

## An Inquiry of Intentions in Kim Hye-yŏng's 'First Meeting': A North Korean Short Story in *Korea Today* (2007) Alzo David-West

*Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.*  
– Wimsatt and Beardsley<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In 2007, *Korea Today*, a multilingual North Korean magazine available on the official *Naenara* (My Country) web portal, published in the course of January to May a short story in English titled 'First Meeting' by Kim Hye-yŏng (Kim Hye Yong).<sup>2</sup> No information about the author or the work was provided nor any explanation as to what criteria merited world exposure of the 6,755-word narrative to a global audience in the international lingua franca. By the nature of the allegorical-political storytelling style, culturally specific expressions, and nationally peculiar ideological-rhetorical form, it is apparent this is a work that was not originally written for readers outside North Korea. As with other short stories printed in *Korea Today*, 'First Meeting' is a case of symbolic and tendentious fiction that could be readily dismissed as affected, moralising, and laughable garbage by one unacquainted with North Korean social-political culture and the national literature. But even such an acquaintance does not guarantee the short story will be *seen* as anything other than insipid and insufferable propaganda (a medium for ideological policy dissemination) and artistically dubious. Indeed, the problem here really is one of a normative orientation to the North Korean literary text-object and an unwillingness to perceive what more the text is capable of self-disclosing in the act of reading. Notwithstanding its service as a medium for official party-state policy, 'First Meeting' represents an interesting case for literary-critical inquiry, as the work consists in the main of two structurally competing narratives. *Intentionally*, it is an *exhortative narrative* about affectionately embracing the authority of the Workers' Party of Korea and the Korean People's Army in the military-first (*sŏngun*) era, initiated in 1998. *Incidentally*, it

<sup>1</sup> William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy,' *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-18, 18, *Southern Methodist University*, <http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Fallacy.htm> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Korean names and words in the paper are, for the most part, transliterated according to the McCune-Reischauer system, except for the names Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un, which follow the North Korean romanisation system. All family names precede first names, following the Korean practice. The family name 신 is transliterated as 'Shin' (South Korean pronunciation) not 'Sin' (North Korean pronunciation), since the latter transliteration invites a negative reading. As a Korean-language edition of 'First Meeting' could not be obtained, transliteration was aided by comparing equivalent names and words in the English and Korean editions of the official *Korean News* website at <http://www.kcna.co.jp>.

'An Inquiry of Intentions in Kim Hye-yŏng's "First Meeting": A North Korean Short Story in *Korea Today* (2007).' Alzo David-West.  
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.  
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

is an *unstable narrative* with elements that run counter to the authority, in the voices of its portrayed narrative figures, set in a fictional North Korea around 2000 to 2006.

One must pause for a moment and consider the significance of saying the North Korean short story in question is ‘portraying’ (vs. reflecting) ‘narrative figures’ (vs. persons) in a ‘fictional North Korea around 2000 to 2006’ (vs. in North Korea around 2000 to 2006). In spite of the temptation to state that the incidental narrative involves a reflection of certain persons or groups in contemporary North Korea, such a claim is, strictly, an association, an extrapolation, or a presumption.<sup>3</sup> Probably, the portrayals have sociological equivalents, as this author suspects; however, a probability (a likelihood) is not a certainty.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, insofar as one is doing *literary* criticism, not sociological criticism, it would be a methodological error to presume that anything literary simply reflects (throws back) social reality; for literature does not mirror bare facts of social life.<sup>5</sup> Instead, literatures gives one semantic correlations of *images* (artistic-intuitive representations) and/or *symbols* (allegoric-discursive propositions) that abstract, accentuate, displace, generalise, interpret, and rearrange selected life material, which create in consciousness an aesthetic *sense* of reality to greater or lesser degrees.<sup>6</sup> While

---

<sup>3</sup> See sociological extrapolations of North Korean literature in Jeong-Ah Cho, *The Changes of Everyday Life in North Korea in the Aftermath of Their Economic Difficulties* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2007), *Korea Institute for National Unification*, <http://www.kinu.or.kr/upload/neoboard/DATA05/ss07-06.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2013); Soon-Hee Lim, *Value Changes of the North Korean New Generation and Prospects* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2007), *Korea Institute for National Unification*, <http://www.kinu.or.kr/upload/neoboard/DATA05/ss07-01.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2013); and Marshall R. Pihl, ‘Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today,’ *Korean Studies* 1 (1977) 63-110, 89. Occasionally, Cho and Lim say ‘novel’ when they mean ‘short story.’ Cho 3 and Pihl 89 respectively admit that ‘reality in the literature [of North Korea] is *not the objective reality itself* but a *refracted reality*, viewed as it is through the prism of the literature policy of the Korean Workers’ Party,’ and ‘North Korean literature is *less a reflection of reality* than it is a *statement of social ideals*’; emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of the ‘sociological equivalent’ is from Georgi Plekhanov. See Aleksandr K. Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings, 1911-1936*, trans. and ed. Frederick S. Choate (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 1998) 119-120, 213, 332

<sup>5</sup> ‘Artistic creation [is] a deflection, a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art.’ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky, ed. William Keach (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2005) 147.

<sup>6</sup> On the distinction between artistic images and allegorical symbols, see Ernst Cassirer, ‘Art,’ *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1944) 176-217, 177; Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964); G. V. Plekhanov, ‘Ibsen, Petty Bourgeois Revolutionist,’ *Marxists Internet Archive*, 19 July 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1908/xx/ibsen.htm> (accessed 30 May 2013); Georgi Plekhanov, ‘V. G. Belinsky’s Literary Views,’ *Selected Philosophical Works: In Five Volumes*, Vol. 5 (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004) 178-221, 189, 196; and Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life* 83, 98, 101, 178, 179, 224, 225. On abstraction and the semantic in images and symbols, see Susanne K. Langer, ‘Abstraction in Science and Abstraction in Art,’ *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957) 163-180; and Susanne K. Langer,

all literature takes its material from four-dimensional reality, literature is not reality.<sup>7</sup> Contrivance is not existence.<sup>8</sup> With the critical principle that 'First Meeting' is fundamentally a contrivance (an artificial, human-crafted, construction), a *counterintuitive reading* reveals that the artificial literary object discloses figural interactions in its incidental narrative that are discordant with the intentional narrative – that defy the apparent regime of intentions the work is meant to propagate.<sup>9</sup> The significance of these discordances may say something about real people and real life in the real North Korea, but that 'may' demands concrete sociological proof and a different kind of literary investigation than this inquiry is designed to undertake.

### Intentions and Effects

As is well known, North Korean literature is written under the authority of the Korean Writers' Union, the literary organ of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), with an overtly didactic and socio-functional intention to aesthetically, ideologically, morally, and politically inculcate official values into the wider society in the survival interests of the ruling party-army caste. North Korea having inherited traditional and modern Korean *social didacticism* and having assimilated the totalitarian policy of Stalinist-Zhdanovist *socialist realism* in 1945 to 1960, the legacy is a regime of intentions under which literature must subserve.<sup>10</sup> As the late leader Kim Jong Il states in *On Juche*

---

*Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>Trotsky (148) says art obtains its material from the 'world of three dimensions' and the 'world of class society' through the 'experience' of the artist. While humans do, indeed, perceive material in three spatial coordinates (left-right, near-far, up-down), the factor of experience reveals that material exists positionally in a fourth coordinate (time); hence a four dimensional reality in actuality.

<sup>8</sup> The category error of identifying literature (contrivance) with reality (existence) occurs in Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012). Unfortunately, this work by a non-literary specialist consists largely of long-quotation and summary and commits the most elementary errors of literary criticism and sociological criticism. See further discussion in Alzo David-West, 'Serious Problems in Sonia Ryang's *Reading North Korea: A Critical Review Article*,' *Mulberry* 62 (2013) 99-111.

<sup>9</sup> The critical reading strategy of counterintuitive reading is partly influenced by Stephen Epstein, who says: 'Given the *revelation of social fissures in North Korean literature*, its reception by its audience merits continual consideration; if we focus solely on how the regime wishes its fiction to be interpreted, we run the risk of taking its profession of monolithic solidarity at face value, precisely as *its fiction warns us against doing*'; 'All [North Korean] stories promise a better tomorrow, even at the expense of *raising contradictions between a text's details and its final message*'; and '*Ambiguities* leak into these recent [North Korean] texts even when they *may not in any way be intended by their authors*.' See 'On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium,' *Acta Koreana* 5.1 (January 2002) 33-50, 35-6, 48, 48n28; emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> See Tatiana Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2010); Hyun-Soo Lim, 'Soviet Influence on the Literary Control Policy of North Korea, 1946-50,' *Chung-So yŏn'gu [Sino-Soviet*

'An Inquiry of Intentions in Kim Hye-yŏng's "First Meeting": A North Korean Short Story in *Korea Today* (2007).' Alzo David-West.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

*Literature* (Chuch'emunhakron, 1992), the 'spirit in literature aims at embodying in it the idea and *intention* of' the WPK; 'Only when literature is created and built under the Party's leadership can it safeguard and carry out the leader's ideas and *intentions* and the Party's policy on art and literature without the slightest vacillation in any wind'; and 'Political guidance of literary creation means controlling and leading literary creation to establish a correct political principle in line with the Party's ideas and *intentions*.'<sup>11</sup> Correspondingly, the 'writer's ideological *intention*' is beholden to the policy line that 'all writers must regard the Party's *intentions* and policies as being absolute,' for writers are 'faithful assistants to the Party,' and they 'must be sensitive to the Party's plans and *intentions* more than anybody else.'<sup>12</sup> Bureaucratically and administratively, the literary policy is superficially clear and straightforward, and the first official requirement for a work of literature to be appraised or judged as valuable in North Korea is 'when it is clear in its ideological *intention*.'<sup>13</sup>

Predictably, the result of the dictatorial regime of intentions is a formally state-controlled and socially conformist literature. Bureaucratic-dogmatic intentionalism does not, however, give the WPK authority a magical, mysterious, or oracular power over any approved literary work. After all, what official party sanction indicates is that the bureaucracy is more normatively disposed than others to clearly seeing its own absolutist intentions represented in the work – the bureaucracy does not see the work *as it is*, objectively, in the reading spaces outside the ruling circle. What this situation gives rise to is the problem of the *intentional fallacy*, that is, the problem of purpose/intention versus function/meaning of the North Korean literary text. In an instructive statement applicable to all genres of literature, William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley explain:

---

*Affairs*]12.4 (Winter 1988-1989) 177-93; Pihl 63, 64, 67, 68; A. A. Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature: The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature,' *Marxists Internet Archive*, [http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit\\_crit/sovietwritercongress/zhdanov.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/zhdanov.htm) (accessed 30 May 2013); and Andrei A. Zhdanov, *Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music* (New York: International Publishers, 1950). See also the study of Soviet and Hungarian *socialist realist* literature from the mid-1930s to 1953, Paul Hollander, 'Models of Behavior in Stalinist Literature: A Case Study of Totalitarian Values and Control,' *American Sociological Review* 31.3 (June 1966) 352-64. Hollander 352-3, 354 defines *socialist realism* as (1) a totalitarian Stalinist methodology to overhaul a popular value system by providing models of behaviour in the realm of the arts and (2) a 'politically supported carrier of the ideal patterns devised by the ruling groups, disseminated in a monopolistic fashion.' Hollander rephrases the latter as a "vehicle for the monopolistic dissemination of the ideal patterns devised by the ruling groups" in the 1982 version of the essay in *The Many Faces of Socialism: Comparative Sociology and Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1988) 33-54, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Jong Il Kim, *On Juche Literature: January 20, 1992* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.) 27, 248, 249, *Naenara* [My Country], <http://www.naenara.com.kp/en/great/leader.php?2+3+4> (accessed 30 May 2013); emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 171, 248, 263, 264; emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 164; emphasis added.

'An Inquiry of Intentions in Kim Hye-yŏng's "First Meeting": A North Korean Short Story in *Korea Today* (2007).' Alzo David-West.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>



The poem is *not the critic's own and not the author's* (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Here, the suggestion is that through mass social acts of reading and reception, the objective function and meaning of the work take on a life, an existence, of their own, as the object is *grasped, interpreted, and judged* by the varying sensitivities, sensibilities, and standards of the people themselves, not the author(ity).<sup>15</sup> When a work is published, 'the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art,' Wimsatt and Beardsley note.<sup>16</sup> Suggestively confirming that reality *even* in North Korea, Kim Jong Il admits, '[W]e are *yet* to say that our people read with relish *all* the novels written by our novelists,' a confession whose 'yet' encompasses a period of forty-four years of mass public reading, from 1948 to 1992.<sup>17</sup> North Korea was founded as a state, under Soviet Army auspices, on 9 September 1948.

While it would be a false hypothesis to declare *a priori* that North Koreans readers simply suffer with state-sanctioned national literature – official and academic sources actually suggest a dynamic coexistence of receptive and dismissive reading in the country – what the intentional fallacy points to is that WPK accordance of primary value by measure of *its own* conscious ideas and intentions is a phenomenologically occlusive

---

<sup>14</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley 5; emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> *Sensitivities* are 'capacities to react to certain properties and magnitudes' and are physical or perceptual 'functions relating intensity of reaction to magnitude of stimulus.' 'Differences of sensitivity can affect both one's disposition to see the work in a certain phenomenal way and one's dispositions to judge it positively or negatively.' *Sensibilities* are abilities, dispositions, or propensities 'to identify certain features, properties, or relations of a work as being aesthetically significant, i.e., as either being value-making or value-lowering,' as 'sources of value or disvalue.' Significantly, 'not all interpretational disputes [of a work] will amount to differences in sensibility,' but 'may indicate a disagreement over content' as 'interpretational content disputes'; for 'differences in sensibilities do not necessarily imply differences in the way the nonaesthetic features of the work are being experienced.' *Standards* 'codify and express at least some of one's sensibilities.' Complicating the problem of the 'aesthetic properties' and 'ultimate value' of an object or work is that 'shared sensibilities (like shared standards) do not guarantee agreement' over what satisfies people. John W. Bender, 'Sensitivity, Sensibility, and Aesthetic Realism,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59.1 (Winter 2001) 73-83, 74, 75, 77, 79, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 209; emphasis added.

orientation.<sup>18</sup> In other words, bureaucratic-administrative obsession with conscious intentions neglects the actual, real, objective *literary function* of the work and the imaginary reconstitution and activation of the actual, real, objective *literary meaning* in the non-party and non-authorial reader's aesthetic (sensory-emotional-cognitive) consciousness – in mental acts of reading that cannot truly be regulated by anyone or any institution.<sup>19</sup> (Presumably, the inability to regulate the reader's living, personal-social mind is one of the reasons why the WPK is obsessed with its own intentions.) What, in any case, is the result of the literary processes that occur beyond meta-authorial (party-state) intent and authorial intent? As Edward Bullough puts it, 'The *function* of Art ... may reveal itself in consequences independent of those consciously aimed at, in effects not intentionally striven for, but arising incidentally.'<sup>20</sup> One may say function mobilises the unconscious problematic of the literary text.

Significantly, the *unconscious, incidental, and accidental effects* constituted by the intentional fallacy in North Korean literature will demonstrate themselves differently to different readers, native and foreign. While illusory effects can manifest in the reading process – through purely subjective and arbitrary psychological associations – legitimate effects are objectively generated by the structural-semantic relations of the literary text itself *under the illumination* of different reading practices and reading strategies deployed spontaneously (typically by the non-specialist reader) or systematically (typically by the trained literary critic), though mistakes are possible in every case by any reader since human knowledge is approximate. Non-arbitrary reading will, nevertheless, allow the literary work *as an object* to reveal real aspects, features, sides of itself otherwise overlooked under the regime of intentions. By way of an analogy to crime scene investigation, consider how infrared light can be used to detect traces of blood, washed and diluted by the perpetrator, that are invisible to the unaided human eye.<sup>21</sup>

Now, the analogy is not trying to say sideways that every work of North Korean literature has a concealed trail of blood behind it. Some works might, as WPK writers are known to have been politically attacked, purged, and exiled in the past, for example, the

---

<sup>18</sup> The false hypothesis appears in Gabrousseko 174. See further discussion in Alzo David-West, 'North Korean Literature and 'Theoretical Problems of Literary Studies': Tatiana Gabrousseko's *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47.2 (April 2012) 236-49, 241-3.

<sup>19</sup> '[N]o institution can undertake to regulate opinions upon every subject. Only the most important ones can be attended to, and on the rest men's minds must be left to the action of natural causes.' Charles S. Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief,' *Charles S. Peirce*, <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p107.html> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Edward Bullough, 'The Modern Conception of Aesthetics,' *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays* ed. Elizabeth Wilkinson (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1957) 1-89, 84; italics in original.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Hernandez Sherwood, 'Infrared Camera System Could Detect Blood at Crime Scenes,' *Smart Planet*, 29 March 2011, <http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/pure-genius/infrared-camera-system-could-detect-blood-at-crime-scenes/5860> (accessed 30 May 2013).

case of Yi T'ae-jun (1904–1974?).<sup>22</sup> But that is a subject for a political criminology of North Korean party-literary administration, not the critical analysis of literary text form-content and its objective revealing in subjective social consciousness. What is of interest here is how the regime of intentions is contradicted by the actual, real, objective elements in the work itself – ‘First Meeting’ – through the literary-critical strategy of *counterintuitive reading*. How does one proceed with this interpretative method? Firstly, it begins with suspension of normative prejudices and presuppositions of North Korean literature; direct aesthetic contact with the material, feeling it with the senses, emotions, and intellect; and selfless immersion in the literary experience of the story-world.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, it involves impartial description-interpretation of *internal evidence* (e.g. characters, form, plot, and setting) in view of the *circumstantial evidence* (e.g. country, period, politics, and venue of publication) that unite with the literary object.<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, it infers the extra-literary intentions from the narrative data and their internal arrangements, afterwards locating what objective text elements, images, and symbols exist in contravention to the inferred party intentions.

### Synoptic Description

Description is necessarily interpretation. Human consciousness does not have access to pure objectivity, to pure facts (invariable, uniform datums) – consciousness can only know facts as they evidentially show themselves within the limits of empirical sense and mental experience; thus, an inherent act of interpretation in any act of attempted description.<sup>25</sup> And this is especially so for literary facts, which are always mentally

<sup>22</sup> See Tatiana Gabroussenko, ‘Yi T’ae-jun: The Failure of a “Soldier on the Cultural Front,”’ *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2010) 105-33.

<sup>23</sup> The following description approximates to the idea of selfless immersion in the story-world: ‘When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I. There is consciousness of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken, etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousness; it is they which present me with values, with attractive and repellent qualities – but me, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself [this is overstated – AD]. There is no place for me on this level. And this is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness.’ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘The Transcendence of the Ego,’ *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretations* ed., Joseph J. Kockelmans (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 324-38, 334-5; italics in original.

<sup>24</sup> This is adapted from the method of text analysis in Thomas Paine, ‘Part First, Section 10,’ *Age of Reason*, <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/reason/singlehtml.htm> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>25</sup> ‘If we cannot recur to the first cause, let us content ourselves with second causes, and those effects which experience shows us; let us gather true and known facts; they will suffice to make us judge of that which we know not; let us confine ourselves to the feeble glimmerings of truth with which our senses furnish us, since we have no means whereby to acquire greater.’ Baron d’Holbach, *The System of Nature, or, Laws of the Moral and Physical World*, Vols. 1-2 (New York: G. W. and A. J. Matsell, 1835) 246, *Google Books*, <http://books.google.com/books?id=Gz8RAAAAYAAJ> (accessed 30 May 2013).

reconstructed in the reader's consciousness.<sup>26</sup> A literary description is likewise, more specifically, a *secondary conscious* interpretation following a *primary unconscious* interpretation. (That is to say, as soon as one reads a work, the mind automatically engages in the interpretative process, and upon the initial structure of spontaneous interpretations are formed the more self-aware and considered class of interpretations.) Subjectivity in consciousness does not, however, render all literary descriptions invalid. A subjective description-interpretation can be true if it corresponds to the objective literary artefact. Correspondence is possible because the literary work is made for subjective human feelings and the mind: the work is meant to show itself objectively in human terms, in images and symbols, that humans will understand. That goes for North Korean literature as well. In spite of the politically authoritarian situation in which the literary texts are produced, they are humanly teleologically posited artefacts (serving some aim, end, goal, or purpose within a human social system); they are *always* human works, even if many may lack a sense of lifelike (verisimilar) realism of portrayal.

The most basic descriptive-interpretative procedure in trying to achieve an understanding of 'First Meeting' is in identifying its main features in a *synoptic description* that sorts out essential details. There is no need to reconstruct every feature of the narrative, as that will only lead to an imitation, which is unnecessary when the work is already at hand. Unlike the imitation, synoptic description gives one a general, true picture of the story to aid in its general and particular comprehension. With that, one may point out that, narratologically, 'First Meeting' is organised into four sections: (1) 'Spring Water' (2,632 words); (2) Dream and Reality (1,562 words); (3) Reason and Moment (926 words); and (4) Evidence for Love (1,635 words). The story is also told by an omniscient narrator, begins in the middle of things (*in media res*), and provides backstory information through vivid and extensive *flashback* sequences in the protagonist's mind, creating a narrative movement that shifts between present and past along the plotline. Indeed, a significant portion of the story (2,953 words, or 44 percent) consists of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Iser explains that, in the process of mentally reconstructing a literary text, 'the text establishes itself as a correlative in the reader's consciousness,' and since 'literary texts do not serve merely to denote empirically existing objects,' but take objects out of their pragmatic contexts and shatter their original frames of reference, 'the reader is given no chance to detach himself as he would if the text were purely denotative.' Consequently, 'the reader is absorbed into what he himself has been made to produce through the [text] image,' which 'takes us out of our given reality.' With the literary text, 'we have been temporarily isolated from our real world.' The reader 'stands outside the text,' but the reader's 'viewpoint' is 'manipulated' and 'guided' by the text in the reading process. Needless to say, the text will not affect all readers the same way, nor will the text grip every reader. See *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 107, 109, 140, 152. See also 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) 274-94.



protagonist's 'recollection' or 'memory of the past' (KT 607 [2007]; 609 [2007]).<sup>27</sup> After all of this information is sorted and distilled in chronological order, the synopsis is as follows:

Shin Ch'öng-mi (Sin Chong Mi) is a young university graduate and female reporter for the literary department of a state publishing house in Pyongyang. Six years prior, she was a mill weaver and amateur poet in a provincial town. Publishing a patriotic poem, 'Spring Water,' she received a critical letter from Kim Söng-u (Kim Song U), a Korean People's Army serviceman from a village in Chongsu County. In spite of her initial feeling of insult, the two become penfriends and maintain five years of affectionate correspondence, during which Söng-u sends a grey fountain pen as a present, though neither exchange pictures. After Ch'öng-mi graduates from university, she and Söng-u arrange to meet at a train station before his departure for a tour of duty; however, a little girl with appendicitis, whom Ch'öng-mi takes to a hospital along the way, causes the young woman to arrive too late to see the serviceman. Despite the failed meeting, more affectionate letters continue. But one day, Söng-u says his parents at the home village have arranged for him to be married. He stops writing, and a year elapses. With the fountain pen and her idealised memory of Söng-u, Ch'öng-mi pines depressively over him, all to the consternation of her best friend since university, her roommate Hye-suk (Hye Suk; no family name given), who cannot convince Ch'öng-mi to move on. Subsequently, the publishing house dispatches Ch'öng-mi by train to Chongsu County to cover the Okkye-ri literary circle. After ten days on assignment, she is on her way back to the train station, when she encounters and assists a physically disabled man in a wheelchair. While helping him, Ch'öng-mi drops her pocketbook. The man, able to reach for it, sees and recognises her name, but does not say anything. He grows cantankerous, and as Ch'öng-mi pushes his wheelchair, she overhears one of two women passersby refer to him as Söng-u. Startled, Ch'öng-mi releases the wheelchair and rushes to the train station. In agony, she wonders if Söng-u's disability revolted her; she recalls his critical letter from six years ago; and presuming he sacrificed his legs for her sake during his tour of duty, she eventually finds him at his home. They look at each other's faces; she breaks down in tears; he tells her in shame he is sorry for ruining their first meeting as a cripple; and she embraces him.

Aesthetically, the reader cannot help but react to and evaluate a story like this. It is either (a) a lovely, touching, sentimental story or (b) a stupid, idiotic, moral story. If an aesthetic evaluation should be made, it will depend on which objective features of the work the reader normatively focuses on in order to make the judgements artistic/inartistic,

---

<sup>27</sup> All quotations from 'First Meeting' use in-text citations, referring to *Korea Today* with initials 'KT' and to the respective issue numbers and years of the monthly magazine. The electronic version of the serialised short story was accessed and saved in August 2008. URLs are no longer available at the *Naenara* (My Country) web portal at <http://www.naenara.com.kp>.

beautiful/ugly, genuine/fake, good/bad, realistic/unrealistic, true/false, etc.<sup>28</sup> Simply, it is necessary and desirable in practical, human, aesthetic life to judge art and literature in such terms. Otherwise, art could not be made and enjoyed. Art and its experience have a normative quality. By contrast, an impartial description-interpretation cannot take an explicitly normative position, but accept as *objectively there* and *objectively factual* what the literary work reveals as a literary work. Descriptively, the tale is a combination of *all* features objectively, not arbitrarily, registered by aesthetic sense. Nonetheless, a literary-critical description can concede that, in comparison to real life, the story is not realistic and, in comparison to the experience of other literary works (North Korean and non-North Korean), the story is clichéd. But one must move onto the issue of structural relations.

### Structural Relations

In view of the synoptic description, it is evident that ‘First Meeting’ is moved and guided by a purpose (*telos*) that becomes intelligible in an order of words (*logos*), the motion of which is expressed in the integration of idea-image form (*eidōs*) and a story (*muthos*) that composes a relatively self-contained world (*kosmos*), which coheres in the interaction of time (*khronos*), place (*topos*), nation (*ethnos*), customs (*ethos*), citizens (*politikos*), and desire (*eros*). Since all of this is abstract, it will help to visualise it in a diagram (Fig. 1).

---

<sup>28</sup> Importantly, *evaluation* is not synonymous with *criticism* or *theory*. Criticism translates literary images and symbols into the language of logic and concepts. Evaluation measures the aesthetic significance and artistic truth of a work. Marxist/mimetic-cognitive critics (e.g. Aleksandr Voronsky) and phenomenologist/reader-response critics (e.g. Wolfgang Iser) recognise that criticism and evaluation are distinctive procedures. Theory is a criterion-governed cognitive framework that provides general categories for the translation of a work into concepts; it is governed by the problems of structure, function, and communication; and it maps, charts, and explains the observed data of the literary work in human life. See Wolfgang Iser, *How to Do Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) viii–x, 5-6, 8-9, 12, 167; and Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life* 207, 212-3.

1.  
**Purpose**  
(*telos*)

2.  
**Order**  
(*logos*)

3. <b>Form</b> ( <i>eidos</i> )	4. <b>Story</b> ( <i>muthos</i> )
---------------------------------------	---

5.  
**World**  
(*kosmos*)

6. <b>Time</b> ( <i>khronos</i> )	7. <b>Place</b> ( <i>topos</i> )	8. <b>Nation</b> ( <i>ethnos</i> )
9. <b>Customs</b> ( <i>ethos</i> )	10. <b>Citizens</b> ( <i>politikos</i> )	11. <b>Desire</b> ( <i>eros</i> )

Fig. 1. General teleological and cosmological structure of 'First Meeting.'

Considering the internal evidence of the narrative and the circumstantial evidence uniting with the work, it is possible to infer by textual analysis specific correspondences with the enumerated sections of the diagram: Party ideas and intentions (nos. 1-2), literary images and symbols (nos. 3-4), story-world (no. 5), setting (nos. 6-8), and themes and character-figures (nos. 9-11). Of course, everything that coheres in the work serves the principal, fundamental aim of the *purpose*, which originates in the extra-literary world, prior to the text, and intentionally maintains itself in the artificial literary object. What that purpose is will be discussed later in this paper. Meanwhile, on the sectional structural relations, it is important to underscore the interaction of the last three; for it is at this narrative level that 'First Meeting' is distinguishable from other stories within the same time, place, and nation.

Centrally, a reinforcement of normative customs (*ethos*) occurs through the discursive struggle – epistolary and vocal – of the citizens (*politikos*) concerning the

principle of desire (*eros*).<sup>29</sup> Here, the fictional citizens function as figures, or *figuras* (*eidolon*), ideal symbolic types, specifically, as *nationalist allegorical* personifications.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, the struggle is guided by the Korean People's Army (KPA) serviceman Kim Sŏng-u, whose role in the story is that of a North Korean positive hero.<sup>31</sup> His name is apparently a contraction and blend of the words 'Kim Jong Il' and '*sŏngun sasang*' (military-first ideology), signifying great-leader and party-army-state authority in his characterisation and stated criticism: 'I don't know poetry. / Yet, I love poems. / I don't know how to write poems. / Yet, I am good at criticizing poems,' he writes versically (KT 608 [2007]).<sup>32</sup> As for Shin Ch'ŏng-mi, she is a non-hostile protagonist whose ideological-political outlook is reformable, something that occurs through Sŏng-u's positive criticism.<sup>33</sup> Her name appears to literally mean 'Spirit' (*shin*) 'Blue-Green' (*ch'ŏng*) 'Beauty' (*mi*). Consonant with her literary design, the character-figure is essentially a sentiment – a non-physical expression (spirit) of morally virtuous (beautiful) youth (blue-green). Meanwhile, Hye-suk, a non-hostile antagonist, operates as a foil that contrasts with and emphasises the moral virtuousness of Ch'ŏng-mi. Hye-suk's name appears to mean 'Intelligent' (*hye*) and 'Skill' (*suk*), manifesting *practical wisdom*, which contends with *virtuous emotion* under the *political authority* in citizen life (Fig. 2).

<sup>29</sup> 'Discursive' pertains to communication/speech, whereas 'discursivity' pertains to logic/reason.

<sup>30</sup> See Alzo David-West, 'Savage Nature and Noble Spirit in Han Sorya's *Wolves: A North Korean Morality Tale*,' *Transnational Literature* 4.2 (May 2012) 1-18, 3n11, [http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/bitstream/2328/25882/1/Savage\\_Nature.pdf](http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/jspui/bitstream/2328/25882/1/Savage_Nature.pdf) (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>31</sup> See Alzo David-West, 'The North Korean Positive Hero in *The People of the Fighting Village*,' *North Korean Review* 3.2 (Fall 2007) 101-18; and 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, 10, 11, 20, 22, 26, <http://www.clogic.eserver.org/2009/david-west.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2013). Hollander 363-4 says the *positive hero* (good) and the *negative hero* (evil) personify and express the 'short-term programs and policies' of Stalinist regimes.

<sup>32</sup> Suggestively, Sŏng-u is also the first name of the late Chang Sŏng-u (Jang Song U, 1935-2009), who was a member of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, as well as a general and vice marshal of the Korean People's Army. Chang was the eldest brother of the Chang Sŏng-t'aek (Jang Song Thae, b. 1946), the late Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law, and part of the Kim family circle, which presides over North Korea on behalf of the ruling party-army caste.

<sup>33</sup> See North Korean discussion on 're-education through criticism' and 're-education of the negative by means of the positive' in Jong Il Kim, *On the Art of the Cinema: April 11, 1973* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1989) 47-8, 106, *Naenara* [My Country], <http://www.naenara.com.kp/en/great/leader.php?2+3+1> (accessed 30 May 2013). One must note that Kim invokes national-Stalinist construction of 'socialism and communism' in North Korea. On 28 September 2009, the Kim Jong Il regime announced to the international media that 'communism is impossible to hold onto' with the continued existence of 'American imperialism' and deleted 'communism' from the military-first (*sŏngun*) constitution adopted in April that year.



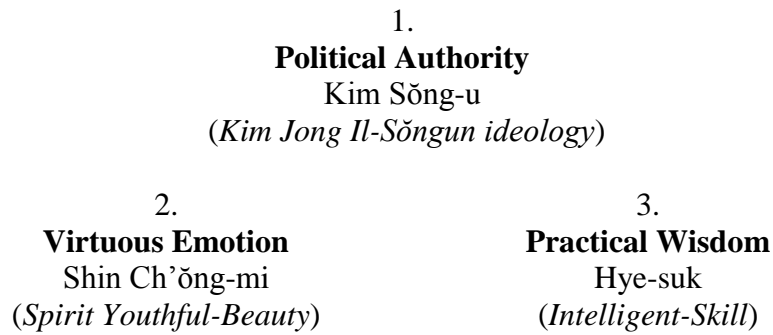


Fig. 2. Allegorical relationship of authority, emotion, and reason in 'First Meeting.'

The symbolic oppositions constitute a nationalist allegorical struggle with a strong Neo-Confucian resonance, recalling Chu Hsi's and Chŏng Tasan's opposition of the 'moral mind' and the 'human mind,' as well as Chu Hsi's view that the 'intelligent person' has a closed mind since it is 'already full of ideas, full of convictions.'<sup>34</sup> (The struggle of virtuous emotion and practical wisdom also recalls the ancient ethics of Aristotle; however, Neo-Confucian ethics is the historical root in the North Korean case.) Besides the three main character-figures, there are twelve secondary and minor figures (KPA ensemble conductor, KPA newspaper reporter, literary department chief, little boy, little girl, student, teahouse waitress, two women in Pyongyang, two women passersby in Chongsu, and woman at grocery in Chongsu), invoked figures (Air Koryo pilot, Ch'un-hyang, Kim Sŏng-u's parents, and the KPA Song and Dance Ensemble), supernumerary figures (crowds and pedestrians), and ambient figures (cicadas and grass insects) in the literary demography. All of these presences have deep symbolic meaning for the story, with special significance borne by the invocation of Ch'un-hyang – referring to the traditional Korean folktale of a romantically devoted, faithful, and suffering courtesan (*kisaeng*), a state-owned slave in the feudal Chŏson era (1392–1910) – whose name appears towards the end of the story.<sup>35</sup> More vital, though, is the *non-antagonistic contradiction* in the discursive struggle of Ch'ŏng-mi and Hye-suk. Non-antagonistic contradiction is Josef Stalin's 1936 principle for 'friendly,' non-hostile, class relations in

<sup>34</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, *Chu Hsi: Life and Thought* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1987) 66-67; Edward Y. J. Chung, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'ŏegye and Yi Yulgok: A Reappraisal of the 'Four-Seven Thesis' and Its Practical Implications for Self-cultivation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995) 46, 47, 107, 126-127; and Shin-Ja Kim, 'On the Exploration of the Human Being,' *The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chŏng*, trans. Tobias J Körtner and Jordan Nyenyembe (New York: Peter Lang, 2010) 187-232. See also Alzo David-West, 'Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: *Juche* and the Case of Chŏng Tasan,' *Korean Studies* 35 (2011) 93-121.

<sup>35</sup> Hyangjin Lee, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Culture, Identity and Politics* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) 91.

life under national state-socialism.<sup>36</sup> The principle is the basis for Andrei Zhdanov's 1946 theory of conflictlessness (*bezkonfliktnost*), which North Korea adopted with the implantation and indigenisation of Stalinist-Zhdanovist socialist realism in 1945 to 1960.

### Discourse on Desire

Desire (*eros*) manifests in 'First Meeting' as two competing notions of 'love' the two major female character-figures propose. The contest is fundamentally a 'friendly' struggle between Ch'öng-mi's and Hye-suk's competing ideologies of love. During Ch'öng-mi's correspondence with Söng-u, Hye-suk realises the two have not exchanged photographs. She cries out in amazement: '[Y]ou mean you've loved a man you've never seen? What an affair!' (KT 608 [2007]). The narration explains that Ch'öng-mi did not require Söng-u's picture because she thought 'facial beauty' a 'vulgar requirement' and a 'defilement' of 'pure affection,' and she believed this was his idea as well. Subsequently, when Ch'öng-mi graduates and decides to marry Söng-u – it is not mentioned if Söng-u has expressed an interest in wedding Ch'öng-mi, but their prolonged correspondence signifies an extended courtship ritual – the blind decision confounds Hye-suk even more, and she urges Ch'öng-mi to seek a 'more reasonable, scientific love' (KT 609 [2007]). Ch'öng-mi, who had demanded if Hye-suk thinks love 'merely a game,' shouts back: 'I don't want such love!' which would be 'comfortable' and expected of a 'reporter.' Hye-suk withdraws and acknowledges that a 'feeling of fascination cannot be checked by any strength of reason.' At this point in the discursive struggle, love has not been fully defined. Instead, a pair of notional oppositions is explicitly advanced: (1) *pure affection* vs. *reasonable, scientific love* and (2) *feeling of fascination* vs. *reason*. What these oppositions reveal is that Ch'öng-mi is an *erosic idealist*, and Hye-suk is an *erosic rationalist* in their divergent attitudes to love.<sup>37</sup>

By internal chronology, the first definition of love in the story is put forward as a self-consolation after Ch'öng-mi fails to originally meet Söng-u at the train station. She says, 'Love means mutual belief and understanding. With belief and understanding, I will be able to wait for ten or twenty years. Such waiting is just happiness' (KT 609 [2007]). Here, Ch'öng-mi's definition qualifies her notion of *pure affection* with *committed faith*, and her proposition that *long-waiting is happiness* flows from her implied preference for

---

<sup>36</sup> See J. V. Stalin, 'On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.: Report Delivered at the Extraordinary Eighth Congress of the Soviets of the U.S.S.R., 25 November 1936,' *Works: 1934-1940*, Vol. 14 (London: Red Star Press, 1978) 151-97, 159, 160-1, 167, <http://www.marx2mao.com/PDFs/StWorks14.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2013). See North Korean discussion on non-antagonistic contradiction in Kim, *On the Art of the Cinema* 102-8.

<sup>37</sup> The word 'erosic' is used in distinction from the word 'erotic.' Influential conventions of speech in English claim the latter as a euphemism for 'pornographic' or 'sexual.' By contrast, 'erosic' as applied here denotes the quality of affective-intentional desire expressed in different forms and types of human love.

*love of struggle over love of comfort.*<sup>38</sup> That said, when Sŏng-u eventually terminates the penfriendship and ‘month after month’ elapse after Ch’ŏng-mi writes back to him in ‘trust and hope,’ Hye-suk angrily declaims that love does not come true by ‘coercion or appeal,’ whether it is Sŏng-u or Ch’ŏng-mi who is doing the coercing or appealing (KT 610 [2007]). (Symbolically, this is an extraordinary statement.) Ch’ŏng-mi is unable to ‘refute’ her more rational friend, and the narrator says the young woman’s heart is broken because ‘her *belief* of love was destroyed.’ The statement, however, is unreliable. Ch’ŏng-mi’s belief is not annihilated or extinguished, and that is seen a year later when the two young women discuss at a teahouse. Hye-suk, now engaged to an attractive music conductor for the KPA after an over three-year romance, is ‘lost in love’ (KT 607 [2007]). She offers her own definition of love: ‘Love is a *feeling of fascination with beauty*. This fascination gives rise to inexhaustible passion and devotion that makes one not hesitate even to die. Fascination, passion, devotion! So the strength of love is so great, isn’t it?’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added). Clearly, this is *incompatible* with Ch’ŏng-mi’s definition of love – which is ‘mutual belief and understanding’ premised on ‘pure affection’ free of ‘facial beauty’ (KT 608 [2007]). Hye-suk’s idea of love is based on physical attraction, as confirmed in the narration: ‘Hye Suk’s lover was a conductor of the Korean People’s Army Song and Dance Ensemble. His *appearance*, talent and passion were *smart enough to attract women*’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added). Thus, while an ‘envious’ Ch’ŏng-mi initially remarks, ‘You’re right,’ she goes on to say, ‘Love, along with the history of mankind, has given birth to numerous philosophies. I am not sure whose assertion is an absolute truth. Still, I think, it can be said that the intensive expression of all the philosophies is “*Devotion is love*”’ (emphasis added). Discursively, the ‘friendly’ non-antagonistic contradiction between Ch’ŏng-mi and Hye-suk boils down to the rhetorical problems of argumentation and definition, namely, *arguing in a circle vs. arguing in a line* and *circular definition vs. logical definition*.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Ch’ŏng-mi (circular erosic idealism)**

- Love = mutual belief and understanding based on non-physical pure affection
- Devotion = mutual belief and understanding based on non-physical pure affection

#### **Hye-suk (logical erosic rationalism)**

- Love = a feeling of fascination with physical beauty
- Devotion = a product of the feeling of fascination with physical beauty

<sup>38</sup> See B. C. Koh, ‘The Impact of the Chinese Model on North Korea,’ *Asian Survey* 18.6 (June 1978) 626-43; and Raymond L. Whitehead, *Love and Struggle in Mao’s Thought* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> On arguing in a circle and circular definition, see Monroe C. Beardsley, *Practical Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956) 176-80, 359, 384-9.

While circular thinking does not add up to much logically – it assumes as true what it must prove – circularity is undefeatable because it needs no proof. Therefore, it is a matter of faith. Ch’öng-mi’s thinking given to faith, it is not surprising how she reacts when Hye-suk angrily implies, after her friend’s comment on devotion, that Söng-u’s love was hypocritical. Now, Ch’öng-mi aggressively declares, ‘No. You’re wrong. *I’ve never suspected our love.* ... It filtered as a *pure feeling* into us and enabled us to back up and lead each other. I think it impossible for me to fall again in such *noble and sacred love*’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added). Against this assertion of *pure, suspicionless, noble, sacred love*, Hye-suk is consternated that Ch’öng-mi requires no ‘further evidence’ to prove that Söng-u still loves her. When Ch’öng-mi attempts to justify his termination of the correspondence by saying, ‘Perhaps there is a cause beyond his control’ (she somehow forgets his statement about a family-arranged marriage), Hye-suk retorts, ‘No. No barrier can check *true love*. Can love be changed by environment?’ (emphasis added). Perhaps because there is a lapse in rational argument here, Ch’öng-mi is unable to counter. But after the two friends leave the teahouse and Hye-suk offers to introduce her friend to a ‘fine man,’ a ‘pilot with the Air Koryo,’ Ch’öng-mi utters, ‘What an absurd idea!’ smiling vaguely. In Ch’öng-mi’s point of view, ‘everything’ is ‘simple and clear to her[self],’ and she wishes Hye-suk would see things likewise. After Hye-suk beamingly meets and departs with her fiancé, upon which Ch’öng-mi recalls her friend’s words, ‘What on earth has he devoted to you?’ the narration reads that Ch’öng-mi is ‘swept’ by ‘[g]roundless sorrow and [a] feeling of *denial*’ (emphasis added). Characterologically, Ch’öng-mi’s psychology is fideistic, fixed, and intractable. If her mind is interpreted naturalistically, not allegorically or literarily, she would approximate in real life to the dogmatic person, the obsessive person, or the self-deluding person.

### Stroke of Grace

Later, en route to Chongsu County on her journalistic assignment, Ch’öng-mi does say to herself, ‘Love is something *grateful and yet spiteful* as it gives rise to both *joy and agony*. Is parting this painful? Why did we meet each other?’ (KT 609 [2007]; emphasis added). But these musings are not expressions of doubt or uncertainty. The character-figure is justifying her idea of *pure, suspicionless, noble, sacred love* with the ideas of *love of struggle* and *long-waiting is happiness*. Significantly, in the last section of the story, ‘Evidence for Love,’ there is the turning point, a momentous stroke of grace against Hye-suk in the discursive contest. After Ch’öng-mi runs away from the wheelchair-bound man when she overhears a passerby refer to him as Söng-u, she falls onto a bench at the train station and condemns herself, shuddering and shivering in regret and shame, internally monologuing, grabbing her chest, and struggling with her conscience (that is, introjected *ethos*): ‘It was too abrupt for me to know what to do. Anyone would have done so in such a circumstance. ... No, you lie, her mind said. If you saw him standing on his feet, you would never have turned back. So you evaded him’ (KT 611 [2007]). (The



idea is that Ch'öng-mi is turned off by a physically disabled man; again, Ch'öng-mi does not remember what Söng-u had written about a family-arranged marriage.) Afterwards, Ch'öng-mi recalls Söng-u's verse letter from six years ago, and she suddenly has an epiphany:

*Truth is judged by act, not word. / If you are really the 'spring water', / Prove yourself / At the critical moment / When the motherland calls for you.*

Right! Truth is revealed only before the enemy's gun barrel aimed at one, before a firing pillbox and before a grenade just about to explode, that is, at a critical moment.

The slightest hesitation or vacillation at such a moment would lead one to criminal, shameful and treacherous actions. But Song U did not hesitate to risk such a moment, sacrificing his legs. [Söng-u had said there was a 'tense situation' during his tour of duty – AD]

What then did I do? She asked herself. It was my mission to lead people to the path of feats [as Ch'öng-mi wrote in her patriotic poem 'Spring Water' – AD]. But, before anyone else, I shrank away from the moment, contrary to my will to well up as spring water anywhere the country wanted.

Chong Mi once again shuddered with self-hatred. So Song U must have recognized me when he picked up my dropped pocketbook. That's why he looked so agonized. Why didn't I recognize it?

She dropped her face on her hands. She did want to think of nothing else. [sic]

After a while, she stood up and headed for the road along which Song U had just disappeared.

Hye Suk! She said inwardly. You said that only infinite passion and devotion were the evidence of true love. You asked me what he had done for me. Love for me made him even sacrifice his precious legs to defend the homeland, the valuable gift for me his love. And such behaviour was the evidence of his ardent love for me. I, too, would dedicate my life to him as the evidence of my love for him, that is, the one for his spiritual world, not his appearance. (KT 611 [2007]; italics in original)

This is a fabulous rhapsody, and it inspires Ch'öng-mi to seek out Söng-u, whom she finds with the help of a woman, at a grocery, who exclaims to Söng-u, 'Here's a girl as beautiful as Chun Hyang. Look out!' But how has Ch'öng-mi arrived at her conclusion that the long-silent, hitherto unseen Söng-u loves her? Basically, (1) she manufactures her evidence by deductive justification; (2) she misrepresents what Hye-suk had said; and (3) she reinvoles the principle of non-physical pure affection, the basis of the synonymous love/devotion. In other words, with errors of reasoning, Ch'öng-mi reproduces her circular faith argument to claim a discursive victory over the absent Hye-suk. However

sophisticated the stroke of grace may be, the narrative point is that Ch'öng-mi was *always right* to love and struggle on the basis of pure affection and belief in Söng-u, without any physical 'vulgar requirement.' And that is what makes her 'beautiful' in the North Korean story-world.<sup>40</sup>

### Party Intentions

Compared to a number of other short stories in *Korea Today*, 'First Meeting' is relatively more individuated, as it involves two distinctive female character-figures who are in love relationships, who discourse, and who express feelings such as affection, agony, aggressiveness, amazement, anger, anticipation, anxiety, concession, consternation, defensiveness, depression, disagreement, disappointment, friendliness, happiness, insult, joy, nervousness, self-hatred, surprise, sorrow, and stubbornness.<sup>41</sup> Of course, all of this is a *semblance*, since the figures are, quite clearly, consciously designed as nationalist allegorical formulas to address 'different ideological beliefs' and 'internal contradictions amongst the working people.'<sup>42</sup> Fundamentally, the North Korean short story is about 'a loyal person, a most beautiful and noble typical person of the *Juche* type,' whose 'traits' of 'loyalty and filial piety become an article of his faith, conscience, morality and everyday concern' and must be 'vividly and adequately' shown, regardless of 'whether this [typical person's love and works are] appreciated by others or not.'<sup>43</sup> (*Chuch'e* means 'subject' and was first used by Kim Il Sung in 1955 in reference to the 'Korean revolution.' In 2005, the [North] Korean Central News Agency reported, 'For the Party

---

<sup>40</sup> Notably, the word 'appearance' in the long quote appears four times in the story, that is, three times in the first section and once in final section: (1) 'His [Hye-suk's fiancé's] *appearance*, talent and passion were smart enough to attract women' (KT 607 [2007]); (2) 'After examining her [own] *appearance* in the mirror, she [Ch'öng-mi] hurried down the stairs' (KT 608 [2007]); (3) 'This [fountain pen] made her [Ch'öng-mi] imagine his [Söng-u's] *appearance* as the most ideal, warming up her heart' (KT 608 [2007]); and (4) 'I, too, would dedicate my life to him as the evidence of my love for him, that is, the one for his spiritual world, not his *appearance*' (KT 611 [2007]). The first case makes Ch'öng-mi 'envious'; the second causes her 'disappointment and doubt' when she sees a man 'well past forty'; the third is 'warming up her heart'; and the fourth comes after her 'self-hatred' when she sees Söng-u is 'disabled.' In other words, Ch'öng-mi's love/devotion was never really, truly, the 'pure affection' or 'pure feeling' without physical 'defilement' and 'vulgar requirement' she had declared it to be. Her ideological-political outlook is completely reformed when she accepts Söng-u as he is.

<sup>41</sup> The other comparatively less individuated *Korea Today* short stories the author has in mind are Jo Phil Su's 'After Gunfire Dies Away' (617-620 [2007]), Han Song Ho's 'Guide' (631 [2009]), Sok Yun Gi's 'Second Answer' (633-635 [2009]), and Kwak Song Ho's 'Matches' (654 [2010]). Relatively more individuated than these works are Pak Il Myong's 'Small House in My Village' (629-632 [2008]), Jang Ki Song's 'Right to Return Home' (643-644 [2010]), Pak Yun's 'Like Father, Like Son' (655-658 [2011]), and Kim Hung Ik's 'Women of This Country' (659-665 [2011]). Most similar to Kim Hye Yong's 'First Meeting' is Kim Hung Ik's 'Women of This Country,' which is set five decades earlier in the Korean War era. All the short stories are allegorical, moralistic, and tendentious.

<sup>42</sup> Kim, *On the Art of the Cinema* 104, 107.

<sup>43</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 145, 150; emphasis added.

*Juche* is *Songun* and *Songun* is *Juche*,’ meaning the term is now synonymous with Kim Jong Il’s military-first ideology.)<sup>44</sup> What is the general intention of a North Korean literary work with a typical figure? Officially, it is to exert a positive influence, ‘to give an answer to what is beautiful, noble or tragic and what is mean, vulgar or comical,’ thereby ‘arming people’ with approved ‘progressive ideas’ and ‘knowledge about life,’ providing ‘noble ethics and beautiful emotions’ and ‘instilling beautiful and noble emotions,’ according to Kim Jong Il.<sup>45</sup> Formally, ‘First Meeting’ satisfies all these general intentional criteria, and in the figure of Ch’ŏng-mi, who is an intellectual by North Korean standards, her story follows Kim’s dictum: ‘The beautiful deeds of the people of our era can also be found *without interruption* among Party workers, public security men, *intellectuals, young people and students* in all parts of the country.’<sup>46</sup>

Quotation of Kim Jong Il does not, however, settle the inquiry of intentions in the North Korean short story. Besides the logical invalidity of appealing to authority, Kim’s statements are too general for a work-specific analysis. One must inductively infer the extra-literary party intentions of ‘First Meeting’ from the evidential structure and elements of the narrative itself with the knowledge that, in North Korea in the military-first (*sŏngun*) era, loyalty consists in being faithful to Kim Jong Il and the party-army leadership. (Kim Jong Il died of heart failure on 17 December 2011 and was succeeded by his son, Kim Jong Un.) While there are several articulations and moments in the story that are denotative of its apparent intentions, the most cogent of these is in the following scene, after a KPA newspaper office reporter delivers a letter to Ch’ŏng-mi one evening when she is still in university:

Back to her room after seeing the [KPA newspaper] officer off, she tore open the envelope in haste, revealing an orderly folded letter and a dazzling, grey fountain pen.

That night she could not sleep. The fountain pen – quite different from

<sup>44</sup> Il Sung Kim, ‘On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* [the Subject] in Ideological Work: Speech to Party Propagandists and Agitators, December 28, 1955,’ 2008, *Marxists Internet Archive*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kim-il-sung/1955/12/28.htm> (accessed 30 May 2013); and ‘WPK Exploits Will Be Everlasting, Says *Rodong Sinmun*,’ *Korean News*, 4 October 2005, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2005/200510/news10/05.htm#10> (accessed 30 May 2013). The original Korean sentence translates literally as ‘In our Party, the Subject is the Army-First, and the Army-First is the Subject’ (Uri dang-e issŏsŏnŭn chuch’e ija sŏngun igo sŏngun ija chuch’e da). See ‘*Rodong shinmun* p’yŏnjbŏguk ronsŏl “Sŏngun ūro paeksŏng-ŭl ttŏlch’yŏon Chosŏn rodong dang-ŭi objok-ŭn yŏngwŏn pulmyŏl halgŏt ida” [Workers’ Daily Editorial Office Lead Article “The Achievements of the Workers’ Party of Korea, (which) Has Been Wielding a Hundred Victories with the Army-First (Ideology), Will Be Eternal (and) Immortal”], *Chosŏn t’ongshin* [Korean News], 5 October 2005, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/2005/10/10-04/2005-1004-012.html> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 7, 12, 17; emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 151; emphasis added.

[the] usual ones in brilliancy, colour, weight and shape – seemed to reflect something meaningful to her. It created a ceaseless, strange stir in her mind.

She supposed that the fountain pen mirrored Song U's strong wish for successes in her school record and literary creation. At the same time she went so far as to regard it as a sign of meaning his pledge that might be of great importance in her life.

So she didn't dare to use it. She kept it carefully in her trunk [under her bed]. Whenever she was unable to control her longing for the man, she would take [it] out and look at it as if she had faced him. This made her imagine his appearance as the most ideal, warming up her heart.

One day when she sat alone looking at the fountain pen in the room, the door was flung open and Hye Suk entered.

Taken aback, Chong Mi hurriedly hid the fountain pen between the leaves of a book. Her act, however, caught Hye Suk's eyes.

With twinkling eyes, Hye Suk rushed up and pushed her to reveal what she had just hidden.

'Show it, quickly.'

'Stop! Don't tickle me! What do you want?'

'Your lover's picture, isn't it?'

'What?'

Chong Mi fell and sat down.

Hye Suk was stunned to look at the fountain pen rolling out from between the book leaves.

'I thought it was a picture,' Hye Suk expressed her disappointment.

'I, too, haven't seen a picture of his,' Chong Mi mumbled with an awkward smile. (KT 608 [2007])

Classical libidinal psychoanalysts would have interesting things to say about this passage. But since the object here is *literature, words, images, and symbols* – not psychology, drives, traits, and complexes – it is incumbent on the *literary critic* to focus on the *literary object*.<sup>47</sup> Literarily, it is evident that in the epistolary courtship of Ch'ŏng-mi and

---

<sup>47</sup> Literary criticism centres on the *written fictional text*, not the deep brain-mind functions that underlie the writing/reading or production/reception of literature; otherwise would be to enter the field of psychology or one of its subfields. '[C]riticism has to be based on what the whole of literature actually does.[...] Once we admit that *the critic has his own field of activity*, and that he has autonomy within that field, we have to concede that criticism deals with literature in terms of a specific conceptual framework. [...] *The first thing the literary critic has to do is to read literature, to make an inductive survey of his own [literary] field and let his critical principles shape themselves solely out of his knowledge of that field.* Critical principles cannot be taken over ready-made from theology, philosophy, politics, science, or any combination of these. *To subordinate criticism to an externally derived critical attitude is to exaggerate the values in literature that can be related to the external source, whatever it is.* It is all too easy to impose on literature an extra-



Sōng-u, the pen has a metaphorical relation to Sōng-u.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, for Ch'ōng-mi, the pen is a tangible symbolic extension of the KPA serviceman, and by this association, she directs an intensity of affection to the writing implement that is arousing and satisfying of her desire (*eros*). Ch'ōng-mi is also a book reader (she becomes 'engrossed' in reading in the story), suggesting the book in the above scene is a metaphorical extension of herself. Thus, when the pen (Sōng-u) is placed in and falls out from the book (Ch'ōng-mi), this can be interpreted as part of a symbolic sex act. Adding to the suggestiveness are the anxiety, nervousness, and surprise when Hye-suk enters the room, a set of reactions that communicate the sense of having walked in on a most private and intimate moment.

When one recalls the earlier-discussed structural relations of customs (*ethos*), citizens (*politikos*), and desire (*eros*) in 'First Meeting,' in conjunction with the allegorical names of the character-figures, it is inferable the symbolic sex in the quoted passage intends to instil into the mind of the North Korean reader customary dispositions of citizen-loyalty to the authority by means of heterosexual affection and desire. *Sōng-u is a male soldier representing the political authority of the WPK and the KPA* (the former enrolls him in a military academy, and he is affiliated with the latter). *Ch'ōng-mi is a female intellectual representing masses of ordinary citizens: blue-collar workers (mill weaver), artists (poet), youths (university student), and white-collar workers (reporter)*. When Sōng-u gives Ch'ōng-mi the pen and she becomes captivated by it, their gestures are a symbolic expression of a mass-political controlling function in the story-world. The authority patronises the citizens, and the citizens desire the authority. The symbols thus translate as a power/dependence and dominant/submissive relationship of masculine-authority/feminine-citizens in the social-life conduct of the nation (*ethnos*). Symbolic sex becomes political sex, so to speak.

If the inference is correct, it confirms the intention to emotionally programme WPK-KPA-approved attitudes, ideas, and values into the reader. For example, when the said passage is read immersively, the awkwardness of the events (composed of the functional relations of characters, objects, setting, and situation) can make the reader

---

literary schematism [...] Northrop Frye, 'Polemical Introduction,' *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 3-29, 6-7; emphasis added. On classical psychoanalysis and literature, see Peter Brooks, 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism,' *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* ed. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (New York: Methuen, 1987) 1-19; and Aleksandr K. Voronsky, 'Freudianism and Art,' *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings, 1911-1936*, trans. and ed. Frederick S. Choate (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 1998) 173-201.

<sup>48</sup> The metaphorical relation is interpreted with metaphor understood in the 'narrow sense' of the 'conscious denotation of one thought content by the name of another which resembles the former in some respect, or is somehow analogous to it'; 'conceptual and nominal substitution' in which 'one [concept] is semantically made to stand proxy for the other'; 'circumlocution of one idea in terms of another,' all of which 'presupposes that both the ideas and their verbal correlates are already given as definite quantities.' Ernst Cassirer, 'The Power of Metaphor,' *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1953) 83-99, 86-7; italics in original.

giggle, as it did with the author of this paper. Aesthetically engaged in the selfless moment and because of the constitution of human consciousness, the reader forgets or cannot see that Ch'öng-mi's captivation and Hye-suk's sudden intrusion are didactic, socio-functionalist, and inculcating in their literary intention. In the case of the North Korean reader, unless he or she is a critical, disabused, dismissive, protesting, or resisting reader, that individual 'could' respond likewise, absorb the facts of the literary experience, and, mentally affected by them, act in real life on the normative relations to the authority that are aesthetically received – with or without conscious awareness – and reinforced by supplementary means of compelling in the social environment.<sup>49</sup> Relevant to the aesthetic engagement, Kong Dan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig document how 'political thought is a strong emotional attachment' in North Korea: a male North Korean in his thirties, who defected in the early 1990s, reports 'he was moved to tears by a North Korean film, heavily laden with propaganda; when he saw the movie again after fleeing to South Korea ..., the work struck him as absolutely silly.'<sup>50</sup> But the matter now goes beyond literature and into the areas of social psychology and political psychology, subjects outside the scope of this inquiry. Suffice it to say, in the *intentional exhortative narrative* of 'First Meeting,' the party seeks to instil at least three authoritative injunctions: (1) Have faith in the regime! (demonstrated by Ch'öng-mi's devotion to the unseen Söng-u); (2) Do not criticise the regime! (demonstrated by Ch'öng-mi's discourse with Hye-suk); and (3) Support the regime! (demonstrated by Ch'öng-mi's embrace of the handicapped Söng-u). Yet there is no guarantee that the intended message of the short story will be received or 'correctly' interpreted by the reader, and that problem is compounded by defiant, contravening elements in the *incidental unstable narrative* and its figural interactions.

### Contravening Elements

When Kim Jong Il invokes the word 'intention' in *On Juche Literature*, he does not explain what the term means; however, the original Korean, *üido*, consists of two semantic-etymological parts meaning 'idea/meaning/wish/desire' (*üi*) and 'diagram/to plan/picture/drawing/chart' (*do*).<sup>51</sup> Basically, an intention is a *consciously directed*

<sup>49</sup> The sociological concept of the 'means of compelling' is from Georgi Plekhanov, and it is found in the following reciprocally interactional process: (1) state of productive forces, (2) process of production, (3) economic relations, (4) relation of social forces, (5) form of organisation of society, (6) means of compelling, (7) particular character traits, and (7) role of individual in history. See G. V. Plekhanov, 'On the Role of the Individual in History,' *Marxists Internet Archive*, 9 October 2007, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1898/xx/individual.html> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Kong Dan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000) 37, 220n86-7.

<sup>51</sup> See sample cases of *üido* in Jong Il Kim, *Chuch'e munhak ron: 1992-nyön 1-wöl 20-il* [*Juche Literature Theory: January 20, 1992*], (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1992) 282, 297, 298.

*mental act consisting of an aim and anticipation to achieve some sort of goal.*<sup>52</sup> Despite the WPK criteria for North Korean literature to be ‘clear in its ideological intention’ and for a writer to ‘provid[e] absolute conclusions,’ the problem of ‘disparity’ between ‘creative purpose’ and ‘images’ is an officially acknowledged dilemma in Kim’s writings from 1973 and 1992.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, it is also recognised ‘that a naturalistic element, though contained in only one part of a work, *may make the whole work go against the original creative intention,*’ and ‘even the smallest gap in the plot *will cause the whole work to crumble.*’<sup>54</sup> Complicating matters is that North Korean writers are instructed to bury the intention in life and make the intention reveal itself naturally, subordinate the intention to the physiology of the work, and interpret the intention in a lifelike way, because if the intention is ‘overstate[d]’ or ‘well manifested ... but not lifelike,’ mass readers will find the work and its representations unattractive and unenjoyable.<sup>55</sup> There is a real dilemma here because, under the authoritarian party-state system, the literary work is *mandatorily politically controlled, politically correct, and politically appraised,* even if Kim admonishes party critics to do ‘literary criticism but not sociological criticism or political commentary.’<sup>56</sup> Combined with the contradictory demands in the world of party-writers and the world of party-critics – in competition with the contradictory demands in the world of non-party readers – the North Korean literary work emerges as an *inherently unstable object* in spite of the effort to assert authoritarian political control (censorship and repression) over it. Considering the complex reality of the literary object in North Korea, intentions may subsist in a work and can, potentially, be inductively inferred from the literary data, but this *does not mean* intentions are simply available in the aesthetic experience of a work. Too much is going on structurally in the work and psychologically in the act of reading to permit a smooth linear conveyance of meta-authorial intentions: There are objective relations in the text that can defy intentions, and there are objective reconstructions in the mind that can modify intentions.

Discordances with the intentional exhortative narrative in ‘First Meeting’ occur at several important points in the incidental unstable narrative of the short story. One can argue deductively that the internal discordances are already imputed in Ch’ong-mi’s emotional appeal to faith – for example, one 2002 study of North Korean short stories from 1998 to 1999 assumes the substitution of ‘emotional catharsis for verifiable proof’

<sup>52</sup> This general definition of ‘intention,’ derived from the hanja (Chinese characters) of *ūido*, compares to the definition of the ‘artist’s intention’ in American analytical aesthetics as follows: ‘The artist’s intention is a series of psychological states or events in his mind: what he wanted to do, how he imagined or projected the work before he began to make it and while he was in the process of making it.’ Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981) 17.

<sup>53</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 144, 164; and Kim, *On the Art of the Cinema* 128; emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 43; and Kim, *On the Art of the Cinema* 84; emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 39, 123, 171.

<sup>56</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 240, 248, 249.

involves a ‘lack of confidence’ – but this argument does not properly address the matter.<sup>57</sup> A position of faith (emotional or pragmatic) is not necessarily a position of discordance or unconfidence.<sup>58</sup> Since the deduction and the assumption are questionable, it is more reliable to show real, particular instances in ‘First Meeting’ when text elements, images, and symbols contravene the official WPK intention to instil certain fundamental political-ethical commandments into the reader. In this author’s present point of view, the six most obvious contravening elements are found on the figural and narratorial levels:

- (1) **Sec. 1, Hye-suk, Narrator:** “*I can’t understand indeed.* He [Sǒng-u] talked so much about justice and conscience. How could he change like that?” Hye Suk was angry.’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added)
- (2) **Sec. 1, Narrator, Hye-suk:** ‘Then what Hye Suk had just said rang in her ear. / “*What on earth has he devoted to you?*” / Groundless sorrow and [a] feeling of denial swept into her [Ch’ǒng-mi] as she stepped toward her bed.’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added)
- (3) **Sec. 1, Ch’ǒng-mi:** ‘Love, along with the history of mankind, has given birth to numerous philosophies. *I am not sure whose assertion is an absolute truth.* Still, I think, it can be said that the intensive expression of all the philosophies is “Devotion is love.”’ (KT 607 [2007]; emphasis added)
- (4) **Sec. 2, Narrator:** ‘Hye Suk asserted *love could not come true by dint of coercion or appeal by any one side.* Chong Mi could find no words to refute her opinion.’ (KT 610 [2007]; emphasis added)
- (5) **Sec. 4, Narrator, Woman:** ‘The woman who guided her [Ch’ǒng-mi] there first stepped in the yard, jokingly shouting, “*Here’s a girl as beautiful as Chun Hyang.* Look out!”’ (KT 611 [2007]; emphasis added)
- (6) **Sec. 4, Narrator:** ‘With no word exchanged, they [Ch’ǒng-mi and Sǒng-u] kept impatiently looking at each other. In the woods near the river, *grass*

---

<sup>57</sup> Epstein, ‘On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium’ 36.

<sup>58</sup> Faith means (a) to assume something as trustworthy because it is impractical to always verify it or (b) to take something on trust because it cannot be proved. Importantly, faith is not exclusive to emotional convictions or irrational convictions. In natural science, for example, ‘success in practice’ generates a pragmatically motivated ‘faith’ in the scientific procedure: ‘We are entitled to have faith in our procedure just so long as it does the work which it is designed to do – that is, enables us to predict future experience, and so to control our environment,’ even if present success ‘affords no logical guarantee’ that the procedure will be continuously successful. Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952) 50, 94, 118.



*insects and cicadas were droning in turn as if to rebuke the man and the woman for doing so.*' (KT 611 [2007]; emphasis added)

Whatever the official intention to include these passages in 'First Meeting,' they are, in the context of the story as a whole, functionally oppositional to the desired social conformism. Remarkably, one finds that Hye-suk, because of her practical wisdom, will not change her mindset and is implicatively *politically resentful* of the Kim Jong Il party-army regime (represented by Sŏng-u), to the point of declaring, symbolically, that the party-state authority cannot force its official morality and ethics on the masses of citizens (represented by Ch'ŏng-mi). Indeed, in the story, Hye-suk never actually changes her views. Ch'ŏng-mi, for that matter, despite her invocations of affection, feeling, and devotion is 'not sure' whose statement about love is 'absolute truth,' a highly destabilizing remark that articulates *ideological uncertainty* in a narrative supposedly grounded on acceptance of the 'Party's intentions and policies as being absolute' and in a political state where *chuch'e* ideology (interchangeable with *sŏngun* ideology since 2005) is 'absolute truth.'<sup>59</sup> (*Chuch'e* is the ideology of Kim Il Sung, and *sŏngun* is the ideology of Kim Jong Il.) Moreover, Ch'ŏng-mi is approvingly compared to a feudal-era courtesan and state-owned slave, indicating that the artists, students, youths, and workers represented by Ch'ŏng-mi bear the status of the *socially exploited and oppressed* in an abusive, illiberal, and unequal society. Punctuating the internal subversions, the only non-human figures in the story – insect figures – voice a low continuous protest, 'droning' a 'rebuke' against the *unnatural union* of the citizens and the authority, who are 'impatiently' staring. Unlike any of the other figures, the insects in 'First Meeting' are in the most objective symbolic position to voice the internal criticism. In the story, they exist within its world (*kosmos*), within its time (*khnos*), and within its place (*topos*) – proximately to the nation (*ethnos*), customs (*ethos*), citizens (*politikos*), and desire (*eros*). Narratologically, the insect figures, as an idea and a point of view, are not politically co-opted, and they have the advantage of perspective in this particular North Korean story-world.

If the incidental unstable narrative in 'First Meeting' can reveal itself in this way or in similar ways, it objectively tells the reader to doubt, disbelieve, and reject the victory Ch'ŏng-mi claims in the intentional exhortative narrative when she finally embraces Sŏng-u. Presumably, the six aforesaid contravening elements were incorporated to (a) give a 'lifelike' sense to the artificial story so that non-party North Korean readers would find it more attractive and enjoyable and to (b) underscore the moral strength of *pure virtuous emotion* that overcomes all obstacles that accompany *vulgar practical*

---

<sup>59</sup> Kim, *On Juche Literature* 248; and Jong Il Kim, 'The *Juche* [Subject] Philosophy Is an Original Revolutionary Philosophy: Discourse Published in *Kulloja* [Worker], Theoretical Magazine of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, July 26, 1996,' 1-11, 9, 10, *e-Asia Digital Library, University of Oregon Libraries*, <http://library.uoregon.edu/ec/e-asia/readb/108.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2013).

wisdom. But that idea takes the normative view that 'First Meeting' is simply Ch'ŏng-mi's story, and only readable that way, when this is also Hye-suk's story, which is carried through in her counter-discourse and partly expressed in the six above-quoted statements. Here lies the great instability of the narrative, its great internal discordance, which exceeds the 'friendly' non-antagonistic contradiction that premises the struggle. On one level, *this is a story that tells the reader to have faith and find happiness in suffering for the WPK-KPA regime because it supports and defends the people*. On another level, *this is a story that tells the reader that the WPK-KPA regime is coercive, that it exploits the people, and that it has inadequately proven its worth*. Demonstrably, the literary text has set itself against itself, and there is no way around the problem, especially when the work reaches non-party readers, for whom the function of the text, not its intention, will exert the greater effect.

### Conclusion

Aprioristic approaches and naive induction with its intuitive practical judgements take as unquestionable that North Korean literature is 'Party-oriented propaganda in literary form' in which 'dissenting views' are 'unheard of.'<sup>60</sup> The problem is that the objective reality of the literary text is never so plain, simple, and one-sided. When one claims that a work of art or literature produced under authoritarian conditions exists *only* as a unidirectional and fully controlled channel of policy dissemination, such an assertion closes up the real, evidential disparity in the intentions, functions, and incidental or accidental and unconscious effects of the work, which is always reconstructed in the consciousnesses of those it engages or disengages. But why is there a general tendency to react to North Korean literature as pure propaganda and not experience the work as a work?<sup>61</sup> Intentionally, North Korean literature incorporates a convergence of aesthetics, ethics, and politics that has been generally disvalued as crude, oppressive, and unnatural in the influential Western sensibility since the epoch of anti-feudal capitalist-democratic

---

<sup>60</sup> Tatiana Gabroussenko, 'North Korean 'Rural Fiction' from the Late 1990s to the Mid-2000s: Permanence and Change,' *Korean Studies* 33 (2009) n. pag., *Questia*, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-214712564> (accessed 30 May 2013); and Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front* 1. Gabroussenko makes this erroneous claim in spite of her statement that she is 'a reader of North Korean literature with more than twenty years' experience.'

<sup>61</sup> Counter to the general tendency, a 2012 comparative literature dissertation by Immanuel J. Kim argues for 'legitimizing the need to read the [North Korean] works for [their] literariness rather than as merely another component of state propaganda.' He says, 'The Party can only disseminate the propaganda, but it cannot control the readers' subjective taste,' and 'What the outside world often overlooks is the entertaining aspect of North Korean literature,' even if 'not all North Korean fiction is entertaining.' See 'North Korean Literature: Margins of Writing Memory, Gender, and Sexuality,' diss., University of California-Riverside, 2012, 246, 247, 255, *eScholarship, University of California*, <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/9s80978x> (accessed 30 May 2012). One should note that Kim's study is not strictly literary criticism, but a form of political-philosophical discourse criticism by way of literature.

revolution in the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Contrarily, though, highly valued Western literatures from before that period were produced in absolutist-authoritarian social environments in which the convergence was deemed normal.<sup>63</sup> Yet these esteemed works are often spared an unliterary classification. Who today, except for a doctrinaire commentator, would regard as mere propaganda Virgil and Spenser because they wrote panegyrics to an emperor and a monarch? Distance has made the ancient and early modern texts more objective, permitting greater sensitivity to and appreciation of their many-sidedness as literature.

If there have been North Korean Virgils and North Korean Spensers, it is the job of the literary critic to find them and objectively interpret and evaluate their works as literary artefacts. That said, approximating to the position of distance and applying the method of *counterintuitive reading*, following a selfless immersive reading, this inquiry has shown through an examination of the exhortative narrative and the unstable narrative

---

<sup>62</sup> Western aesthetics achieved autonomy as the ‘science of sensual cognition’ in the mid-1700s and has been influentially seen as the ‘science of beauty’ or ‘science of the beautiful’ since the mid-1800s. Some major moments in the autonomisation of aesthetics include Anthony Shaftesbury’s *The Moralists* (1709) and *Sensus Communis* (1709), Joseph Addison’s *Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination* (1712), Francis Hutcheson’s *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* (1725), Alexander Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750-1758), David Hume’s ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ (1757), Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), Friedrich Schelling’s *The Philosophy of Art* (1802-1803; published 1859), Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), Georg Hegel’s *Aesthetics* (1820-1829; published 1835-1838), and Friedrich Vischer’s *Aesthetics, or the Science of the Beautiful* (1846-1857). By contrast, the comparatively archaic coterminosity of aesthetics, ethics, and politics in North Korea has a distinctive genealogy in feudal Korean Neo-Confucianism (1392-1910), Japanese late-Meiji to Showa modernism (1905-1945), Soviet Stalinism and Zhdanovism (1924-1956), the Korean Artists’ Proletarian Federation (1925-1935), and Chinese Maoism (1931-1976). See discussion in Alzo David-West, ‘North Korean Aesthetic Theory: Aesthetics, Beauty, and ‘Man,’’’ *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47.1 (Spring 2013) 104-10; Youngmin Kwon, ‘Literature and Art in North Korea: Theory and Practice,’ *Korea Journal* 31.2 (Summer 1991) 56-70, [http://www.ekoreajournal.net/issue/view\\_pop.htm?Idx=2734](http://www.ekoreajournal.net/issue/view_pop.htm?Idx=2734) (accessed 30 May 2013); Marshall R. Pihl, ‘Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today,’ *Korean Studies* 1 (1977) 63-110; and Vladimir Pucek, ‘The Impact of *Juche* upon Literature and Arts,’ *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* ed. Han S. Park (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996) 51-70. See also Rüdiger Frank, ed., *Exploring North Korean Arts* (Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2011); Youngna Kim, *20th Century Korean Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005); and Peter H. Lee, ed., *A History of Korean Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Elizabethan courtier and knight Sir Philip Sidney famously writes in a ca. 1579 work posthumously published in 1595 that the task of poetry (i.e. imaginative literature) is to ‘delight, to move men to take that goodness into hand’ and to ‘teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved,’ in other words, to ‘show the way’ and a ‘sweet prospect to the way.’ The poet, ‘pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.’ See ‘The Defense of Poesy,’ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, 8th ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006) 953-74, 959, 962, 963.

in Kim Hye-yŏng's relatively complex short story 'First Meeting' that the *intentional fallacy* is operative in the North Korean literary work, which has objective elements and functions that contravene, defy, and protest the official regime of intentions demanded by the party-army-state authority. Going by a sixtieth anniversary *Korea Today* editorial board statement in December 2009, describing the mission of the magazine, one can retroactively ascertain that Kim's story was serialized in 2007 in a general effort to globally showcase North Korean party 'policies'; the 'achievements,' 'creative life,' and 'happiness' of the people; and national 'history, geography and culture.'<sup>64</sup> 'We'll do our best to help you know the realities of Korea,' the statement added.<sup>65</sup> By the implied political standards, 'First Meeting' was appraised as entirely favourable to the official and correct image of North Korea. While it may not have been the aim of the editors, by publishing the tale of Ch'ŏng-mi, Hye-suk, and Sŏng-u, they gave the international community an opportunity to experience a nationalist allegory whose discursive struggle tendentially valorised *political authority* and *virtuous emotion*, yet, in spite of the valorisation, showed that *practical wisdom* was a rationally dissenting opponent and that a symbolic rebellion against circular-emotional desire for the authority was incidentally voiced in the story-world, from its narrator, to its character-figures, to its ambient figures.

---

*Alzo David-West is a lecturer at Aichi Prefectural University in Japan, an associate editor for North Korean Review, and an ABD in communication at the European Graduate School. He is published in the areas of aesthetics, language, literature, politics, philosophy, and social psychology. His recent publications include 'Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism' (Korean Studies) 'Erich Fromm and North Korea' (Critical Sociology), 'North Korea and the Contradiction of Inversion' (North Korean Review), 'North Korean Aesthetic Theory' (Journal of Aesthetic Education), and 'Savage Nature and Noble Spirit in Han Sŏrya's Wolves' (Transnational Literature).*

---

<sup>64</sup> *Korea Today* Editorial Board, 'On the 60th Anniversary of the Foreign Language Magazines,' *Korea Today* 642, December 2009, *Naenara* [My Country], <http://175.45.176.14/en/periodic/todaykorea/index.php?contents+5031+2009-12+134+27> (accessed 19 December 2010; URL no longer available).

<sup>65</sup> *Korea Today* Editorial Board.