

Savage Nature and Noble Spirit in Han Sörya's *Wolves*: A North Korean Morality Tale Alzo David-West

Introduction

Wolves (Süngnyangi) by Han Sörya is a canonical North Korean novelette that debuted in 1951 during the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, establishing major narrative conventions, motifs, and tropes in the North Korean national form of *socialist realism*. Notably, the work was republished in the state cultural journals *Korean Literature* (Chosön munhak), *Youth Literature* (Ch'öngnyön munhak), and *Thousand-Li Horse* (Ch'öllima) in August 2003, one year after the rightwing Bush administration designated North Korea a member of the so-called 'axis of evil' and five months after the United States invasion of Iraq. Since *Wolves* appeared in American translation in 1994, there has been a general tendency among commentators writing in English to dismiss the work as crude propaganda.¹ There is, for example, the interpretation that the narrative constitutes the 'main anti-American tale' of North Korea and that it is a 'fiercely ethnocentric mix of anti-American and anti-Christian propaganda' that disabuses hope for a 'social' storyline because of its racist character portrayals, remote fairy-tale setting, and an allegedly trivial incident that motivates the plot – a small Korean child is beaten into a coma by a missionary's teenage son over an old rubber ball. Moreover, the plot is said to be 'simple'; the protagonists represent no 'particular ideology or social class' and need 'no special explanation'; and the story 'is not about the [Korean] war but about missionary child-killers,' about 'murderous U.S. missionaries in colonial Korea.'² Narratological analysis, however, taken in conjunction with North Korean criticism of *Wolves* for North Korean readers, reveals that there is more to the novelette than racism, anti-Christianism, and anti-Americanism. There is a colonial-class dimension to the literary characters; there is a

¹ See Sörya Han, 'Jackals,' *Han Sörya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK*, by Brian Myers (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1994) 157–88. Further references to the novelette will be included in parentheses in the main text. One should note that 'Jackals' is a mistranslation and refers to an animal that is not indigenous to Northeast Asia, but to Africa, Southern Asia, and Southern Europe. *Süngnyangi* means 'dhole' (*Cuon alpinus*), 'Korean wolf', or 'wild dog'. As for *Han Sörya and North Korean Literature*, it must be said that this is not a strictly literary study, but a biography of a North Korean writer, with disparaging and theoretically unsophisticated discussion of his fiction. Myers takes a Soviet Russocentric approach, reduces North Korean literature to the life and literary output of one author, and makes the absolute claim that *socialist realism* failed in North Korea. That claim is disproven with empirical evidence in Tatiana Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010). Gabroussenko's study, which has a predominantly biographical and political focus, is also disparaging of North Korean literature. See Alzo David-West, 'North Korean Literature and "Theoretical Problems of Literary Studies": Tatiana Gabroussenko's *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 47.2 (April 2012) 236-49.

² Myers 94, 95, 97; B. R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – and Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2010) 150, 187n64. See Alzo David-West, 'North Korea, Fascism and Stalinism: On B. R. Myers' *The Cleanest Race*,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41.1 (February 2011) 146-56.

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fundamental set of moral conflicts that operate as shaping principles; and the story relates to the Korean War through the structure of allegory.

Realism and Allegorism

Wolves is a difficult story to approach for a number of reasons. To begin with, it is not written for non-North Korean readers; it is a postcolonial-Gorkian narrative inspired by Maxim Gorky's sentimental didactic novel *Mother* (*Mat*, 1907); and it is ideologically self-conscious.³ The story is also told by a semi-omniscient, partial, and intrusive narrator, who takes sides in the storytelling, reacts, and uses partisan language and insults, for example, 'Japanese oppressors' and 'judo bastards' when describing the brutal Japanese colonial response to the 1 March 1919 independence movement in Korea (168, 169). An additional complication is that of realism, not *socialist realism*, which is a Stalinist policy method, but literary realism, the 'representational form'.⁴ *Wolves* is not a work of realism, as that term has generally come to be understood in the Western literary tradition, descending from nineteenth-century European and Russian literature. Han's story is not written in the 'grand style' realism of Balzac, Dickens, Hugo, and Stendhal, with tendencies of 'naturalist empiricism';⁵ the work is not compatible with the realism of Dostoevsky, which portrays 'all the depths of the human soul' with 'objectively realistic, sober, prosaic depiction';⁶ nor is this a case of the 'sincere, explicit realism' of Tolstoy, a 'complete realism' or 'naive realism' that removes veils.⁷

One who engages *Wolves* expecting a realism that renders an externally or internally 'objective and exact portrayal of life' will be placing extraneous demands on the text.⁸ North Korean literature is peculiar and possesses its own historically determined mythos, modes, and genres, proper discussion of which requires a specialised study that surveys the entire North Korean literary field inductively and without bias. Such a survey naturally lies outside the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that there is a system to North Korean *socialist realist* literature, and the values within that system have to be accepted, through a 'willing suspension of disbelief for

³ Han is reported to have been familiar with the writings of Gorky, to have followed his teachings, and to have written about him. See Se-p'yong Yun, 'Han Sol-ya and His Literature,' *Han Sol-ya and His Literature: North Korea* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Publications Research Service, 1960), 12, 20; Defense Technical Information Center, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA376834>, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA376834&Location=U2&doc=GefTRDoc.pdf> (accessed 28 March, 2012). See also M. Gorky, *Mother: A Novel in Two Parts*, trans. Margaret Wettlin (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2000); and Maxim Gorky, 'Soviet Literature,' *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2004, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gorky-maxim/1934/soviet-literature.htm> (accessed 28 March, 2012).

⁴Pam Morris, *Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 4.

⁵Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélèn Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1984) 52

⁶Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 277.

⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 237; Aleksandr K. Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings, 1911–1936* (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 1998) 217, 268.

⁸The phrase is from Voronsky 107.

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the moment,' to understand the national narratives.⁹ Suspension of this sort is not a form of unreasoning trust, but a rational critical procedure to avoid prejudiced reading, to avoid excluding and protesting in analysis of the narrative data. '[W]e must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text' in order to be 'open to the immediate experience of the text,' says Wolfgang Iser.¹⁰ Representation of objects (things, processes, people, experiences, feelings) within a lifelike range of plausibility (verisimilitude) is not the structural aim of a work like *Wolves*, which utilises tendentiously exaggerated portrayals, moral condemnations, virtuous and vicious characters, and the grotesque. This is a novelette about abstract principles and conflicts that are selected and translated into archetypal characters that have a metaphorical relation to empirical reality. Han Sörya's *Wolves*, in other words, is a morality tale that combines sentimentalism, realism, and nationalist allegorism.¹¹

On the grotesque, Han makes decisive use of animal and demonic imagery in the physiognomy of his villains. While it has been previously claimed that there is no precedent in Soviet Stalinist *socialist realism* for the use of 'lupine and vulpine imagery' to underscore the 'predatory nature' of enemies,¹² it is known that the 'fantastic grotesque' of the Soviet 1920s – which combines the planes of the real and fantastic – exploited animalism, dehumanisation, and satire. That is seen in the work of the pre-*socialist realist* poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky, who marks the

⁹ The concept of 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment' comes from the British Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and originally means temporary acceptance of the 'shadows of the imagination' (dramatic illusions) in literature on 'poetic faith'. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Chapter XIV, *Biographia Literaria*, Department of English University of Pennsylvania, <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html> (accessed 28 March 2012). Stephen Epstein has attempted to reformulate the concept as 'willing acquiescence in belief.' See Stephen Epstein, 'On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium,' *Acta Koreana* 5.1 (January 2002) 33-50, 48.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,' *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) 290, 291.

¹¹ The term 'nationalist allegorism' is from 'nationalist allegory' and used in the following sense: (1) an idealist symbolic mode that is religious-moralistic, that mystically apotheosises, idolises, and projects a lost sense of wholeness or being into the nation-state in the epoch of finance capital, speaks to emotions, and does not aesthetically re-embody the real historical world; (2) an idealist symbolic mode that translates the experience of collective national trauma into a postcolonial literature, that combines adapted and locally developed *socialist realist* themes with indigenous iconographies, and manipulates familiar archetypes with material from the level of conscious human life; (3) an idealist symbolic mode that renders a metaphysical story-world with an ethos based on political nationalism; that is homiletic, moralistic, and sentimental, with appeals to emotion, faith, and spontaneity; and with abstract ideas, imperatives, and virtues that are personified. See Alzo David-West, 'Nationalist Allegory in North Korea: The Revolutionary Opera *Sea of Blood*,' *North Korean Review* 2.2 (Fall 2006) 75-87; Alzo David-West, 'Archetypal Themes in North Korean Literature: Working Notes on Problems and Possibilities,' *Jung Journal* 5.1 (2011) 65-80; and Alzo David-West, 'Reading *Sea of Blood* through Bertolt Brecht's *The Mother*: North Korean "Revolutionary Opera" and Nationalist Allegory,' *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society* 5. 2 (October 2011) 1-24.

¹² Myers 95-6.

beginning of Soviet literature.¹³ Mayakovsky, whom Stalin canonised in 1935 after the writer's suicide in 1930, was read in North Korea, and his portrait, as documented in Kim Il Sung's *Juche* speech of 1955, was hung in elementary schools.¹⁴ Notably, in a 1959 discussion on Han's *Wolves* and other writings, North Korean critic Han Chŭng-mo cited Mayakovksy on the utility of laughter, indicating appropriation of the Soviet grotesque in North Korean fiction: 'Mayakovksy wrote the following about laughter: "Oh, comrades, through laughter let us learn. [Let us learn] to hate the enemy until the end."'”¹⁵ Although the fantastic grotesque underwent a particularly sharp decline in Soviet literature from the 1930s to mid-1950s, following Stalin's proclamation of *socialist realism* through Andrei Zhdanov in 1934, it was not absent. Moreover, animalism, dehumanisation, and satire were common in Stalin-era journalism, political discourse, and visual art, especially in caricature, denigrating external and internal enemies.

Some figurative and metaphorical representations of enemies in Stalin's time included apes, bloodsuckers, carrion, chickens, demons (with claws, fangs, and hooves), dogs, flies, garbage, germs, parasites, pigs, rats, snakes, spiders, and wolves. Soviet *socialist realist* literature, unlike other party-state media, may have been bound to more conservative codes of non-attenuated resemblance in portrayal; however, pejoratives such as 'beastly' (*zyerskii*) and 'wolfish' (*volchii*) appeared on the individual level in practically any work dealing with 'enemies of the people'.¹⁶ The

¹³Svetlana le Fleming explains that Mayakovsky's fantastic grotesque exploits the following: absurdity, alogism, animalism, artificiality, caricature, dehumanisation, didacticism, distortion, exaggeration, hyperbole, incompatibility, and satire, as well as the comic, the ridiculous, the serious, the tragic, and the ugly. See Svetlana le Fleming, 'Aspects of the Fantastic Grotesque in the Works of V. Mayakovsky, M. Bulgakov and E. Schwartz,' MA thesis, Durham University, 1974, *Durham University*, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/785/1/36_-_Aspects_of_the_Fantastic_Grotesque.pdf?DDD36 (accessed 28 March 2012).

¹⁴Kim, Il Sung, 'On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* [the Subject] in Ideological Work,' *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965) 320.

¹⁵Chŭng-mo Han, 'Tanp'yŏn *Sŭngnyang*i wa Han Sŏrya-ŭi ch'angjak esŏ-ŭi p'ungjajŏk t'ŭkjing' [Satirical Features in the Novelette *Wolves* and Han Sorya's Works], *Han Sŏrya-ŭi ch'angjak yŏngu* [A Study of Han Sŏrya's Works], ([Pyongyang]: Chosŏn chakga tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1959) 325-6. Myers 100, cites Han's reference to Mayakovsky, speaks of 'the grotesque', not laughter, and dismisses it as 'rejected decades ago by Soviet literary theorists.'

¹⁶Personal email communication with Soviet literature specialist Professor Petre Petrov of Princeton University (11 October 2011). Professor Petrov suggested consultation of the following sources, even though they do not deal specifically with literature: A. V. Fateev, *Obraz vraga v sovetskoi propagande, 1945–1954* [*The Image of the Enemy in Soviet Propaganda, 1945–1954*] ([Moscow]: Institut rossijskoj istorii, 1999), *Psi-Faktor* [*Psy-Factor*], <http://www.psyfactor.org/lib/fateev0.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012); D. Weiss, 'Zhivotnye v sovetskoi propagande: verbal'nye i graficheskie steryeotipy' [Animals in Soviet Propaganda: Verbal and Graphical Stereotypes], *Politicheskaya lingvistika* [*Political Linguistics*]25 (2008) 19-35, [http://journals.uspu.ru/i/inst/ling/ling25/ling_5\(25\)2008_vise.pdf](http://journals.uspu.ru/i/inst/ling/ling25/ling_5(25)2008_vise.pdf) (accessed 28 March 2012); D. Weiss, 'Zhivotnye v sovetskoi propagande: verbal'nye i graficheskie steryeotipy (chast' 2)' [Animals in Soviet Propaganda: Verbal and Graphical Stereotypes, Part 2], *Politicheskaya lingvistika* [*Political Linguistics*] 27 (2009) 39-46, http://journals.uspu.ru/i/inst/ling/ling27/ling_27_04.pdf (accessed 28 March 2012); and D. Weiss, 'Parazity, padal', musor: Obraz vraga v sovetskoi propaganda' [Parasites, Carrion, Garbage: The Image of the Enemy in Soviet Propaganda], *Politicheskaya lingvistika*[*Political*

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wolf image predates the rise of Stalin and Stalinism, though, and can be found in Lenin in 1921 referring to the ‘imperialist wolf’ with ‘claws and teeth’ preying on a feminized Soviet Russia.¹⁷ Stalin had also spoken in 1918 of the ‘voracious appetite of the imperialist wolves’ and said the following in 1923, in terms that sound remarkably North Korean:

We are surrounded by enemies – that is evident to everybody. The imperialist wolves who surround us are wide awake. Not a moment passes without our enemies trying to capture some gap through which to crawl and do us damage.¹⁸

North Korea appropriated such images into its national form of *socialist realism*, as the social culture was intensively Sovietised/Stalinised from 1945 to 1950 – the period of Soviet Army liberation, three-year occupation, and satellitisation – until the mid-1950s.¹⁹

What is the North Korean view of *Wolves*? An instructive piece of official criticism for North Korean readers may be found in party writer Yun Se-p’yŏng’s August 1960 *Korean Literature* essay ‘Han Sol-ya and His Literature,’ which says the following:

In his short story ‘Sung-nyangi,’ he [Han] exposed the *savage nature* of [the] monstrous murderers of American imperialism.²⁰ [...] Han Sol-ya exposed the true *character of human hatred* and the *barbaric conduct* of the cruel aggressive enemies of American imperialism. And, at the same time, he confronted the enemy with the *moral characteristics* of the *noble spirit* of the Korean people for their *love of mankind and peace*. Han Sol-ya artistically

Linguistics] 24 (2008) 16–24,

[http://journals.uspu.ru/i/inst/ling/ling24/ling_4\(24\)2008_vise.pdf](http://journals.uspu.ru/i/inst/ling/ling24/ling_4(24)2008_vise.pdf) (accessed 28 March 2012).

¹⁷V. I. Lenin, ‘Speech at a Plenary Meeting of the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies,’ Marxists Internet Archive, 2002,

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/feb/28.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012).

¹⁸J. V. Stalin, ‘The South of Russia: *Pravda* Interview,’ Marxists Internet Archive, 2009,

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1918/10/30.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012); J.

V. Stalin, ‘The Twelfth Congress of the R.C.P. (B.),’ Marxists Internet Archive, 2008,

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1923/04/17.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012).

The wolf image appears as early as 1894 in Lenin’s political writings and as early as 1906 in Stalin’s works. The precedent is in Marx, who referred to the ‘bourgeoisie’ as ‘wolves’ in 1845 and employed the phrases ‘stock exchange wolves’ (1848), ‘wolves of finance’ (1850), and ‘wolves, swine, and vile curs of the old society’ (1871). ‘Stock exchange wolves’ also appears in volume one of *Capital* (1867). Lenin quotes Marx’s wolf-swine-cur construction in the preface to the edited pamphlet *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann* (1907). Other figures such as the ‘bloodsucker’ and ‘vampire’ appear in Marx’s and Lenin’s writings as well.

¹⁹Jae-Cheon Lim, *Kim Jong Il’s Leadership of North Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 19. See also Charles K. Armstrong, ‘The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945–1950,’ *Journal of Asian Studies* 62.1 (February 2003) 71–99; and Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁰Yun 23; emphasis added.

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defined the *inviolability* of the Korean people. In ‘Sung-nyagi’ the author accuses the tyrannical inhuman cruelty of the cunning American missionary who calls out, ‘Oh, Lord,’ in the name of the holy cross in Korea; and by contrasting the missionary with Su-kil and his mother’s virtuous and admirable character.²¹

Despite what may seem to be a biased tone, this criticism is notable because it is a form of thematic criticism that identifies a fundamental *thematic conflict* and a set of attendant *moral conflicts* that find expression in *character conflict* in Han Sörya’s classic novelette. These conflict structures may be delineated more clearly in diagram form (Fig. 1).

Thematic Conflict	
American Imperialism	Korean People
Moral Conflict	
Savage nature	Noble spirit
Barbaric conduct	Moral characteristics
Human hatred	Love of humanity and peace
Character Conflict	
American Missionary	Korean Mother/Sugil
Tyrannical inhuman cruelty	Virtuous and admirable character

Fig. 1. Levels of thematic, moral, and character conflict in Han Sörya’s *Wolves*.

Although it has been alleged that *Wolves* is a ‘racist’ work and specifically racist against Caucasians, Yun’s criticism for North Korean readers shows that racism – a master-slave ideology of biological superiority and inferiority – is not a thematic concern as far as the Korean side of the narrative conflict is concerned.²² The

²¹Yun 24; emphasis added.

²²One must distinguish between racism and race-thinking in the North Korean context. A general survey of (North) Korean Central News Agency articles, for instance, reveals that racism (*injongjuüi*) and racial discrimination (*injong ch’abyöl*) are seen as crimes (*pömchoe*) that are bound up with aggression (*ch’imryak*), annihilation (*malsal*), colonialism (*shikminjuüi*), domination (*chibae*), imperialism (*chegugjuüi*), and oppression (*t’anap*). Racism is also associated with Hitler and fascism (*p’ashijüm* or *p’assyö sasang*). When North Korean media celebrate the idea of a ‘homogenous ethnic-racial state’ (*tanil minjok kukga*) and reject the ‘multiethnic, multiracial society’ (*taminjok, tainjong sahoe*), that is not understood as racism in North Korea, but as expressive of the ‘idea of ethnic-racial self-determination’ (*minjok chagyöl-üi sasang*). Since Korea was an oppressed nation subject to colonial and colonial-fascist rule under Imperial Japan from 1910 to 1945, North Korea regards itself as a past and present victim of racism and racial discrimination, espousing in turn the defensive, reactive notion of ‘Korean ethnic-race firstism’ (*Chosön minjok cheiljuüi*). Despite the strong presence of ethnic-racial pride (*minjokjök chabushim*) in North Korea, which Kim Il Sung endorsed in the *Juche* speech of 1955, the regime accepts the fact that most countries in the world are ‘multiethnic-racial states’ (*taminjok kukga*) and pursues a non-racially selective foreign policy open to international and diplomatic relations with countries in Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania. Notably, Kim Jong Il said in 1997 that ‘all countries and all ethnic-races are completely equal and self-mastering’ (*modün nara, modün minjök-un ta p’yongdünghago chajuök ida*) and that all peoples have ‘excellence’

reference to the ‘inviolability of the Korean people’ is also less of a racist invocation than it is an ethnonationalist, patriotic, and self-defensist one that identifies grand moral principles of the good with the ethnic nation, which confronts ‘American imperialism’, a super-national system of finance-capitalist domination. Importantly, the said inviolability does not mean incorruptibility. Koreans can be morally corrupt, and there are Korean characters in the novelette who fall on the immoral side of ‘American imperialism’. It is also telling that, in *Wolves*, it is not the narrator or protagonists who are racist, but the American missionary and his family. They call people of African descent ‘niggers’ and outside God’s reach and also associate Koreans with filth, ignorance, and savagery, while claiming some Koreans can be saved. The recorded history of colonialism and evangelism has no shortage of such hypocritical social types. While that experience may provide some objective, extra-literary background to the story, Yun’s criticism indicates that the central problems of *Wolves* are moral ones and that Han’s protagonists and antagonists are not so much characters as they are *allegorical personifications*, decisively embodying the essential contending forces of ‘savage nature’ and ‘noble spirit’.

Social Setting and Plot Demography

Wolves is divided into six parts that can be summarised as follows: (1) A little Korean boy named Sugil claims a rubber ball in a puddle by a cowshed in a colonial-era missionary compound; (2) an American reverend’s teenage son named Simon declares theft and violently attacks the small Korean child; (3) Sugil’s single mother accosts the reverend, her employer, for justice, but the man feigns ignorance; (4) the reverend’s wife Mary admits Sugil into the mission hospital as a personal safety measure; (5) Sugil is quarantined for allegedly contracting a contagious disease, murdered, and cremated; and (6) Sugil’s mother breaks into the reverend’s house and demands Simon’s life, after which she is beaten, tied up, and arrested. From a reader’s perspective, this is an unpleasant and upsetting story. A mother’s only child is killed, an only son for that matter, which is a great calamity in Korean culture, and those who are responsible get away with it. But that is not all. The story casts the impression that Americans and Christians are, at bottom, a self-serving and immoral people, that only Koreans are good. One feels a strong nationalistic and didactic intention in the storytelling, and that, especially for an outside readership, can discourage a fully sympathetic reading. From a critic’s perspective, things are more complicated.

(*ususŏng*), something that is not connected to ‘racial nature’ (*injongjŏk t’ŭksŏng*), but is formed sociohistorically. As for the internal situation in North Korea, while ethnic-racial ‘oneness’ (*tanilsŏng*) and ‘homogeneity’ (*tongshilsŏng*) are esteemed, there is a minority of mixed, naturalised, and non-ethnic North Koreans in the country. See Jong Il Kim, ‘Hyŏngmyŏng kwa kŏnsŏl-esŏ chuch’esŏng kwa minjoksŏng-ul kosuhaldae taehayŏ’ [On Adhering to the Subject Spirit and Ethnic-Racial Spirit in the Revolution and Construction,] 19 June 1997, *Kuguk chŏnsŏn* [National Salvation Front], <http://ndfsk.dyndns.org/kuguk8/munon84-3.htm> (accessed 28 March 2012). See also the official English translation Jong Il Kim, ‘On Preserving the *Juche* Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction,’ 19 June 1997, *e-Asia Digital Library*, University of Oregon, <http://www.libweb.uoregon.edu/ec/e-asia/readb/111.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2012).

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An examination of the social setting and plot demography of *Wolves* reveals the presence of class distinctions among Han's characters. While there is no bourgeois *ruling class* (owners of capital) depicted in the story, there is a foreign/native *middle class* (landowners and professionals) and a *working class* (wage earners and poor villagers). The nationalist allegory does not simply oppose these two social classes. *Wolves* subsumes them and their intra-class layers into a coloniser-colonised dialectic, and characters from *both* social groups exist within the coloniser/negative field and the colonised/positive field (Fig. 2). But this apparent element of realism turns out to be a 'semblance of realism,' since all the foreign (American and Japanese) characters are allegorically placed in the coloniser/negative field. One also notices that the poorer the Korean characters are, the more they tend to be included in the colonised/positive field. Case in point is the contrast between the missionary hospital workers (e.g. doorman, guard, janitor, orderly, and nurses), who are all morally compromised, unlike workers who labour around the missionary's house and elsewhere (e.g. chore woman, factory worker, odd-jobs man, and locals in the surrounding village), who are unguillible and uncompromised.

Coloniser/Negative Field		Colonised/Positive Field	
Foreign/Native middle class	Compromised native workers	Patriotic-minded native middle class	Uncompromised native workers

Fig. 2. Class, coloniser-colonised dialectic, and positive-negative fields in *Wolves*.

Similarly, among the middle class, one finds former missionary hospital doctors with private practices who are profit-minded and double as usurers, whereas a patriotic-minded doctor is the son of a 'penurious carpenter' and treats underground activists and the gravely ill for free (168, 175). The moral conflict structures, coloniser-colonised dialectic, and positive-negative fields dramatically manifest in the plot demography as follows: There is a racially and nationally proud American reverend, a twenty-year resident of Korea, who has established a comfortable colonial dominion for himself, his heavysset wife Mary, and their fifteen-year-old son Simon. They live in a 'white house' amid a grove on a hill; own land, a cow, and a cowshed with adjoining boys' quarters; and are part of a foreign-native missionary community with brick houses, a church, hospital, and school fenced off with barbed wire. Working for the reverend's family as a cow milker, cowshed cleaner, fruit picker, and launderer is an aggrieved but tough Korean mother, the uneducated widow of a peasant union activist, and her pre-elementary-school-age son Sugil, who come from a farming village. They live next to the cowshed. Outside the compound is a squalid local village with impoverished Koreans and their children living in 'rock huts'.

Here is a situation in which class, ideological, and national contradictions are ensured: a compound of well-to-do foreigners and natives living in but outside Korea, encapsulated and cut off from the life of the poor multitude. The words of the narrator after Simon's deadly beating of Sugil, who claimed the teen's abandoned ball, captures the great social and moral divide: 'This was the kind of thing that could have

been committed by people who *never consider the consequences of their actions, let alone assume responsibility for them*' (168; emphasis added). Indeed, growing up in a privileged colonial-style community and in a racist Christian family, Simon stands above the natives around him and compares them to Satanic 'blacks,' whom he has been taught he has a right to beat. (The story appears to be set in around the 1930s.) The teenager is never punished for his wrong, which his father witnessed with little concern and comes to deny ever happened. Still, the boy's actions induce *great fear* in the reverend and his wife once the locals become aware of the incident. That fear is exacerbated when a strange Korean man, the factory worker Yi Tonggön, visits Sugil's mother and the unconscious child. The American family's dread is seen in Mary's thoughts when she prayerfully visits the boys' quarters:

For an instant, disconnected images rose in her mind. She saw an iron hammer, a kitchen knife, the shovel in the stable, the rake and the pickaxe in the storage room ... then she saw all these things in the hands of Sugil's mother and Tonggön as they set upon her. (171)

Terrified as to what may follow if Sugil is seen by a local physician, Mary admits the child to the mission hospital. Yet she does not confess to Simon's attack, nor does she intend to see Sugil get better, which would guarantee her son's incrimination and, in her mind, lead to a massacre. That is a possibility she and her husband connect to how the Korean 'savages' stood up against the Japanese colonial government in 1919, displaying mass fearlessness before death, something the reverend had observed in disbelief. The family thus conspires with the hospital director Mrs Mack to infect Sugil with a bacterium and cremate his body. After Sugil ails at the mission hospital for two weeks, he is mysteriously quarantined; his mother is denied access to him; and he eventually dies. All the mother's attempts to beseech the help of Korean hospital staff fall on deaf ears. One hospital pharmacist declares, 'Americans don't lie', for these progressive people build hospitals and schools and bring doctors and preachers to Korea. The narrator says, 'All the Koreans who worked in the hospital, all of them, were Korean in name only. Inside they were no different from Americans. They seemed to her like people from a *completely different world*' (181; emphasis added). In other words, the hearts and minds of the Korean hospital staff are colonised.

Shifting into Allegorism

The semblance of realism in the social setting and plot demography of *Wolves* is accompanied by occasional and sharp dramatic shifts into allegorism. For one unacquainted with the hybrid form of the novelette, it will come across as 'riddled with mixed metaphors (usually of the bestial variety), logical inconsistencies, long stretches of tautologous dialogue and confusingly abrupt transitions'.²³ It might also be regarded as 'questionable' whether the work 'succeeds even as melodrama'. And if nineteenth-century British realism is the standard of judgment, one could say, 'Han is

²³Myers 157.

no Dickens, and thus cannot prevent the juxtaposition of heroes and grotesquely lampooned villains from imbuing the entire story, the central tragedy included, with a surreal quality'.²⁴ But these comparisons are not helpful. *Wolves* embodies a quite different literary tradition – one that does not combine naturalist empiricism, caricature, the comic, the popular, and the serious in works designed for a market of English middle-class family readers – and it is addressable to cultural, historical, and political problems that are unique to the (North) Korean situation. The novelette has its own objective form, which unites sentimentalism, realism, and allegorism, and it is necessary to accept that form without imposing value-judgments on it.

That, of course, is difficult to do, and maybe more so for the American reader or critic, since *Wolves* is tendentious literary fiction, portrays a group of Americans as racist and fanatic, and is designed to generate strong emotions against the American presence in Korea. This, however, is not a story about Americans per se, but a response to the Korean War, during which the US and UN military intervention led to a full-scale invasion of North Korea after the Korean People's Army was driven from the South. While the war is an extra-literary factor, it conditions the novelette, and it is apparent that *Wolves* is a metaphorical translation of the Korean War experience. One such metaphor is discernible toward the closing, when the mother confronts the missionary family at their home over dinner. The reverend attempts to exorcise her from the premises, 'Out, devil!' and she screams:

Devil? You son of a bitch, you kill someone for taking a ball you've thrown away. *You* bastards get out! Who gave you the right to come to another country and kill innocent people? This is our Korean land, Korean land ... do you think all Koreans have died? (185; italics in original)

The US invasion and national self-defence imagery is palpable. But at the same time, the social setting and plot demography of the text, not to mention Yun Se-p'yŏng's 1960 criticism for North Korean readers, indicate that there are fundamental concerns in *Wolves* that go beyond the war, allegorised moral concerns about 'savage nature' and 'noble spirit', hatred and love, vice and virtue, wealth and poverty, and colonialism and independence.

Allegory operates throughout *Wolves*; however, it is particularly evident in the fifth part of the novelette, where the vices of Han Sŏrya's *psychomachia* (battle of the soul) are most sharply delineated. The antagonists emerge as purer allegorical personifications in the opening dialogue between the reverend, his wife Mary, and the mission hospital director Mrs Mack. Plotting the murder of the ailing Sugil, the reverend says to the director:

'You are an American. For what have we Americans come to Korea to work, for what do we bestow God's grace on Koreans?'

'For America,' said his foxlike wife, picking up where he had left off, 'for the American people.'

²⁴Myers 97-8.

‘And what is the life of one Korean child when weighed against the glory of the American people? I tell you, why concern yourself any more with a life that even God knows nothing about?’

‘One discarded by God is like a flea-bitten beggar,’ chimed in his wife once more. (176)

After the reverend admonishes Mrs Mack that the ‘ignorant’ Korean people are brave and can smuggle the child from the hospital under cover of night, Mary adds: ‘Where’s your American wisdom? You mustn’t be contaminated by their ignorance. American wisdom, bravery and virtue are vital’ (176). Subsequently, the reverend suggests diagnosing Sugil with a ‘contagious disease’ and quarantining him. When Mrs Mack says that was her thought, she is praised:

‘Gooood. Spoken like a true American. We need our own American virtues, not Korean virtues or any others for that matter.’ [...] Not only that: we have to demand our virtues from others. And if it hasn’t got a contagious disease, then we must give it an injection of bacillae and *make* it a contagious disease.’

‘Let’s just say it is for the sake of the American people – ,’ put in his wife again. (177; italics in original)

Mary emphasises that the child’s death must be within an hour, and Mrs Mack confirms that lethal injections are available at the hospital. This leads to an expression of relief:

‘Good. I should hope so. The victory of the American people and its virtues requires more than just churches. God also gives us bullets, airplanes and warships. What do you think the bibles are, that we missionaries carry, or our doctor’s syringes?’

The director said nothing.

‘They are weapons for America and its people,’ answered his wife with another twitch of her mouth.’ (177)

Afterwards, the director states she will completely dispose of Sugil’s body, which meets with the reverend’s approval: ‘Ah! Right, right. Americans are wise. The day when America rules the world is nigh. May you be imbued with the glory of the American people’ (178). He orders a cremation of the corpse and ends the dialogue with a malicious prayer:

‘God our Father!’ cried the missionary. ‘Bestow glory on the American people. Aaamen.’

‘Bestow fortune on Director Mack. Aaamen,’ prayed his wife, as if to supplement her husband’s prayer. (178)

This is a very significant set of passages from a literary point of view. They do not qualify as literal, natural, or reported speech and cannot be properly read as

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such. Here, the reverend and his wife are no longer people, nor even Christians. They are *personified vices*, who serve the destructive forces of darkness and domination. They are devils. Along with the allegorical symbolism, one also sees that the personifications stand as representatives for a demonic ‘American imperialism’, and noticeable in the dialogue are metonyms for the Korean War (airplanes, bullets, and warships) and their metaphorical translation (bibles and syringes), all in relation to the great imperialistic demon that threatens to devour ‘Koreans’ and destroy ‘Korean virtues’. The reader has entered the world of the mythic, and Yun Se-p’yŏng’s criticism turns out to be quite appropriate. That the object is ‘American imperialism’ (super-national dominationism) and not Americans themselves, Christians, or even Caucasians is verifiable by critically distilling the above dialogue down to its core strategic references to America and virtue:

We Americans
For America
Glory of the American people

American wisdom
American wisdom, bravery and virtue

American virtues
Demand our virtues
For the sake of the American people

Victory of the American people and its virtues
For America and its people

Americans are wise
When America rules the world is nigh
Glory of the American people

Bestow glory on the American people.

Through this distillation, which can stand as an ultranationalist or fascistic free-verse poem, the voices of the personified vices become a single, unified incantation of American imperialist oppression, whose demonic content is ‘savage nature’, ‘barbaric conduct’, and ‘human hatred’, three things that find their practical expression in the ‘tyrannical inhuman cruelty’ of the heartless and racist antagonists in *Wolves*. Symbolically consistent with the allegory is the image of the reverend, Mary, and Simon in part six of the novelette. The narrator describes the three as chimera-like creatures – a wolf with the beak of an eagle, a she-fox with a serpentine stomach and jutting teats, and a slippery wolf cub – and calls them ‘demons’. The mother, too, who has now broken into the reverend’s home after piecing together the awful crime, sees the family’s ‘six sunken eyes’ as ‘open graves’ (184). She cries hysterically for the return of her dead son and demands Simon’s life in retribution, making the

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chimera and demon imagery psychologically congruent from the standpoint of character. When a trembling Mary says, 'The devil has gotten hold of you', the disheveled and despairing Korean woman replies, 'The devil? You want to see a devil, just draw some water and look at your reflection' (185). A great moral violation has occurred.

Neo-Confucian Subtexts and Dreams

As a building has a foundation upon which its frame and parts are constructed, a piece of literature also has an underlying structure that allows the work to stand and function. Unlike a building, however, the foundation of a literary text is not physical material below ground level, but something inferred from the symbolic action and conflict on the 'surface' of the text. The conceptual foundation of the literary text is a structure of ideas: a theoretical substructure, a subtext of authorial and meta-authorial first principles with extra-literary conditions.²⁵ The moral conflict structures in *Wolves* suggest a Neo-Confucian subtext. That is probable since Neo-Confucianism was the ideology of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) and since North Korea did not abandon its Neo-Confucian heritage after the Soviet Army liberation in 1945 and founding of the state in 1948.²⁶ One, indeed, finds that the influential ideas of Korean Neo-Confucians such as T'oegye (1507–1570), Yulgok (1563–1584), and Tasan (1737–1805) have an enduring, even if officially de-emphasised, presence in the ideological and moral discourse of North Korea.²⁷ Korean Neo-Confucianism, which consists of interpretations of the Chinese Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi, is a philosophy centered on morality, human beings, and virtue, three things that are incarnated in Han Sŏrya's novelette.

The fundamental moral structure of *Wolves* compares to the Neo-Confucian notion of the fundamental moral structure of the universe. As morality is a shaping principle in Neo-Confucian metaphysics, so too does that principle find expression in the thematic, moral, and character conflict of the North Korean narrative. The moral-literary correspondence may be an unconscious one – that is, if the moral ideas are deeply internalised in the psychology of society; become a 'normal' part of social character, behaviour, conduct, and conventions; and are acted on spontaneously. Even though Neo-Confucianism in North Korea may be removed from its social basis in the feudal Chosŏn era, the moral philosophy achieves an independent historical life in the form of tradition, something that dictates normative relations. These are relations of how things *should be*, how things are supposed to harmonise with the fundamental moral principle (*li*). Social expressions of Neo-Confucian morality are found, for example, in normative acts of benevolence, courtesy, education, devotion, filial piety,

²⁵ On the concept of the meta-author, see Alzo David-West, 'The Literary Ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il: An Introduction to North Korean Meta-Authorial Perspectives,' *Cultural Logic*, 2009, 1-34, <http://clogic.eserver.org/2009/David-west.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2012).

²⁶ See Jin Woong Kang, 'The "Domestic Revolution" Policy and Traditional Confucianism in North Korean State Formation,' *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10.2 (Spring 2006) <http://www.asiaquarterly.com/2008/02/01/ii-150> (accessed 28 March 2012).

²⁷ On the assimilation of Tasan in North Korea, see Alzo David-West, 'Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: *Juche* and the Case of Chŏng Tasan,' *Korean Studies* 35 (2011) 93-121.

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self-control, self-cultivation, social justice, and the striving to organise society as a 'virtuocracy'.²⁸ These acts, of course, are highly contradictory in the extra-literary world, but things are different in literature.

In a moralistic and allegorical narrative like *Wolves*, which is not an imitation of real life, there is nothing wrong if virtuous characters *should* act virtuously, and vicious characters *should* act viciously. That is needed for the moral self-cultivation of the North Korean reader. Neo-Confucianism as an ideological conditioning factor and a literary subtext cannot be neglected in the novelette. Even though the Neo-Confucian tradition manifests peculiarly *within* a system of national-Stalinism in North Korea, the tradition is still there.²⁹ In North Korean literature, the tradition is found in the hybrid synthesis of Neo-Confucian didacticism and national-Stalinist *socialist realism*. What are some cases in *Wolves* that constitute the traditional Neo-Confucian 'noble spirit' the 'Korean people' are supposed to strive after? There are at least eleven inviolable principles that appear symbolically: (1) Commitment to honesty and justice, (2) Anger and rage against injustice, (3) Retribution for unconscionable wrongs, (4) Responsibility for one's actions, (5) Perseverance in pursuing goals, (6) Father as guide and authority, (7) Motherhood and mother's love as sacred, (8) Welfare and education of children before oneself, (9) Thrift and moderation in wealth, (10) Charity and goodwill for the sick, and (11) Ethnic identity and patriotism.³⁰

These principles are threatened, compromised, and violated under colonialism and imperialism in *Wolves*, and it is the task of Han's virtuous Korean mother to defend the grand principles. Her friend, the factory worker Yi Tonggŏn, serves a similar function as a secondary character and positive hero. Of the eleven principles, the seventh is notable because it puts a prerogative on motherhood that supersedes any presumed supernatural force or agency. That is evident in the earlier-mentioned scene in *Wolves* when the mother calls to the mission hospital pharmacist, a Korean man, to help her find her mysteriously quarantined son. Before the man tells her that Americans do not lie, their exchange goes as follows:

After listening indifferently to her trembling voice, he said in a prayer-like tone: 'Being entrusted to Americans is like being entrusted to God.'

²⁸ See Young Whan Kihl, 'Taking Culture Seriously: Confucian Tradition and Modernization,' *Transforming Korean Politics: Democracy, Reform, and Culture* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005) 39-61.

²⁹ National-Stalinism is a nation-building strategy that combines ethnocentric nationalism and the Stalinist program of constructing 'socialism in one country'. See Cheng Chen and Ji-Yong Lee, 'Making Sense of North Korea: "National Stalinism" in Comparative-Historical Perspective,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40(2007) 459-447; and Alzo David-West, 'North Korea and the Opinion of Fascism: A Case of Mistaken Identity,' *North Korean Review* 8.1 (Spring 2012) 105-16.

³⁰ Ethnonationalism and patriotism are not traditional Neo-Confucian ideas, but were assimilated into Neo-Confucianism in the twentieth century as a reaction to Japanese colonial rule in Korea (1910-1945). On Neo-Confucianism, nationalism, and patriotism, see Jang-Tae Kum, *Confucianism and Korean Thoughts* (Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 221-243. See also Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: University of California Press, 2006).

‘But sir! What do you mean entrusted to God?!’ If anything, the pharmacist’s words only unsettled her more. How could even the greatest god compare with a boy’s mother? (181)

The appeal and the indifference to the supernatural are dissonant for two basic reasons. On the subtextual level, Neo-Confucianism gives high priority to secular human affairs and to motherhood as an institution that produces successful sons.³¹ Also, on the character level, Koreans are morally obligated to recognise the importance of mothers in *their* social culture. The hospital staff, as the narrator later says, are ‘Korean in name only’ and ‘like people from a completely different world’ because they abandon normative Korean sociopsychological behaviour in Korea. This brings one to the problem of dreams.

Narratologically, Han’s semi-omniscient narrator is able to enter the minds of his characters and report their thoughts, memories, experiences, and dreams. This is material that gives additional structure to the narrative, but it is not deployed as primary material. Nevertheless, the fact that psycho-narratological elements are contained in *Wolves* means that they, like all aspects of literature, are significant. The material is there for a reason and means something. How does the dream material, specifically, relate to the *surface text* and *subtext* of the narrative? Whereas those two layers consist of empirical relations and ideal relations, the dreams in *Wolves* are deep relations and an in-between *deep text* that meaningfully links surface text and subtext.³² Here, a brief distinction must be made: To dream in literature is not the same as to dream in real life. While both are stories, one is an applied literary technique, and the other is a physiologically induced mental activity. The secondary or tertiary dream narratives in *Wolves* do not affect the unfolding of the plot, but they do underscore the profound moral crisis that is occurring in the story, since dreams have a special place in Korean culture; allow the reader to enter the inner life of the one character who dreams, the mother; and function as foreshadowing devices.

Two brief but important dream sequences are seen in the fourth and fifth parts of *Wolves*, occurring in moments after which the anxiety-ridden mother has been deprived of sufficient sleep. After the unconscious Sugil is admitted to the mission hospital, the mother sits worriedly by his bedside for several days when the following occurs:

³¹ On motherhood in Neo-Confucianism, see Hae Joang Cho, ‘Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in South Korea,’ *Asian Women 2* (1996) 77-104.

³² The terms ‘surface text’, ‘deep text’ and ‘subtext’ are in general use in literary studies and applied differently by different authors. Terry Eagleton, for example, speaks of a ‘secret sub-text’ to a ‘surface text’, describing the former as deep, invisible, and systematic, with a ‘hidden logic’ and ‘rarely apparent on the surface’. See *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) 293. Other scholars refer to ‘surface text’ and ‘sub-text’ as primary and secondary levels or as explicit and implicit texts. Others still have called the ‘sub-text’ a palimpsest that informs a superimposed ‘surface text’. The ‘sub-text’ has also been termed a hypogram, from the Greek *hupo* (under) and *gramma* (thing written).

One day, leaning against the cold radiator, she managed to rest her tired eyes for a while. Half awake, she felt as if she was holding something in her arms. Certain that it was Sugil, she tightened her embrace. Then she realized it was an icy boulder. Death! The consciousness of it suddenly sent a horrid fear down her spine. In vain she tried to cast off this feeling. Just then she was joggled by a pitiful cry from somewhere. (174)

Sugil awakes, but he drifts in and out of consciousness for about two weeks until the mother sees Tonggõn, who helps arrange an appointment for her son with the patriotic Korean physician Dr. Yu. But it is then that Sugil is suddenly quarantined, and the mother's turn to the Korean hospital staff proves futile. When Tonggõn agrees to visit the hospital director with her the next evening, another dream experience manifests:

After almost an entire day and night without sleep, she was finally able to close her eyes at dawn and doze off for a bit. No sooner had she done so, she began to dream. She was being chased by a terrifying thief. She tried to flee but was unable to run. After struggling for a while she saw the thief before her eyes. But suddenly someone took a sharp dagger and went and stabbed the son of a bitch. It was a welcome sight indeed. She was sure the rescuer was her husband, but when she looked closer she saw it was Tonggõn. She woke, stretching herself with a deep sigh of relief. Now she could hear the sound of a nightingale from somewhere. 'What does today have in store?' She thought, with a tightening of her heart. (181)

That morning, however, a hospital worker visits the mother and says her child has died, bringing to literary reality what was foreshadowed in the first dream. But the dreams are not limited to foreshadowing. They represent the thoughts and feelings of the mother in the midst of her dilemma, and they have metaphorical and moral significance. The dreams form a different psycho-narratological existence in the narrative. Part of the deep text, they are structurally closer to the ideal and metaphysical relations of the subtext.

What are some of the symbols in the dreams? In the first, they are *an embrace, a son, an icy boulder, and death*. In the second, they are *a chase, a thief, a rescuer, and a dagger*. These symbols summon two distinctive feelings in the mother: fear and relief. Of interest is how the psycho-narratological elements relate to the other textual layers and articulate moral concerns, as *Wolves* is a morality tale. The deep text in both dreams reveals their essential continuity and reflects the normative Neo-Confucian subtext, expressing the *striving for motherhood, the striving for justice, and the striving for the father*. Both are also dreams about death, and it is notable that Sugil does not return in the second one. Moreover, the thief the mother sees is never particularised, underlining the broad metaphorical significance of the figure, who can be colonialism, imperialism, the hospital, and the cold death that claims Sugil. Before the first dream sequence is told, the narrator explains that Sugil will be unable to follow in his deceased peasant unionist father's footsteps. The mother's grief is described as follows: 'She could no longer see or hear anything; she was blind

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and deaf to the outside world. Guns, knives, and the sound of cannonfire formed one lament in her dreams' (174). These are not literal 'dreams' but desires, and it is noteworthy that the knife imagery is reincarnated in the dream world.

Although the mother is physically defeated at the end of *Wolves*, the Neo-Confucian subtext and dreams reveal a great moral victory, for the fundamental moral principle (*li*) is greater than physical reality (*chi*), and the mother substantiates the noble in 'human nature'.³³ Still, it is the guiding presence of the father that enables her victory. The mother's anticolonial activist husband, who died in prison, always admonished her to make all necessary sacrifices for their son and his education. That is why she took the job at the missionary compound, so that Sugil could attend the mission elementary school. The voice of the father is a stimulus to action, commitment, and direction, and his patricentric authority finds further expression in the worker Yi Tonggön, who served in prison with the father.³⁴ Tonggön becomes a symbolic father and is the first person the mother turns to in times of difficulty. When the mother dreams of Sugil's death, she is also dreaming of the death of the father and his erasure from the moral universe, which is the greatest horror. But the husband later returns as a rescuer with a dagger: Tonggön. The father is not dead. Morally, he is still very alive. That brings prophetic significance to the mother's last words: 'But you just wait. [...] Not all Koreans have died (187).

Previous criticism of *Wolves* that neglects allegory, plot demographics, the Neo-Confucian subtext, and the deep text of dreams has resulted in impressionistic and superficial claims: This is 'not a war story,' but a form of 'moralist and ethnocentric social criticism' and an 'openly racist work' with the 'lack of a socioeconomic dimension.'³⁵ Han makes 'halfhearted nods at [Soviet] socialist realist convention', but is tempted by 'tearful histrionics', is 'beyond himself with rage', 'seems to lose all control of his craft', and writes in an 'overheated style' that involves '[p]age after page of unadulterated, shriek-filled dialogue' with 'racial overtones' and 'ethnocentric elements' that lead to the 'equation of ethnic and moral categories'.³⁶ The story has a 'surreal quality', 'bizarre world', and 'incongruous Kafkaesque ring', juxtaposing 'conventional heroes and grotesquely lampooned villains' and glorifying a protagonist who embodies 'ethnic aversion to the white race'.³⁷ Lastly, the 'tragic ending' evokes 'literary pessimism', and the mother's final words 'sound downright

³³ Yulgok explains that 'human nature' consists of 'humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity'. Tasan adds that 'human nature' is only potentially good and that the substantiation of goodness requires the triumph of 'moral nature' over 'physical inclinations'. See Michael C. Kalton, et al, *The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Neo-Confucian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 134; and Mark Selton, *Chǒng Yagyong: Korea's Challenge to Orthodox Neo-Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) 86.

³⁴ Yulgok says: 'With the father as stimulus, there is the movement of filial piety, with the ruler as stimulus, there is the movement of loyalty, with the elder brother as stimulus, there is the movement of reverence'. See Kalton 133.

³⁵ Myers 94, 101, 153, 155.

³⁶ Myers 97, 98, 99, 100, 101.

³⁷ Myers 97, 98, 99.

pathetic'.³⁸ The problem here is the substitution of condemnations, polemics, speculations, and value-judgments for serious literary criticism, whose axioms and postulates must grow out of the literary work.³⁹

Conclusion

Han Sörya's *Wolves* is a difficult text that needs to be approached with critical distance, dispassion, and detachment. Narratological analysis of the work and its internal evidences, without the intrusion of too many extra-literary factors, reveals that the classic of North Korean *socialist realism* is more complicated than it presents itself in a reader's perspective. The novelette, to be sure, is imbued with an ethnonationalist ethos and mythos, and in the phenomenology of reading it is possible for the nationalist allegories and semblance of realism to be blurred, resulting in super-generalised views of real people based on the chimeras and grotesques in the story. While that may qualify as racism for some non-North Korean readers (an audience for whom the text is not intended), examination of narrative elements in *Wolves* in conjunction with official criticism for North Koreans indicates that the story is to be read in an antiracist way that opposes the 'human hatred' of 'US imperialism' with the 'love of mankind and peace' of the 'Korean people'. The basis for this reading is the writing of the tale after US and UN military forces entered North Korea during the Korean War, resulting in a catastrophic national trauma that is symbolically remanifested in the struggle of a widowed Korean mother and the death of her small son, her only son, Sugil. Narratologically, *Wolves* is a hybrid of genres; the story is an allegory of the battle against 'savage nature', invasion, imperialism, and colonialism; and the good are Korean proletarians, patriots, and mothers under the guiding imperatives of the father, who does not need to be physically present. *Wolves* is also a postcolonial self-cultivation narrative, drawing from the normative Neo-Confucian tradition, and in the context of the Korean War, which has not formally concluded, teaches the North Korean reader that the inviolable Korean 'noble spirit', which can be lost in some Koreans, is not extinguished by violent death or painful deprivation. The ending of this story is not pessimistic; it is moralistic and inciting to nationalist self-defensive action.

³⁸Myers 100, 101.

³⁹Frye 6.