Early South Korean Modernist Poetry: a Genealogy

By Jae Won Edward Chung

In 1948, four months before the Republic of Korea was established, Sinsiron ("new poetics") published their first anthology volume. In it, co-founder Kim Kyŏng-nin (1918–2006) declared that modern poetry began with "the annulment of all promises about language." What did he mean? In the past, language had been but a tool for the explication of concepts and the circulation of ideology. With modern poetry, language became a scientific mode of thought that could produce its own "fusion" of reality.

> [I] wish to propose an experimental course for a new trajectory of modern poetry. In order to express a new way of thought (*sago*), we must adopt reality through a scientific perspective, at the right speed, and this reality must be constituted through a new fusion, with a fresh, pictorial imagination (*imijineisyŏn*). It is poetic thought that regulates this new fusion, and what adds speed to this new form of thought is art's comprehensive action (*aeksyŏn*).[1]

1. Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Hyŏndae si ŭi kusangsŏng [The conception of modern poetry]," *Sinsiron* 1 (April 1948). Quoted in Kim Yang-hŭi's "Haebanggisi esŏ chŏnwi ŭi ŭimi: t'ekchŏnwishiinjipt'emkwa t'ekshinshiront'elmŭl chungshim ŭro [The meaning of avant-garde in post-liberation poetry: Focusing on *Avant-garde Poetry Anthology* and *Sinsiron*]," *Han'gukhakyŏn'gu* 58 (September 2016): 127–128.

According to Kim, reality is both recreated and contemplated through poetry, and the "pictorial imagination" combined with "speed" allows the poet the opportunity to engage in "action." The promise of autonomous poetic agency and its reliance primarily on the power of the image would become attributes most consistently enshrined by modernist poetics in the coming decade. Almost forty years later, in his publication of the collection *Seoul, Wild Horse-like* (1987), Kim states that while modernism should not be constrained to a "dictionary concept," underlying its multiplicity through history were the principles of surrealism or imagism that allowed poets to draw from their contemporary contexts to "unfold new movements."[2]

It is not enough, however, to say modernism allows for multiplicity. We must look at how historical developments set the terms for what kind of multiplicity modernism may hold—that is, how they shaped the outer limits of modernism's constitution as a field of organizational, creative, and discursive activities.[3] This is especially true for the cultural politics of South Korea's turbulent early years. At the end of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), Korea was divided (the northern zone administered by the Soviet Union and the southern by the United States). Across the South, there was widespread ideological mobilization across virtually all organizational units. If 1930s modernism solidified its position in the cultural field in the wake of the dissolution of KAPF (Korean Artists Proletarian Federation) by the Japanese colonial authority, then jockeying for position in the post-liberation era by various factions unfolded more or less concurrently after Liberation, in a shorter span of time, overlapping with migrations, strikes,

2. Kim Kyŏng-nin, *Sŏul ŭn yasaengma ch'ŏrŏm* (Seoul: Munhaksasangsa, 1987), 117.

3. While the article does not mean to reduce modernism to its contexts, it holds firm to the notion that resilience of certain themes, their repetition with variation, and modernism's synthesis of former antimonies are better appreciated when situated within the poets' interpersonal, organizational, and socio-historical milieu. Attention to such overdetermining constitutive processes does not deflate the importance of poetic form; on the contrary, it confers more significance upon those artistic choices.

demonstrations, acts of terror, political and economic uncertainty, and eventually, the outbreak of the Korean War. The legacy of this civil war and its decades-long solidification into a sustainable postwar system involved the entrenchment of Cold War ideology and continual disavowal by state and citizenry. Modernism was implicated in this process.

As we examine the complexity of this implication, a genealogical method allows us to pay attention to moments of diverging possibilities at an early juncture of South Korean literary history.[4] It also allows us to engage in ongoing debates about how aesthetic and discursive borders of modernism in Korea have been constituted. Kim Hansung and Choi Junga, for example, have shown how acts of translating or creatively adapting the works of W.B. Yeats yielded varying possibilities for modernism across generations of Korean poetry.[5] While Kim and Choi show how Yeats's oeuvre became a fruitful Rorschach test for Korean modernists of their respective eras, Janet Poole's work on "mid-century modernism" seeks to trace the resilience of modernist themes across discursive boundaries shaped by the Cold War.[6] By showing how Ch'oe Myŏng-ik's aesthetics of melancholia and negation persist across the 1945 divide, Poole offers a way of understanding modernism less in "specific formal terms" and more as a questioning of unidirectional progress.

---

4. In Foucault's formulation, he critiques "attempt[s] to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities," and calls for attention to "the external world of accident and succession." My intention, then, is not to trace the origin of postwar modernism in South Korea, to some "timeless essential secret." This re-tracing method is tempting, since it was not rare for modernists themselves, beleaguered by postcolonial anxiety about belatedness, to present their projects as developmental, but such a search can easily slip back into a logic of "reception" and the valorization of European predecessors as the original moderns. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 142.

5. Kim Hansung and Choi Junga, "The Genealogy of Korean Modernism in Poetry: Focus on Translations of W.B. Yeats," *Acta Koreana* 21, no. 2 (December 2018): 553–574.

6. Janet Poole, "Crossing the Great Divide: Mid-Century Modernism on the Korean Peninsula," in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean Literature,* ed. Yoon Sun Yang (New York: Routledge, 2020).

If Kim and Choi privilege variation, and Poole repetition, I attempt to track both in early South Korean modernist poetry. I also bring together the genealogical approach and attention to processes of "negation," which proves versatile in that it can be applied temporally (as Poole engages it)[7] and in terms of synchronic and adjacent aesthetic practices. In formulating modernism as a translatable and potentially universal concept, Peter Osborne has described it as "a particular constellation of fields of negation . . . . Hence its potentially contradictory manifestations in, for example, both radically nationalistic and radically anti-nationalistic, cosmopolitan forms, in different historical and national contexts."[8] In early South Korea, the "fields of negation" would include (groups of) poets who thought of themselves as writing modern poetry, without necessarily identifying as "modernist." Moreover, if we consider that all post-liberation poetry was being produced within a postcolonial moment, we can see how the actual dynamics of negation were even messier than the national/anti-nationalist binary. This is why I trace a modernist genealogy with an eye to inner dissensus and paramodernist expressions, since it allows us to better see how these overlapping conflicts are later resolved, however partially, through aesthetic, organizational, and sociohistorical transformations.

Looking across wartime austerity of late colonial Korea to the early post-liberation euphoria in South Korea, we find startling examples of modernist continuity drawing on "negation, paradox, and irony," as Poole's mid-century hypothesis would suggest. There is also striking incongruity between what is expressed as modernist poetry and how the modernists themselves picture their artistic futures; the former remains haunted by shock, dislocation, and unease,

7. Poole develops her idea of negation, in part, as an aesthetic formal response to Osborne's formulation of modernism as a temporal negation: "the name for the *cultural affirmation of a particular temporal logic of negation* ('the new,' the temporal logic of the modern)." Peter Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 57.

8. Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, 60.

while the latter consists of sanguine views about the emancipatory possibilities of poetic technique. The post-liberation works of Pak In-hwan (1926–1956) stand out for this reason. For Pak, who formed Sinsiron and Huban'gi with Kim Kyŏng-nin,[9] the historical content in his poetry and his innovative aesthetics appeared unified and, at least for a time, equally forward-looking, embodying a civic, decolonial, and cosmopolitan vision of modernism. In the following years, this vision would be repressed, realigned, and reworked as modernism adapted to the shifting ideological terrain of the Cold War. At the same time, over a tumultuous decade that included the devastation of the Korean War, modernist poets maintained a remarkable continuity of aesthetics, by revisiting tropes of visuality, death, speed, fracture, darkness, anxiety, science, and technocracy. The article concludes with the rise of Kim Su-yŏng (1921–1968), whose post-revolutionary poetics would reassess the literary culture of the 1950s as colonized.[10] The emergence of Kim's modernism of political engagement cannot be fully understood without careful consideration of the ideological and aesthetic dissensus that preceded it.

Sinsiron: between Pure Literature and Political Literature

After the collapse of the Japanese empire, literary organizations flourished in Seoul. This efflorescence also led to disputes and rivalries. On the left, tension between Im Hwa's Headquarters for the Construction of Chosŏn Literature and Yi Ki-yŏng's Chosŏn Proletarian Literature Alliance caused some associated with the

9. The genealogy provided by this article is not without its own trajectory. It focuses mostly on Sinsiron, Huban'gi ("latter half"), and DIAL, which were the major self-describing modernist poetry groups of their time. Focusing on the three brings to relief a clearly defined chronological lineage, implicitly privileging Kim Kyŏng-nin, the only poet to have played a leadership role in all three. Focusing on figures like Pak In-hwan is a way to complicate this trajectory, albeit without overturning it completely. This article should be read as an invitation for more radical critiques.

10. According to Young-Jun Lee, Kim viewed contemporary literature as "colonial literature" and the journals before April Revolution as "unsanitary." See Young-Jun Lee, "Howling Plants and Animals: Kim Su-yŏng's Sovereign Language and Reading 'Grasses,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 72, no. 1 (June 2012): 111.

latter to leave for the North—an early wave of a phenomenon called *wŏlbuk*.[11] Leftist organizations combined forces to become, eventually, the Chosŏn Writers' Alliance, which was active until 1947. The right responded by establishing the Writers' Youth Association on 4 April 1946. It included major writers of the era, such as Kim Tong-ni and Cho Yŏng-hyŏn. Among its poets were Pak Mog-wŏl, Pak Tu-jin, and Cho Chi-hun, who made up the poetry collective Ch'ŏngnokp'a ("blue-green deer faction").[12] Their eponymous anthology, *Ch'ŏngnokchip*, was published in June 1946 to broad acclaim and became emblematic of the so-called pure literature movement.[13] For Kim Tong-ni, who praised their works as "the discovery of nature,"[14] pure literature sought to somewhat paradoxically transcend "historical time and political ideology," while cultivating a national literature within a "world-historical context."[15] Its position was fiercely opposed to socialist and communist incursion into the artistic realm, while trying to link literature's autonomy to an understanding of national culture oriented toward a traditional or primordial past.

---

11. Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 66–67.

12. For translations of Ch'ŏngnokp'a members' poems, see *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Poetry*, ed. David R. McCann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110–128, and *The Silence of Love: Twentieth Century Korean Poetry*, ed. Peter H. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980), 135–187.

13. Kim Yong-jik identifies three trends in *Ch'ŏngnokchip*: 1) rural and folkloric over urban and cosmopolitan, 2) mostly detached from socio-historical reality, and 3) considerable attention paid to economy of rhythm and meter. Kim Yong-jik, "Haebanggi sidan ŭi Ch'ŏngnokp'a [Ch'ŏngnokp'a of the post-Liberation period]," *Oeguk munhak* 18 (March 1989): 185–186.

14. Kim Tong-ni, "Samgasi wa chayŏn ŭi palgyŏn [Three poets and the discovery of nature]," *Yesul Chosŏn* (April 1948).

15. Kim Tong-ni and members of Ch'ŏngnokp'a may be considered "paramodernists" within the framework of this article. Just as modernists actively attempted to negate what they saw to be "traditional" cultural forms, paramodernists worked in productive tension with more self-conscious modernist expressions. Travelling "alongside" or more contentiously thinking of themselves "apart from" modernism, they contributed to consolidating contemporary modernism's aesthetic and discursive borders. For more on Kim's literary philosophy, particularly his anti-modernist vision of literature as a form of humanistic religiosity, see Chiyoung Kim's introduction in *Imperatives of Culture*, ed. Christopher P. Hanscom, Walter K. Lew, and Youngju Ryu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 199–202.

Ch'ŏngnokp'a's prominence is crucial for understanding the significance of Sinsiron's modernist position. Sinsiron differentiated itself from what it saw as the atavistic folk lyricism found in *Ch'ŏngnokchip*, while decrying the stultifying ideological demands of the leftist camp. From its inception, then, Sinsiron's modernism was betwixt and between, calling for linguistic experimentalism and forward-looking historical engagement (therefore a break with the past) without reducing literature to a vulgar political instrument.

It should not be so surprising, then, that Sinsiron's co-founder Pak In-hwan would be difficult to place on an ideological spectrum. While he participated in events held by the right-wing Writers' Youth Association,[16] we should also pay attention to his contribution to the post-liberation literary scene through his bookshop, Mari sŏsa. The shop was named after Parisian Cubist painter and intellectual Marie Laurencin (1883–1956), known for bringing together different elements of French avant-garde and American expatriate society.[17] According to several accounts, something akin to this border-crossing cosmopolitanism could be found at Mari sŏsa. The space attracted O Chang-hwan and Im Hog-wŏn (both eventually went North), as well as Kim Su-yŏng, who, despite his well-known rivalry with Pak, would reminisce fondly about the space as being free, "like Montmartre," where visitors did not have to worry about ideological division.[18]

Kim Ki-rim (1908–?) was another renowned regular at Pak's bookshop. While primarily remembered for his contribution to 1930s modernism, his reputation loomed large for young poets of

16. "Yesul ŭi pam kaech'oe" [Opening of the night of the arts]," *Tonga Ilbo,* 15 June 1946.

17. This account is from Pak's eldest son, Pak Se-hyŏng, told to him by his mother. It is also possible that the term "Mari" came from Fuyue Anzai's poetry collection, *The Battleship Mari* (Gunkan mari) (1929). According to Kim Su-yŏng's recollection, surrealist painter Pak Yŏng-il told Pak In-hwan about *Gunkan mari*, which the latter adapted to name his shop. See Kim Su-yŏng's "Mari sŏsa," in *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun* (Collected works of Kim Su-yŏng, vol. 2, prose) (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1997).

18. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 74.

the post-liberation moment. He knew and influenced Kim Kyŏng-nin and Pak In-hwan directly. Huban'gi member Kim Kyu-dong, when he first migrated south, had been a student of Kim Ki-rim when they lived in the north. Su-yŏng gives sideways recognition to the older poet's position of authority by recounting an incident where Ki-rim urged him to change the word "aristocrats" to "heroes" in a poem;[19] Su-yŏng's stubborn refusal was a moment of coming into his own as a poet. Most important, the aesthetic commitments of Sinsiron would come to reflect the values and biases of Ki-rim, especially his criticism of "secluded, retrospective, and sentimental" tendencies of poets like Kim Ŏk and Kim So-wŏl, which he published in 1939, calling on his contemporaries, instead, to embrace a more forward-looking "physiology of dawn."[20]

Sinsiron published its eponymous inaugural anthology on 20 April 1948, three months after Mari sŏsa closed its doors. Despite its fragmented, stylized exposition, this essay excerpt expresses the group's position well.

> The weak found refuge in shaky cosmopolitanism, and without proper global consciousness or historical judgment, succumbed before the enemy's gates after minimum resistance.
> August 15th. The disengaged self. Disengagement (*yuri*). Disengagement.
> Experts knew the source of their error. Where their weakness was rooted. The return of the real . . . drove the advancing people to discover themselves.
> They couldn't go blue-green and frolic with flowers and mountains in an Eastern-style garden.[21] Because it was a

19. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 229.

20. Kim and Choi, "The Genealogy of Korean Modernism in Poetry," 563.

21. While an in-depth analysis of *Ch'ŏngnokchip*'s poetics is not possible here, it is worth noting that the imagery found in the poems tends to privilege obscurity over definition. Particularly in Pak Mogwŏl's works, even as his lines conjure a vision, it is often already dissolving away—hence, the privileging of phrases like "arŭndaenŭn" (wavering), "ŏsŭrŭm" (dusky, dim), "poil tŭt mal tŭt'an" (barely visible), "asŭmasŭm" (faintly), "talmuri" (a ring of haze around the moon). For a comparison of English translations conveying this aesthetic, see

worn-out beauty, which their bodies had rejected. Because there was no genuine science or vitality there.[22]

Liberation from Japan has not automatically brought wholeness. The self finds itself alienated and "disengaged." The search to overcome this disengagement means rejecting going "blue-green" or frolicking in an "Eastern-style garden." These references appear to be explicit attacks against Ch'ŏngnokp'a, the aesthetics of pure literature, and Kim Tong-ni's call for a national literature. Sinsiron's critique of Ch'ŏngnokp'a importantly echoes Kim Ki-rim's criticism of Kim Ŏk and Kim So-wŏl a decade before; both use the language of weakness and lack of vigor ("worn-out beauty") to characterize the poetry of the past.

While themes of "global consciousness," "historical judgment," and overcoming "disengagement" would be further explored in Sinsiron's second volume, *New City and Its Citizen Chorus*, the decolonial character of its modernism would receive fresh emphasis. For one, contributor Im Ho-gwŏn included a tribute to the late poet Pae In-ch'ŏl (1920–1947), in a poem called "Black Sorrow."[23] Pae's creative investment in the historical struggle of blacks was well known among writers of this time. Huban'gi member Kim Ch'a-yŏng would later recall, "[Pae's] black poetry symbolized the sorrow of the oppressed and weaker nations, by evoking their pent-up anger, the somber fate of being a person of color, and the force of resistance. . . . Pae was an ethno-nationalist (*minjok*) poet and an anti-lyricist modernist."[24] Though Im's assessment of Pae's contribution to the black struggle is sometimes exaggerated, even patronizing from today's perspective, Pae's

---

"Green Deer," in *The Silence of Love,* and "Blue Deer," in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Poetry*.

22. Quoted in Kim Yang-hŭi, "Haebanggi si esŏ chŏnwi`ŭi ŭimi," 121–122.

23. Im would be another example of a paramodernist, an admittedly reluctant (or perhaps merely modest) member of Sinsiron, who seemed to think, based on the preface to his own poems, that his work did not belong in the anthology. *Saeroŭn tosi wa simindurŭi hapch'ang: Sinsiron sijip* (Seoul: Tosimunhwasa, 1949), 3, 44–47.

24. Yun Yŏng-ch'ŏn, "Pae Inch'ŏl gwa hŭginsi wa Inch'ŏn [Pae In-ch'ŏl, black poetry, and Inchon]," *Hwanghae munhwa* 55 (June 2007): 214.

haunting presence in *New City* is a trace of a future foreclosed:[25] of a postwar modernism that could have imagined the construction of national literature across the Third World as a cross-racial decolonizing process even prior to its realist revival in the 1970s.

Pae's posthumous tribute was part of a larger ethos animating the volume, which achieves fuller elaboration in Pak In-hwan's preface:

> In the streets occupied by soldiers of capital, there's only the fog of loathing and reality . . . . Folk songs and the elegy from the colonial days seep into the district's air. But the eternal Sunday creeps into my breast. I go to the outskirts with the one I love, following poetry's steps to the virgin forest, where I can enjoy its earth and air, my individuality and freedom of thought. O, the scalding heat of countless roses that torment me there.[26]

Pak does not shy away from historical forces, naming the contested terms of the day: *capital* and *colonialism*. Precisely when he seems to posit poetry as a means of escaping such politicized concepts, he laments how the heat of roses (possibly the beauty and freedom of poetry) brings him torment. There is also the contradiction of natural beauty—repeated references to flowers, trees, earth, and air—which seems to be returning him to the land, but the evocation is more symbolist than pastoral.

Despite the creeping of the "eternal Sunday," Pak's poems in *New City* dare wade through the "fog of loathing and reality." He goes first to the seaside in "Inchon Harbor," where profiteers traffic in booze, opium, and black-market merchandise. In the poem, Pak neatly folds together memories of the Japanese occupation, the British rule of Hong Kong, and South Korea under the American

25. Pae was killed by gunfire on May 10, 1947. Some have speculated, in light of his activities with the Southern Workers' Party, that he was a victim of political terror by a right-wing organization.

26. Pak In-hwan, "Changmiŭi ondo [Temperature of a rose]," *Saeroun tosi wa simindŭrŭi hapch'ang: Sinsiron sijip* (New city and its citizen chorus: *Sinsiron* poetry anthology) (Seoul: Tosimunhwasa, 1949), 51.

military government. And if "Inchon Harbor" laments the re-colonization of Korea after the Second World War, "South Winds" and "Poems for the Indonesian People" describe the decolonizing efforts of Asians outside of Korea. Like Pae's tribute to the black struggle, Pak's poems unfold as a direct address to the downtrodden people seeking decolonization. In "South Winds," the promise of liberation comes not from the might of the American military but from the decolonizing struggles of other nations, which spread their winds of resistance across Asia, connecting people across the region with emotional immediacy ("seep into your destitute heart").

Also significant is Pak's choice of form. Scholar Kim Ŭn-yŏng has noted that "Poem for the Indonesian People" draws from the "realist epic tradition" of the 1920s; Kim Ki-jin, a prominent member of KAPF, laid out how Im Hwa's poetry could contribute to the popularization of poetry, through "epic structure, theatrical personification, conflict centered around class-struggle."[27] If we take into account Pak's redeployment of the "realist epic" mode within the post-liberation moment, along with the fact that "Inchon Harbor," "South Winds," and "Poems for the Indonesian People" were all originally published between 1947 and early 1948, when political suppression from the American military government began driving more and more leftist sympathizers north, Pak's decision to republish the poems in 1949—eight months after Syngman Rhee established his anti-communist government—may be interpreted as his unflagging rebuke of the geopolitical order.

Huban'gi (後半紀): Cultural Politics of Modernism in Wartime

While Huban'gi was formed before the outbreak of the Korean War, its activities were inescapably shaped by it.[28] The deepening

27. Kim Ŭn-yŏng, *Huban'gi, 1950 nyŏndae modanijŭm siŭi p'yojŏng* (Huban'gi: Expression of 1950s modernist poetry) (Seoul: Sŏnin, 2011), 153–154.

28. According to Kim Ŭn-yŏng, it was formed in 1949, shortly after *New City and Its Citizen Chorus* was published. On the continuing confusion over when the group was first organized, see Kim, *Huban'gi,* 44.

geopolitical divide affected Huban'gi's membership and conditions of its poetic production. Once Kim Pyŏng-uk, Kim Kyŏng-hŭi, and Im Ho-gwŏn (those who had participated in Sinsiron) went north, Yang Pyŏng-sik, though he remained in the South, chose not to join, perhaps no longer recognizing the collective as the same group. Yi Sang-no and Yi Han-jik were early members but dropped out to focus on the war effort, joining the ranks of Ch'anggong gurakpu ("Blue Sky Club") to publish propaganda literature for the Republic of Korea's Air Force Writers Collective.[29] The chaos of wartime also contributed to making Huban'gi a more decentralized movement, which meant the contours of its aesthetic commitments and its membership would remain even more open to ambiguity and contestation. Kim Kyu-dong, a later arrival, would call Huban'gi a "Modern Poetry Research Group" consisting of six individuals: Kim Kyŏng-nin, Pak In-hwan, Yi Pong-nae, Kim Ch'a-yŏng, Cho Hyang, and himself (eliding Yi Sang-no or Yi Han-jik).[30]

The war pushed most South Korean literary activities farther south, for a time, but without completely subsuming it into the war effort. Cho Hyang, a surrealist who'd been primarily active in Busan, published the second edition of his college literature reader, *Hyŏndae kungmunhak su*, introducing his now canonical "Sea's Stairway."[31] The poetry section of the 1952 edition is noteworthy for its organization;[32] while there appears to be no clear logic to his list of prominent modern poets of past and present, he sets apart members of Huban'gi toward the end, with a section break, including an entry for "Collaborative Poem" (*hapjaksi*) as though this work was itself a poet.[33] The poem,

29. Kim, *Huban'gi,* 44–46.

30. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun Siron* (New poetics) (Seoul: Sanhojang, 1959), 176.

31. Cho Hyang, "Pada ŭi ch'ŭnggye [Sea's stairway]," in *Hyŏndae kungmunhak su* (Collection of modern national literature), ed. Cho Hyang (Busan: Chayujang, 1952), 165.

32. *Hyŏndae kungmunhak su* (Collection of modern national literature), ed. Cho Hyang (Busan: Chayujang, 1952), 2.

33. This idiosyncratic feature of Cho's anthology has been noted by several scholars. Hong Raesŏng also observes how the 1948 edition did not include other modernists who would eventually become part of Cho's Huban'gi coterie.

"Barren Elegy," is an example of *cadavre exquis*, a method that generates random and unconscious associations between words by combining thoughts and images from different artists. The act of inclusion is itself playful in a Dadaist way, subverting the logic of the textbook anthology; at the same time, it does the serious work of symbolically shoring up Huban'gi's status within the poetry field, as well as Cho's own status within Huban'gi. His exercise of editorial agency is significant in light of the fact the group, unlike Sinsiron, never published an official anthology of its own.

While literary activity retained some autonomy, most writers, including members of Huban'gi, volunteered or were persuaded by circumstances to contribute to war propaganda. This raises an interesting question in light of Sinsiron's earlier commitment to stay out of the ideological warfare of the post-liberation era: How would Huban'gi modernists rationalize their involvement in the war effort? For Kim Kyu-dong, there appears to have been no conflict or hypocrisy.

> When poets, caught midst the trembling web of world history, can decide their orientation towards life and pursue existential investigation regarding their position with a penetrating eye—this vision would foretell the future of new poetry.
>
> First and foremost, a poet had to become a fierce critic of communism.[34]
>
> If history forges a background from which the new poets can forge new songs, then during these two years of war, Korean modernists, without a doubt, found their poetry's authentic territory in the ruins of battle.[35]

Hong Raesŏng, "Cho Hyang ŭi ch'ohyŏnsilchuŭi shiron ŭi parhyŏn gwajŏng gwa t'ŭkchil e taehayŏ [The manifestation process and properties of Cho Hyang's surrealist poetics]," *Inmun nonch'ong* 71, no. 3 (August 2014): 304.

34. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 169.

35. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 151.

The first quote is Kim's description of the political polarization in the post-liberation era. In his view, as modern poetry would not have been able to survive under communism, it was not inconsistent for the "new poet" to militate against it. There was natural continuity between this position and Kim's acceptance of Cho Hyang's participation in the propaganda efforts of the Korean War.[36] Did such works represent a genuine part of wartime modernism, or were they merely cultural work deemed vital to maintain the freer conditions their modernist pursuits required? The second quote, also from Kim Kyu-dong, seems to suggest that the demands of propaganda did not significantly negate war's potential for producing "genuine" poetry; on the whole, the war became an opportunity for the modernists to expand their efforts.

On the other hand, the theme of wartime conditions' potentially harmful effects on art is addressed self-reflexively in Kim Kyŏng-nin's "For a Decade of Makeup."[37]

I cannot promise Father
a tomorrow
when
the din of military trains
and rotary presses racing ahead
like propaganda flyers
cannot count as music.
It was my fate,
being unable to betray him.

36. Kim uses the term "propaganda" to describe pro-war writing of the period, and cites a poem by Cho Hyang as an example. The general sentiment throughout Kim's essay is that it was necessary to fight the communists by any means necessary.

37. Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Hwajanghan yŏndae rŭl wihayŏ [For a decade of makeup]," in *Han'guk sijip (sang)* (South Korean poetry anthology), ed. Yi Han-jik (Busan: Taeyang, 1952), 1: 118–121. Yi Han-jik, an original member of Huban'gi, describes in the afterword of the volume that it is meant to provide a "bird's-eye view" of the poetry field of the time. Unlike Cho Hyang in *Hyŏndae kungmunhak su*, Yi relatively diminishes his editorial role, declaring that the poets chose which of their own poems to publish. The anthology includes modernists alongside the Chongnop'a poets like Cho Chi-hun and Pak Tu-jin.

Maybe I would've been better off
learning the splendid ways of speed and makeup.

In this excerpt, technologies of print and transport have been co-opted by war. The din of totalization has made the "music" of art impossible. While speed is traditionally celebrated in modernist aesthetics, it is linked here cynically with "makeup." Though the poem is unable to show a way forward ("I cannot promise Father a tomorrow"), it does not flee from historical conditions. It engages with and critiques them, managing to clarify the weight of the speaker's moral dilemma, which takes on greater poignance if we consider Kim's own work for the technocratic wartime regime.[38]

Pak In-hwan likewise wrote poems for and against the war,[39] but he differed from Kim in that his language against the war was less cryptic, more unequivocal. Pak's post-Sinsiron turn away from his freewheeling decolonial outlook to a more inward, lugubrious, and mournful style, can actually be traced back to before the outbreak of the war. It may be that his reorientation was shaped by an increasingly punitive political climate. In July 1949, he was accused of being a Southern Labor Party member and narrowly escaped conviction.[40] Early next year, he went on to participate in a three-day National Arts Exhibition organized by the Bodo League, an anti-communist re-education program.[41] When the Korean People's Army invaded Seoul in June, Pak was unable to flee, which

38. In "Like a Bullet," for example, first published in *Yŏnhap Sinmun*, Kim writes, "Let us embrace [the Korean War], which makes our bodies shudder. Let us fly like bullets towards the nation's soil (*kukt'o*) [to reclaim what] we have lost." Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Tanal ch'ŏrŏm [Like a bullet]," in *1953 nyŏn yŏn'gan sijip* (1953 annual poetry anthology) (Taegu: Munsŏngdang, 1954), 47–48.

39. Pak's pro-war poems include "From the Western Front [*Sŏbu chŏnsonesŏ*]," and "Flare [*Sinhot'an*]." Pak In-hwan, *Sijiip ch'anggung* (Konggun mun'go, 1952), 17–21.

40. Pak was arrested with other left-oriented reporters for violating the National Security Act. According to Pang Min-ho, Pak appears to not have been an actual member of the Southern Labor Party, while having held certain anti-government opinions in common. Pang Min-ho, "Pak Inhwan sanmun e nat'anan miguk [America as it appears in Pak In-hwan's prose]," *Han'guk hyŏndae munhak yŏngu* 19 (June 2006): 421.

41. *Tonga Ilbo*, "Kungminyesuljejŏn poryŏnjuch'oe [National arts exhibition hosted by Bodo League]," 4 January 1950.

compromised his ideological pedigree even further; when Seoul was eventually recovered by U.N. forces in September, those who had chosen to remain in the capital, regardless of reason, were marked as complicit with the North Korean regime. Joining up with the South Korean Army, as Pak ended up doing, would have provided a degree of safety from persecution by the state. In spite of his collaboration with the war effort, in "O Dark God," we sense the depth of Pak's dejection. The grievous despair exceeds that of Kim Kyŏng-nin's "For a Decade of Makeup," which managed some degree of irony and levity through fanciful language.

Huban'gi disbanded around late 1953.[42] Scholars and former members disagree over the details. Kim Kyu-dong claimed that after returning to Seoul, freeing one's "individuality from restriction" was paramount for fostering innovation of poetic technique. The disbandment was described amicably as a "forward-looking breakup" (*palchŏnjok haesan*).[43] Cho Hyang, on the other hand, pointed to an underlying political conflict. At the time, the provisional capital Busan was full of right-wing terror. Those who voiced their dissent against Syngman Rhee—even elected officials—were violently rounded up. Many artists, grudgingly or willfully, sided with the status quo. In Cho's own recollection, he speaks trenchantly against this trend of complicity, which involved members of Huban'gi: "I was appalled by the coterie's support for the ruling party. I didn't want to be with them any longer."[44]

Pak In-hwan and Kim Kyŏng-nin experienced Huban'gi's afterlife differently. Pak, whose poems had taken a turn toward sentimentality, never recovered the spirited vigor of the Sinsiron-era; even his poems about traveling across the Pacific were mired in meandering melancholy. In 1955, Kim went to the United States

42. Kim Ŭn-yŏng, *Huban'gi*, 56–57.

43. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 182.

44. For Kim Ŭn-yŏng, Cho's account is more convincing. To argue primarily for advancement in poetry by separating it out from politics and historical reality was ultimately tantamount to "condoning the current of contemporary politics." Kim, *Huban'gi*, 58–61.

to study civil engineering at the State University of New York. During his American visit, he met with modernist giant Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.[45] Kim himself is said to have considered Pound to be an important mentor.[46] Less emphasized in the retellings of this encounter is the fact Pound was hospitalized to evade charges of treason for having collaborated with Italian fascists during the Second World War. For decades, a fuller consideration of Pound's antisemitism and fascist involvement would be sidelined in favor of celebrating his monumental contribution to modernism.[47]

DIAL: Post-Armistice Modernism and Political Quietism

The postwar critical tendency toward quietist disavowal when considering Ezra Pound's imbricated legacies of modernism and fascism is useful for thinking about the South Korean case. The years of post-armistice reconstruction until the democratic rupture of the April Revolution would produce a flurry of publishing activities and new organizational formations, which would seek an autonomous space from government intervention while by and large submitting to the underlying ideological reality of Cold War division.

Upon returning to Seoul, Kim Kyŏng-nin continued his modernist activities in 1957 with the founding of DIAL, a year after Pak In-hwan's untimely passing. He published two anthology

45. An even more remarkable connection, perhaps, than Kim's encounter with Ezra Pound, is his distinguished career in civil engineering after returning from the States. Kim went on to become Director of Construction of Yeongnam Region. According to his eldest daughter, Kim would frequent the Blue House during the Park Chung-hee regime to be briefed about urban and industrial construction plans. Surely, it is worth noting that one of the pioneering modernist poets of the postwar era also became a dedicated servant of the developmentalist state. See "Chŏnhu kukkajaegŏn t'omoksaŏbe hŏnshinhan 'huban'gi' modŏnisŭt'ŭ [The "Huban'gi" modernist who devoted himself to postwar national construction civil engineering]," accessed 6 January 2020, http://www.daesan.or.kr/webzine/sub.html?uid=3512&ho=81.

46. Kim Myŏng-ok, "Kim Kyŏng-nin, kŭ ŭi samgwa munhak segye [Kim Kyŏng-nin, his life and works]," *Munye undong* (March 2007): 73.

47. Michael Patrick Coyle and Roxana Preda, *Ezra Pound and the Career of Modern Criticism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2018).

volumes that same year. *Modern Temperature* contained works by former Huban'gi member Kim Ch'a-yŏng and newcomers like Yi Yŏng-il, who would go on to become the premier historian of Korean national cinema.[48] *Testimony Towards Peace* included Huban'gi's Yi Sang-no and Kim Kyu-dong and Sinsiron's Kim Su-yŏng, among others.

Despite the resurgence of publishing activity, especially when compared to Huban'gi's legacy of having produced zero anthologies, a pall of defeatism lingered in Kim Kyŏng-nin's works. "O Weekend Lost,"[49] included in both anthologies, demonstrates a remarkable continuity with "For a Decade of Makeup." In both, the speaker is displeased with the contemporary era. Before, politicians hid behind makeup; now they have newspapers spread across their chests, hiding behind "over-beautiful words." The figure of the Father returns too, linked now with an "unfortunate family" who are told to "digest the present in type." Who is this moribund collective? The nation? Its poets? Whoever they are, they seem to have no choice but to accept and internalize what the present era dishes out.

Did Pak In-hwan's civic and alliance-seeking spirit of modernist poetry during the post-liberation era disappear after the Korean War? It did not so much vanish as become reconfigured by the Cold War's ideological entanglement. My earlier point about how Kim Kyŏng-nin enhanced his modernist credentials by networking with a rehabilitating fascist was a symptom of this development. Another example is the publication of "Death of a Girl in Budapest" by Kim Ch'un-su (1922–2004) in *Testimony Towards Peace*, in which the speaker laments the death of a thirteen-year-old girl by "a volley of Soviet-made bullets" during the Hungarian

48. For more about Yi Yŏngil's career as a film historian, see Hieyoon Kim's "Living with a Postcolonial Conundrum," *Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3 (August 2019): 601–620.

49. *Hyŏndae ŭi ondo* (Modern temperature) (Seoul: Tosimunhwasa, 1957), 23–26. *P'yŏnghw aeŭi chŭngŏn* (Testimony towards peace) (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1957), 104–107.

Revolution of 1956.[50] Kim moves from the Danube River and Johann Strauss to the sandy banks of the Han River where an unnamed Korean girl died.

On the surface, the poem's geopolitical Others are obvious and convenient. The enemy of the Hungarian Revolution was Soviet imperialism. Kim's past tormentor is Korea's former colonizer. Whereas Pak In-hwan called out American neocolonialism and sympathized with the decolonizing efforts of fellow Asians, Kim Ch'un-su's transnational alliance toes the Cold War line. Many have assumed the girl who dies by the Han River to be a civilian casualty of the Korean War, the death of an innocent by communist belligerence being a linchpin that connects Hungary and South Korea. But this does not explain the repeated appeal to "*tongp'o*" (compatriot), which invokes a blood-based ethno-nation, including North Koreans, and why the details surrounding the Korean girl are left so vague. There is also this striking passage that flashes back to the colonial era, later removed in Kim's revision:

> I was twenty-two.
> A college student.
> I'd been incarcerated as a "discontented Korean" in
> Tokyo's Sedagaya.
> One day, a sound crawled
> out through the throat like
> writhing of intestines,
> "Mother, I want to live!"
> It was sound like I'd never heard, from somewhere far away.
> Me and somehow not me . . . .

After this recollection, the speaker asks, "Was the desire to stay alive the beginning of my disgrace?" Perhaps we can read Kim's

50. Kim Ch'un-su, "Pudap'esŭt'ŭesŏ ŭi sonyŏ ŭi chukŭm [Death of a girl in Budapest]," in *P'yŏnghw aeŭi chŭngŏn* (Testimony towards peace) (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1957), 52–56.

valorization of selfless sacrifice against the grain as an expression of a divided nation's political unconscious: a dream of radical courage against authoritarian suppression, communist or anti-communist.

The year 1957 also saw the founding of the Society of Korean Poets, which called for uniting modern poets to forge a "communal bond of ideology and emotion" and avoid "unnecessary factional strife," as a concerted move away from the contentious organizational activities in the post-liberation era. Cho Chi-hun, Pak Mog-wŏl, Pak Tu-jin, Kim Su-yŏng, Kim Ch'un-su, Kim Kyŏng-nin, and Kim Kyu-dong were among the dozens of signatories. This mission statement, published before the table of contents of the inaugural issue of *Modern Poetry*,[51] marked a significant détente for poets of Ch'ŏngnokp'a and the modernists of DIAL. Tellingly, the issue included a roundtable in which ten poets, including Kim Kyŏng-nin, Pak Mog-wŏl, and Cho Chi-hun, sat down to discuss the state of modern poetry in South Korea. The mood throughout is almost painfully conciliatory. From the beginning, Pak diplomatically suggests the purpose of the roundtable should not be to "set rules" for the literary field. Kim later states, "there is no mainstream in modern poetry, nor could there be,"[52] and "there is no need to divide poetry into factions (*yup'abyŏl*)."[53] He goes on to qualify the latter statement by saying if such a division were necessary, he would consider "intellectualist and anti-intellectualist" tendencies, as well as the poet's chosen method and subject matter. What is striking about Kim's careful response is his reluctance to bring up the word "image."[54]

51. If this inaugural issue sought to herald a new era for South Korean modern poetry, it also paid its respects to those who could not join the journey, including an elegiac poem for Pak In-hwan who had passed away the previous year. Yu Chŏng, "Pak In-hwan man'ga [A lament for Pak In-hwan]," *Hyŏndaesi* (Modern poetry) (October 1957): 11–13.

52. Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Hyŏndaesi ŭi Chemunje: Chuadam [The problems of modern poetry: a roundtable]," *Hyŏndaesi* (Modern poetry) (October 1957): 38.

53. Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Hyŏndaesi ŭi Chemunje: Chuadam," 40.

54. This omission is significant and appears deliberate, as in the very same volume that carried the roundtable transcript, he published "Modern Poetry and the Image," where he states, "*all changes* in modern poetry's technique have unfolded with 'the image' at its center" (emphasis added). Kim Kyŏng-nin, "Hyŏndaesi wa imiji," *Hyŏndaesi* (Modern poetry) (October 1957): 34. He echoes this sentiment in the preface to his poems in *Testimony Towards Peace*, published

In Kim Kyu-dong's *New Poetics*, too, we find evidence of how such a reconciliation might have begun to affect the modernist criticism of the era. Within the same volume, there is a remarkable contrast between "Modern Poetry and Ideology" (1955) and "War and Poetry" (1957) in terms of how the pure literature movement is remembered. In 1955, Kim decries Ch'ŏngnokp'a for retreating into "worn-out past traditions and reminiscence of decay," calling their "so-called pure poetry" not worthy of being compared to the genuine pure literature of Valéry or Mallarmé.[55] By 1957, however, Kim highlights communism's threat and commends the achievements of poets who sought to "rescue poetry from political turmoil"; among those named are "Cho Chi-hun, Cho Hyang, Pak Mog-wŏl, Kim Kyŏng-nin." After a list of important works of the era, which includes *Ch'ŏngnokchip*, he praises the "fiery humanism" (*pulbunnŭn hyumaenijŭm*) that would steer literature toward the territory of "pure art."[56] Intentionally or not, he ends up echoing Kim Tong-ni's pure literature position from 1946.

It would be inaccurate, however, to characterize the Society of Korean Poets' establishment as modern poetry's wholesale submission to anti-communist statism. Far from it, its centrist position was consolidated by maintaining a critical distance from the government. The poets had formed a coalition to reclaim a more autonomous space from Rhee's increasingly unpopular regime, which had sought to mobilize government-sponsored cultural organizations for his political benefit. In other words, this response by post–armistice era civil society marked an important rebellion (albeit a measured one) against the state's wartime attempt to subsume all aspects of cultural production.

Even under the umbrella of this new organization, individual poets pursued their own innovations and revisions. In Kim Ch'un-su's re-issue of "Death of a Girl in Budapest," the colonial-era flashback and the poignantly self-interrogating line, "Was the

---

the same year: "The world of the two-dimensional 'image' . . . is the most important phenomenological process in modern poetry."

55. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 152.

56. Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 167.

desire to stay alive the origin of my disgrace?" were elided. For some, this self-revision was indicative of a shift toward a historical nihilism.[57] One is tempted to wonder if this moment marks a turn that paved the way to Kim's decision to contribute an ode to the notorious dictator Chun Doo-hwan at the latter's 1988 retirement banquet.[58] But hindsight sees straight lines where actual paths may wind and fork, especially when historical distance spans decades. Perhaps we can more assuredly shift our attention synchronically to Kim Su-yŏng's "Waterfall," also published in *Testimony Towards Peace*, to see what alternate possibilities were stirring.

"Waterfall" strikingly displaces the site of modernist poetics from the urban to the natural and shifts its emphasis away from the visual toward the auditory.[59]

> When it's evening with nary a man or marigold in sight
> the waters fall with their righteous sounds.
>
> The righteous sounds sound.
> Righteous sounds bring righteous
> sounds.

The lines negate the visual realm and fill the dark with primordial sounds. Kim's rhetoric of tautology and repetition ("The righteous sounds sound") confuses the subject-object relation, pushing the reader to a realm of immanence in relationship to nature. Does the waterfall need a hearer to "sound"? Is what makes the waterfall "righteous" the hearer's own moral projection, or is the quality somehow inherent within the waterfall as process? In addition to

57. For more on the implications of this revision, see Yi Kangha, "Kim Ch'un-su ŭi 'Pudap'esŭt'ŭ esŏŭi sonyŏ ŭi chukŭm' yŏn'gu [Scholarship on Kim Ch'un-su's 'Death of a Girl in Budapest']," *Tongagŏ munhak* 63 (August 2014): 401–405.

58. "Yŏksa ŭi hansun'gan . . . hwansonggwa sŏkbyŏl [A historic moment . . . a regretful farewell]," *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, 25 February 1988.

59. As a point of contrast, consider Kim Kyu-dong's claim published in an essay titled, "On Poetry and Musicality," no less: "It should be said that I have not budged an inch when it comes to my aesthetic creed about the centrality of a poem's painterliness." Kim Kyu-dong, *Saeroun siron*, 18.

bracketing the visual, the poem also noticeably lacks references to scientific or technical diction, found in the works of Sinsiron and Huban'gi poets Kim Kyŏng-nin, Kim Kyu-dong, and Cho Hyang.

As we saw in the Kim Su-yŏng-Kim Ki-rim quarrel over the word "aristocrat," a poet's chosen idiolect had always been linked to the question of what made a poem modern.[60] For younger writers of the postwar generation who had received their formative literary education in Japanese, anxiety over the modernity of one's poetic diction would have co-existed with an underlying insecurity about one's mastery of Korean.[61] After the April Revolution of 1960, when protesters overthrew Syngman Rhee's corrupt regime, Kim Su-yŏng's poetics turned more explicitly to the problem of language and its sounds, which most Sinsiron and Huban'gi members would have thought beyond the scope of their interest. If, in 1957, Kim Kyu-dong could write "On Poetry and Musicality" without mentioning the aural qualities of the Korean language, then Kim Su-yŏng would celebrate the immediate everyday sensibilities of the Korean vernacular, such as *yogang* (chamber pot), *kombo* (pockmarked person), and *aekku* (one-eyed person).[62]

Kim's turn toward language was not merely another iteration of pure literature movement's cultural nationalism. Nor was it a reduction of poetry to an instrument of postcolonial politics. Despite Kim's being remembered as a leading poet of political engagement during the 1960s, Young-Jun Lee has argued that his actual poetics does not translate neatly into the pure poetry

60. Kim Su-yŏng also recounts with enmity an episode in which he corrected Pak In-hwan about a word choice. Pak retorts that the word had been coined while Kim was in a prison camp and deflects Kim's attempt at correction. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 64.

61. For such postwar poets (Kim Su-yŏng and Kim Kyŏng-nin had also studied in Tokyo), Liberation meant transitioning from an uneven bilingualism to a repressive monolingualism, as Japanese "was forced to disappear from public spaces." But Kim Su-yŏng's turn toward the poetics of the Korean language hardly meant a wholesale rejection of his Japanese. For his playful negotiation with colonialism's linguistic legacy, see Serk-Bae Suh, *Treacherous Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 135–139.

62. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 279–280.

versus engagement poetry debate of the decade that appeared to rehash post-liberation era literary factionalism.[63] Rather, Kim's poetics synthesized the previous era's conflicting tendencies of nationalist rootedness, modernist cosmopolitanism, and leftist decolonialism to put forth an autonomous position of sovereignty for language *outside of* time. When language lost its sovereignty, Kim maintained, it was the role of poetry to restore it. This meant that language *in time* was always provisional and temporary—"an error to be amended" by the poet.[64] By representing the sounds of nature, plants, and animals and repeating with variation colloquial expressions that divested words of their everyday meaning, he sought to bring the reader nearer to this sovereign realm.

In one essay, after reading Lionel Trilling's "The Fate of Pleasure" (1963), Kim asked himself which of his early poems from the 1950s should count as his "maiden work"—that is, as marking his true beginning as a modern poet. After considering "Folding Screen" and "Waterfall" as candidates, he concludes: "But if I think of it my own way, setting aside Trilling, it might be 'Seaweed Soup,' which I wrote June 2nd [of this year] and hasn't been published. And if I think about it even more deeply, maybe I haven't written a single thing that could count as my maiden work."[65] His thoughts on the intrinsic incompleteness and restlessness of language seem to have applied to the idea of modern poetry itself.

Conclusion

I have shown how overlapping conditions of interpersonal dynamics, organizational conflict, aesthetic and ideological division, and geopolitical realignment contributed to the production of modernist poetry after the Second World War. By following the trajectory of Sinsiron, Huban'gi, and DIAL,

63. Young-Jun Lee, "Howling Plants and Animals," 102.
64. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 282.
65. Kim Su-yŏng, *Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip 2: Sanmun*, 230.

this genealogy implicitly foregrounds the modernism of imagist aesthetics led by Kim Kyŏng-nin, who played a leadership role in all three groups, and whose poetics remained almost unchanged between the post-liberation era and the post-armistice years of Reconstruction. My account also highlights counter-movements (as embodied by Pak In-hwan's decolonial poems in *New City and Its Citizen Chorus*), inner dissensus (as demonstrated by conflicting accounts of what led to Huban'gi's disbandment), and an emergent counter-poetics (as displayed by Kim Su-yŏng's works that quietly began subverting the imagist orientation of the 1950s modernists). My privileging of Kim Su-yŏng as a kind of "destination point" is not meant to portray his rise as somehow inevitable. On the contrary, as I have suggested through the works of Pak In-hwan, Im Ho-gwŏn, and Pae In-ch'ŏl, early conditions more hospitable to poetry of political critique may have led to more poems of their kind.[66] Such works, by combining formal and linguistic experimentation with decolonial cosmopolitanism, may have transformed how other poets, critics, and readers understood the outer limits of modernist practice, thereby charting a different course for postwar literary history.

The possibility of such alternative pathways also calls into question Kim Kyŏng-nin's claim in *Seoul, Wild Horse-like,* also echoed three decades earlier by Kim Kyu-dong, that modernism owes its multiplicity to its underlying principles, according to

66. Swaner claims that "the received historical wisdom of most Korean literary scholars grants that sociohistorical conditions effect literary production, but actually argues that sociohistorical upheaval in every case stunted the growth of Korean literature and literary studies in every case." He goes on to argue that "the opposite has been true," meaning sociohistorical upheaval fomented the growth of Korean poetry, especially when it came to its political aesthetics. I argue something slightly different, while focusing primarily on a period prior to Swaner's study. Ideological warfare definitely foreclosed certain types of poetic expression in the South, through self-censorship, conversion, or migration to the North. The aesthetic possibilities for those who remained were shaped by rivalries, factions, and debates across the literary field as well as by larger scale socio-historical developments. See Scott Swaner, "Politicizing the Aesthetic: The Dialectics of Poetic Production in Late Twentieth-Century South Korea, 1960–1987 (Kim Su-yŏng, Kim Chiha, Pak Nohae, Hwang Ji-woo)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2003), 37.

which historical contexts provide the poet material with which to chart new aesthetic futures. History is not mere fodder for the poet. Its developments can set the underlying conditions—what we might call an *aesthetic episteme*—for what poetry can know and express. This was especially true during South Korea's early years. Having compared the respective aftermaths of the Korean War and the April Revolution, one comes away with a somewhat startling conclusion that war had less of a transformative effect on contemporary modernist poetry than a democratic uprising. Despite its enervating toll, the former intensified modernist *ressentiment* that had its roots in post-liberation malaise, already teetering on nihilism. The latter overturned the very parameters of what modernism could think, speak, and feel—and, rightly or wrongly, reset the terms for how its past practitioners would be judged.

1. Kim Ki-rim

Sea and Butterfly

(*Sea and Butterfly* [*Padawa nabi: sijip*], 1946)

For he was never told about the water's depths,
the white butterfly does not fear the sea.

He flutters down
mistaking the blue green as that of radish fields
and returns exhausted, like a princess,
his young wings splashed.

He is sad that the sea does not blossom in March,
his side singed blue in the shape of a crescent moon.

2. Pak In-hwan

South Winds

(*New City and Its Citizen Chorus* [*Saeroun tosi wa simindŭrŭi hapch'ang: Sinsiron sijip*], 1949)

The years of agony climb
like a turtle from the sea.

The aborigines whose clothes were snatched away.
On a day without sun
your love withered gently like jasmine
on a white man's rubber plantation.

The fate of the nation
lives with the glory of the Khmer God,
the country of Angkor Wat.
The Vietnamese People's Army.

Sounds of gunshot from your rebellion
echo to our distant land.

South winds strong enough to batter one's heart.
When the seasons change come the typhoons.

Those asleep across
Asian latitudes
listen carefully.

When you awake
the fragrance from the southern region
shall seep into your destitute heart.

O Dark God

(*Selected Poems of Pak In-hwan* [*Pak Inhwan sŏnsijip*], 1955)

Who's been crying in the graveyard?
Who's that appearing from the building's ruin?
What's been extinguished like smoke, over the black sea?
What's died in the heart of humankind?
What begins now after a year's end?
Where's my friend, snatched away by war?
Instead of sorrow, give me death.
Instead of humankind, shroud the world with wind-swept snow
So where buildings and graves sit as ash
no flowers may bloom.

O dark god,
that is your subject:
a war for a day or a year, its grisly reminiscence.

The Miraculous Modern

(*Selected Poems of Pak In-hwan* [*Pak Inhwan sŏnsijip*], 1955)

My name is a rose blossomed along a river.
Civilization's fog billows from every chimney.
Poet, you piteous insect,
your cries are heard through the city.

For long your yearnings were a vanished painting.
In the thick garden of weeds
where fondness and phantasm rub against each other
the name of this past decade
is last night's forlorn vermin.

Love is nostalgia in a statue.
During a journey of mud and farewells
I leaned on a tree rotting away.
Whence comes
this speed of unease,
so light and nimble, like a telegraph.

My fate around the time
I was making eyes at the terror of silence
float aimlessly through the skies
of the miraculous East.

These Streets Welcome You

(*The Wooden Horse and the Lady* [*Mongma wa sungnyŏ*], 1976)

—song for anti-communist youths

All the doors
are open.
The table bears roses
and liquor flows
freely.

We have
freshly washed clothes
on hangers.
On these streets:
no whips,
no fences,
no persuasive maneuvers.

These streets
have no dictators,
no harmful plots,
no forced labor.
Go from one street
to another,
whichever you please.
Wherever you go
the warm faces
of our humble nation

will
console your sorrows
from fetters of your past.

Go
strutting through the streets,
swinging arms.
Go,
these streets are
your home
with resplendent liberty.

These streets
are your new
beginnings,
there's nobody to hinder
you.
Come together
like the clouds
in those expansive skies
and freely flow.

Every door is open.
Pin your rose
to a clean shirt
and drink.

3. Cho Hyang

Sea's Staircase

(*Collection of Modern National Literature* [*Hyŏndae kungmunhak su*], 1952)

The beat-up accordion has given up on conversations.

—Hello?

wild chrysanthemums blooming among
p'onp'on ttaria
mazurka
diesel engines

—Why are you doing this?

the telephone receiver
in a field of sand
thigh of a lady
octopus ink-black shadow

rendez-vous between pigeons and girls
and over them
hands waving with blue detonators

A butterfly
clinging to the hip of a
mechanical crane
counts the sea's blue-green stairs.

4. Kim Kyŏng-nin

Mighty Axis

(*New City and Its Citizen Chorus* [*Saeroun tosi wa simindŭrŭi hapch'ang: Sinsiron sijip*], 1949)

On the streets,
spinning with pictures of unfamiliar hues
after a May without foot traffic,
I leaned towards a more raucous space.

I placed a long-held dream
on my forehead
as history unfolded.
When I rap on my body
split into two halves
oh
the dawn is still distant as it pours out
below answerless sounds.

Young men,
take our mangled hopes in your arms
and
march past the shadows of a faraway future
on behalf of my frail body.
Let us ring the mighty axis of the earth.

For a Decade of Makeup

(*South Korean Poetry Anthology, vol. 1*
[*Han'guk sijip, sang*] 1952)

Today
brings more autumn rain
over my war-fatigued
image.

I wondered if there would be fissures
in the slanted streets
and my unforgotten affection.

Sometimes
I'd go searching for
a zone of vain comfort.

I cannot promise Father
a tomorrow
when
the din of the military train
and the rotary press racing ahead
like propaganda flyers
cannot count as music.
It was my fate,
being unable to betray him.
Maybe I would've been better off
learning the splendid ways of speed and makeup.

It was not unreasonable
for the ceaselessly approaching decade
and the changeless skies and stars

to demand from me
a new physics,

but when the parabola traced by
temperature and tempest
signified a worn autograph,
how dare I spend the day in flight
with a powdered politician?

O Weekend Lost

(*Modern Temperature*
[*Hyŏndae ŭi ondo*], 1957)

My unfortunate
family
suffers all the more
unable to digest the present in type

The denominator of
our once ripe and
splendid lives
seeped through our meninges
like a mistake.

The flow of night stretched
like a fog
could do me no good

and politicians with
newspaper spread across their chests
and the mushrooming of over-beautiful words

tormented me
with the incongruous price index
like the draft card that arrived today.

If the past was to be forgotten
because it was not today
then
I would rather love's conversations
be images inside a film.

My fathers say
they can't understand
the sorrow of this generation
swimming through the uneasy current
of the now.

I take hold of the
tilting twilight
and write unchanging letters
to soldiers who don't return

and tell my
unfortunate family
to digest the present in type.

5. Kim Kyu-dong

War and Butterfly
(*Butterfly and the Square* [*Nabi wa kwangjang*], 1955)

The kill zone
billows black
over every hill.

The speed's advance
collided fatally with
my
body parts

At that instant
a black soldier's stroll
spread crimson bloodshed
like communism
in my fantasy.
I stare at the pale reflection
of my nervous tissue,
while lying on the operating table.

Whenever the parabola of players
descends into crashing light
of the raving sea,

young butterflies
climb embattled hills
donning pale rays of light
And explode the transparent morning
like magnesium in the dark.

6. Kim Ch'un-su

Death of a Girl in Budapest

(*Testimony Towards Peace* [*P'yŏnghwa aeŭi chŭngŏn*], 1957)

Early winter in eastern Europe, the Danube covered in thin ice.
Around twilight, a few fallen leaves skitter along the tree-lined streets.
A volley of Soviet-made bullets out of nowhere
fell you to the ground,
looking shabbier, more insignificant than a mouse.
That moment,
the crown of your skull, shocked to pieces, jumped thirty steps in the air.
The blood from your throat soaked the pavement,
flowing down the streets so familiar to you.
They said you were thirteen years old.
Your death summoned no flowers
or white-feathered doves.
Budapest could not wail through the night, mourning your passing.
Your soul, unburdened in death,
floated above Danube's blue waves,
where the watchful gaze of ten thousand eyes could not reach
and wept loudly for those still living.
Does the Danube flow clearly and gently
like the melody of Johann Strauss?
Why did a thirteen-year-old girl in Korea have to die
in a land without music, nameless on a world map
along the banks of the Han River, clutching fistfuls of sand
as the devil laughed behind her back?

Did the thirteen-year-old in Korea wave her hands as she died
through the ungraspable air?
Girl in Budapest, I don't think you were alone in your act.
The death of the girl by the Han River
seeps through the hearts of her people as bright, thick anguish.
Today and tomorrow, will the river waters, raging with memory,
flow as tears from her people?
Will they flow from the conscience of humanity,
when, after two months of fighting,
and the heroes have fallen,
and your brothers and uncles are kneeling
before the muzzle of rifles,
the kind that were pointed at you?
Why does the one nailed to the cross,
disowned three times before the rooster crowed by the weak-willed
Saint Peter
demand from me every memory, an immortal night?
I was twenty-two years old,
a college student.
I'd been incarcerated as a "discontented Korean" in Tokyo's
Sedayaga.
One day, a sound crawled
out through the throat like
writhing of intestines,
"Mother, I want to live!"
It was sound I'd never heard, from somewhere faraway:
me and somehow not me . . . .
My head slammed against the concrete floor
and I could not hold back the pent-up tears.
Who'd made a mockery of me?
Was the desire to stay alive the beginning of my disgrace?
Did the death of the girl in Budapest spring from
the disgrace of her people, trembling from the thought of death?

This sprouting came not from the tree of sorrow or rage,
but from the violet bruise of disgrace,
stirring to life in the heated blood of a girl seeking liberty.
This sprout grows into a vibrant image, a menace
midst the obsequiousness of humankind
and blossoms one night into a fiery, sleepless flower.
Humankind will fall and rise again.
And fall again, the cycle continuing without end.
Humankind will wail from the depth of existence.
Early winter in eastern Europe, the Danube covered in thin ice.
Around twilight, a few fallen leaves skitter along the tree-lined
streets.
A volley of Soviet-made bullets out of nowhere
fell you to the ground,
looking shabbier, more insignificant than a mouse.
O, girl in Budapest.

7. Kim Su-yŏng

Waterfall

(*Testimony Towards Peace* [*P'yŏnghwa aeŭi chŭngŏn*], 1957)

The waters fall from a tall cliff
showing no inkling of fear.

Currents beyond rules
and without the meaning of towards,
and no regard for season, day, or night,
fall with a noble spirit without rest.

When it's night with nary a man or marigold in sight
the waters fall with their righteous sounds.

The righteous sounds sound.
Righteous sounds bring righteous
sounds.

The waters dropping like thunder
without height or breadth,
leaving no moment of intoxication
upending idleness and calm,
they fall.

Seaweed Soup

(*The Complete Works of Kim Su-yŏng: Poetry* [*Kim Su-yŏng chŏnjip: si*], 2003)

The oil floating on the seaweed soup
professes our history, our joy.
Yellow flowers wither in the grass and the gust
cracks more harshly than the shattering of plates. We call this
the sound of eternity.

The sun shines brighter than when the Puritans landed on the
continent's East.
O the ashes of ourselves, the clacking of our speech,
the briefness of life and language. We call this
the sound of combat.

Seaweed soup has us walking our lives backwards. Still we've
gotten younger
than our thirties. After sixty, will we become even more
youthful? Whether a machine gun or a raft, life and its parts move
as one. We call this
the sound of poverty.

O joy! O seaweed soup! O the oil floating in that soup! O our
mournful forefathers!
O our drought-afflicted people! It doesn't matter whether you're
Toegye or Dasan, as long as you're an old-timer with a beard.
You can be some crooked real estate agent, a landlord bandit. Just
take it easy, please.
It doesn't matter if the self-proclaimed art-for-art's-sake poets curse
our eloquence. This is our joy, so what are we to do?

Life and its parts move as one. We call this
the sound of matrimony.

Choi Jeongrye was born in a city near Seoul. She studied Korean poetry at Korea University and received her PhD from the same school. She has published nine poetry/essay books, including *Tigers in the Sunlight* (1998), *Lebanese Emotions* (2006), and *Kangaroo Is Kangaroo I Am I* (2011), and has received several awards from the Korean Poetry Society. She participated in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa in 2006, and stayed one year at the University of California, Berkeley, as a visiting writer in 2009. Her poems have appeared in venues such as *Free Verse*, *Iowa Review*, *Text Journal*, and *World Literature Today*. An English-language collection, *Instances: Selected Poems* (which she co-translated with Wayne de Fremery and Brenda Hillman), has been published. In 2018, she was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. In 2019, she translated James Tate's *Return to City of White Donkeys* into Korean.

Chung Eun-Gwi was born in Kyungju, South Korea. After earning a PhD at SUNY Buffalo, she has taught modern poetry and translation in Korea. Currently, she is Professor of the Department of English Literature and Culture at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul. She translates poetry into both Korean and English, and her publications include articles, translations, poems, and reviews in various journals including *World Literature Today*, *Cordite*, and *Azalea*. Her recent publications are *Bari's Love Song* (2019), *Ah, Mouthless Things* (2017), and *Fifteen Seconds Without Sorrow* (2016).

Jae Won Edward Chung is Assistant Professor of Korean Studies at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. He is working on a monograph that looks at the era of liberation, war, and reconstruction between 1948 and 1960 in South Korea, focusing on how changing ideas of everyday life interacted with the evolving media ecology. His writing, translations, and research have appeared in *Journal of Asian Studies*, *Boston Review*, and *Apogee Journal*.