Prague, Bucharest, Tokyo, and London" (1379). It is also worth recalling Breton's statement, mentioned in my Introduction, that fascism is "... a frightful disease, a disease inevitably followed by denial of all rights" (*What Is Surrealism?* 114).

⁴⁹ D. Baker writes, "Under such an oversimplified definition of fascism ["... Fascism tells us that there are no real conflicts of interest in society, that if we all work together harmoniously, everyone will benefit though not all will reap equal benefits (just as in a family, the favorite metaphor for the state for Fascists)."], Park Chunghee was a fascist. However, he doesn't fit the full definition of a fascist, which is someone who promotes respect for an authoritarian leader as a father-like figure and also uses racism to create an us-vs-them mentality. So I put quotation marks around 'Fascism' when I apply it to Park Chunghee. He was closer to Fascism than he was to Democracy or Communism" (personal communication, August 3, 2012).

participates in union activities and “raised the questions of pay, vacation, and reinstatement of workers dismissed without just cause,” but the company does not work with him; what’s more, they “tramp[ed] on the efforts of trade union members to hold peaceful elections of union representatives and officials ... ” (197). Despite Yōng-su’s efforts to effect improvement in workplace conditions, in both instances his employers not only prevent most, if not all of the changes he asks for, but in certainly the first case, they fire him. Unfair, yes, but was it legal at the time? The history of recent developments in international human rights definitions suggests that it was not, thus indicating a government failure to protect the rights of its citizens, which in turn suggests government-corporation cronyism and corruption at the expense of human laborers.

Indeed, the corporations/companies in the novel exhibit the fascist attitude that labor unions are unnecessary in the first place. D. Baker explains that fascist ideology tells us “there are no real conflicts of interest in society, that if we all work together harmoniously, everyone will benefit though not all will reap equal benefits” Without conflicts of interest, Baker continues, labor unions are extraneous, and indeed “according to Fascists, anyone who claims there is a real conflict of interest between employees and employers is inventing conflicts of interest just to cause trouble or gain power ... ” (personal communication, August 3, 2012). These attitudes are reflected in employers’ statements in meetings with labor unions in “The Fault Lies with God as Well.” One employer says to Yōng-i, a union leader, “Union Steward, I’ll bet you believe the relationship between employers and laborers is completely adversarial.” When the leader confirms the statement, the employer continues, saying, “That’s a mistaken perception. If business goes well, then the people who benefit are you laborers” (154). The mindset is evident—like a fascist dictator, the employer believes that (1) there is no real conflict of interest (“If business goes well ... ”) and (2) claims of misconduct are no more than trouble-making (“I’ll bet you believe ... ”). The government becomes complicit with the mistreatment when nothing is done about workers being fired without cause (assuming, that is, that they have a responsibility to take an active role in ensuring that labor rights are upheld), Yōng-ho gets beaten up by men who presumably work for the corporation, and “ ... Yōng-i, the steward of our union local, [is] taken away for a week to some unknown place for questioning” (172). It is not unreasonable to assume that if these characters felt that the government would fight for

their rights, they would have reported the company to the police or to government investigators. That they do not report mistreatment suggests that they do not trust the government or are unaware of its enforcing duty.

A fascist-leaning government is also evident when the people of Ŭngang find themselves unable to protest pollution and poor conditions in their town. Again, the absence of government suggests its complicity with the corporation's misdeeds. In "On the Footbridge" a critique of the government by Shin-ae's brother and his friend when they are in college is obstructed at least in part, perhaps, by fear of negative repercussions to them.⁵⁰ One of the reasons that the editor of the school newspaper cites for his refusal to print their "opposing viewpoint" is that they are inciting "chaos" (95). There are two likely explanations for this: either the editor works in some way for the government, representing a government-controlled student press, and/or the editor is afraid that if the students speak out, they (and perhaps he) will be persecuted by the government—another type of government control. Cho also writes, "It was the time when demonstrations—the only way the students could express their views—first became subject to suppression by a well-trained organization and the new machinery of oppression. Some of us have conveniently forgotten, but, yes, there was such a period, a period we lived through" (94). Perhaps forgetting, whether consciously or subconsciously, is a survival mechanism that in a way absolves them of any legal guilt of involvement in protesting for human rights, as well as the moral responsibility to continue to protest. Either way, it is significant that Cho is not more explicit about government-economic ties or the lack of governmental protection on behalf of workers. These stories were published at the tail end of the Park regime. As such, Cho may have been risking his life and livelihood by publishing the novel in the first place, and as such may have had to be subversive in any commentary critical of the dictatorship.⁵¹ Certainly, subversion is a characteristic of surrealist art.

⁵⁰ For example, the professor says to the two students: "[Y]ou shouldn't resent me for keeping it out of print; instead you ought to be thankful. Print this and nothing would come of it" (95).

⁵¹ Another example of political subversion is Shin-ae's brother's observations about "the bronze statue of Admiral Yi Sun-shin propping up the oppressive sky of this stifling city. . . . Cunning posterity was torturing the admiral by setting him there in the midst of traffic exhaust," Cho writes (94). This statue—if it indeed refers to a statue of the same likeness in Seoul—was erected in 1968, near the middle of Park's presidency, and for Cho to call, in a way, the president of the country "cunning" (as he must have had some role in the statue's placement), the sky above his nation "oppressive," and his nation's capital city "stifling" could but subversively undermine the latter's leadership.

Other references to fascism appear in Cho's work. For example, Cho does not explicitly state why Chi-sŏp was expelled from his law studies at the most prestigious university in the land, but considering his subsequent heavy involvement in labor affairs, the reader can but wonder if it was his involvement or concern with labor politics that led to poor relations with the police and/or a university leadership closely linked to the government. Also, when politicians on the campaign trail arrive at Felicity Precinct in "A Little Ball," they promise improvements to the area, but whether such improvements address the needs of the residents is another matter. In the end, the slum area in this precinct is razed and new apartments for wealthier residents are built in their stead. Again, the reader can but wonder if these politicians had been unfairly influenced by corporations, and if so, what does that say about government-corporate ties?

Moreover, the corporations themselves can be seen as examples of fascist power structures as they put corporate allies in union posts, establish churches controlled by the corporation, and even play parental roles in the workers' lives. "[T]he full definition of a fascist, ..." in addition to the aforementioned, "is someone who promotes respect for an authoritarian leader as a father-like figure and also uses racism to create an us-vs-them mentality" (D. Baker, personal communication, August 3, 2012). That the sort of paternalistic attitude mentioned above exists in the corporation is suggested by parallel dialogues between 1) employers and workers, and 2) the dwarf/his wife and their children in "The Fault Lies with God as Well." These conversations do not occur at the same time, but Cho presumably urges us to compare them by placing them side-by-side in the narrative. For example, both parents/employers take the opportunity to teach their children/workers about responsibility. Cho writes the dialogue thus:

Mother: When you children do something wrong, Father has to take responsibility.

Yŏng-hŭi: Until when?

Mother: Until you children are grown-up.

Employer 1: "In the future, if there's some incident, all of you will have to take responsibility."

Mother: And when you're grown-up you'll have to take responsibility yourselves for what you do. (154)

In both cases, those being spoken to are treated as children. In the first, they are rightfully treated as children by the parents. In the second case, they are spoken to as children by their employers, whereas they may all be considered adults because of their employment status.

Revolution

The surrealist response to the reduction of humans to market values is revolution against those in power and against the status quo. Likewise, every story in Cho's novel, if not depicting manipulation or disempowerment, shows a disempowered person seeking to (re)gain his/her human rights through revolution. In surrealism, revolutionary methods are violent, based in love, and informed by knowledge/skepticism. I discuss these characteristics, as they pertain to surrealist theory, throughout the thesis, but primarily in this chapter.

Surrealistic revolutions in art and politics are violent. Rosemont writes that "With the decline of capitalist society, as Trotsky noted, the new artistic tendencies assume an ever more violent character. And with surrealism, of course, this violence reaches its absolute point ...⁵²" (14). The surrealist response to fascism is characteristically violent; Breton says that fascism

seeks to obtain ["lasting resignation"] from those who suffer. Is not the evident role of fascism to re-establish for the time being the tottering supremacy of finance capital? Such a role is of itself sufficient to make it deserving of all our hatred. We continue to consider this feigned resignation as one of the greatest evils that can be inflicted on beings of our kind; and those who would inflict it deserve, in our opinion, to be beaten like dogs.
(*What Is Surrealism?* 115)

Violence is evident in the surrealists' hatred and in the statement that those guilty of bullying the disempowered deserve physical punishment.

True to its surrealist tendencies, revolution in *The Dwarf* is often violent. Ideologically, this is represented in Yōng-su's personal notes from his study. He writes, "What is violence? Violence is not just bullets, nightsticks, and fists. It is also neglect of the nursing babies who are starving in the nooks and crannies of our city" (67). Here, violence is

⁵² This ellipsis exists in Rosemont's text.

social injustice that descends upon the poorer classes. Yǒng-su writes more, saying, “A nation without dissenters is a disaster. Who is bold enough to try and establish order based on violence?” (67). Dissent and violence, in any case, are the stuff of revolutions.

The novel abounds with instances of violent revolution. One example is Yǒng-su’s killing the brother of the owner of the factories that exploit the work of himself, his family, and many others. Of their work situation Yǒng-su tells Yun-ho, “Everything’s one-sided. Nothing goes according to the law. All we do is lose” (127). In killing the owner, the dwarf’s son was trying to secure his and other workers’ rights, however, he kills the owner’s brother, mistaking him for the owner. Yǒng-su’s actions make him a surrealist hero by Matthews’ characterization above.⁵³ The dwarf’s son receives the death penalty, but the novel’s open ending and history itself suggest that revolutionary actions like his would be perhaps somewhat successful—laws protecting laborers were established and began to be enforced, and what’s more, Park Chung Hee was assassinated. Less than ten years later, democratic rule was established in the state. Another example of violent revolution occurs when Shin-ae almost kills a man because she is upset with him for beating up the dwarf who would fix her water pump/faucet. By hiring the dwarf Shin-ae is able to get her water before everyone else, and this ability represents an acquisition of power.

Other examples of violent revolution include two disabled men in “The Möbius Strip” killing a real-estate speculator who made more than a 100% profit off of them by buying their houses cheap and selling the land for more, and Yǒng-hŭi drugging and robbing the man who took advantage of her family and of her body in “A Little Ball.” These examples show characters committing violent acts against those who participate in unfair (violent) systems that take advantage of them. Obviously, each of these violent acts was preceded by another act of mental, spiritual, or physical violence against the final actors—thus, what Cho depicts here is not unprovoked violence, but vindictive, revolutionary violence against former aggressors.

Each of the characters who commit violent acts feels a sense of entitlement or validation because of the injustices he or she has suffered. A sense of reason or an unwritten system of justice seems to undergird the revolution in the novel. The violence here isn’t

⁵³ See the subsection “Surrealist Novels?” in my Introduction for Matthews’ discussion of the surrealist hero.

anarchistic.⁵⁴ Testifying at his murder trial, Yǒng-su explains that “some people had gotten worked up and gone to the Weaving Section intending to damage the machines,” and he “ran there and stopped them” from doing so; additionally, he decided against building a bomb to kill the owner of the corporation because of the possibility that “innocent people would be injured” (195). Speaking as a witness, Chi-sǒp says, “Destruction of anything is bad. And to destroy expensive machinery would be out of the question” (202). A sense of destruction for destruction’s sake, or destruction for art’s sake, was not behind their actions. Chi-sǒp and Yǒng-su’s ideal was “based on love” (203). By killing the corporate executive, Yǒng-su sought to awaken executives to the human presence that made their factories run—and thus, presumably, improve the workers’ lives.

As in *The Dwarf*, proletarian attitudes towards justice and fairness in surrealism are informed by love. Romanian surrealists Gherasim Luca and D. Trost write, “Objective hazard [objective chance] leads us to see love as the general revolutionary method, specific to surrealism.” Love in *The Dwarf* stems from the ideology of the dwarf himself. Of his father, Yǒng-su says, “Father was a warm man, though. He held out hope for love” (142). In the dwarf’s idea of a perfect society, love rules. There, as Yǒng-su describes,

Those who accumulated excessive wealth would be officially recognized as having lost their love for others, and the homes of these loveless families would be screened off from sunshine, blocked from breezes, cut off from electricity, and disconnected from water lines. Flowers and trees do not grow in the yards of such homes. Neither bees nor butterflies fly there. In the world of Father’s dreams the only thing that was enforced was love. People would work with love, raise their children with love. Love would make the rain fall, love would lead to equilibrium, love would make the wind blow and make it come to rest, even on the small stems of buttercups. . . . In the world of Father’s dreams, they passed laws. I did away with those laws. My idea was to use education as a means for everyone to possess a noble love. (142)

⁵⁴ Note that Hopkins associated anarchism with Dadaism and not surrealism. He writes, “ . . . subtle and significant differences existed between [Dadaism and Surrealism]. Dada was largely anarchic in spirit. The people who held it together, however tenuously – namely Ball, Huelsenbeck, Tzara and Picabia – were highly ambivalent about what they were doing, just as Dada was defined by them as simultaneously affirmative and destructive. By contrast, Surrealism, impelled by the organizational proclivities of André Breton, was much more of a ‘movement’ in the sense that the word implies direction” (28).

Thus we see that to these people, love represents fairness and equality, and those lacking this trait deserve to suffer. Of a group of loveless people, Yǒng-su says, the Ŭngang employers “disliked saintly people, those who epitomized love and sacrifice” (163). His motive for killing the corporate executive is because “That gentleman [the corporate executive] did not think about human beings” (198). Notably, Yǒng-su’s foil is the nephew of the murdered executive, who seems ignorant of love, fairness, and equality. “People’s love saddened me,” he says, thinking of the fate of Yǒng-su, Yǒng-su’s family, and the workers (208). Depending on how it’s interpreted, this could be a redeeming thought for the character. However, he evidences his corruption when he decides to conceal that love in favor of seeking a place in his father’s company. “Love would gain me nothing,” he says (208). In this statement that represents corporate indifference, Cho seems to justify the worker’s revolution.

Awareness of societal conditions and human rights plays a large role in the novel’s surrealist revolution(s). Knowledge and skepticism are twin terrors for the status quo. Breton writes, “It is only when the proletariat have become aware of the myths on which capitalist culture depends, when they have become aware of what these myths and this culture mean for them and have destroyed them, that they will be able to proceed to their own proper development” (*What Is Surrealism?* 140). In the novel this awareness extends to the “bourgeoisie”—to those in the upper echelons of the corporate power structure. One of the wealthy characters in the novel, the son of the man killed, says to his cousin, “You ought to believe what [the dwarf’s son] said in court. I know what kind of work Father was helping Uncle with” (192). In other words, the speaker here is skeptical of his father’s innocence—a skepticism born of knowledge about the injustices that occurred in the factories his late father helped to run. It is as if he is absolving Yǒng-su of a measure of his guilt, in a way legitimizing the revolutionary act. Likewise, the factory workers’ conviction that they were not being paid commensurate to their work led to skepticism of the management. Yǒng-su speaks of the power that presumably resulted from situations like this, saying, “Management didn’t know that the young workers, though they didn’t demonstrate when they were anxious to have something, were sprouting into something new. . . . If pressed to explain, I would call it a kind of power—a power that is completely skeptical of authority” (147). Indeed, this is the same Yǒng-su who, having read and learned as much as he did about things like labor

law, “had a desire to effect a revolution—starting in the minds of the people who worked in Ŭngang” (146). Thus, it is evident that knowledge/skepticism is a prerequisite for revolution.

Fear may prevent knowledge-seeking and skepticism. Yŏng-su narrates, saying that “the ministers at regular churches made use of fear. The minister at the workers’ church was different” (148). He provided books for Yŏng-su and “emphasized that fear was our greatest enemy” (147). It was this minister who helped Yŏng-su learn about unions, to understand the mechanisms for injustice, and to seek to correct those injustices. Fear is employed to maintain the status quo and prevent oppressed classes from revolting against unfair situations. On the other hand, those who cease to fear, like Yŏng-su, Chi-sŏp, Shin-ae, Yŏng-i, Squatlegs, and Humpback, act against oppressive mechanisms despite possible legal or other (such as physical abuse or being blacklisted) retribution.

Literary Surrealism

The Dwarf employs many surrealistic literary elements, and they frequently complement the political surrealism just discussed.

Dreams

Cho describes several of his characters’ dreams, and these appear to illustrate convergent truths theretofore unbeknownst to and misunderstood by the characters. This is suggestive of concern with the subconscious, which is certainly also a surrealist concern.

I will focus on four dreams of apparent significance in *The Dwarf*: (1) the dwarf’s dream (not necessarily a sleeping dream, but more his hope/desire) of life on the moon,⁵⁵ (2) Yŏng-hŭi’s dream of her mother’s response to her affair, (3) Yŏng-su’s dream of a shrinking father, and (4) the dream of the son of the Ŭngang CEO of hostile fish. First, the dwarf’s dream is to live on the moon, where his “job is to keep an eye on the telescope lens” at an observatory (74). Though there could be many possible interpretations for the cause of this dream, two that stand out are (1) the dwarf is delusional amidst the trials of life, or (2) his dreams are a method of escape from his oppressive world. The dwarf’s conception of this lunar world appears to have emerged from talking with Chi-sŏp and the latter’s book *The*

⁵⁵ The three other dreams listed here are presumably had during sleep.

World Ten Thousand Years From Now. The ideas in the book seem to offer the impoverished, oppressed man a new life in an unearthly place; as such, the book could be a metaphor for religious scripture. Chi-söp's talk of another world in the distant future, then, represents religious claims of salvation and new life. Like religious claims may, the dwarf's delusion seems to provide him with hope for a better future and freedom from present suffering. When discussing the meaning of symbols in *The Dwarf*, Pihl writes, "space astronauts, and the moon are symbolically linked to the realization of an ideal world ... " (343).⁵⁶ Perhaps Cho is suggesting through the dwarf's dream the ridiculousness of religion and the futility of religious belief in that it was unable to help him thrive or even survive for long in a cruel, dehumanizing society.

Another significant "dream"⁵⁷ is that of Yöng-hüi in "A Little Ball" when she is with the man from whom she sought her family's occupancy rights—and with whom she acquiesces in a sexual relationship in order to retrieve those rights. She dreams of her mother's response to that affair. In the dream, after her mother compares Yöng-hüi to a great-great-aunt who as a slave slept with her master, Yöng-hüi says she's different and that she likes it. "You go to hell!" her mother shouts in response (83). Is Yöng-hüi glad to break free from the misery of her destitute childhood, is this a case of teenage rebellion, or is it something else? And why does she squirm when she wakes? Is it because she is afraid of her mother's judgment or does she fear that what her mother has said is true—and perhaps worse in her mind, that she actually likes it? In any case, Cho's including the dream suggests that understanding it may be important in understanding Yöng-hüi's motives and psyche. From a societal standpoint, it may illustrate the emergence of a new moral attitude that allows premarital sex, but it also indicates that such an attitude may leave those who espouse it with lingering fear and self-loathing. Certainly, the dream lends itself to a psychological reading.

Yöng-su also has a queer dream that begs for interpretation, from the story "The Cost of Living." Yöng-su seems overwhelmed about his father's death,⁵⁸ at which point the narrative shifts to thoughts of his father's suffering and his height and weight, and then to a

⁵⁶ Pihl discusses other symbols in his paper and refers the reader to O Se-young for further analysis (343). At least two of these are also relevant to this section on dreams—he says that "nets and fish bespeak entrepreneurs and laborers ... " (This relates directly to my discussion of the dream from the "Spinyfish" story below.) (343).

⁵⁷ Yöng-hüi says when she had this dream-like conversation with her mother she was "Half asleep ... " (82).

⁵⁸ Narrating, Yöng-su says, "When I thought about the deep, pitch-black interior of the brick factory smokestack, I felt a choking sensation" (130). His father presumably committed suicide by jumping off that smokestack.

dream of his father that he often had “during [his] early days at Ŭngang” (130). In the dream, his father is less than half his normal size. After dragging “A copper spoon coated with blue tarnish” in the summer heat, his father tires, climbs into the bowl of the spoon, falls asleep, and, presumably dead, shrinks. In response, Yŏng-su grabs the spoon and shakes it, trying to wake his father. Immediately following the dream, Cho writes into the mother’s speech an interpretation—that the dream is a result of Yŏng-su’s worrying about his responsibility as the man of the family in the wake of his father’s death (130). She also suggests that though he was unaware of these thoughts, they are not new to him (131). One possible interpretation is: the father’s dwarfed stature shows how significant the awareness of the dwarf’s height had become to Yŏng-su. The copper spoon represents the dwarf’s plumbing tools, and as he labored with such effort in an unwelcoming society, so he labors in the heat of the sun, dragging the spoon (his tools) around. In the end, his labors have worn him out, and he dies cradled by the spoon—here perhaps also representing the metal machines of factory industrialization. Yŏng-su, saddened by his father’s death and afraid to take over as household head, tries to wake his father, but to no avail. The image of the dwarf’s body shrinking in the copper spoon may also represent the diminishing influence of the love he dreamed of in the new industrial order.

And finally, another compelling dream is that of the son of the corporate owner in the “Spinyfish” story. In the dream, while fishing, he descends into the water to observe his catch. Instead of seeing fat fish, he sees big-spine fish that attack him with phosphorescent rays, and “every time the spines touched me my skin was torn open. I woke up screaming for help, in pain from being torn to shreds,” he narrates (208). One obvious interpretation of this dream is that it represents his fear that the company workers will revolt, who like the big-spine fish could tear him apart. The rays with which the fish attack him could merely be his mind’s utilization of the tactile sensation or visual awareness of the sun striking his body through a window, but it’s also ironic, considering that in the dwarf’s ideal world, “the homes of those loveless people [“who accumulated excessive wealth”] would be screened off from the sunshine . . . ” (157-8). To add to the irony, later in an automatic writing-type paragraph of over two pages,⁵⁹ the son expresses his opinions of love, mentioned above in

⁵⁹ See my discussion of automatic writing in *The Dwarf* below. There I mention that several times Cho writes a pages-long paragraph of more-or-less continuous thought and observation. This paragraph is such a time. I

this paper: 1) “People’s love saddened me” and 2) “Love would gain me nothing”—to him, it was a weakness (208). If he accepts this interpretation of his dream, the character would find himself in a difficult situation; if he pursues the life he desires in the company, he may suffer revolution at the hand of the workers (big-spine fish) and their love-based revolution (phosphorescent rays), much like his uncle did.

Surrealist Metaphors

In addition to dreams, striking metaphors also greatly shape *The Dwarf*. These metaphors often illustrate the convergence of dual realities in surrealist ideology itself and parallel concepts in Korean society. These include the Möbius strip and the Klein bottle—two representations of dual realities converging in an unprecedented manner. “Mathematical surface models provided ideal material for the Surrealists,” writes an author of The Science Museum (“Strange Surfaces”). These two examples are just that—mathematical models. In fact, M.C. Escher, an artist often associated with the surrealist movement, created two works involving the Möbius concept, titled “Möbius Strip I” and “Möbius Strip II.”

In the “The Möbius Strip,” the first story of *The Dwarf*, a mathematics teacher describes how to form this model: cut out a strip of paper, twist it once, and then paste it together. Then, he says, “you can no longer distinguish inner from outer [surfaces]” (2). Similar to the Möbius strip, the Klein bottle has, as the man of science explains to Yöng-su, “No inside or outside, and it has a closed space” (176). It is “formed by making a hole in the wall of a tube and passing one end of the tube through that hole” (175). On the one hand, these two models may represent the dual, co-existing realities that constitute surreality. Of these realities, Breton writes that surrealists

have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming *one*. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction (and in this contradiction we see the

consider this an “automatic-writing *type* paragraph” (along with the other examples) because Cho’s writing here is likely very prepared and polished, while one will recall Ades and Gale’s statement from my Introduction that automatic writing “precluded any preconceived subject or style (syntax, grammar, correction etc [*sic*]), to facilitate the flow of images from the subconscious” (Ades and Gale). Cho is perhaps mimicking the natural flow of thought here.

very cause of man's unhappiness, but also the source of his movement), we have assigned ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion ... for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same. (*What Is Surrealism?* 116)⁶⁰

Thus producing, or at least first conceptualizing, the Möbius strip and the Klein bottle represent conceptualizing the cause of man's psychological suffering and the solution to it. In other words, when man learns to join his conscious and subconscious, a process prohibited by his reduction by market forces, a demeaning god, fascism, etc., like the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle, the two realities of his existence will be joined. This dual-reality concept explains the mathematics professor's riddle of two chimney sweeps in "The Möbius Strip": the two logical explanations students presented are wrong because the occurrence is impossible in the first place. At this moment, the reader must understand that Cho expects him to suspend any previous conceptions of reality as he encounters Cho's depiction of Korean society amidst rapid industrialization.

Kim Yun-sik's interpretation is relevant. Kim says (paraphrased by Pihl) that "the Möbius band and Klein bottle symbolically contradict the assumption that there are discrete boundaries in society, and at the same time, assert a seamless totality embracing all classes, rich and poor, urban and rural, mainstream and marginal." Proletariat revolution could be read in the suggestion that the symbols "assert a ... totality embracing all classes" (343).

Introducing these two models, Cho draws stark but not altogether clear parallels to contemporary Korean society. He intimates the existence of realities beyond one's original perception. The first of these is the suggestion that the narrative offered in public schools (and thus, presumably, from the government) is flawed. "I've tried to teach you according to the standard curriculum, but I've also tried to teach you to see things correctly," the mathematics professor says to his students in "The Möbius Strip" (12). Then, as a seeming non-sequitur, the narrative jumps to two dwarves who kill a corporate man who cheated them of their money. Perhaps the Möbius strip is a cue for the reader to consider the presumed legitimacy of surrealist revolution, that if market forces cause dehumanization, the humans involved are justified in destroying those market forces in order to restore their humanity.

⁶⁰ In several places in this thesis I refer to interior/exterior reality and internal/external reality. I was perhaps referring to this quote by Breton in some or all of these, but I have not necessarily explicitly cited him in all such cases.

Exterior reality may be the thriving economy, with interior reality the suffering, used, and oppressed societal class, and a complete picture emerges wherein these two ideas connect: oppression and suffering amongst the exploited, lower class(es) in particular result from greedy corporatists building a strong economy. And like conjoined ends of a Möbius strip, leading to an infinite loop, Squatlegs, a victim of the market-driven system, laments, in tears, “Another long night—when would it end?” (12).

Likewise, discussion of the Klein bottle does not stand alone, but is buttressed on either side by discussions of labor activism. In “The Klein Bottle,” after Chi-söp delivers a lecture to Ŭngang laborers, presumably about labor activism for better working conditions, the man of science introduces the Klein bottle to Yöng-su. First, Cho’s description of the incident is surrealist: the man of science explains that one’s level of education does not affect one’s ability to understand the concept, and to Yöng-su, the bottle “was right there before [his] eyes, but its reality was ignored and it seemed to exist only in the world of imagination,” illustrating proletariat power and intellectual worth in the first instance and surrealist dualities in the second (176). Meanwhile, “[e]veryone grew weaker” in the factory town and the dwarf’s wife has a nightmare of her son’s future actions and fate that comes true by the end of the novel (177). That this nightmare becomes reality is perhaps suggestive of the surrealist belief in the power of dream and the surrealist goal of joining exterior and interior reality. After a fruitless meeting about labor reform with company managers, Yöng-su sees the Klein bottle and realizes its meaning, saying, “If you just follow the wall, you can get out. So in this world the notion of enclosure itself is an illusion” (178). The factory workers feel isolated, enclosed, and without option—either they stick with their jobs, watch their rights and health diminish, and suffer, or they leave the factory and die of starvation from unemployment. It’s a catch-22. However, there is a solution, perhaps realized in dream: kill the company managers. Effect violent revolution to restore the rule of love, fairness, and equality. Thus, understanding of society parallels understanding of the bottle.

Manipulation of Time and Place; Elements of Absurdity

Other elements of the novel that are suggestive of surrealism are Cho's manipulation of time and space and elements of absurdity.⁶¹

There are several references to space travel in *The Dwarf*. For example, in "Epilogue," the mathematics teacher tells his students, "I've decided to leave on a space voyage for a small planet you gentlemen haven't heard of" (218). Earlier, in "Space Travel," Cho writes, "Later Chi-söp had said he'd met beings from outer space over there" "in the slum across the sewer creek" (37). As mentioned before, the dwarf dreams of going to the moon. Yun-ho tells Ŭn-hŭi in "Space Travel" that she failed the college entrance exam because "An alien came. Stole your answer sheet" (41). These suggestions are quite absurd. In reality, every thought or image our conscious and unconscious minds produce may not necessarily mean anything, but in art, including literature, these thoughts—sometimes absurd—are often intended to signify something—especially for the surrealists. In the world Cho creates in *The Dwarf*, these absurdities may perhaps be attributable to the workings of the characters' subconscious minds. One possible explanation for why the mathematics teacher, Chi-söp, the dwarf, and Yun-ho concern themselves with space travel aligns with something one student overheard, that "sightings of aliens or flying saucers are a defense mechanism appearing at a moment of societal stress" (219). To this, the professor essentially says: I'm serious; there really are aliens. In the explanation provided by this student, the aliens represent subconscious creations of the human mind, stressed perhaps due to such reasons as societal oppression and poor health, too-rapid industrialization, or failing the college entrance exam.

Nevertheless, there are other possibilities to the meaning or purpose of these aliens in the narrative aside from what has already been discussed. One is that the aliens symbolize the oppressed, suffering classes stigmatized by their genealogy of servitude, their height, revolutionary ideas, economic status, or other differences. The juxtaposition of alien and human reinforces the surrealist idea of market values-based dehumanization of the working class as it emphasizes their non-humanness. Cho suggests this metaphor when he says that Chi-söp met aliens ("beings from outer space") around the squatters' homes (37). Other

⁶¹ I discuss both of these ideas in relation to surrealism in my Introduction.

possibilities of meaning for Cho's absurd statements include that they represent meaningless, passing thoughts or madness.

Along with such absurdities, Cho manipulates time and space in his stories, which creates a sense of dreaming or magic-making. The manipulation can be said to be surrealist. Perhaps speaking of surreal states, Aragon, in *Une vague de rêves*, writes that "there are other relations besides reality, which the mind is capable of grasping and which also are primary, like chance, illusion, the fantastic, the dream. These various groups are united and brought into harmony in one single order, surreality" (qtd. in Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* 126). As was aforementioned, Cho's narrative more than once includes several dialogues presented in the same narrative space, as if they occur concurrently, but in fact the dialogues take place at different times and different places. As was previously discussed, the placement of these dialogues in the same place in stories lends itself to analysis of Cho's motivation for doing so, thereby linking stories and ideas and, in essence, offering new insights.

Cho manipulates time and space in other ways that contribute to a dream-like effect. For example, in "A Little Ball," as the dwarf and Yǒng-su sit in a rowboat in the sewer creek by their house, the dwarf reminds Yǒng-su of an event that took place over three years ago, though the dwarf claims that the event was the day before. "There was nothing I could say," Yǒng-su narrates. "It was three and a half years previous, and not the day before, when we had met the hunchback, but Father wouldn't have believed me had I told him this now" (61). The setting is at night, in the cold, and winter approaches. All of these factors contribute to the feeling of dream: the late time suggests preparation for sleep, the cold a slowing of life processes characteristic of sleep, and winter itself is a symbol of the sleep state, wherein dreams occur. Then, in the same story, the next section begins *en media res* with Yǒng-ho narrating, saying, "I lay in the grass near the bank of the sewer creek." He has just woken up—again, suggesting sleep and dream, a suggestion enhanced by the boy's statement of an absurd rumor that "aliens had taken Yǒng-hŭi away in a flying saucer ...". Also absurd is the boy's response to the suggestion; he says, "From the beginning I had put no stock in it" (63). Why would he have put stock in it in the first place? The blend of dreaming, absurdity, shifts of narrative voice, and manipulation of space and time are all suggestive of surrealism.

Automatic Writing

Another source of material for surrealist analysis is automatic writing. Rosemont defines automatic writing or automatism as “writing in the absence of conscious control, utilized in surrealism to express the ‘real functioning of thought’” (Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* 360; quoting Breton). Cho sometimes depicts his characters in the midst of such automatic-type thought.⁶² At least twice these thought cascades are written in a single paragraph that extends for pages at a time. In one, the son of the company executive describes his response to observing Chi-söp testify in court. He begins with a lament about stoics, narrates Chi-söp’s ascent to the witness stand, suspects that Chi-söp is a master criminal, notes Chi-söp’s physical features, closes his eyes where he sees an assortment of seemingly unrelated, spontaneous images (“The color of a lake, hot sun, trees and grass, a breeze blowing through them, a motorboat cleaving the lake, skiing on a lawn, a girl with strange proclivities, a delicious nap ...”), shares insights from studies in economic history, returns to narrating the courtroom drama, repeats what Chi-söp’s is saying on the stand, shares his response, and continues narrating courtroom events and dialogue (199). The paragraph extends almost 2.5 pages. This type of narration—especially the moment when he closes his eyes and various images appear—is fodder for surrealist analysis of subconscious realities. To them, it represents unedited thought, and analysis of those thoughts will open a window into an interior reality.

A particularly compelling automatic-type narration is Yöng-hüi’s description of what comes to mind when she “think[s] of death” She says, “ ... I stand naked. My legs are slightly spread, my arms drawn close to me. My head is lowered halfway and my hair covers my chest. If I close my eyes and count to ten my outline fades and disappears. All that remains is the windy gray horizon.” She imagines her old home and her family; all are gray, and as she thinks of them she thinks of the Ancient Mariner who “had lost his boat and was afloat on the sea” (79). Her description suggests the following:

⁶² Note the difference between automatic writing and stream-of-consciousness writing. The former supposedly allows the writer “to bypass the conscious mind and tap into the unconscious.” The latter “comes from the conscious thoughts of the writer, but is untempered by constraints of style, structure, and punctuation” (“Stream of consciousness”). Here, Cho maintains elements of style, but seems to follow thoughts and uninterrupted images, etc. Whether they represent one, the other, neither, or both types of writing remains a bit unclear.

1. Embarrassment at her leaving home to live with a man. Source: she pictures herself standing naked on the horizon with her legs slightly spread, indicative of the sex act. She draws her arms close, perhaps in fear, and covers herself, as someone ashamed of nakedness would.
2. Lack of self-worth. Source: when Yǒng-hŭi counts to ten, she disappears without a trace. There is no eternal soul remaining after death, no gravestone or tears shed by loved ones. Only nothingness. This may be related to or result from the first point.
3. Her family is powerless and overwhelmed by their low socio-economic status in society. Source: they and their house are “gray-coated,” suggesting social anonymity by the muted color and also perhaps suggesting, along with “the windy gray horizon,” the trials of a storm (79). They speak so softly nobody can hear, suggesting that whatever their news or complaint, it falls on deaf ears. Their Mother looks up to a gray sky, suggesting that fate or religion have no deliverance for them.
4. She is wiser, having suffered much and having made many mistakes, including, perhaps, inflicting suffering on her family. Source: she compares herself to the Ancient Mariner, who suffers great tribulation after shooting an albatross. His crew perishes at sea.

Additionally, in light of the novel’s political undertones of revolution against capitalist reduction of humans to market values, Yǒng-hŭi could even be seen as a type of her family or of her socio-economic class—ravaged and invisible in their exploitation, but wiser from their experiences. Thus, the automatic-style writing here echoes surrealism’s revolutionary message in Cho’s novel.

Narrative Structure

The Dwarf is a linked-story novel.⁶³ They write, “The twelve stories are written in a lean, clipped style that features abrupt shifts of scene, time, and viewpoint” (222). Pihl compares the form of *The Dwarf* to types of film shots when he writes,

Dealing with several sets of characters who lead parallel and sometimes intersecting or colliding lives, he [Cho] creates the cinematic shock effect of a

⁶³ The Fultons define a linked-story novel thus: “a collection of stories that can be read independently but are all linked by character, theme, and setting” (222).

split screen or jump-cut by juxtaposing bits and pieces of their contrasting realities and, by doing this without warning in contexts where the reader may be unprepared, he infuses the overall work with its fragmented and discontinuous quality. (344)⁶⁴

The linked-story form itself is metaphorically suggestive of Breton's surreality. Recall from footnote 14 Kwŏn's statement about *The Dwarf's* form: "[T]he shifting of the narrators' viewpoints and situations is in harmony with the linked-story format describing present-day reality and antireality using a unique sentence style" ("Late" 477). Though the words he uses are not quite surrealist, the meaning can be appropriated as such. Various characters, settings, and points of view come together to present a single vision of South Korea at the time; this is reminiscent of surrealism's desire to bring together the conscious and the subconscious into a single surreality.⁶⁵ Cho's presenting revolutionary themes in a choppy, jumbled narrative suggests that the surreality he depicts, like the narrative itself, is global—spaceless and timeless.⁶⁶ And again, there is something to be said of the fact that Park Chung Hee's led South Korea as a dictator when the stories in *The Dwarf* were being published (1975-8). This perhaps influenced him to hide a consistent revolutionary message amidst a jumble of stories.

Pihl adds to what was quoted above that Cho's form suits the content of the novel, "which mirrors, in a microcosm, the complexity of modern Korean society itself ..." and amidst the bleak aspects of modern Korean society, the protagonists "search for meaning and wholeness, for 'a world spiritually bonded together by love, a world in which love defines the value of life'" (quoting O Se-yeong). He then ties this idea to the Korean literary nationalism of the time, "which sought to recapture the harmonious totality of human life that was being so direly threatened" (344). Cho's form, which thus seems quite surrealist, corresponds to the equally surrealist goal of a society wherein all humans are liberated, both in body and mind.

⁶⁴ On the other hand, this is reminiscent of the Dada that Hopkins described. Recall that Hopkins wrote: "Dada ... often revelled in the chaos and the fragmentation of modern life ..." (xv).

⁶⁵ Recall from my Introduction Breton's statement to this effect: he says that he "believe[s] in the future resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of *surreality* so to speak" (*What Is Surrealism?* 126).

⁶⁶ This is different from, but perhaps inspired by what the Fultons suggest in the Afterword of their translation of *The Dwarf*. Speaking of the Klein bottle and the Möbius strip, they write, "This notion of interchangeability and the references to the history of science and space exploration" lead to a feeling that themes expressed in the novel are universal (223). Here, I attribute the sense of the universality of surreality to Cho's manipulative jumbling of space and time. Both may be true.

Literary Subversion

Political, religious, and societal subversion (the latter in Yōng-su's murder of the company executive, in various characters' participation in labor activism, etc.) in Cho's work have already been discussed. Generic subversion is also evident. For example, even as Breton uses photographs and pictures amidst the text of his work *Nadja*, Cho includes various non-narrative elements in his stories, such as a demolition notice, responses to a survey, a proof-of-demolition form, a diagram, and entries in a budget book. These essentially subvert the short story genre because they are not standard for narrative prose and yet they accomplish the same purpose of telling the story in a sense. Indeed, by reading the survey responses, the reader knows, perhaps even better than had Cho explained it in narrative prose, the reality of the workers' awareness level and dependence on the existing power structures to survive. One wonders whether an entire story could be told using only such non-narrative elements—and if so, whether it could still be called a story.

Finally, the narrative structure, with its “abrupt shifts of scene, time, and viewpoint,” both within individual stories and in the work as a whole, represent the same subversion of genre, undermining the perhaps more typical progression of a single, central story line (Fulton and Fulton 222). Indeed, Pihl, citing Kwōn Yōngmin, notes that Cho actually redefined the genre of linked-story novels, saying,

critics commonly refer to it [*The Dwarf*] as a *yeonjak soseol* [linked-story novel], hastening to add that Jo [Cho] has redefined the meaning of the term. Whereas this expression had previously been used to designate a collaborative work in which several writers contribute to the making of the whole, Jo Se-hui's [Cho Se-hŭi's] collection can be described as a series of loosely-connected but realistically-interrelated stories. (339)

Cho's lack of concern for pre-existing styles/modes makes him sound quite like Matthew's description of a surrealist, to whom “formal classifications are less important than the spirit which infuses the completed work” (73). It is not only the general structure, but also the style that subverts norms. Pihl writes that Cho's “lean and clipped style” differs from “the conventionally undulant prose of Korean writers in the generation immediately preceding

his” and that “it is a change in language and form that sets Jo [Cho] apart from the rest” (340-1).

Metafiction

Cho’s work at times employs metafiction, which implies authorial self-awareness. Pihl writes that Cho Se-hŭi, with “others of [his] generation, share a ‘point of view that sees fiction not as the presentation of a story but, rather, as the presentation of perception’” (337; citing Han Hyeong-gu). This sounds quite similar to Ristich’s statement about surrealist humor—that it is, to recall a quote from my Introduction, “an intuitive and implicit criticism of the mental process in its conventionality” (qtd. in Gershman 48).

Cho may as well be speaking about himself, his own work, and the risks he took under Park’s leadership when he wrote into the possibly corrupt university professor’s character in the story “On the Footbridge,” “It’s [the student activists’ article is] subversive. And you knew that when you wrote it, didn’t you?” to which one of the two students responds, “What kind of writing is *non*-subversive” (95). The risk Cho takes by publishing such a work during Park’s regime is perhaps never as clear as it is in this story and this conversation.

Irony

Irony as a literary tool has been linked to surrealist humor. Rose writes that “[h]umor was a favorite tool of the Surrealists, especially irony, or the interplay of objects and images that contradict one another, and so evoke the mystery and non-linearity of the unconscious mind.” In his article, Rose discusses Lee Miller’s⁶⁷ post-WWII photography in Germany and specifically a portrait of herself in Hitler’s bathtub, taken by the Jewish photographer Dave Scherman. Describing her work, Rose writes that “most of Miller’s humor is dark and bitter.” Of the bathtub portrait, Rose says, “*Lee Miller in Hitler’s Bathtub* uses this same technique of constructing an image to encode the photograph with two interconnected purposes: first, to *disguise* a ritual, a ritual that becomes a commentary on the holocaust. Second, by disguising this ritual, the image becomes representative of the irony enacted by the gap between truth

⁶⁷ Lee Miller had strong ties to surrealism; Rose writes: “As an artist, Lee Miller was trained and actively participated in the Surrealist movement.”

and non-truth in propagandic space.” Likewise, Cho uses irony, especially in names, to enhance his central theme of disguised truth. For example, the dwarf’s actual name, Kim Pul-i, is rarely used—perhaps more an element of Korean culture than authorial purpose—but it nevertheless holds ironic value. We see the name at least twice—once when the dwarf sells his land occupancy rights, wherein he is cheated into selling for much lower than the actual value, and again on a proof-of-demolition certificate, which the dwarf’s daughter fills out to retake their occupancy rights after his death. The irony lies in the fact that his name means “reflecting the desire of poor parents for a son to become wealthy,” but (ironically, despite his name) the man is cheated of wealth (his home and land), and that wealth is only regained *after* his death and at the cost of his daughter’s innocence (73). The truth disguised in his name⁶⁸ is the seeming futility of descendants of hereditary slaves longing (to use Cho’s word) for wealth and power; instead of the opportunity surely promised at their freedom, they are met with discrimination and injustices that prevent material gain, comfort, and health. The irony compares to that of Miller’s photograph, which recalls Jewish ritual cleansing in the bathtub of a man who was responsible for the murder of millions, mostly Jews, in gas chambers disguised as cleansing showers (Rose).

Ironic, too, are place names associated with the dwarf’s family. Their slum that runs along the banks of a polluted body of water is located in Felicity Precinct, Eden District (37). In “A Little Ball,” Yǒng-hŭi, immediately prior to stepping out of her taxi at Paradise District to reclaim her family’s occupancy rights—wherein she succeeds but presumably at the cost of falling deeply ill—notes, “The sinners were still asleep. No mercy to be found on these streets” (84). Though it seems she makes these comments before reaching Paradise District, the fact that Cho mentions one right after the other invites the reader to consider the relationship between the ideas. And finally, in “The Klein Bottle,” “The people of Liberation Precinct stripped the bark from the Indonesian logs, which had grown tall in the Indonesian sunshine” for fuel use at home and for sale (160). What kind of liberation is it to peel bark from tress that, judging by their height, had probably been healthier than you are? In Felicity and Eden, the dwarf’s family meet sewage and hunger; near Paradise, sinners sleep, and

⁶⁸ Note additional cues in the paragraph: “The older man didn’t realize the meaning of Father’s name ... He had no way of knowing the connotation of painful longing in that name. ... Mother handed over ... two copies of the notarized impression of Father’s registered seal, used for the first time, to dispose of their house dirt cheap; ... and two copies of the family register, containing the names and ages of the powerless members of our family” (73).

streets are merciless; and in *Liberation*, the dwarf's widow rummages for scraps to survive, bound in a way to do such work due to her miserable circumstances. The irony, which reinforces Cho's themes of economic inequality and suffering among the lower classes, is obvious and bitter.

Surreality

Various characters in the novel have visions of reality that are consistent with the surrealist worldview. Yōng-su indicates his burgeoning awareness of a falseness in society when he writes in his notebook, "To govern is to give people something to do in order that they may accept their society's traditions and remain occupied, and to prevent them from wandering the periphery of an empty, dreary life" (68). In "On the Footbridge," Shin-ae describes her brother and his friend as "stuml[ing] along inside this great monstrosity ['the society in which they lived'] even though they didn't accept it" (93). The interior in which they stumble suggests an external reality as well, and the negative connotation of "monstrosity" suggests that what is better, or perhaps truer, exists outside of this. Finally, in "The Klein Bottle" Yōng-su narrates, saying that "only in [Chi-söp's] mind did there exist the beautiful, unspoiled world that he called the Land of the Moon. To make that world a reality outside his mind, he came to Ŭngang a brave man of action" (172). While this borders on otherworldliness, which is not surrealist,⁶⁹ and also strongly suggests that the Land of the Moon is an allegory for a perfect society, it is formed in Chi-söp's mind, perhaps directed or influenced by his subconscious or a subconscious moral compass, and as such is suggestive of surrealist ideas.

Inspiration

Though they are not the only source of inspiration in the novel, two young women therein—Ŭn-hŭi and Kyōng-ae—could be seen as types of the *femme-enfant* and similar to Breton's

⁶⁹ Ray criticizes Gershman's book cited in this thesis for using certain language, saying that "words like 'other-world message,' ... have no place in surrealist doctrine ... " (135). Ray continues, explaining why this is so: rather than a sort of spiritual discovery outside of oneself, surrealism is interested in unconscious discovery ("For Breton, as indeed for Freud, the only 'message' that man receives issues from his own unconscious ... "), and furthermore, "for Breton there is no 'other'—there is only man and the external world" (136). Ray presumes Gershman's use of such words is due to a fundamental misunderstanding of the ideas behind the movement or possibly represents Gershman's "using language with extraordinary carelessness ... " (135).

Nadja. Both are love interests of Yun-ho and both are young and innocent.⁷⁰ I will focus this discussion on Ŭn-hŭi. She, who like Yun-ho is preparing to retake the college entrance exam, is described as “the purest and most innocent member of [In-gyu’s] club” (41). Like Nadja’s inspiring Breton, Ŭn-hŭi jump-starts Yun-ho’s imagination; indeed, when they are together he goes on about aliens stealing answer sheets, honestly informs her about his encounters with other girls, and shares his contemplations. And significantly, in a comparison rife with Freudian psychoanalytic meaning, after Yun-ho finds his father’s gun in “Space Travel” and is desperately close to suicide, “Like a mother [Ŭn-hŭi] approached Yun-ho and took his teary face in her arms and bosom” (46). She’s naked when she does this. Yun-ho’s mother is presumably dead or has left the family.

Objective Chance

Objective chance seems to play a role *The Dwarf*. For example, dream narratives more than once materialize in the actual events of the novel. For instance, after Yun-ho visits the dwarf’s shantytown with Chi-sŏp in “Space Travel,” “he dreamed that the dwarf climbed the brick factory smokestack and sent a paper airplane flying” (38-9). It seems unlikely that Yun-ho would have shared his dream with the dwarf. Yet in a later story, “A Little Ball,” the events of the dream play out in real life. Yŏng-su narrates, saying, “Father was standing at the very top [of the brick factory smokestack]. Just one step in front of him hung the moon. Father took hold of the lightning rod and reached out with his foot. In that position he sent a paper airplane flying” (63). To recall Shattuck’s words, surrealists saw objective chance as reflecting “both the randomness and the hidden order that surrounds us” (21). Could the idea—of one’s soul traveling to the moon via a paper airplane—have come from the book that both Yun-ho and the dwarf were reading—*The World Ten Thousand Years from Now*? Even if that were the case, the connection is remarkable. The reader is left questioning the nature of reality and the significance of the images—the smokestack, the paper airplane, life on the moon, and the meaning of dwarf’s existence.

⁷⁰ See footnote 26 for Shattuck’s statement regarding the surrealist belief in the significance of monogamy in love while concurrently advocating sexual liberation. Yun-ho falls in love with Kyŏng-ae despite his concurrent interest in Ŭn-hŭi, which seems compatible with surrealism.

For other possible examples of objective chance, in “The Klein Bottle,” Yǒng-su’s mother dreams that he is arrested for having gone “to the main office in Seoul and killed one of the higher-ups” (177). The fact is, in “City of Machines,” an earlier story, Yǒng-su determines to kill the Ŭngang CEO, but as far as the reader is aware the mother was not privy to this plan. Her dream may thus suggest a connection between that aspect (the subconscious; dream) and the aspect of external reality. As it happens, the mother discloses this dream in the same story that Yǒng-su tells us of an encounter with the man of science. He says, “That day when I asked why he had shown me the bottle he replied only that I had arrived at the instant he finished making it. It didn’t seem coincidental to me, though” (176). True to its function in the novel, the bottle’s existence causes Yǒng-su to question his own concept of reality—for, as Yǒng-su narrates, “the essence of the bottle . . . was right there before my eyes, but its reality was ignored and it seemed to exist only in the world of imagination” (176). Nevertheless, it is difficult to say if or how this relates to Yǒng-su’s decision to kill the company president.

Genre: Other Possible Readings and Potential Limitations to the Surrealist Lens

Viewing *The Dwarf* as a surrealist work should in no way preclude the possibility of other readings, especially an allegorical reading. The allegory of the moon is an important aspect of Cho’s work. Both Chi-sǒp and the dwarf speak of life on the moon. They are perhaps informed by Chi-sǒp’s book *The World Ten Thousand Years from Now*. As aforementioned, the dwarf dreams “To go to the moon and work at an observatory . . .” there (141). Thus, life on the moon in a way represents a desire to escape the world wherein he lives in a slum and can hardly find any work to do. This is perhaps why he launches a paper airplane from the top of the brick factory smokestack—there, indeed, “Just one step in front of him hung the moon” (63). Perhaps he imagined his soul traveling with the plane in the direction of the land of the white rabbit. The moon takes on the feel of a paradise world—evidenced also by Chi-sǒp’s vision: “At that time, only in his mind did there exist the beautiful, unspoiled world that he called the Land of the Moon” (172). What’s more, Chi-sǒp becomes a savior-like figure because he sought to bring that paradise to the misery in Ŭngang. The moon as an allegory for escapism and a fair afterlife is evident in Yun-ho’s statement in “Space Travel”

amidst asking Ŭn-hŭi to shoot him. He says, “ ... I won’t really be dead. I’m going to the moon, and I’ll have a lot to do there. Can’t get anything done here. It’s like Chi-sŏp *hyŏng*’s [elder brother’s / elder friend’s] book says. Time is utterly wasted, oaths and promises are broken, prayers go unanswered. I have to go there so I can find the things that have disappeared here” (46). Escaping seems incompatible with surrealism. Vydrin confirms this when he writes, “The Surrealists did not want to escape from the world but to return to it — to reclaim reality for those whom reality drove into exile” (1). Though the dwarf does note that he is looking for things lost on earth, the lunar world here, so long as it is not a metaphor for the mind, represents another world that seems to lack external reality, which makes up half of the surrealist vision.

The references to aliens are also allegorical. Recall that Chi-sŏp tells Yun-ho in “Space Travel” that “he’d met beings from outer space” in the squatter community by the sewer creek (37). In the same story, after Chi-sŏp takes him to the dwarf’s home, “ ... Yun-ho dreamed that an alien came up beneath his window and knocked on the pane,” and he later jokes with Ŭn-hŭi that she failed the college entrance exam because “[a]n alien came. Stole your answer sheet” (38, 41). And significantly, when Yŏng-hŭi goes missing in “A Little Ball,” there is a “rumor that aliens had taken Yŏng-hŭi away in a flying saucer ... ” (63). Each of these could be read in relation to class conflict—and thus, aliens are allegorical references to class-related struggles. In the first example, the slum dwellers are alienated from Yun-ho, who is unaware of the realities of their life until Chi-sŏp introduces Yun-ho to them. The alien approaching Yun-ho’s window in a dream could represent his encounter with these people or his future encounter with the very wealthy, who are also outside of his (middle) class. While the third seems like solely humor, the last may represent the rich realtor “abducting” Yŏng-hŭi from her town and taking her to his upper-class world.

It is arguable whether a work can be both allegorical and surrealist. Abrams and Harpham suggest, in a way, that it can be: “Allegory is a narrative strategy which may be employed in any literary form or genre” (Abrams and Harpham 8). However, of the potential inconsistency of allegory with one genre, magic(al) realism, Bowers writes, “In allegorical writing, the plot tends to be less significant than the alternative meaning in a reader’s interpretation. This makes it difficult to incorporate allegory into a magical realist novel, as the importance of the alternative meaning interferes with the need for the reader to accept the

reality of the magical aspects of the plot” (27). Likewise with allegory and surrealism, it could be difficult to accept *both* surrealist *and* allegorical interpretations of the moon and aliens in the work. Perhaps the elements lose their whimsical nature and become calculated, formed, and thus false in a way—in other words, perhaps less surreal. However, considering the significance of these potentially allegorical images in illuminating the characters’ subconscious minds, it is conceivable that they are constructs of that mind wherein subconscious fears, tensions, desires, etc. are illuminated. That these fears are related to class struggles could thus allow for the presence of such allegory in an inwardly-focused surrealist work.

Another, albeit less likely possibility for these elements of absurdity in a novel fundamentally about working conditions for the lower classes in industrializing Korea is that they are types of the fantastic. In her glossary definition of the fantastic, which draws from Tzvetan Todorov’s writing, Bowers writes that “there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary events presented,” which does not seem to suit Cho’s work; very few, if any characters actually seem to believe in the reality of life on the moon or of aliens (130). Additionally, Cho’s attention to workings of the subconscious mind suggest surrealism more than magic(al) realism, which includes, as Bowers writes, magical occurrences among the everyday (131). There are other examples of places where one could read such things as subconscious desires and fears into the text.⁷¹

However, while exploring the idea of a mental desire to escape one’s circumstances is compatible with surrealist thought, the idea of the existence of other worlds is inconsistent with the movement. Recall (from footnote 69) Ray’s criticism of Gershman’s book for using such language as “other-world message” (135). The reader will recall that Ray’s explanation for Gershman’s use (or misuse) of language was that either Gershman fundamentally misunderstood surrealist ideology or that he was being careless in his writing (135). Obviously, I am not immune to such faults.

⁷¹ In addition to the discussion of dreams, automatic-type thought, etc., examples of this abound. Consider the following:

- a. “What Yun-ho saw after a rain was lovely beyond words. He often heard there the sound of a small spirit that was shrinking” (104).
- b. “When Yun-ho thought of Ŭngang, he sensed his own shriveled self” (120).
- c. “Yŏng-hŭi woke up crying at night. She cried without Mother knowing it. But Yŏng-hŭi was still young and couldn’t think about what kept her in bondage” (135).

Strong class distinctions, mistreatment of the laboring classes, along with talk of violent revolution against unjust factory owners (read: the bourgeoisie) strike Marxist chords, and this is compatible with surrealist theory. What's more, Cho writes simply "in order to reach the widest possible audience," as it seems a Marxist would wish to do (Fulton and Fulton 222). Of surrealists' concern with class struggles, Breton writes, "Let it be clearly understood that for us, as surrealists, the interests of thought cannot cease to go hand in hand with the interests of the working class, and that all attacks on freedom, all interference with the emancipation of the working class and all armed attacks on it cannot fail to be considered by us as attacks on thought as well" (*What Is Surrealism?* 140-1).⁷² What distinguishes this work from a purely Marxist work is Cho's concern with the subconscious—for example, in the significance of dreams in the text and psychological possibilities related to Marxist-informed conflict, such as Yun-ho's suicidal ideation and behavior. Proyect writes of surrealism's focus on the subconscious more than Marxist issues when he says, "While the Marxist elements of surrealism remained underdeveloped, Freud's 'insights' informed nearly everything that both the writers and painters produced." In *The Dwarf*, however, undercurrents of class consciousness and portrayals of social injustice is at least as significant as concern with the subconscious.

In some ways, the work is dystopian. The protagonists, especially Yǒng-su, have many traits characteristic of dystopian protagonists,⁷³ the novel shows evidence of dystopian control (via corporations and the government),⁷⁴ and the society has dystopian

⁷² Proyect writes, "While Surrealist painting tended to avoid any obvious engagement with the class struggle, the writers were deeply involved with radical politics."

⁷³ According to one source, "The Dystopian Protagonist

- often feels trapped and is struggling to escape.
- questions the existing social and political systems.
- believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives.
- helps the audience recognize [*sic*] the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective" ("Dystopias").

⁷⁴ The same source (see the previous footnote) includes control as a key element of a dystopia. It defines dystopia as: "A futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system" ("Dystopias"). Some of these characteristics could fit *The Dwarf*.

characteristics.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, even as the work might be considered both Marxist and surreal, it may also be considered perhaps a surrealist, dystopian work that employs allegory.

⁷⁵ A few from the list “Characteristics of a Dystopian Society” in “Dystopias” that I consider applicable to *The Dwarf* are: “Citizens live in a dehumanized state,” and “Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad” (“Dystopias”).

3. Other Works of Korean Fiction

In this chapter I examine nine other works of modern Korean fiction published between the years of 1936 and 2011 for elements of surrealism. This investigation will show that such elements persisted in Korean fiction from around the time of the movement's entry into Korea in the first half of the 20th century up until contemporary times. This, in turn, would seem to suggest that surrealist ideas, themes, and styles continue to emerge in Korean literature today. Discussion of the historical trajectory of modern Korean literature will be interspersed throughout.

To contextualize these works, I will first briefly outline trends in premodern and early-modern Korean literature, focusing on fiction. Premodern literature in general tends to be didactic. Bruce Fulton, et al. write, "Because Korean literature has always had a didactic element, social engagement is often seen as a reflection of an ages-old native literary tradition" ("Introduction" 2). In many of the stories addressed in this thesis and elsewhere, this social engagement is evident. Likewise, Fulton, et al. write that "Class relations have long been a rich source of thematic materials" (2). Indeed, we have already seen this legacy in *The Dwarf*. Other historically significant themes that Fulton, et al. touch on with regard to the legacy of those themes include foreign influence and the nation's history, power structures, censorship (both self- and externally-driven), and confinement. This relates to surrealism insofar as the latter is concerned with the suppression of the mind, body, and imagination caused by such forces as authoritarian regimes and socio-economic inequality. Thus, perhaps Korea's literary and socio-political history prepared the ground for surrealism to take root.

A distinction between premodern and modern Korean literature is usually made around 1905, when Korea was made a Japanese protectorate. Other important historical demarcations in modern Korean literature, which have already been mentioned and/or will be discussed later in this chapter, are the end of Japanese colonization in 1945, the publication of Cho Se-hŭi's *The Dwarf*, and the IMF crisis in the late 1990s.

The earliest works of modern Korean fiction included biographies of heroes, fables, and satires (Kwōn 390-2). Then, a new, modern fiction emerged. Of this, Kwōn writes,⁷⁶ “As traditional fiction gradually declined with changes in the Confucian social structure, new fictional works reflecting the life and consciousness of the new era emerged” (“Early” 392). Kwōn also writes that “[t]hrough its use of the vernacular, the new fiction became the mass literature,” (“Early” 392-3). Many writers of this period studied either “in Japan or at the Japanese imperial university in Seoul” (Fulton, *Introduction* 4). It was during this time that Korean literature turned inward to the self⁷⁷ and focused on the “[d]iscovery of the individual” (Kwōn, “Early” 394). Kwōn writes, “Slowly the main concerns of modern Korean fiction began to shift from didacticism to the creation of new characters and subjectivity. The establishment of a prose style based on the spoken language, in particular, marked a turning point” (“Early” 395). Various circles of writers formed, including the Korea Artista Proleta Federatio. Writers of this decade also wrote satire and works involving folk customs (Kwōn 403-5).

Yi Sang, “Wings” (Nalgae, 1936)

Yi Sang was perhaps the most significant and experimental writer of the 1930s. Critics have associated Yi with modernism and surrealism. Kwōn writes that Yi’s works, among the works of other writers from this period, “are closely related to the tendencies of modernism in a larger sense” (“Early” 401). Kim Yoon Young clearly aligns Yi Sang with surrealism (and modernism) when she writes, “He was a lonely modernist who has been posthumously recognized as the preeminent surrealist that he was” (262).

Of Yi Sang’s “Wings,” Kim and Fulton write in the headnote to their translation of “Phantom Illusion” in *A Ready-Made Life* that it “is one of the best-known modern Korean stories. Whether it’s read as an allegory of colonial oppression, an existential withdrawal from the absurdities of contemporary life, an extended suicide note, or simply the degradation of a kept man, it is strikingly imaginative” (172). Kwōn writes that in several

⁷⁶ Kwōn’s chapter(s) focuses on fiction by men. In the same format of Peter Lee’s book, whence Kwōn’s chapter is drawn, I include separate sections for addressing specifically fiction by women.

⁷⁷ Kwōn writes, “In Korean literary history, the work of Yi Kwangsu signalled a rediscovery of the self. It is remarkable that most writers of the period advocated liberation of the self even though they themselves were under a colonial rule that made national identity impossible” (394).

works, including “Wings,” “Yi Sang portrays desire and the crisis of the self confronting reality ... ” (“Early” 402).

“Wings” is narrated by an unemployed man living in a residence for prostitutes with his wife, who works there. For most of the story, the man seems ignorant and indifferent about his wife’s work. He begins to distrust her upon realizing that for a month, instead of aspirin for his malaise, she has been giving him Adalin, a sleep aid.

Surrealist elements in “Wings” include a concern with the mind and consciousness, an absurd style, subversion, bizarreness,⁷⁸ and intimation of objective chance. Many of these elements appear in the very first subsection. Consider the following examples: “It’s only when my body creaks with fatigue that my mind begins to glint like a silver coin” (concern with the mind; bizarre analogy); repetition of “Goodbye” (absurd style); and “Block out the 19th century - if you can - from your consciousness” (awareness of the conscious mind) (1-2).

An intimation of objective chance exists when the protagonist describes his room, saying, “I am delighted by the thought that perhaps I came into the world with this room in mind” and “my room - my absolute space – is room seven. A bit of Lucky Seven, I suppose. I love the number 7 ... ” (3). And in one bizarre metaphor, the protagonist describes himself as “a nerve bundle in clothes” (5).

Additionally, the entire story could be seen as a subversion of neo-Confucian gender roles in that the man seems to have remained in the inner room for much of his married life while his wife sees visitors in the outer room and even out to the gate; his experience is similar to that of palace women in Chosŏn, who were traditionally confined to the inner chambers. What’s more, his wife is the breadwinner in the relationship, providing him with living expenses and money periodically—another inversion of traditional Confucian gender roles.

Likewise, as mentioned, the potential allegorical representation of colonial oppression is certainly subversive against the Japanese imperial power in Korea at the time the story was written. One should recall Ko’s description of Korean surrealists as “show[ing] the desolated [sic] spiritual climate of those days (under the rule of Japanese imperialism) and the will to escape from that” (56). In this interpretation, the man’s wife would be an

⁷⁸ Recall from my Introduction that Hopkins wrote, comparing it to Dada, “ ... Surrealism [“is seen”] as similarly anti-bourgeois in spirit but more deeply immersed in the bizarre” (xiv-xv).

imperial Japan, repressing him (Korea) as she gives him sleep medicine rather than pain medicine, suggesting spiritual confinement. Perhaps suggesting subversion against capitalist culture, the protagonist “threw the piggy bank [filled with money] in the loo” (9). Or finally, consider the subversiveness of the protagonist’s wife giving him sleeping pills instead of aspirin as if she wishes to minimize his presence in her life.

Yi Sang, “Phantom Illusion” (幻視記, *Hwansigi*, 1938)

This story begins with a poem about an idiot progenitor, perhaps an Adam type, containing potential religious implications. The poem goes, “In the beginning there was an idiot who couldn’t tell right from left, / And now, a hundred generations later, / Invalids cursed by heaven proliferate among his hapless descendants” (172). Herein can one read disdain and a comedization of religious myth. The poem may be suggestively compare Yi Sang the narrator, who chases his “phantom illusion” Sun-yŏng, to Adam, who was cast from the Garden of Eden because he fell for Eve.

This very short story bears several similarities to Breton’s *Nadja*. First, Sun-yŏng is a type of *femme-enfant*, like Nadja. Sun-yŏng is seemingly young, beautiful, and has a power of attraction (despite her “face seem[ing] a bit lopsided toward the left . . . ” as her husband, Song, observes) (172). Even as men seem to attach themselves to Nadja, so the narrator, Yi Sang, follows Sun-yŏng from job to job. Even as Nadja creates a personal history that many came to question, so is Sun-yŏng’s history somewhat dubious, evident, for example, in her first telling Song, Yi Sang’s friend, that she was born in Hoeryŏng, but later, that she was born in Vladivostok. Furthermore, Yi Sang’s attitude to her and to love is somewhat akin to Breton’s to Nadja—both have wives, yet they pursue the women. However, a significant difference is that Breton’s wife is presumably complicit in his pursuit of Nadja, while Yi Sang’s wife is absent for much of the story.

The story also addresses psychology and madness. The narrator says that Song is “persecuted by mundane reality. It runs counter to his conscience, and he’s all mixed up” (176). (Perhaps significantly, Yi Sang seems to view Sun-yŏng as the solution to Song’s issues, making her a sort of inspirational figure, like Nadja.) This, too, echoes Ko’s statement that Korean surrealists depicted contemporary spiritual desolation under Japanese

colonization “and the will to escape from that” (56). There are no dreams in the story, but it nevertheless contains bizarre images, such as that of tropical flower petals “chang[ing] before [the narrator’s] eyes into something frightening, wicked, sensual. A mere touch, and my fingers would putrefy, decompose, fall away in bits and chunks” (178).

Ch’oe Chŏng-hŭi, “The Haunted House” (凶家, Hyungga, 1937)

As Carolyn So discusses in “Early Twentieth-century Fiction by Women,” women writers of the early-modern (colonial) period were confronted with both the difficulties of colonization and the legacy of gender oppression in Korean society and the Korean literary establishment. In premodern times, women wrote within the walls of their homes, did not actively publish their work, nor were they publicly known (So 406). The early-modern period was one of contradiction: women were educated in the name of modernization, but they were nevertheless expected to conform to Confucian gender roles (406).⁷⁹ However, as So writes, “[d]uring the colonial period, there were only about a dozen active women writers of fiction” Unfortunately, their personal lives were given more attention than their writing (407). What’s more, So writes that “Despite the overwhelming need of the time which demanded that Korean leaders, whether men or women, address Korea’s political and social predicaments as a colony of Japan, women writers remained committed to women’s preoccupations during the modern period” (406-7). While on the one hand it appears that women writers did not reach their full literary potential during this period, the time and circumstances perhaps necessitated such a transitional period.

So writes about fiction written by women in this period and divides the period into three phases: 1) “From the private space to the public”, 2) “Social commitment and motherhood”, and 3) “A room of one’s own.”⁸⁰ In the first phase, “rather than their literary output, the women writers’ appearance in the public eye and their personae gain prominence”, So writes (408). In the second phase, “the once-popular discourse on new women begins to disintegrate and committed literature becomes prominent as leftist/socialist thoughts blossom in East Asia following the success of the Russian Revolution.” They also write on

⁷⁹ So cites Partha Chatterjee when she writes that “the traditional framework of Confucian patriarchy transformed to a new form of patriarchy . . . ” (406).

⁸⁰ Quoted portions here are subtitles of section titles in So’s chapter (see pages 408, 411, and 414, respectively).

motherhood, So adds (411). And finally, in the third phase, “nonideological issues received increasing attention” (414). Ch’oe Chŏng-hŭi’s “The Haunted House” falls into the third phase. That Ch’oe is the only pre-IMF female writer addressed in this thesis suggests the former relative absence of women writers in the Korean literary world.

“The Haunted House” concerns a single, working mother who rents a home for her family only to hear afterwards about its being cursed or haunted. She comes down with tuberculosis after moving in and begins to be tormented by dreams about the place.

Arguments could be made for the story being surrealist and magic(al) realist.⁸¹ On the one hand, when the handyman tells the protagonist the story of the house, he does not speak of possibilities, but of facts. He says, “Oh well, even though the site is ill favored, everything depends on the power you bring to the house, they say” (154). This is suggestive of magic(al) realism.⁸²

References to the protagonist’s mental state abound. For example, within the first two pages of the story, we see her anxious, worried, ashamed, embarrassed, and losing her temper. She notes having “had a very funny and weird dream [her] first night in the house,” but she also accepts that it was “Perhaps because of this old man’s [the plumber’s] story, ...”. Then, after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, she dreams that the woman who used to live in the house comes and beats her up, but rather than associating the dream entirely with the suggestion that the house is haunted, she says, “... I could argue that the bad dream I had that very night was the result of that fright” (156). Despite the fact that she negates this, saying that she was not worried about her health then, having a dream representing subconscious fears seems to be a perfectly reasonable Freudian explanation, and thus would be more representative of surrealism than magic(al) realism.

Furthermore, though the protagonist lies awake one night, afraid of the crazy woman’s entrance into the house, that fear never materializes, thus undermining the idea of a haunting. When she “still *thought* I could see the shadow of the persimmon cast by the dazzling moonlight ...”, “still *thought* I could hear the rooster crowing,” and “the eyes in the

⁸¹ I also see value in an allegorical reading of the text, where the protagonist represents Korea, disenfranchised and struggling under Japanese occupation. Indeed, the former owner’s brother may represent the greed of the Japanese empire. This reading could be considered surrealist, too, in its depiction of the negative effects of imperial (authoritarian?) rule on the governed.

⁸² Recall from my Introduction (in the subsection titled “Surrealism and Magic(al) Realism”) Bowers’s statement about societal acceptance of the supernatural being suggestive of magic(al) realism.

gourd mask ... *seemed* to bug out at me and the lips *seemed* to twitch,” the reader further questions her mental state and the reality of the dream, even as the protagonist seems to as well (158-9; emphasis added). Moreover, in the plumber’s own story about the house, rather than focusing on a curse or haunting, he focuses on general misfortune and the madness of the former woman of the house. Indeed, of the site and the former owner’s misfortune, the plumber says, “Folks whisper about how the owner of this house died, but the fact is, he simply overworked himself.” He figures that the protagonist will not mind (read: believe) the tales about the house because she is “modern,” suggesting that “modern” sensibilities reject the supernatural (155). The story thus becomes one about madness as much as it is about a haunted house; indeed, perhaps the house haunting represents the woman’s own mind haunted by her responsibilities as a single, working mother and her developing tuberculosis.

Chang Yong-hak, “Poems of John the Baptist” (Yohan sijip, 1955)

As in world history, 1945 was an important year in Korean history—it marked the end of the Japanese colonization of Korea. This date is useful in Korean literature studies because “the pre-1945 literature was the literature of a colonized land, and post-1945 literature is the literature of a divided nation” (Fulton, *Introduction* 5-6). Post-1945, writers have addressed topics such as life in the unique period of relative peace between the end of Japanese colonization and the beginning of the Korea War, the war itself, the postwar divide, industrialization, democratization, women’s issues, and the IMF crisis and its aftermath. Kwŏn writes, “During the post-liberation period, creative practices centered on assigning meaning to the new life and understanding the social conditions and demands that accompanied the new freedom from colonialism. Most fictional works focused on realism by problematizing the notion of understanding reality” (“Late” 468). Realist literature represents an understandable and potentially healthy response to the 35 years of Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula in the first half of the 20th century, the Korea War, and postwar recovery. Indeed, speaking or recording traumatic events is generally accepted as part of a natural psychological healing process.

Chang Yong-hak’s “Poems of John the Baptist” is a post-Korean War work that deals with the postwar psyche. Kwŏn writes of one “tendency” in postwar literature, saying,

“Writers who had experienced the war expressed resistance against current social values – rejecting the moral consciousness established by the older generation when the prospect for a new life in the postwar ruins became uncertain.” Chang Yong-hak was such a writer, with his “critical attitude toward historical consciousness and reality” (“Late” 472).

At the beginning of “Poems of John the Baptist”, the author writes of a hare emerging from a cave. Dealing with mental conceptions of freedom, liberty, capitalism, communism, existence, crime, time, space, etc., it also tells the story of a prisoner of war named Tong-ho who is looking for his friend Nu-hye’s mother. The reader also learns of Nu-hye’s sad fate and afterwards glimpses into his life and ideology.

“Poems of John the Baptist” contains many elements of surrealism. Literary elements that have been examined in other works in this thesis include absurdity, dream parts (or visions/reveries), discussion of time and space and other scientific/mathematical ideas, and the psychological/insanity. Political or ideological surrealism emerges in discussion of communism, capitalism, dehumanization, violence, anti-war sentiment, and atheism (note irony, therefore, in the title), but Chang does not side with Marxist politics. Instead, he seems to be anti-ideology. For example, consider what Nu-hye writes about joining the communist party and his later disillusionment with it: “I attempted a rebirth by becoming a friend of the people. I joined the communist party. I soon found that there were no people in the Party. They were busy creating a people by killing off the enemies of the people. Creating and killing and an unbridgeable gap between them” (24). Kwōn writes, presumably of other works of Chang’s as well, that he “attempted to escape from the current framework of fiction while appropriating the dark postwar reality as a fictional background. ‘Yohan sijip’ ... critically describes how the meaning of existence is damaged by such abstract and meaningless concepts as ideology, people, and class during and after the war” (472). These ideas (such as anti-ideology and anti-contemporary-form) were subversive, and his work could be called surrealist.

A few elements that are perhaps not so surrealist are, first, the potential allegorical meaning(s) of the story of the hare and the cat-and-mouse game in Nu-hye’s mother’s shack, and, second, references to other worlds; surrealism explores the subconscious of the world/reality, but not necessarily alternate worlds of existence. Chang writes, “The sound of my voice seemed to make me her son, to make Tong-ho Nu-hye. ust [*sic*] because there is a

world in which one [plus one?] equals two, there is no reason why there should not be another world in which one plus one equals three” (13). However, a later reference to two different worlds tends more to the psychological, with references to an inner and an outer world. Chang writes, “The two different worlds--the inside world in which I had to stand holding his eyeballs and the outside world where the whistling of the guard was alleviating his homesickness--were the only two things I knew” (21).

Ch'oe In-ho, “Another Man's Room” (他人의房, T'ain-ŭi pang, 1971)

Korea began to rapidly industrialize in the 1960s, and writers began to address contemporary issues resulting from that process. Kwŏn writes:

Korean fiction around this time began to portray the sensibilities of the petite bourgeoisie and their daily lives, while at the same time criticizing the contradictions of the social structure by describing the decay of the rural community. Such fiction also depicts the extension of mass culture, the changing values of the younger generation, and the plight of the workers. Such critical issues as debates on national literature and literary realism are reflected in the creative process, as well, and a new critical understanding of the division of the country began to be embodied in fiction. This tendency brought about an expansion of the modes of fiction, and an increase of medium- and full-length fiction may be said to reflect the writers' changing views of the world and life. (“Late” 474)

Indeed, *The Dwarf* nicely fits this description of the literature of the time. “At the threshold of the 1960s, a new generation of writers emerged” who were educated in Korean schools, by Korean teachers, using the Korean language—appropriately called the *hangŭl* [Korean alphabet] generation (“Late” 474). Ch'oe Inho is one of these writers, along with Cho Se-hŭi.

Ch'oe In-ho's “Another Man's Room” depicts a man who, upon returning to his apartment, becomes upset that his wife does not come to open the door for him. When he unlocks the door himself and enters, he finds that she has gone away and has left a note for him. As he settles in, objects in the apartment come alive, and the reader begins to question the man's mental state. An abrupt shift of scene shows a woman returning to the rented room,

startled to find that someone has been inside. She is appeased upon discovering that nothing has gone missing, and she even finds something left behind. Before leaving, she writes a note to her husband and places it on the dresser where the previous, almost identical note once lay.

One surrealist element is the character's psychological state. Similar to the protagonist in "The Haunted House," it seems that the protagonist here could be going insane. One very likely explanation for the coming to life of objects in the room is that the man is psychotic, presenting what occurs in his mind as reality. Significantly, a strong sense of the surreal emerges when the spoon begins to come to life; it "seemed to strip the skin off his consciousness and he saw it leap into the air; it was something beyond the range of visual experience ... " (34). This is surreal insofar as it is absurd. Though he does not say it outright, Kwōn seems to suggest a correlation between the protagonist's madness and urbanization.⁸³ Read in that way, the story becomes a work of social commentary about the ill effects of modernization.

The story is full of surrealist features. Ch'oe writes striking and bizarre similes, characteristic of surrealist art,⁸⁴ everywhere. For example, he compares the initial fluttering of a just-powered-on fluorescent light to "an insect in a collector's jar ... " and "clothes hanging there [in the closet] like sea fish drying" (30, 34). Other elements of surrealism in the story are time and space issues (for examples: the clock is faulty; he feels trapped) and the suggestion of revolution.⁸⁵

Ch'oe Such'öl, "Conviction" (Hwakshin, 2003)

Several events represent significant markers on the timeline of modern Korean history. As Bruce Fulton suggests, the IMF crisis had perhaps the largest effect on the literary establishment. He writes,

⁸³ Kwōn writes that "in the midst of rapid urbanization, Ch'oe uses various narrative techniques to describe the modality of personal existence in an urban living space. His interest lies in exploring true character as one faces the problems arising out of the urban space and the loss of personal identity in the age of industrialization. In [several works, including 'Another Man's Room',] he heightens his literary style and vitality and treats the serious problems of consciousness generated by an industrial society" (475).

⁸⁴ Recall the discussion of metaphors in my Introduction.

⁸⁵ Consider the following example from the story, from when the apartment begins to come alive: "In the cold press dishes piled on top of each other start a clattering, clamouring revolt" (35).

... it makes increasing sense to focus on pre-IMF literature and post-IMF literature. The economic strictures that bound Korea in the mid-1990s during International Monetary Fund intervention had the unforeseen consequence of the opening up of the Korean literature power structure, a trend especially notable in literary fiction. Women fiction writers gained more visibility both in Korea and abroad, as men abandoned the humanities in search of job stability in commerce and industry. Women began finally to penetrate one of the last bastions of male privilege in the literary establishment—the academy (at the dawn of the new millennium, no Korean literature department in the top three universities in Seoul employed a tenured female professor). The publication of literary fiction became more reader-friendly. More attention was directed to the reception of Korean literature overseas. (*Introduction 6*)

In addition to the changes outlined above, brought about by the IMF crisis, enormous changes in society and consumerism—and the way the population learns about, obtains, and reads books—occurred with the advent of the information age. In his article “The *Munhak Tongne* Phenomenon: The Publication of Literary Fiction in South Korea Today,” Fulton addresses some of these changes as they relate to the recent arrival and success of a new major publishing company (*Munhak Tongne*, 문학동네) in South Korea. This publishing house, established in 1993, has made available more works by women, children’s fiction, translations, and works that do not necessarily conform to more traditional literary trends regarding such aspects as theme, content, and form, than any of the other three major publishing houses. What’s more, because they have found more commercial success than the older publishing houses, the others are following suit.⁸⁶ The remaining four works examined in this chapter were written after the IMF crisis.

“Conviction” is a bizarre story about a man tormented by the thought that he has lived his life without conviction. In it, we see the man in and out of dream-like states. In the opening section, the man is sitting on a beach when the tide comes and he is unable to stand up and move. In addition to dreams, the man’s obsession with water, insects, and death suggests a certain madness—perhaps connected to seeing a childhood friend’s dead body.

⁸⁶ Note that this and the previous two sentences are largely informed by Bruce Fulton’s article mentioned herein.

Indeed, madness is often the subject of surrealist works. As Hofmann writes, “*La Révolution surréaliste* [early surrealist journal] set [sic] out to explore a range of subversive issues related to the darker sides of man's psyche with features focused on suicide, death, and violence.” Consider also the character's concern with lacking conviction and recall Gracq's desire to “carry conviction away” (qtd in Matthews 10). Other potential elements of surrealism in the work include chance meetings (objective chance), a sense of timelessness, a narrative style that seems to follow the man's thoughts, and perhaps subversion therein. “Conviction” borders the fantastic and perhaps magic(al) realism in parts, but Ch'oe's focus remains on the man's psyche, which is suggestive of surrealism.

P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, “Corpses” (Shich'etŭl, 2004)

Women played an increasingly important and recognized role in Korean literature after 1945—both through published works and in the literary establishment. Ch'oe Yun suggested that women of necessity—due to the woundedness or absence of men, played a more prominent role in the home and in society after the wars (481). Of their increased prominence in the literary world, Fulton writes, “it could be argued that it was not until the 1970s and the emergence of writers O Chŏng-hŭi and Pak Wan-sŏ that women fiction writers began to be evaluated primarily for their literary accomplishments and were liberated from the stereotype ... of the delicate, lyrical, sentimental woman writer” (“The *Munhak Tongne* Phenomenon”). Women writers, especially by the 1980s, were influenced by increasing opportunities, such as employment amidst industrialization, educational opportunities and programs, and increasing recognition (Ch'oe Yun 490-1⁸⁷). In the 1990s, *Munhak Tongne* published many women writers and indeed, as Fulton writes, “*Munhak Tongne*'s most immediate contribution to literary fiction in South Korea ... was to help rectify a long-standing gender imbalance among fiction writers” (“The *Munhak Tongne* Phenomenon”). Moreover, Fulton's comments on the positive effect the IMF crisis had on women writers have already been noted above.

“Corpses” tells of a man whose wife presumably slips into a ravine and drowns on a fishing trip they take together. After her death, the man is left to clean up their seafood

⁸⁷ Ch'oe Yun may address such topics elsewhere in the chapter as well. The reference here specifically refers to the 1980s and beyond; the pertinent section title is: “The Rise of Feminism: Fiction of the 1980s and After.”

restaurant prior to the demolition of the building wherein it is located. He is called in several times by a detective in the area of the ravine to identify body parts pulled out of the water.

The work contains strong elements of modern literary surrealism but lacks the political/socio-economic elements present in Breton's theory and in *The Dwarf*. Surrealism is evident in such elements as dreams, a concern with psychology, and subversion. One type of subversion is evident in P'yŏn's use of space in a very different way than most of her literary predecessors. After calling P'yŏn subversive in the headnote to Cindy Chen's translation in *Waxen Wings*, Fulton writes of her use of space: "In the literary tradition of modern Korea confinement is arguably the most important motif, but P'yŏn invests her stories with the opposite of confinement—space, which is equally disorienting be it psychological, as in 'Corpses,' or physical ... " (184). As in *Habiro* (see below), a key element of story is the disappearance of the main character's wife. Surreal images in the work include the wife "remov[ing] her leg and plo[p] it down on his head," the leg standing in as a windshield wiper in a downpour, and the appearance of her ghost-like form preparing rotting fish in the restaurant's kitchen—all presumably only in his mind (186). What distinguishes the surreal in this story from magic(al) realism or fantasy is P'yŏn's focus on the psychology and mind of the protagonist. At several points in the story, including the conclusion, the demarcation between dream and reality remains unclear.

Yi In-hwa, Habiro (2004)

Habiro is a murder mystery set in post-WWI Shanghai. The protagonist, Yi Chun-sang, is a Korean detective responsible for solving it. He suffers memory loss that began after his wife's disappearance six years previous to the events in the novel. In his search he encounters rival gangs of the Shanghai underworld and connections to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Significantly, one clue leads Yi to his own files from years ago but which had been lost from his memory due to amnesia.

Yi's novel very much responds to literary tradition and contemporary social trends. It is perhaps important to note that the novel form in Korea "often bear[s] the stigma of lowbrow fiction" (Fulton, *Introduction* 5). Yi takes this one step further by writing for a

gaming generation.⁸⁸ Furthermore, while many works of Korean fiction address the reality of the North/South political divide, and before that, Japanese colonization, and are written in a realist style,⁸⁹ Yi consciously pushes back against these trends.

The novel is surrealistic in a number of ways. First, the setting is significant; at the time, Shanghai had become a major international seaport for trade between the East and West, and as such, a center for foreign nationals with extra-territorial rights, where “the East and the West, the past and the present co-exist” (Hö).⁹⁰ Yi says that, in setting the novel in Shanghai, he “broke from the historical limits of the Japanese occupation,” but he nevertheless uses the city as “a mirror of our present day” (qtd. in Chŏng Ch‘ör-hun).⁹¹ This is suggestive of the timelessness and spacelessness observed in *The Dwarf* and as described in a sense by Matthews in his discussion on surrealist novels. It is subversive, perhaps, in how it responds to relatively recent trends in fiction. These trends may include featuring “the divided nation and the painful experiences of war” in the 1970s and *roman-fleuves* that seek to understand Korean identity amidst its history, such as Pak Kyŏngni’s *T’oji* (*Land*, 1969-94) and Cho Chŏngnae’s *T’aebaek sanmaek* (*T’aebaek Mountains*, 1986) (Kwŏn, “Late” 477-80).

Another element of surrealism in the work includes additional subversion in Yi’s use of writing reminiscent of video games, which represents a type of genre experimentation. Nevertheless, at least one element borders on allegory; consider that the main character is meant to be representative of the plight of men in modern Korea.⁹²

⁸⁸ “I wanted to try and write a novel for the gaming generation, who are in their early 20s,” Yi said in an interview (Yi In-hwa, “Keimsedae”; “20 대 초반 게임세대를 위한 소설을 써보고 싶었습니다.”).

⁸⁹ Fulton describes the role of realist writing in making the reading of Korean literature a “not altogether pleasant experience for students ... and general readers” (*Introduction* 5).

⁹⁰ “동양과 서양, 과거와 현재가 공존하는 혼혈도시였다.”

⁹¹ “리니지 게임을 즐기는 20대 젊은층이 향유할 수 있는 소설이 무엇인가, 오랫동안 고민하다가 일제 식민시대의 역사적 한계에서 벗어나 선과 악, 동과 서, 고대와 현대가 뒤엉킨 혼혈도시 1930년대 상하이로 떠올리게 됐습니다. ... 상하이가 우리 시대의 거울처럼 보이더군요.”

⁹² In comparing to the opium-addicted narrator to men in modern Korea, Yi says, “Some time ago I received an email due to a meeting with classmates from high school with the following: ‘Seeing as we pacify our pride, trampled by family and society, through alcohol ...’ At first I resisted it, but thinking how we all adapt to such an urgently changing generation, I realized it really is hard. I wanted to bring out this fact that we are struggling to set our own lives in order amidst this confusing period through the novel’s main character, Yi Chun-sŏng [*sic*]” (“Sinjaksosŏl”). [“얼마전 고교동창 모임 때문에 메일을 받았는데 ‘가정과 사회에서 짓밟힌 우리의 자존심을 소주로 달래느니...’하는 내용이였다. 처음엔 반발심이 들었으나 이렇게 급변하는 시대에 모두 적응하느라 힘들어 하는구나 하는 생각이 들었다. 혼혈의 시대에 자기 삶을 추슬러야 하는 삶의 모습을 소설속 이준성을 [*sic*] 통해 드러내고자 했다.”]

Ch'oe Inho, Another Man's City (Nanigŭn t'ain tŭl-ŭi tosi, 2011)

This novel⁹³ bears a significant resemblance to Ch'oe's story "Another Man's Room." The plot involves a man, K, who one day begins to question the authenticity of his relationships, suspecting that several people, including his wife, are part of a conspiracy involving him.

This work contains many elements that have in this paper been associated with surrealism. However, due its focus on discovering true identities and returning to the real world, the work cannot be placed fully into that category—a conclusion that also calls into question the generic characterization of "Another Man's Room" in this paper.

I wrote above that surrealism is concerned with discovering a deeper, more complete version of existence beyond the external reality before our eyes. However, in *Another Man's City*, Ch'oe's protagonist states his concern in quite different terms, asking a series of questions including, "So what happened to my real wife? Where's my real alarm clock, my real daughter, the real puppy? Where's my real mother-in-law, my real father-in-law?" (39). It is true that the protagonist's mental state is a central concern in the novel. Anxiety, delusions, a panic attack, amnesia due to a concussion—all of these are explored in some detail as possible contributing factors to the feeling of unreality that plagues the protagonist. A surrealist story, on the other hand, would consider the products of these mental states as windows into the sur- (read: subconscious) of surreality. Or perhaps the story is more allegorical—the protagonist, like Yi Chun-sang in *Habiro*,⁹⁴ representing everyman's identity crisis (men in modern Korea), or perhaps even some kind of national identity crisis.

That said, there are significant aspects of the story that are more compatible with surrealist art, including concern with consciousness, bizarre metaphors, dreams, evidence of dehumanization (often in relation to capitalism), and the use of scientific/mathematical models for conceptualizing ideas. One incident of surrealist humor perhaps of interest is that of K's father telling him a story that repeatedly folds in upon itself, reminiscent of a Klein bottle and of Ristitch's claim that surrealist humor is "an intuitive and implicit criticism of the mental process in its conventionality" (qtd. in Gershman 48).

⁹³ The translation I used is unfinished, limiting my analysis to only part of the book.

⁹⁴ See footnote 92 for Yi In-hwa's statement about this protagonist of *Habiro* representing men in modern Korea.

4. Conclusion

This thesis considers surrealism in Cho Se-hŭi's *The Dwarf* and nine other works of modern Korean fiction published between 1936 and 2011. It has two main objectives: (1) to analyze elements of surrealism modern Korean fiction, and (2) to characterize surrealist fiction writing as it appears in that body of work. I have attempted to meet the first goal in chapters 2 and 3, building on the discussion in the Introduction of surrealism in both Western and Korean literature. In this Conclusion I wish to summarize how surrealism functions in modern Korean fiction—basing my summary on the body of work analyzed in this thesis.

Korean fiction contains elements of both political and literary surrealism. Some of the works examined here are very political (*The Dwarf*, “Wings,” “Phantom Illusion,” “Poems of John the Baptist”). Some lack the political aspect but show strong elements of literary surrealism (“Conviction,” “Corpses,” *Another Man's City*). Several make important social commentary through surrealistic elements (“The Haunted House,” “Another Man's Room,” *Habiro*).

As noted before, Mun writes that surrealism in Korea differed from the West in its lack of connection to Dada and its disconnect from political activities. Perhaps what Mun was referring to was the sort of “foray into organized leftist politics” that the Western surrealists engaged in (Eburne 1378). I am unaware of any Korean writers or writing groups acting likewise under the banner of a sort of surrealist liberation, nor am I aware of any clear connection between Korean Dada and surrealism besides the fact that they both appeared in the early 20th century. But contrary to what one may infer from the second part of Mun's statement, Korean surrealist fiction is hardly apolitical, and some of these works and writers must have rocked the political world as much as they did the literary world. *The Dwarf* is potentially a good example of this.⁹⁵ In their Afterword to the work, the Fultons write that “it is likely that the book was read by the great majority of college students in South Korea in the 1980s” (222). Less than a decade later, in 1987—just before the 1988 Olympics in Seoul,

⁹⁵*The Dwarf* is a very political work. Written during the leadership of the economic powerhouse Park Chung Hee in Korea, it represents a sort of testimony, though the characters are fictional, of the dehumanizing economic forces at work during that period. It subversively shows how corporate giants, when the government is complicit, can get away with gross mistreatment of laborers in the name of prosperity. In addition to such a political focus, a large number of elements characteristic of literary surrealism are also present, including dreams, scientific/mathematical metaphors, a narrative style that convolutes time and space, and others.

instigated and fueled in large part by demonstrations led by the very students who might have read *The Dwarf*, the authoritarian regime in Korea was overthrown in favor of a more democratic one. This shows the incredible potential for the sort of liberating revolutionary forces, about which Breton spoke, that *The Dwarf* and likely other works had in modern Korean society. In other words, this suggests that the political theory akin to that of surrealism in the works—especially *The Dwarf*—also influenced real political revolution—and Korean surrealism, therefore, was (and may continue to be, to a lesser degree,) political, but not quite in the explicit way that surrealism in the West was for a time.

Among the political events of the 20th century in Korea, three stand out as having had the most influence on Korean peoples' lives: Japanese colonization, the civil war, and democratization. Several works seem to respond directly to these events in a surrealistic way. I reviewed in the Introduction surrealism's disdain for fascism and dehumanization and, in the chapter on *The Dwarf*, examined stark examples of that from not long before the period before democratization. "Poems of John the Baptist" reacts to the ideological division that existed before, during, and after Korea's civil war, and it is possible to read "Wings" and "The Haunted House" as allegories of colonial oppression. The surrealism that Rosemont depicts, as outlined in my Introduction, is very political, and these works exemplify that characteristic—especially pre-IMF works. Perhaps this is due to the development of a much stronger democracy in the 1980s.

One of Rosemont's statements—to which I refer in the Introduction—describes surrealism as "an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom, and misery" (1). This is a political statement, and several of the works examined in this thesis exemplify this definition. For example, the protagonist of "Wings" throws money into the toilet, representing the rejection of capitalist ideals and, perhaps, the reduction of "all human aspirations to market values" that Rosemont describes (1). In "Conviction" the protagonist is tormented by his lack of conviction; one might call such a life boring and/or miserable—again to recall Rosemont's statement above. In *Another Man's City*, the protagonist seeks to find the true identities of his family members, and like "Another Man's Room," the story could be read as depicting the negative effects of industrialization and modernization—and as such, perhaps, the misery resulting from a market values reduction of human life.

It could be said that surrealist heroes, according to Matthews' characterization,⁹⁶ act in ways that increase human liberty. This is reminiscent of Rosemont's statement that surrealism itself "aims to free the imagination from the mechanisms of psychic and social repression . . ." (1). It has already been suggested that Yŏng-su is a surrealist hero. Other characters in these stories who could also be termed such, to varying degrees, include the protagonist in "Wings," who steps out of his rented room to the world outside (freeing himself), and, in "Poems of John the Baptist," Nu-hye, whose suicide in a way freed him from the falseness of the conflicting ideologies of his time and also enlightened his friend, Tong-ho, about that very falseness. If these are read allegorically as political works, one potential consequence would be to incite revolution against forces that oppress the body and spirit of the Korean people. This aligns with Rosemont's statement above about surrealism and Matthews' characterization of the surrealist hero. As is evident from the previous examples and in other places in these stories, freeing the mind from repression is central to surrealism in Korean fiction.

While Korea's political history fits Eburne's description of countries wherein "Alternative modes of surrealist activity continue to permeate the arts . . .", unlike Eburne's suggestion that these "remain committed to a political poetics", the modern works examined here have tended to shift the focus from political issues to those more social—such as Yi In-hwa's using 1930s Shanghai to reflect contemporary Korean society⁹⁷ and his suggestion that his main character represents men in modern Korea⁹⁸ (Eburne 1379). However, when Korea was *under* authoritarian regimes (Japan, Park Chung Hee), the literature better suited Eburne's statement.

Though some works are (or seem) relatively apolitical, all of the works contain literary elements of surrealism. One element is the rejection of convention in technique or subject matter, or "even the same ["subject matter and techniques"], perhaps treated differently or utilized to obtain different results" (Matthews 4). For example, through *The Dwarf*, as Pihl notes, Cho "redefined the meaning of the term" "linked-story novel" (339). Matthews' wrote with surrealist novels in mind, but other works in this thesis exemplify his

⁹⁶ See the subsection "Surrealist Novels?" in my Introduction.

⁹⁷ See my discussion of *Habiro* in chapter 3, where I refer to Yi's statement about using Shanghai to reflect the present. (The original source for Yi's statement is Chŏng Ch'ŏr-hun's article.)

⁹⁸ See footnote 92, where I present Yi's discussion of this.

statement about rejecting convention, be they novels or short stories. Recall, for example, the fact that P'yŏn Hye-yŏng's "Corpses" inverts the motif of confinement, common to Korean literature, and instead makes space anxiety-provoking.⁹⁹

Rejection of conventions in technique and subject matter is reminiscent of the genre experimentation discussed earlier. For example, *Habiro* is quite an apolitical work. Recall that the author, Yi In-hwa, said that in setting the novel in Shanghai he "broke from the historical limits of the Japanese occupation" (qtd. in Chŏng Ch'ŏr-hun).¹⁰⁰ This defies trends in writing: his very breaking from the focus on Japanese occupation in Korea represents a significant shift from a theme so characteristic of so many Korean works; what's more, the author writes in a style that suits a generation of gamers.¹⁰¹ This may also represent a new trend in Korean literature. Furthermore, one may recall Yi In-hwa's comments about the trajectory of Korean literature; he said, "Those in their twenties today are not of the generation of realist literature. . . . Korean subject matter is not the important thing; what Korean people feel is" ("Sinjaksosŏl"). Much of modern Korean literature has been realist, drawing perhaps from the didacticism of previous eras. Examples of such realism may include Chu Yo-sŏp's "My Mother and Her Guest" (*Sarang sonnim kwa ōmŏni*, 1935) and its social commentary on neo-Confucian gender roles amidst the realities of modernity, and Hwang Sunwŏn's *Descendants of Cain* (*K'ainŭi huye*, 1954), which portrays the terse political climate before the outbreak of the Korean War. These capture moments in time, like photographs, but the works examined in this thesis are far more experimental—whether they be novels or short stories. These surrealist elements thus serve a boundary-pushing function in Korean literature—changing definitions and forcing those involved to rethink and even reroute literary trends.

I wrote before that surrealism is concerned with discovering a deeper, more complete version of existence beyond the external reality before our eyes. In reading the modern works examined here—those published after 2000—one often finds it difficult to distinguish between everyday reality and the dreams/visions/potential madness that take place simultaneously—especially in "Corpses," "Conviction," and *Another Man's City*. This

⁹⁹ A paraphrase of the claim Bruce Fulton makes in the headnote to Cindy Chen's translation of "Corpses" in *Waxen Wings*. For this quote, see my discussion of "Corpses" in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ For portions quoted from Korean-language material, see the first instance I quote them for the original Korean.

¹⁰¹ To review the source for these claims, see my discussion of the novel in chapter 3.

ambiguity occurs in works published before 2000 as well, but to a lesser degree, such as in “The Haunted House” and “Another Man’s Room.” This very difficulty suggests that the world that we see doesn’t fill the entire space of what is (or *surreality*), and that there exists something beyond the world a realist text would depict. Like the Klein bottle or the Möbius strip in *The Dwarf*, this suggests that in modern Korea, and the world, there are realities that exist beyond our everyday awareness. In *The Dwarf*, one of these realities was the existence of the world of poor folk like the dwarf’s family and in *Habiro*, one was the underworld of criminal activity in Shanghai decades ago, including Korean, Chinese, and Japanese gangs. Thus, surrealism in modern Korean literature, through its employment of such things as unique metaphors, like the Klein bottle, and ambiguous states, has a function of revealing aspects of reality (social, or perhaps political or historical) that otherwise go unnoticed—suggesting also that there are more of these than presently meet the eye.

Akin to discovering a deeper, more complete version of existence is the idea that surrealism “attempt[s] to create a new mythology and put modern man and woman back in touch with the forces of the unconscious” (Hopkins xv). These works may very well have that effect on the Korean mind. The literature examined here tends to be increasingly experimental when viewed chronologically. For example, dreams or states of ambiguous realities take up more of the narrative space in the later works. Among the three works published in the 1930s, dream states (dreaming and/or uncertainty about what is real) play a significant role in only one of the three works, “The Haunted House.”¹⁰² On the other hand, in the four works published after 2000, such states play a central role in at least three of the four works (“Conviction,” “Corpses,” and *Another Man’s City*). Thus, judging by the selection of works here, it seems surrealist fiction has tended to delve more into the subconscious and to give that aspect of existence more play. Perhaps this represents the creation—or acceptance—of a new mythology where the subconscious mind has greater influence.¹⁰³

There exists little academic literature in English on modern Korean authors and/or works. Likewise, though surrealism itself is not a new movement, and while *surreal* and

¹⁰² The protagonist of “Wings” sleeps a lot, but his dreams remain largely undiscussed.

¹⁰³ Recall this statement: “Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought” (Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* 122).

surrealist have been used before in reference to some of the works before,¹⁰⁴ it also represents a fresh focus through which to view modern Korean fiction. To my knowledge, it is the first of its kind to focus entirely on surrealism in modern Korean fiction.

As with any thesis, limitations exist. I have referred to some in the body of this thesis. My refusal to resolutely call (most of) these works and/or their authors surrealist (ameliorated by postmodern theory) is perhaps a limitation, as may be my understanding of the movement and my use of language to describe so-called surrealist characteristics. Others include my lacking a strong academic background in literary theory, as well as the potential for a sort of surrealist bias or bias in the description of surrealism in favor of elements already identified in the works.

Future research could take a variety of forms. A short history of surrealism in modern Korean literature or fiction, including a translation of an overview such as that of Ko Myŏng-su, would make a valuable contribution. Magic(al) realism and/or magic(al) realist readings of Korean literature would also be instructive, as would be a similar approach to the fantastic/fantasy and other genres. We might also ask how Korean literature, and fiction in particular, has evolved since the post-Korean War era and the realist tendency of fiction from that era. Comparative studies of surrealist and magic(al) realist works of modern Korean literature along with counterpart works from Japan, China, India, the West, and elsewhere would be particularly fruitful.

¹⁰⁴ Among perhaps other examples, see Pihl, et al.'s headnote to Ch'oe Such'ŏl's "Conviction" in *Land of Exile*, Fulton's headnote to "Corpses" in *Waxen Wings*, and the discussion of *The Dwarf* story "The Spinyfish Entering My Net" from Liber's blog. Also, Yi Sang's surrealist ties, in addition to being discussed above, seem well known.

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¹⁰⁶ Lesson plan published online.

¹⁰⁷ This is a Microsoft Word document. The page numbers I note in parenthetical citations correspond to my version of this document.

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¹¹³ The interview is attributed to *Yŏnhap nyusŭ* [Yonhap News], and a copyright by the same is noted at the bottom of the page, just above a copyright by Naver Corp.