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Literature of the Bittersweet: Kim Sung-ok and 1960s Korea*

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Where is Kim Sung-ok?: Paradox as Point of Departure

There are two major views on post-war Korean literature in English-language scholarship. The first view regards post-war literature as that of the so-called hangul generation. This view acknowledges the historical context of post-war Korean literature, delineating a progression of generations from the Chinese-language generations at the close of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), to the Japanese-language generations during the 45 years of colonial rule (1910-1945), and finally to the post-liberation Korean language generations (1945-present). For one example of this view, see Kwon Young-mins [Kwon Yong-min] introduction in Marshall R. Pihl and Bruce & Ju-chan Fulton, eds., *Land of Exile: Contemporary Korean Fiction* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993): pp.vii-ix. The second view is largely an elaboration of the first view, recognizing both the need

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for and the benefits of addressing trends and movements *within* this so-called hangul generation that now spans more than 55 years. The second view does not appear in any one place, and in this sense it is not a view per se; it is actually an assimilation of individual critiques, articles, and anthology introductions that address specific trends and movements. When taken together, this collection of articles sees post-war literature as a chronological baton relay of distinct types of literatures, the four most prominent being Korean War literature of the 50s, *minjok* (of the nation) literature of the 70s, *minjung* (of the masses) literature of the 80s, and feminist literature of the 90s.

The first view is insightful and accurate to a point, but it tends to miss the larger picture and is in that sense misleading. Not all post-war authors can be called part of the hangul generation, and indeed, in the 50s and 60s many active authors were not educated in hangul but rather in Japanese. The designation of a hangul generation is due partly to wishful thinking and partly to nationalism, pointing out the uniqueness of post-war Korean literature vis-à-vis the grand sweep of the last two centuries of literary production. This was and still is an important distinction, but its relevance is ebbing as the years pass.

The second view is also insightful and accurate, and the delineation of types of literature happily increases the level of analysis such that it begins to examine various distinct and significant trends within such a broadly defined hangul generation, but at the same time this view has a number of shortcomings of its own. First and foremost, there is no discernible movement being ascribed to the 1960s. To the extent that the 60s is characterized at all, it is characterized by the critical debate between pure literature and engagement literature, which may or

may not have had an effect on literary production. Second, this view also basically ignores writers and works that do not fit neatly into the larger trends, such as early feminist writers and works or the significant overlap between the minjok and minjung literary movements. Third, the relay view also contributes to a kind of type-casting of authors that ignores the breadth and variety of many authors works, such as artistic and experimental works of so-called Minjung writers. Fourth, the relay framework implies a progression of linear literary development, suggesting, or at least seeming to suggest, an inferiority to 1950s Korean War novels and a superiority to 1990s feminist works. Finally, and perhaps related to this implied linearity, neither the generation framework nor the progression framework do very much at all to help us understand Korean literature of the 1990s and 2000s, just as they do not shed much light on current trends and issues in contemporary Korean social, political, economic, and cultural spheres.

To the extent that a progression of trends is viewed as a linear, inevitable outcome of continued literary training, experience, and development, Korean literature loses its socio-cultural and temporal specificity. In other words, female authors exploring feminist issues would in this regard be seen as a reflection of the sophistication, modernity, and successful teleological development of Korean literaturea development that would have very little to do with, say, steadily increasing levels of educational and professional opportunities for women in post-war Korea. To be sure, no one explicitly makes such an argument, and most critics are careful to use the more neutral term *chongae* (unfolding) rather than *paljon* (development), but it is nevertheless a possible conclusion that can be drawn by the casual

observer of the relay framework. Critics all seem to heartily agree that there is actually in post-war Korean literature a deep and readily noticeable connection between a given work and its greater socio-historical surroundings. Indeed, regardless of ones theoretical or ideological bent, the one, unyielding criterion for judging the success of a given work has been how well that work reflects, or in some way addresses, social reality.

In my dissertation I will pursue an in-depth literary and socio-cultural investigation into the crucial, transitional decade of the 1960s in the attempt to begin traveling the road to an alternative, more comprehensive interpretive framework for viewing post-war Korean literature. My approach will center on the erstwhile novelist Kim Sung-ok (b. 1941, often also Romanized as Kim Seung-ok), with a focus not only on his watershed works of the 1960s, but also on his lesser-known works of the 1970s as well as on the circumstances and possible reasons for his decision to quit writing in the 1980s. Much has been written about his 1960s works in both English and Korean, but in my research I have not encountered anyone in any language to specifically address *the transitional nature* of his works and the significance of this transition. Furthermore, very little has been written in either Korean or English about Kims disappearance, and no one has even begun to speculate as to the significance of his absence. In this dissertation, I will use the 1960s as a central node of genealogical links reaching back on the one hand into the colonial period and the war and on the other hand spreading out to a vision of the future, most recognizably into the 70s but into the 80s and 90s as well. Furthermore, his literary influence also extends well beyond the 60s. Although it would be overstating the matter to say that Kim Sung-ok is the

founding father of contemporary Korean fiction, it is clear that his influence can still be felt today in literary, critical, and socio-cultural arenas.

And yet this presents a paradox, since at the same time that he is revered, he is virtually ignored by the canon and popular memory. Kims fame is not in questionanyone who studies Korean literature knows who Kim is, and in a superficial sense Kim is both firmly ensconced in the canon and fondly remembered by the reading public. Yet as mentioned above, both the canon and popular memory have forgotten about the 60s, and Kim is in substance very much a 60s author. The critic Chon I-du (b. 1930), among others, refers to Kim as the standard-bearer of 60s literature (*60nyondae munhak ui kisu*). Chonjaerosoui kodok: Kim Sung-ok <Soul 1964nyon kyoul> [The solitude of existence: Kim Sung-oks Seoul, 1964 winter], in the 2001 Nanam collection, Kim Sung-ok, *Mujin kihaeng* [A journey to Mujin] (Seoul, Nanam, 2001): pp.617-30. Kim is reputed to have participated in the April 19 (1960) Student Uprising, and this seems to be where the flag-bearing metaphor stems from. But just as the 4.19 uprising was not merely popular (more than just students hit the streets) but also fighting and dying for a cause (loosely put, Freedom), Kims works were more than just popular. There was content: his works from the 60s address certain basic human contradictions and are in this respect timeless, and these same works are also firmly grounded in their larger socio-cultural contexts of 1960s Korea. I am tempted to place the word firmly here *sous rature*. Beside the fact that Microsoft Word is incapable of it, it would also seem to be dated, theoretically. By firmly I mean that, in new critical terms, the Kims settings can not be understood as anything but Korea, in the then and now. This

characteristic is shared, however, with highly ideological literature that at times seems to want to beat the reader over the head with the (problems and author-sponsored solutions of) then and now. Stephen J. Epstein, in The Meaning of Meaningless in Kim Sung-oks Seoul: Winter 1964 *Korea Journal* 37 no. 1 (Spring 1997): 98-107, uses the term obliquely, (p.98) and I have borrowed this term as well elsewhere in this paper. Epstein does not elaborate on his usage, but it seems clear that at the very least he means that Kim is comparatively more subtle about his settings. Im not sure whether Epstein meant it or not, but to be obliquely grounded in reality also seems to suggest that an author does not go on to propose a solution to whatever social contradiction he or she portrays, which can be a bad thing or a not-so-bad thing depending on the literary camp to which you belong.

At the heart of Kims paradox, therefore, lies the ever-present literary debate between pure literature and engagement literature. Although foci and emphases have shifted and the players and names of literary coteries and journals have changed, the substance of this debate has remained basically the sameat least regarding the function and meaning of literaturesince the times of Yi In-jik (1862-1916), There are some discrepancies regarding the date of Yi In-jiks death. Kwon Yong-min, in *Hanguk kundae munin taesajon* [Great dictionary of modern Korean literary figures] (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1990), s.v. Yi In-jik, gives the date as (Nov. 25) 1916, and the Yahoo! Korea encyclopedia (Doosan EnCyber), accessed on 27 October 2002, gives the date as (Nov. 1) 1916. The difference between the two may be the result of various conversions and reversions to the Western solar calendar from the lunar calendar. Two separate sources, however, list the year (without giving month or day) as 1919: Kichung Kim,

Mujong: An Introduction to Yi Kwang-sus Fiction *Korean Studies* 6 (1982), p.129; Kim Hunggyu [Kim Hung-gyu], *Understanding Korean Literature*, trans. by Robert J. Fouser (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p.115. Despite the fact that Kwons volume, as well as his companion two-volume set on contemporary literary figures, contains numerous typographical errors, this does not seem to be the case here, as 1916 seems to be the correct date. Choe Nam-son (1890-1957), Yi Kwang-su (1892-c.1950), The date of Yi Kwang-sus death remains unconfirmed. During the Korean War Yi was captured by the North Korean Peoples Liberation Army and taken to the North and he is assumed to have died shortly thereafter. Yu Chong-ho, in The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, ed., *Whos Who in Korean Literature,* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1996) s.v. Lee, Kwang-su, says that he reportedly died of consumption in October, 1950. Kim U-chang, in Extravagance and Authenticity: Romantic Love and the Self in Early Modern Korean Literature, *Korea Journal* 39 no. 4 (Winter 1999): pp.61-89, uses a question mark, as in Yi Kwang-su (1892-?), p.69. Kwon Yong-min, in *Hanguk ui munhak pipyong 1, 1896-1945* [Korean literary criticism 1, 1896-1945] (Seoul: Minumsa, 1995), sidesteps the issue of Yis death altogether, listing in his bio only his birth and major works, p.103. and the conscious founding of modern Korean literature. In broad strokes, the enormous staying power of this debate has been due to its ability to aid in the unfolding of a modern literature capable of receiving and assimilating literary trends (both domestic and foreign) and historical change (political, economic, socio-cultural). The down side, however, is that this debate has tended to be unable to comprehend or encompass authors and works that do not fit neatly into one of the two sides. Kim Sung-ok is one such

case: while his works actually do address and challenge the reality of his times, they do not engage that reality with a specific political agenda, and while his works often address deep, dark, and perverse abscesses of the human soulas is considered the domain of pure literaturethey also engage and hold the reader with brilliant rays of hope, humor, and style, coming dangerously close to facing the kiss of death known as popular literature. I will argue, therefore, that in order to understand Kims paradoxical position in Korean literary history, one must view his works from within the context of the debate between pure and engagement literature.

Pure Literature vs. Engagement Literature

Pure literature (sunsu munhak) has meant slightly different things at different times, but in essence pure literature can be described as art for arts sake. This begs the question of what art is, and this concept also varies, but to simplify again, art is the a-cultural treatment of humans and humanity, the message-in-a-bottle that anyone, anywhere, at any time can read. Pure literature explores experiences common to all humans, regardless of race, nationality, or era. Classical Korean literature was basically pure, where literature proper, to put forth yet another gross generalization, was the domain of yangban scholars writing either formalistic sijo poetry or didactic poetry expounding the virtues of Confucianism. Regarding the sijo form, see Kim Hunggyu [Kim Hung-gyu], *Understanding Korean Literature*, pp.66-70. Regarding the generalization that literature was the domain of male scholars, there are several, glaringly obvious exceptions, such as classical literature written by women, and the curious reader can see JaHyun Kim

Haboush, trans., with an introduction and annotations, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong: the Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth Century Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) among others. The point of the generalizations here is not to exclude, but rather to briefly depict the give and take in the historical flow of Korean literature.

In 1876 Korea was forced open by the Kanghwa Treaty, and by the turn of the century a number of Korean intellectuals were going to Japan for advanced study. The enlightenment period in Korea was thus born, and writers such as Yi Kwang-su reacted against classical literature, rebelling not just for the sake of rebellion, but also as the combined result of being introduced to Western ideas via Japan and witnessing Koreas very sovereignty encroached upon by the already-enlightened Japan. Yi Kwang-su shared with classicists a passion for didacticism, but he differed in the content of that education, as he believed deeply that literature was best used as a tool to educate, enlighten, and liberate the masses. Didactic literature was therefore the first incarnation of engagement literature. Authors were meant to engage their society with the ultimate goal of changing their society for the better; *how* authors were meant to engage society basically varied with whatever ideology happened to hold sway.

As Japanese colonial rule shifted from the dark years of military rule (1910-1919) to the somewhat more lenient so-called cultural rule (*bunka seiji*, 1920-1937), Yi Kwang-su continued to advocate didactic literature, but he also began to take a pragmatic view of colonial rule, and in the end actually endorsed colonization because it was the only realistic way he saw, under those circumstances, of educating and modernizing the Korea public to a level sufficient to challenge the

Japanese on a level playing field. Yi is vilified to this day by many (South) Koreans as a collaborator, and as one might expect, he was also challenged in his own time. In 1919, the author Kim Tong-in (1900-1951) founded the literary journal Changjo [Creation] which became a springboard for Kim Tong-ins attack on didacticism in literature. Kim went on to become a pioneer in literary realism and naturalism, and Kim is credited with creating a past tense in order to better differentiate between ongoing and past events within the flow of a narrative. Kim wanted to tell the best story that he could, and in this regard pure literature can be seen as a rejection of the ideological ism of the day in favor of the literary theoretical ism of the day. Not everyone agreed with Kim Tong-in, however, as is evidenced by the rise of the Korea Artist Proletariat Federation (known in Korean as *Choson purolletaria yesul tongmaeng, Kapu*, or by the roman alphabet acronym KAPF) from 1925 until it was disbanded by the Japanese in 1935. KAPF was led by the writer Im Hwa (1908-1958), who was influenced by Marx and dialectical materialism and therefore advocated socialist realism as the proper way to engage society. Thus the debate between pure and engagement literature was born, except that it is important to note that the critical term engagement and its Korean equivalent *chamyo* had not come into being yet. See Kim Yong-min, *Hanguk kundae munhak pipyongsa* [History of modern Korean literary criticism] (Seoul: Somyong chulpan, 1999). Several chapters are devoted to the various debates that raged in the 20s and 30s.

From roughly 1937 on, the war effort shifted into high gear, and published literary production ground to a halt, but in the days and months following liberation (1945), literary camps were quickly formed and re-formed, and the debate raged anew. Political ideology was the

order of the day, and one camp advocated the use of literature as propaganda and another camp argued that literature ought not to have anything to do with ideology. By the end of the Korean War, however, camps became not only ideologically separated, but also physically separated by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the debate ground to a halt yet again. In the 1950s, then, writers and critics were busy filling the void and laying claim to a national literature (*minjok munhak*). Yet this national literature was not ideology free, and the critic Kim Yun-sik (b. 1936) laments that this period was dominated by naive humanism and blind anti-communism. Kim Yoon-shik [Kim Yun-sik], The Post-War Fiction of Korea: From The Early 1950s to The Late 1960s (sic), in Choe Tong-ho [Choe Tong-ho], et al., *Modern Korean Literature* (1945-1990) (Seoul: The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1992): p.65. While this criticism is certainly valid, Kim Yun-sik is also careful to point out that these authors directly experienced the war and were quite naturally and deeply affected by that experience. Kim notes: The cruelties of war both awakened humanism and established anti-communism as the absolute, ultimate yardstick. Kim Yoon-shik, p.64. The national literature of the 1950s, therefore, is actually another kind of engagement since it is so infused with (anti-communist) ideology. To avoid confusion, however, it will be best to stick with Korean literary-historical convention that holds that anti-communism is not an ideology but rather the rejection of (communist) ideology, such that the literary nationalists of the 1950s were of the pure literature ilk.

By the end of the 50s, however, a new group of writers began to respond to the critics by moving beyond humanism and anti-communism, laying the groundwork for a literary explosion that was the 1960s. Son

Chang-sop (b. 1922), Yi Ho-chol (b. 1932), and Pak Kyong-ni (b. 1927), to name but a few, began to move beyond the black and white worldviews of humanism and anti-communism by affirm[ing] the dignity of man by exploring the inner reaches of the human soul. Kim Yoon-shik, p.75. What this means would require in-depth literary analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that these authors signified a different kind of shift towards pure literature. It was in this literary atmosphere that two watershed events occurred that would overshadow the entirety of the 1960s literary terrain: the 4.19 (April 19) Student Uprising of 1960, and the 5.18 (May 18) Park Chung Hee (Pak Chong-hui) coup detat of 1961. The 4.19 uprising brought about the end of the Syngman Rhee (Yi Sung-man) regime and instilled in the people a concretized sense of freedom and hope. Rhees resignation was followed by factional gridlock, and so the 5.18 coup was not an immediate cause for despair, as many people actually welcomed the renewed sense of honesty, order, and direction brought about by Park, but at the same time the hope of the previous years euphoria now seemed like a foolish pipe dream.

Kim Sung-ok made his literary debut at the age of twenty (by Western count) in 1962, and throughout the 60s he continued with success after success and made a deep and lasting impact on the world of Korean literature. He debuted by winning the *Hanguk ilbos* [Korea daily] annual Spring Literary Contest (*sinchun munye*) in 1962 with the short story Saengmyong yonsup [Life rehearsal]. He went on, also in 1962, to found the literary journal *Sanmun sidae* [Age of prose] with several of his friends from Seoul National University. The journal was proudly iconoclastic, and led by Kim Sung-ok, displayed a fresh, revolutionary sensibility. See Yu Chong-hos famous article *Kamsusong*

ui hyongmyong: Kim Sung-ok, reprinted in Kim Sung-ok, *Mujin kihaeng* [A journey to Mujin] (Seoul: Nanam, 2001): pp.631-37. The article was originally published in 1966. Although further research is necessary, revolutionary here seems best interpreted as totally new without any Marxist connotations, as although Kim and his coterie may have had social-engagement tendencies they were in no way advocating social revolution. Meanwhile, in 1966 the critic Paek Nak-chong (b. 1938) founded the literary journal *Changjak kwa pipyong* [Creation and criticism], which stressed the intellectuals obligation to both engage and lead society and is normally considered the institutional mainstay of engagement literature. And in 1970, the pure literature camp struck back, founding *Munhak kwa chisong* [Literature and intellect], which is considered to lean toward pure literature.

Recent scholarship suggests, however, that the debates that raged during the 60s were less about the proper meaning of literature and more about the ideological stance of a given critic. The critic Kim Yong-min (b. 1955) has recently come out with a two-volume history of twentieth-century Korean literary criticism. Volume one, *Hanguk kundae munhak pipyongsa* [History of modern Korean literary criticism] cited above, came out in 1999 and covers the various critical debates of the colonial period. Although somewhat counterintuitive, the convention in Korea is to use the term *kundae* (lit., recent times) to refer generally to the first half of the twentieth century, and kundae is normally translated as modern. The term *hyondae* (lit., present times) refers generally to the latter half of the twentieth century and is normally translated as contemporary. Volume two, *Hanguk hyondae munhak pipyongsa* [History of contemporary Korean literary criticism] came out in 2000 and ranges from the liberation era through the

1980s. Kim Yong-min, *Hanguk hyondae munhak pipyongsa* [History of contemporary Korean literary criticism] (Seoul: Somyong chulpan, 2000). Unless otherwise noted, future references in this paper to Kim Yong-min will be to volume two. Kim Yong-min devotes an entire chapter to the debates between pure literature and engagement literature in the 1960s, and the picture he portrays is one of intellectual bickering largely colored by ideology. Kim Yong-min, Chapter Six, *1960nyondae sunsu, chamyo munhak ron* [Treatises on 1960s pure and engagement literature]: pp.229-301. Kim Yong-min ascribes the start of the debate to the critic Kim Sang-il (b. 1926), who in 1958 resurrected the pure literature ideas of the author Kim Tong-ni (1913-1995). Kim Yong-min, pp.230-3. Kim Sang-ils article is cited as *Sunsu munhak ui nonui* [The pure literature debate], *Hyondae munhak* [Contemporary literature] (May 1958). In this article, Kim Sang-il not only resurrects Kim Tong-nis theory of pure literature, but also starts with the premise that the realists have misunderstood Kim Tong-nis theory of pure literature while also criticizing the realists for their uncompromising position. Kim Yong-min, p.231. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Korean are mine.

By 1963 the debate had developed into a bona fide controversy (*nonjaeng*) and the attacks become more heated and sometimes even personal. The pure literature camp was largely comprised of the older generation, characterized by conservatism and anti-communism, and they see in the engagement camps fascination with Jean-Paul Sartres (1905-1980) theory of *engagement* signs of socialist revolutionary agitation. The engagement literature camp, by contrast, is largely the younger, up-and-coming generation of critics who want to keep the hope engendered by the 4.19 uprising alive, and they see in the pure

literature camp authoritarian repression of freedom of speech. In one particularly charming exchange, pure-literature critic Kim Pung-gu (b. 1925) charged that engagement literature was tantamount to proletarian ideology, to which the engagement critic Im Chung-bin (b. 1939) retorted that Kim Pung-gus view evidenced symptoms of neurosis. Kim Yong-min, p.296.

The one glaring difference, therefore, between the debate between pure literature and engagement literature as it raged during the 1960s and its previous incarnations is its deep connections with political ideology. Despite the fact that some authors were able to move beyond the ideological disputes of the 50s, we now see that the critics were not. And given the extent to which the 1960s was politically charged, we may begin to wonder if the authors of the 1960s were not at least somewhat affected by ideology and ideological debates. As the next section will demonstrate, despite the fact that Kim Sung-ok was seemingly effortlessly able to glide beyond ideology in the sense that he did not espouse one or another side, he was at the same time nevertheless affected by the debate that was swirling all around him.

Literature of the Bittersweet

I regard Kims works as constituting a literature of the bittersweet. Perhaps similar to tragedy, his stories are sad yet at the same time uplifting, but Kims works are not tragedies. His main characters, for example, never die; it is always peripheral or supporting characters that die. There may be one possible exception, his first novella Hwansang suchop [Fantasy notebook], contained in *Kim Sung-ok sosoljonjip* [Collected novels of Kim Sung-ok] 2 (Seoul: Munhakdongne, 1995):

pp.7-77, and originally published in *Sanmun sidae* [Age of prose] 2 (1962). The first-person protagonist, Chong-u writes a memoir about all of his friends and acquaintances who have died, yet the memoirs are framed by and introduction and conclusion written by Chong-us friend Su-yong, who has collected Chong-us writings after Chong-u committed suicide. The official protagonist would have to be Chong-u, but *Fantasy Notebook* is clearly written in such a way that Chong-us death is not the end of the story. In some of his stories no one dies. By the term bittersweet, I mean not an alternation of bitter and sweet, but rather a simultaneous existence of bitter and sweet, hope and despair, desire and disappointment, love and hate, friendship and alienation, courage and cowardice, communication and misunderstanding. Like ambivalence, these are human contradictions, but they are also social contradictions present in 1960s Korea. In this way, also like the term ambivalence, bittersweet is a paradox, but only on the linguistic level; given the tremendous socio-cultural flux in the 1960s, it is actually a matter of course that hope and despair would co-exist. My theoretical framework of a literature of bittersweet is meant to convey exactly this non-paradoxical paradox.

The body of Kim Sung-oks 1960s writings are stylistically superb explorations of the decade in which he was writing, but these same writings also function on allegorical levels as a response to the Korean War and a look ahead to the future of Korean society. Regarding the Korean War, we will see that it is in this sense that not even Kim Sung-ok could escape ideology. A major theme that runs through all of his 1960s works is the lack of communication in Korean society, and this for Kim is the direct result of the Korean War. The war disrupted the entirety of society, and even before the armistice was

signed in 1953 a great number of people were already flocking to Seoul in search of gainful employment. The war was a resort to violence after communication was cut off at the 38th parallel. This was partly a lament that it was not even a last resort, but it was also a condemnation of the times, in which violence had obviously solved nothing. Based on the continued ideological bickering in the 1960s pointed out above, we can see that the ideological shake-up was far from complete such that people and groups were continuing to talk at cross purposes, and in this sense Kims writing is also a response to the then ongoing pure literature versus engagement literature debate.

Regarding Kims vision of the future, Kims second major theme is the lack of courage, which is at once the direct result of the Korean War and the key to a brighter tomorrow. In Kims view, from 1945 on, basically anyone with the courage to stand up and act upon his beliefs died, either before or during the war. Kims father, for example, died in the 1948 Yosu uprising. Among other places, this fact is listed in the *Chakka yonbo* [Author chronology] at the end of the fifth and final volume of Kims collected works, *Kim Sung-ok sosoljonjip* [Collected novels of Kim Sung-ok] 5: p.262. It is impossible to say with any exactness how this personal tragedy at age six may have influenced his writing, but it seems clear that at the very least he developed a deep respect for courage in the face of difficulty and death. Courage for Kim was the sine qua non of resuming meaningful dialogue, which in turn was seen as the only way to truly achieve future resolution and progress. Courage, therefore, is the key to understanding the feelings of hope that Kim instilled in his 1960s readershipunlike little orphan Annie, the sun in 1960s Korea was not going to come up just because you sang about it. Kims stories are dark, but there is either profound

courage, or as in the case of A Journey to Mujin, a keen awareness by the protagonist of his own lack of courage which results in the protagonist feeling extremely ashamed. This is the final line of the story. Chong Chong-wha [Chong Chong-hwa] has translated this line as I felt an acute sense of shame, in Journey to Mujin, in Shin Dong-wook [Sin Tong-uk], Cho Nam-hyun [Cho Nam-hyon], and Kim Seong-kon [Kim Song-gon], eds., *Journey to Mujin: Anthology of Korean Short Fictions* (Seoul: The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1988): p.86.

Much of this insight I owe to Kim Sung-ok himself, gained in a series of interviews, email exchanges, and phone conversations over the course of my Fulbright dissertation research fellowship in Seoul over the academic year 2001-2002. My original point of departure had been to search for and document the myriad links between Kims writings and his socio-historical surroundings at the time his works first went to press. It is common knowledge that Kim stopped writing after the May 18, 1980 Kwangju massacre, in the middle of serializing a planned novel-length work, *Monji ui pang* [Room of dust] in the *Tonga ilbo* [Tonga daily]. Also on public record is his subsequent conversion to Christianity in 1981, including a rather odd reference to fanatical sects by the critic Yi Tong-ha (b. 1955). In The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, ed., *Whos Who in Korean Literature* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1996): s.v. Kim Seung-ok. Indeed, Kim Sung-ok himself matter-of-factly relates in the authors preface to his 1995 collected works, how in a certain morning in 1981 the white hand of God came to him, and after Kim asked who was there, He responded in Korean, It is the Lord. Kim Sung-ok, Nawa sosolssugi [Novel writing and I], in *Kim Sung-ok sosoljonjip* [Collected novels of

Kim Sung-ok] 1, p.6. Kim goes on to relate that in 1982 the voice of God came again and commanded him to go to India and preach the gospel, and finally in 1983, I came to see with my own eyes the white figure of the resurrected Jesus Christ, with His white body wearing a white gown, His white hair, white beard, the white skin on His face, and so on, and seeing these things I was in the presence of the pinnacle of salvation. Nawa sosolssugi, p.6. It had never even occurred to me that I might be able to meet Kim Sung-ok. I am grateful to Prof. Pak Chung-yon, Department of English Language and Literature, Kyongwon University, Songnam, Korea, for her detective work in finding Kim Sung-ok. I had previously written a letter to Munhakdongne, the publisher of his collected works, but that letter went unanswered and I felt that I had no choice other than to leave it at that.

In our third meeting, on October 20, 2001, Kim Sung-ok calmly began the discussion with the words, Theres something that all the critics have missed about my works. The quotes from this meeting are taken from my notes, hastily jotted down at the time and elaborated upon that night the best that I could remember. I also confirmed a number a holes in my listening comprehension with Prof. Pak Chung-yon, who was also present. I had decided not to tape the meeting out of respect for Kim, as I am not an anthropologist and he is not my subject. Had I known beforehand the immensity of the bomb he would be dropping, I may have reconsidered. Stunned, I managed to grab my pencil and mutter, And what would that be? He continued, All of my works are indeed about the 1960s, but they are really talking about the Korean War. My sense was that he was glad to finally be able to tell his story. As devoted as he is to Christianity (as

it turns out, the cult he joined in 1981 is the Youido Sunbogum kyohoe (Youido Full Gospel Church)the largest congregation in the worldwhich is only fanatical if you regard any Pentecostal church as fanatical) and his new job as professor of Korean language and literature at Sejong University in Seoul, he still takes at least a passing interest in his 1960s writings.

In our first and second meetings, on September 15 and September 22, 2001, he displayed a well-defined interest, albeit somewhat detached, in his works. In our first meeting, most of the time was spent eating lunch and introducing ourselves to each other, but he seemed genuinely delighted that someone was taking an interest in his work. I probably should have been the one to call him first, but he beat me to it, calling me the following Tuesday, September 18, to say that he would have time the following Saturday if that was okay with me. So our second meeting was the first substantive meeting, and he detailed his themes of the lack of communication and the lack of courage and their relationship to the socio-cultural situation in the 1960s, namely, as having resulted from the incredible post-war urbanization and the tragic loss of life before and during the war. I can see now that he told me everything I needed to know in that second meeting, but it had not clicked because I was so focused on the 1960s. This is actually part of the genius of Kims writings, in that they function perfectly well at the non-allegorical level. In contrast, Yi Sangs famous allegory of the colonial period, Nalgae [Wings], is a much less interesting (if not to say counterintuitive) story at the non-allegorical level. It seems fairly clear that he wanted to make sure that I got the point, so he spelled it out in our third meeting.

In our second meeting, he started by talking about A Journey to

Mujin, saying that he had tried to examine the typical (he used the English here) Korean man. I asked if he meant *taepyojok* (representative), and he said not so much representative as typical (again, both terms in English) for which I asked the Korean equivalent, and he answered *chonhyongjok, (Minjung Essence Korean English Dictionary*: model, typical, representative) even writing the Chinese characters îðúþ. What kind of man was this? In the course of the war, courageous men chose a side and then died, as a consequence of their choice, while cowardly men hid and survived, such that after the war, all that was left were cowards who couldnt handle responsibility, types like [founder of the Daewoo conglomerate] Kim U-jung and [former president] Chun Doo Hwan (Chon Tu-hwan), and he even opined that this was why the IMF had to come to Korea in 1997. I then realized that this was precisely the reason why the protagonist of A Journey to Mujin had felt so ashamed, in that he realized not only the he was a coward, unable to follow his heart, but that all the men left were cowards, and that courageous men had all died. A terrible burden for a young man to bear.

He then went on to talk about Seoul, 1964 Winter, drawing a diagram of everyone descending upon Seoul, and this was getting back to an earlier history lesson he had given me about people coming together for the first time in Koreas 5000 year history. Until the war, most people spent the majority of their lives in their own village, with the exception of daughters marrying out to another village. The result of this unprecedented coming-together, he said, was an inability to communicate, and he said that that was what he was trying to portray in Seoul, 1964 Winter. For an excellent analysis of the lack of communication in Seoul, 1964 Winter (and the only article-length

English-language scholarship to date on Kim Sung-ok) see also Stephen J. Epsteins article cited above. He then said that any of his 1960s works could be understood in this vein, as variations on these themes of Korean War trauma. I realized then (still only the second meeting) that his major project was much less catharsis than it was a matter of *chongni,* organizing and putting into order, mass experiences to make sense of the world.

So as not to have Kim Sung-ok do all the work, I would like to add an example of my own regarding the allegorical Korean War in Kims works. One story that has received no significant critical reception whatsoever is Sigol chonyo [Country maiden]. *Kim Sung-ok sosoljonjip* [Collected novels of Kim Sung-ok] 5, pp.62-78. Originally published in *Sindonga* [New Tonga] 11 (July 1965). The third-person country-maiden protagonist, named Yong-sun, is twenty one years old, and as the story opens she is trying, despite the unbearable heat, to finish both todays and tomorrows chores (pulling weeds in the family cotton field) so that she may be better able to get her mothers permission to go into the nearby town the next day. She takes a break, however, to wipe the sweat off her face and to reread the letter from her boyfriend that she has all but memorized. Her boyfriend had been able to get leave from his military duty, and will arrive in the town on the 14th (the next day in the narrative) so that he can officially ask his parents to prepare a wedding ceremony for the two of them when he is discharged from the Army that fall. Before the story can fall into sentimentalism, along comes a fifty-something woman carrying a load on her head. But she is not a peddler, and is instead traveling the country to buy womens hair, to be used in the manufacture of textiles to be exported to the U.S. to be made into suits.

As fate would have it, another hair agent had just been through the village a few days ago, and any willing sellers have already sold their hair. In a further twist of fate, Yong-sun was famous in the area for having the longest, shiniest hair of all. Yong-sun is tempted to sell, as the woman offers her 400 won, quadruple the going rate, and more money than Yong-sun has seen in her whole life. Yong-sun even goes so far as to tell this woman that her engaged-to-be-engaged boyfriend is coming tomorrow, partly to get rid of the pesky woman, and partly because she is burning to tell someone, anyone, that her boyfriend is back. In order to get the woman to leave, she promises to try to get other village maidens to sell their hair, as Yong-sun is genuinely sorry that the woman hair agent has come all this way in vain. Yong-sun also harbors the hope that if all the maidens agree together to sell their hair, they will not be labeled as Western whores by the entire village. Yong-sun meets the other maidens as they are all gathered around the village well, washing their hair. Yong-sun wants to broach the topic, but doesnt know how. Another maiden, however, brings it up first, as she too has met the woman hair agent, and all the girls howl in laughter at how no one in this village would be stupid enough to sell their hair and be branded a Western whore for life. So much for that, thinks Yong-sun, and she goes home and collapses in bed. The story ends as she wakes up in a start early the next morning, only to discover that someone has snuck in during the night and stolen all of her hair.

This is perhaps not the most sophisticated of Kims stories, and one can almost see why it has been ignored. It is a kind of perverted, Korean version of O. Henrys Gift of the Magi. The sophisticated part, and the part I wish to explicate here, is the very first paragraph of the

story:

> From beyond the mountain in front of the house, a tumultuous boom could *suddenly* be heard. *It was so loud that even the mountain shook.* A new vein of coal had been discovered, and a highway was being built that would reach all the way to town, and everyone said that that was where the sound of exploding dynamite was coming from. These days the sound could be heard several times a day. Sigol chonyo, p.62. Emphasis added.

This opening paragraph has nothing to do with Yong-sun, her boyfriend, the great hair caper, or even anything to do with the story except to delineate how isolated the village had been until the mining company started building the road to town. The only other time the soon-to-be coal mine enters into the story is as a topic of conversation among the maidens as they wash their hair by the village well. One girl hopes that the new mine will make their village rich, possibly even as big as the nearby town. Another girl opines that they will all have to be extra careful, as the burly miners will be leering with saliva-dripping mouths agape. And all the girls burst into laughter. Sigol chonyo, pp.74-5. The opening paragraph and the subsequent well-side gossip is a classic example of the way Kim grounds his stories firmly within the reality of 1960s Korea, and it is also a fine example of the nervously excited attitude toward the ongoing encounter with modernity. Regarding the simultaneous fear of and fascination with modernity, see Chong Kwa-ri, Yuhok kurigo kongpo: Kim Sung-ok ron [Temptation and also terror: a treatise on Kim Sung-ok] in the Nanam collection, pp.689-718; originally published in 1980. Chong cites a wide array of Kims works, but for some reason Sigol Chonyo is not one of them.

On the allegorical level, however, there also would seem to be a clear indication in the above opening paragraph that Kim is also nudging us toward facing the legacy of the Korean War. I have italicized the word suddenly and the sentence following it, It was so loud that even the mountain shook in the above long quote. The concept of suddenly appears in various guises (*kapjagi* [suddenly] as in this case, but also *pyorangan* [in the blink of an eye], *munttuk* [suddenly, unexpectedly], *onudot* [before one knows it] *onusae* [in no time], to name but a few) throughout Kim Sung-oks writings, and indeed throughout much of Korean literature. It is after all a fairly common concept, and by itself suddenly would not necessarily require or even prompt one to be reminded of the Korean War. The sentence following suddenly, however, is a rather clever figure of speech that is both understatement and overstatement, and it bears a closer look: *San do hundullil mankum kun sori yotda* [translated literally: it was a big sound to the extent that even the mountain shook]. It is overstatement because no amount of noise could shake a mountain; it is understatement, or perhaps more accurately understated metonymy because if the mountain is shaking at all it is the explosions that are doing the shaking and not the kun sori. There is no narratological justification for the inclusion of a coal mine blasting a road to the nearest town, except maybe to detail just how isolated this village really is, but then there are any number of simpler ways to do that. And even if there were justification for including a coal mine, there was no need for such a clever rhetorical flourishafter all, every Korean above the age of twenty in 1965 *already knows what an explosion sounds like.*

Kim is setting up an allegory of the Korean War. This is how the war started. This is what the war has done to our nation. A twenty one

year old woman has the courage to resist her material desires, the courage to resist the world-wise and wily hair agent, and the courage to affirm what she believes is the proper, decent thing to do. And she is viciously defiled. And in the story, not a shot was fired, and no one died.

Who is Kim Sung-ok?: Literature, Modernity, and National Identity

The body of Kims literature forms an incomplete project, in that I think that what we are really talking about here is more than just an evaluation of the Korean War. The following chapters of my dissertation will examine several of Kims works in detail looking for concrete links between the worlds created within these works and 1960s Korea. My analysis will then look backward to the Korean War and also forward to distinct possibilities for social change. As this dissertation hopes to show, the 1960s was a decade of coming to terms with the war, coming to terms with national division, coming to terms with interpenetration with the U.S., and coming to terms with an irrevocable modernity. The fundamental source of agony, therefore, has to be the conviction that modern society, despite its many social injustices and personal tragedies, is preferable to Choson dynasty society, preferable to Japanese colonial domination, and is preferable to a communist, totalitarian utopia.

The chief criticism of Kim is that it is actually very difficult to discern, especially given the dominant pure literature/engagement literature framework, whether Kim really holds that conviction or not. This criticism has to do with the authors theoretical stance vis-à-vis

the portrayal of social contradictions. After the coffee-shop portion of my second meeting with Kim was over, Kim took me to a nearby copy shop and had copies made of the reprinted major critical articles on Kim Sung-ok that appear in the 2001 Nanam collection. He first apologized that he was unable to give me the actual book, but that the reason was that the book had not come out yet, and this was his only copy, advanced to him by Nanam. Just as he was about to hand me the sheaf of completed photocopies, he then paused, as if again in apology. He said that I should know beforehand that some of the critiques contained within attack his writings because they do not offer a solution or resolution to the contradictions he had portrayed. He then said simply, I believe that literature is the exposure of contradictions.

Without offering a solution, it is hard to know where the author stands, which in other circumstances could be a good thing, but in 1960s Korea, with readers hanging on Kims every word, this can be seen as a grave error of omission, a missed opportunity. Ambiguity in literature is nothing new and is often praised, as one often hears, for example, The Tale of Genji is rich. Ambiguity, however, was one of many things that Korea could not afford during the 1960s. Yu Jong-ho (b. 1935), in his concluding remarks in Revolution of Sensibility (contained, by the way, in the Nanam sheaf given to me by Kim) speaks volumes: I wonder if a sensitivity that can be totally calm, cool, and collected in the face of contradictions in social structure can be called a proper or just sensitivity. A sense of orientation is important. Yu, p.637. I happen not to share Yus frustration on this point, but only because I was not around in 1966 when this article was originally published. It was clear to Yu at the time that Kim was every bit the standard-bearer that people said he was; Kim had an enormous flag,

and people for miles on end could see it, and they were following. And so the ugly head of pure vs. engagement literature rears again.

I believe that Kim Sung-ok was in the pseudo-proverbial right place at the wrong time. Another buzzword in critical circles of the time was *kanungsong* (possibility). The term is particularly prevalent in a collection of criticism by four critics, Kim Pyong-ik (b. 1938), Kim Chu-yon (b. 1941), Kim Chi-su (b. 1940), and Kim Hyon (1942-1990), entitled *Hyondae Hanguk munhak ui iron* [Theories of contemporary Korean literature]. Kim Pyong-ik, et al., *Hyondae Hanguk munhak ui iron* [Theories of contemporary Korean literature] (Seoul: Minumsa, 1972). Three chapter titles are worth noting: Kim Hyons Hanguk munhak ui kanungsong [The possibility of Korean literature] and Hanguk sosol ui kanungsong [The possibility of the Korean novel], and Kim Pyong-iks 60nyondae munhak ui kanungsong [The possibility of 60s literature]. Possibilities here refers to an idea of *limitless* possibilities, and reflects the persistence of the ideal of Freedom gained through the 4.19 uprising. I confirmed my interpretation of possibilities as limitless in conversation with Yu Chong-ho, Spring 2002. As noted above, however, the 4.19 euphoria was short lived, and in 1966 certain limits to Freedom were already evident, and by 1972, with the implementation of the Yusin Constitution, limits were undeniable, and the usage of kanungsong is therefore mostly wishful thinking. This created an unfair horizon of critical expectation, expecting Kim to take a didactic stance when such was never his intention, and expecting Kim to be committed enough to go to prison when just when he was starting his own family.

I began my argument by suggesting that the pure literature vs. engagement literature framework has always been important in

twentieth-century Korean literature and would provide an additional way to view Korean literature from outside Korea, a framework that would be particularly fruitful in viewing the case of Kim Sung-ok and his bittersweet relationship with 1960s Korea. At the same time, however, it will be important, for Koreans and non-Koreans, to remember that, as the case of Kim Sung-ok has also shown, there are clear limitations to this framework. The debate between pure literature and engagement literature that has colored much of modern-era Korean literature is obviously a very helpful additional tool in attempting to understand a wide range of authors and works. Furthermore, the *controversy* between pure literature and engagement literature that boiled over in the 1960s is crucial to the understanding of Korean literature of that period and of literatures relationship with society. But it cannot be the telos; there must be other possibilities out there, waiting.

As I hope I have shown above, Kim was writing on another level, beyond the possibilities of his era. Although this may have been bad for Kim, just as the world has always been cruel to geniuses who sprout before their time, it has certainly been good for the rest of the world and posterity. Whether or not his works are viewed as allegories is not nearly as important as recognizing that these works function on a number of different levels, including a number of levels that he himself was neither aware of nor in control of. If every critic missed his allegories of the Korean War, it is a fair bet that his readership missed it too, at least on the conscious level. Kim, it is important to remember, was very popular in his day. It is sometimes a little too easy to get so caught up in the gameallegorical analyses, postmodern theories, socio-cultural milieux, or even good-old New Critical concepts

of theme, motif, plot, character, and settingthat you forget that you really came to the party to read a good, solid story.

The critics and the reading public all know something that Kim has missed: his works are easy on the eyes, so to speak. His revolutionary style and wit are often praised by critics and are without a doubt major factors in his overall popularity at the time. His stories would not have been *that* enormously popular if they were not somehow uplifting. Stories by other authors with firm links to reality, which is to say, engaged literature, are either depressing or revolting, depending on ones ideological bent. Stories by other authors that are uplifting are often detached from reality (read, pure literature) and take on the flavor of a fairy tale or of a Hollywood happy ending. To borrow Kims famous phrase in Seoul, 1964 Winter spoken by the graduate student An regarding the night streets of Seoul, Kims works also have *ku muonga ka*, that certain *something*. *Kim Sung-ok sosoljonjip* [Collected novels of Kim Sung-ok] 1, p.210. How else can one explain the popularity of stories about suicide, fratricide, self-castration, rape, prostitution, alienation, backroom masturbation, and the stealing of hair? For a surreal example of Kims appeal, despite his dark motifs, see the anonymously edited *Taegyo wihan sosol* [Novels for antenatal education] (Seoul: Purimiom buksu, 2000), which is headlined by Kim Sung-ok, and contains A Journey to Mujin. Kim also wrote a blurb on the back cover describing how reading good literature to the unborn fetus will have a positive effect on the fetus soul. And the front cover has an anonymous blurb boasting that the stories within had been rigorously selected. Im a fan of A Journey to Mujin, but I have a difficult time seeing how a story about a society where the only ones with any courage are the occasional prostitutes who commit suicide

along the embankment can be thought of as good for an unborn fetus to absorb. Im still pondering this one, but it looks like Kim is regarded as even more uplifting than I thought. The answer is clearly style and wit, and I get the sense that Kim does not fully appreciate this aspect of his works, and I think the reason is probably because those were the parts that he didnt have to work very hard atit just came naturally to him.

Although I never intended to physically meet with Kim, my original motivation had nevertheless been to answer the question Where is Kim Sung-ok? in its figurative meaning. I owe this insight to my advisor, Prof. Michael Robinson, Indiana University, Bloomington, who, over a series of meetings during the summer of 2000 was able to take the necessary step backward and pinpoint and express in words just exactly where my proposed research was heading. There must be something fundamental about the relationship between Kims life history and the unfolding of post-war Korean history that would be able to help explain the reason or reasons why such a gifted writer would so suddenly and decisively drop out of society. There will always be the inevitable comparisons to the American author J.D. Salinger (b. 1919), but the reasons for their respective departures will certainly defy any reasonable comparison. Besides the fact that they both dropped out of society, the only other similarity would be the speculation that the pressure of living up to expectations and producing the great American and Korean novels, respectively, became too much to bear. Speculation aside, however, we can see clear differences from what has been documented. Salinger, it seems, shut himself off from the world out of misanthropy. I owe this insight to Sandra J. Holstein, professor of English, Honors, and Womens Studies, Southern Oregon

University and Fulbright Senior Scholar, Sogang University, Seoul, 2001-2002. Fortunately for Salinger, he is able to continue to live comfortably off royalty checks supplied by the society he so hates. Kim, by contrast, was duped by an unscrupulous publisher (Changmunsa) out of all royalties from his one, stellar, best-selling collection of shorts stories, *Soul, 1964nyon kyoul* [Seoul, 1964 winter], and lived at certain times in pathetic poverty, yet still retains his love of humanity. Regarding Kims poverty, see Song Yong, Sosol, Kim Sung-ok [Novels, Kim Sung-ok], *Sosol munhak* [Novel literature] 7 no. 12 (December 1981): pp.46-9. Song Yong is an author and friend of Kims, and in this article Song describes the basement lifestyle Kim led for a month and a half during the winter of 1980, i.e., six months after he stopped writing. With no place to go and very little money, Kim rented out a small area of retail space in one of those *chiha sangga* (lit., basement shopping road) that sprout up wherever large apartment complexes are built. There was little to no ventilation, so Kim had to go outside with his family for hours at a time for fresh air as all heating and cooking was done with propane gas. It seems clear that Kims refusal to write was a kind of active protest against a procession of social injustices that had become too much to bear.

Kims enormous popularity during the 1960s, his shift to the more lucrative business of writing film screenplays in the 1970s, and his 1980 disappearance prompts thoughtful consideration of Koreas long and at times agonizing encounter with modernity. If Kim had continued to write throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s as some of his contemporaries have done, the transitional nature of his 60s literature vis-à-vis contemporary Korean literary history and the transitional nature of 1960s Korean society would not be nearly so clearly

manifest. Kims deep ties to his socio-cultural milieu, albeit non-ideological and often oblique, document about as objectively as possible Koreas negotiations on the way to building its own, positive (we are ·) rather than negative (we are not ·, or, we are against ·) national identity. The question where is Kim? becomes an even more difficult yet more fruitful question of who is Kim? To the extent that any of us can find an answer, we will be that much closer to a fuller, more textured understanding of Korea, then and now. Meeting Kim has been a tremendous step in this direction, and it will be up to me put everything in order, place everything in perspective.

These questions take on a particular relevance in the present day, as the 1960s and Park Chung Hee have enjoyed a renaissance in recent years. The financial crisis of 1997 that ushered in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout of the Korean nation thoroughly solidified nostalgia for the good old days that had been slowly growing even before the crisis occurred. The most concrete example of this is the controversial column in the conservative *Choson ilbo* [Choson daily] entitled Nae mudom-e chimul ppaetora [Spit on my grave] which was a rather unreserved paean to former president Park Chung Hee. *Choson ilbo* [Choson daily], from 1997-1998. The series was then collected and published in a five volume set: Cho Kap-je, *Nae mudom e chim ul ppaetora* [Spit on my grave] 5 vols. (Seoul: Choson ilbosa, 1998-1999). This series of course sparked a spate of indignant counterattacks, pointing out all the vicious and evil deeds carried out during Parks reign, and reminiscent of the 1960s pure literature vs. engagement literature debate, no one that I have seen has been willing to find a middle ground. Not a compromise exactly, as there would be no point in compromising ones beliefs unless part of those beliefs are

recognized as being based on hype, hysteria, or misinformation. Although this will have to be a topic for later discussion, a major theme propounded by the author Choe In-ho is the dangers inherent in compromise as opposed to genuine reconciliation of extremes : Seong, Min-yeop [Song Min-yop] in *Whos Who in Korean Literature, s.v.* Choi In-ho. This at first struck me as counterproductive and against everything I learned in my proverbial kindergarten, but as I hope the above introduction has shown, Choes theme makes perfect sense given the flow of modern Korean history. But a middle ground, where one side recognizes any valid points made by the opposite side, would seem to go a long way toward squaring up with the past so that one may begin to move on.

And in literary circles at least, even Kim Sung-ok himself is getting increased attention. Kims collected works came out in 1995 and are still on the shelves as I write in 2002. In the fall of 2001 the impressive 725 page volume published by Nanam came out, carrying Kims important short stories, novellas, one of his four novels (*60nyondaesik*; 60s style), a collection of major critical works on Kim Sung-ok by major critics, and a semi-thorough bibliography of works by and about Kim. And in June, 2000, the first ever doctoral dissertation on Kim was completed. 43 Kim Myong-sok, Kim Sung-ok sosol yongu [A study of Kim Sung-oks novels], Ph.D. dissertation, Yonsei University, June 2000. It is a modest 150 pages including bibliography and English abstract, but it is the first in-depth treatment I have found on Kim Sung-oks often-celebrated but rarely-explicated sensibility. There is a pseudo-tradition in Korean literature that relegates the writing of a dissertation on one author to points in time after that author has passed away, so this first

dissertation on Kim Sung-ok is not necessarily late in coming. But then again Kim hasnt written a word of literature since 1980, and nothing that has been well received since 1977 (when Soul ui talbit 0 chang [Moonlight in Seoul, chapter zero] won the first Yi Sang Literary Prize), so this first dissertation is not necessarily early either. I believe that part of this renewed interest in Kim has to do with the so-called IMF era and its concomitant nostalgia, but I think a significant part also has to do with Kims style. His lyrical, mournful depictions of how to fight the good fight still have a lot to say to Korean readers, especially given what critic Yu Jong-ho has called the lightening (*kabyowojyotda*) of Korean literature in the 1990s. Prof. Yu Jong-ho, Dept. of Korean Language and Literature, Yonsei University, Seoul, has been my Fulbright fellowship faculty sponsor and has been very generous with his time throughout the year, for which I am very grateful. The quote here about 1990s Korean literature is from a meeting in his office on March 12, 2002. Kims literature of the bittersweet has withstood the test of time; indeed, there are now new generations of thoughtful Koreans who do not know what an explosion feels like.

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[Abstract]

This paper centers on the erstwhile novelist Kim Seung-ok with a focus not only on his watershed works of the 1960s, but also on his lesser-known works of the 1970s as well as on the circumstances and possible reasons for his decision to quit writing in the 1980s. His works from the 60s address certain basic human contradictions and are in this respect timeless, and these same works are also firmly grounded in their larger socio-cultural contexts of 1960s Korea. This article attempts to place the word firmly here sous rature. In new critical terms, the Kim's settings can not be understood as anything but Korea, in the then and now. This characteristic is shared, however, with highly ideological literature that at times seems to want to beat the reader over the head with the problems and author-sponsored solutions of then and now. In order to understand Kim's paradoxical position in Korean literary history, one must view his works from within the context of the debate between pure and engagement literature.