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CATHARTIC HOMECOMING IN YUN HŬNGGIL'S NOVEL SEQUENCE *THE ROAD TO SORADAN*

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ABSTRACT. ***Cathartic Homecoming in Yun Hŭnggil's Novel Sequence The Road to Soradan.*** This paper deals with the contemporary South Korean novelist Yun Hŭnggil (b.1942)'s novel sequence *The Road to Soradan*, and discusses the implications of the adult narrators' act of homecoming[1] by focusing on the importance of war memory recollections, and on the idea of catharsis in relation to a spatial dimension – the hometown. The cathartic connotation of homecoming and the emotional effects those hometown places are charged with come into view as the adult narrators re-access their hometown, recollect their past and thus reconnect with its memories and with their own selves.

Key words: *homecoming, catharsis, traumatic narrative, division narrative, Yun Hŭnggil*

REZUMAT. ***Actul cathartic al reîntoarcerii acasă în romanul Drumul către Soradan de Yun Hŭnggil.*** Lucrarea de faţă aduce în prim plan romanul *Drumul către Soradan*, scris de romancierul contemporan sud-coreean Yun Hŭnggil, şi discută implicaţiile actului de reîntoarcere în oraşul natal întreprins de naratorii adulţi ai acestui roman de secesiune. Ideea reîntoarcerii acasă este corelată cu importanţa rememorării amintirilor de război şi cu racordarea conceptului de catharsis la ideea dimensiunii spaţiale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *catharsis, traumă, naraţiune de secesiune, Yun Hŭnggil*

Introduction

Many of the South Korean novels depicting circumstances of the territorial division of the Korean Peninsula[2] and often written from the point

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[1] The issue of homecoming in *The Road to Soradan* has been previously addressed by the author as part of her unpublished PhD dissertation *Affective Topography in Yun Heunngil's Division Novels*.

[2] South and North Korea have been divided by the 38th parallel since 1945.

of view of a child narrator are referred to as division novels. Among those who write division novels and who share the biographical fact of having experienced the Korean War during their childhood, Yun Hŭnggil deserves a special attention as he has been broaching a new perspective of dealing with the memories of the war circumstances, and the realities of division. On one hand, it is the specific usage of hometown venues that proves the uniqueness of Yun's division novels.[3] On the other hand, in his latest division novel series, Yun adds the unique perspective of the adult narrators which reveals a novel approach to the issue of division by thus supplementing the child narrator's point of view. For both the child and adult narrators, hometown venues are not only a backdrop against which the plots unfold, but also the embodiment of certain events, and a generator of emotions with formative and cathartic implications.

Hometown, through its altering topography, people's trauma, tragic occurrences, relevant encounters, or memories of childhood, bears the idea of novelty and change. For the child narrators, various hometown places become the spatial background where they are exposed to a new knowledge. At the same time, a reconnection with the past, its integration within their mental schemata and a better understanding of themselves is also possible through the adult narrators' homecoming and recollection of past traumatic memories. Thus, in Yun's novel sequence, apart from its formative role, another symbolical connotation of hometown topography is the cathartic homecoming. Catharsis will be here employed with its meaning borrowed from the field of psychoanalysis: a process of reducing or eliminating a traumatic experience by recalling it to conscious awareness and allowing it to be expressed.[4] Any act of healing and overcoming psychological trauma intrinsically implies a temporal dimension. Yet, through compression of the durational aspect – the temporal background against which the traumatic memory has been gradually unfolding, – the frame narratives in *The Road to Soradan* provide the right venue for catharsis. The sense of time – from childhood to adulthood – that has been built up as a traumatic memory now crystallizes as a perception of change within the given

[3] The following novels of Yun Hŭnggil can be referred to as "division novels": *Hwanghon ŭi chip* (The house of twilight; 1970); *Changma* (Rainy spell; 1973); *Yang* (Scapegoat; 1974); *Ttaelgam* (Fuel; 1978); *Mujigae ŏnje ttŭnŭn'ga* (When does the rainbow appear; 1978); *Kiŏk sok ŭi tŭlkkot* (Wildflower in my memory; 1979), as well as his latest novel series, *Soradan kanŭn kil* (Road to Soradan; 2003).

[4] This is one of the first definitions of catharsis used as a treatment in psychoanalysis and formulated by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer in their *Studies on Hysteria* (1974). Their original definition refers to catharsis as a process of reducing or eliminating a complex […..]. Yet, I intentionally replaced the word "complex" with that of "experience," in order to better suit the particularity of this case. More than a complex, it is a traumatic experience that they recall to conscious awareness. Also, according to recent psychoanalytic theories, catharsis is defined as the discharge of previously repressed affects connected to traumatic events that occurs when the events are brought back into consciousness and re-experienced (Dictionary of Psychology, 2007, American Psychological Association).

spatial borders of hometown. The memories of grief and the meanings of the first initiation into the reality of war that those places are inscribed with are now doubled by the adult protagonists' perspective. After a lapse of years, this new and mature point of view generates new meanings through recollecting their past and discharging the frustration of not having them shared until that moment.

The idea of homecoming is supported by Edward S. Casey's philosophy of "alliances" realized through one's act of homecoming. As it will be interpreted, the adult narrators in Yun's novel sequence perform a "series of special alliances" with those who still remained in their hometown; with those who were once there but are now dead or departed; with memories; with the current self, disparate as it doubtlessly is from the self who once lived in the same place (hometown); and above all with the place (hometown) once left.

Having written most of his division novels in the 1970s, Yun Hŭnggil returned to the subject of division in the 1990s. Soon afterward, he published a novel sequence, *Soradan kanŭn kil* (Road to Soradan, 2003), comprised of nine division stories previously published separately.[5] Yun then added two more framing stories to the nine main narratives.[6] Here, the adults' act of homecoming and reminiscing memories of a traumatic past converge into an emotional atmosphere that accompanies their cathartic act.

Emotional environment of hometown

Completing the child narrators' interplay between the environment of hometowns and their emotional experiences, in the frame stories of *The Road to Soradan*, the adult protagonists' act of homecoming and past memories recollection unfolds at the schoolyard of their *alma mater*. The schoolyard is the place where they gather as they return home, and recollect memories of their traumatic past. This venue gains cathartic connotations as they recollect childhood memories and thus reconnect with the past through realizing "alliances" with the hometown image, the memories of the hometown people, or with themselves. Here, the cathartic connotations of sharing traumatic

[5] "Myoji kŭnch'ŏ" (Near the graveyard), first published in *Chakka segye* (Writer's world; Spring 1999); "Nongnim hakkyo pangjuk" (Levee from Nongnim school), first published in *Munhak tongne* (Literary community; Spring 2000); "Kŭnnambau ch'ŏltuk" (Kŭnnambau railroad embankment), first published in *Tongsŏ munhak* (Literature east and west; Summer 2000); "Anappang ajŏssi" (Uncle Anappang), first published in *Han'guk munhak* (Korean literature; Winter 2001); "Aijenhawŏ ege ponaenŭn mettoeji" (A wild pig for Eisenhower), first published in *Hyŏndae munhak* (Modern literature; December 2001); "Kaebine chip" (Kaebine's residence), first published in *Rabbŭllyum* (La Plume; Summer 2002); "Soradan kanŭn kil" (Road to Soradan), first published in *Segye ŭi munhak* (World literature; Autumn 2002); "Yŏksa nŭn pam e iruŏjinda" (History is made at night), first published in *Changjak kwa pip'yŏng* (Creation and criticism; Autumn 2002); "Chongtap area esŏ" (Under the bell tower), first published in *Sumsori* (Breath; Spring 2003).

[6] "Kwihyang kil" (Road home) and "Sanggyŏng kil" (Road to Seoul).

memories of their childhood is induced and supplemented by background elements such as the silence enwrapping the place and the smoke from the mosquito fumigator. As they sit around the fumigator, the smoke and the silence of the night create an atmosphere favorable to past reminiscences. At the same time, silence is a stylistic strategy employed by the author as a means of alleviating the psychological burden of the traumatic memories. The silence of the night blends into the static atmosphere imposed by the sharing of traumatic memories. Silence is often interpreted as an essential element in trauma studies as through its presence traumatic memory is described as "wordless and static" (Herman 1997, 175). Stillness, thus, fills in a traumatic gap that before that moment of homecoming had been withholding of the words because of the protagonists' difficulty to access those memories and reconnect themselves to the past.

Stillness has also a similar role to a moment of silence as a gesture of mourning for a past tragic incident and for its victims. Such a moment is described in "Kŭnnambau Railroad Embankment," when the adult protagonists recall the memory of Muhwan, their childhood friend.

> That atmosphere seemed to make us suggest for a minute of silent prayer as to mourn the death of Yeom Muhwan the leader who had disappeared due to the scorn and bad treatment of the people from Kŭnnambau. ("Kŭnnambau railroad embankment" 112)[7]

The interconnection between the venue where the recollection of past memories takes place and wherein the protagonists' emotional mood manifests itself is thus noticeable in their mutual consent to keep a moment of silence.

"The fumigator smoke vigorously rising up to the sky" (p. 24) and the "random burst of laughter" (p. 24) that were draping that summer night at the schoolyard introduces an atmosphere that would soon evolve into an emotional setting for the recollection of a traumatic childhood. Its presence is, nevertheless, related to the animated atmosphere indicated by the intrinsic features of that locale. Previous researches also imply that the stylistic uniqueness of this novel originates from the harmony between "the solemn silence" that envelops the scenes of characters' act of past recollection, and "the vivid atmosphere" created by their "pleasant manner of speaking" and "humor" (Hwang 2004, 544-45). The concurrent presence of the background elements – the mournful silence charged with traumatic implications, and the liveliness symbolized by the smoke and the laughter – that create the atmosphere at the schoolyard doubles the adult protagonists' simultaneous emotions. Within their process of catharsis, the act of discharging strong emotions associated

[7] This and all other translations by the author.

with their traumatic childhood develops at the same time with the act of charging (themselves) with a need for transgressing the effects of the past and making peace with its memories. From a stylistic point of view, their whimsical tone matches, indeed, the emotional atmosphere of the schoolyard.

Homecoming and Past Memories Recollection

Yun Hŭnggil's adding the adult narrators' point of view from the frame stories to the child narrators' perspective from the main narratives corresponds to his own need for traumatic memory liberation. Based on his own past memories as in many of his novels, Yun wrote the stories of the novel sequence when he was in his early sixties. The adult narrators too are around the same age. In Korean culture, the age of sixty years old represents an important stage in one's life. Named *hoegap*, the term contains the Chinese characters of 回 (*huei*) meaning to return, and 甲 (*jia*) meaning the first stage of life, the beginning. At the age of sixty years old, both the author and the adult narrators are about to symbolically complete a cycle of their lives. As if they were anticipating a rebirth, they are preoccupied with putting an end to the first cycle of their life, which would be possible through reconciling with their past. The reconciliation should be achieved especially because their past was traumatic. The experience of the war and divisional circumstances impaired their psyche while the distressful memories of childhood times have been restlessly lurking within their minds up to present. The author himself confesses that through writing this novel his intention was to attempt to encounter his past memories and eventually get released from their "life-long imprisonment."

> "For almost half a century of my life I felt like I served a life sentence within my soul. This is what memories of the Korean War made me feel like. […] I cannot tell if, according to my initial hope, my liberation from the war memories will have a far and wide impact upon the world. What is important to me is to encounter these memories and break free from them. This is true. At this moment I feel free, as though released from life-long imprisonment" (Yun Hŭnggil 2003, 324-35).[8]

This "life-long imprisonment" refers to the long lasting effects of his childhood trauma, and the impossibility of fully integrating its reality since it is incomprehensible. At the same time, his need to "encounter" these traumatic

[8] Translation by the author. Like the writer himself, the adult narrator, the adult Kim Jigyeom from "The Levee from Nongnim School" confesses his intention to liberate himself from the traumatic memory of his childhood. He envisions the memory of the past like a coiling yellow-spotted serpent in one "isolated corner" of his mind. The image of the snake is highly revelatory of his traumatic mind. The metaphors of its coiling movement, disposition for hiding and being uneasy to be grasped corresponds to the adult narrator's anxiety of being the prisoner of traumatic memories of war.

memories talks about his deeply rooted necessity to face the unbearable reality of his past, to recollect it, share it, and finally assimilate to it within his life. As he just turned sixty years old, Yun Hŭnggil's wish is to include the missing part of his life – that of the childhood trauma and its aftereffects – to the full *hoegap* cycle. His cathartic narration results in reappropriation and consolidation of his own past through reinterpreting himself as a subject of a childhood trauma.

Literary studies of trauma often emphasize the healing aspect of recollection. This act of "interpretation and integration" is referred to as "narrative recovery," which evokes both "the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject" (Henke 2000, xxii). Borrowing Henke's phrase, Yun's writing constitutes an act of "scriptography" or "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (Henke 2000, xii). Also, James Pennebaker, as cited by Henke (2000, xi-xii), suggests that "writing about the thoughts and feelings associated with trauma forces individuals to bring together the many facets of overwhelmingly complicated events. Once people can distill complex experiences into more understandable packages, they can begin to move beyond the trauma." Moreover, Jennifer Freyd, also cited by Henke (xii), explains that "by talking about the traumatic memories, an individual spontaneously creates an episodic interpretation and integration of previously disjointed sensory and affective memories."

Thus, writing and recollecting traumatic memories is an act of cathartic[9] attempt with psychological implications of self-recovery, which Yun's adult characters also realize through their homecoming – after some forty years beyond their graduation from elementary school – and sharing personal experiences and emotions related to the past.[10]

Apart from its "chronotopic[11]" significance and to the detriment of its implied sense of time – from the traumatic childhood to the moment of its recollection – catharsis is discussed in relation to its spatial dimension. The sense of time – with its inherent alterations – is thus defined in terms of its relation to the perception of change within certain spatial borders – the hometowns within North Jeolla Province. Through their act of homecoming the adult protagonists

[9] Previous studies of *Road to Soradan* refer to it as a "purification ritual." According to a Shamanic tradition, the soul of the deceased can be set free from grudge and helped to easily pass into eternity. Likewise, the adult characters of this novel can solve their inner conflict with their own past and diminish the pain of a terrible childhood (Lee Jeongsuk 2012, 240).

[10] Moreover, what augments the psychological and emotional healing value is the adult protagonists' relationship as former school friends who travel together to their hometown. As stated by Judith Herman, recovery can only take place in the context of relationships (Herman 1997, 63) such as in this case, the gathering of the former school friends, paralleled by their shared traumatic memories.

[11] "Chronotopia" stands for the interweaving of both dimensions of time and space; the term is formed from M.M. Bakhtin's "chronotope" which he defines as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981, 84).

come to learn more about how they felt then as children under tragic circumstances, and also about how they can now reconnect with the past by reinterpreting and locating those circumstances within their adult lives.

Hometown Reconnections

Employing Casey (2009)'s philosophy of place and homecoming, among all the "special alliances"[12] he mentions, Yun Hŭnggil's home-bound journey includes the adult narrators' connections with those who were once there but are now departed (former friends or a former teacher), their own memories, as well as with the home-place they left behind. Moreover, not only do the adult narrators reconnect with their own current selves, but they also revive the bond with the selves who once lived in the same place— their younger selves. All these connections achieved by the adult narrators through the process of homecoming are being redefined and reinterpreted.

Usually, as the adult protagonists return home, they realize that their hometown is no longer recognizable. Casey holds that such situation is natural since the qualities of spatial "nonconfinement" and "alterity" are emphasized while discussing the event of one's return home. Even though the adult narrators return to the same place or "the beginning place," they go back to a newly discovered place that "adds a crucial dimension to their understanding" of what that place is and was all about (Casey 2009, 275). Hometown's transformation and inconsistency through time can be visible only after distancing oneself from it. While the nostalgic emotion derives from the feeling of losing the relationship with the places of their home place, anxiety comes from the recollection and recognition of the traces of the war trauma visible within the hometown landscape of their childhood. Casey (2009, 43-4) also points out how Emmanuel Levinas interprets Odysseus' homecoming to Ithaca as a return to both the Same and the Other. Like Odysseus, the adult narrators are struck by the changes they observe within their home place, as well as by the continuities they can identify after many years of being away from home. In "The Levee from Nongnim School," what strikes the adult protagonists the most is the alterations caused by the urban planning of the industrialization process. A sense of instability and a feeling of loss of identification with what that place used to be like make the former schoolmates feel disappointed with the fading of the levee instead of the building of a new school and the fact that a conglomeration of cars can now be seen. As the child narrator returns home as an adult, the hometown landscape has been inexorably transformed.

[12] The "special alliances" Casey (2009, 291) mentions are: with those who still remain there; with those who were once there but are now dead or departed; with…memories; with…current self, disparate as it doubtless is from the self who once lived in the same place; and above all with the home-place…once left.

However, one of the aspects that continue to persist through the time is the legacy of the GI culture. Reminded of the abandoned corpse of the black infant and reviving the image of the Korean women who were taken advantage of during the establishment of the American army troops, the former school friends sadly agree that the disorder of the sexual morality that they can detect in the present Korean society is one repercussion of the GI culture.

The adult narrator of "The Road to Soradan," Lee Gigon starts a debate on the meaning of Soradan. Though all members of this gathering are knowledgeable about the location of Soradan, there are different interpretations of the meaning of this name. This uncertainty regarding the meaning of the proper noun Soradan alludes to the inaccessibility of the past, and especially to the incomprehension of its tragedy. While for the child character Chungseo the pine tree grove Soradan easily became a place of testimony – the only place where he found the easiness to talk about his past and family as the place itself also reminded him of his own hometown – for the child narrator it was a place where he exercised his empathy while listening to his friend's confession. Paradoxically, in spite of being unaware of the nature of Soradan – as he was new to the place–, Chungseo was the one who helped Gigon to discover it. Gigon had never been to Soradan, mindful of the elders' belief that Soradan was "the most secluded place" of their hometown, "bare of any human traces," and "where children can never go alone" (p. 214). Gigon found Soradan to be a "very frightening" and "dangerous" place, where, as his mother explained to him, a leper used to hide in a field of barley and eat children's livers. In stark contrast, Soradan excited Chungseo's curiosity, and even the name of the place sounded delightful to him. It turned out, however, that the words of Gigon's mother were meant to keep Gigon away from a danger of which he was yet ignorant about—the presence of guerilla fighters in the surrounding mountains.

A similar case is visible in "Kŭnnambau Railroad Embankment," where the lack of sufficient knowledge on their own hometown connects both with the traumatic shock[13] of that tragedy that took place in the area of Kŭnnambau, as well as with the post-factum distress regarding the possibility of such a terrible occurrence: "In the end, we could only realize the mutually equal bitterness of still not knowing many things about our own homeland" ("Kŭnnambau Railroad Embankment" 86). The incomprehensible tragedy the adult narrators recollect about this place is related to the terrible death of Yeom Muhwan, an orphan child whose father was a communist. Like the scene of the two fusing images depicted by Dalsik, the child narrator – the one of the train and that of Muhwan's body, at the moment of collision – the leader Muhwan's fate symbolically carved itself into the spot where he lost his life.

[13] Researches on trauma describe a traumatic shock as devoid of any comprehension of the traumatic event in itself.

Moreover, Dalsik's incipient awareness of the war reality, its tragic connotations, as well as the adults' disgraceful fault in Muhwan's death had its seeds embodied in the Kŭnnambau railroad embankment.

In the same manner as these friends venture several interpretations of the meaning of Soradan, they also aim at piecing back together a narrative of their lives through a better understanding of their past. The protagonists of "The Road to Soradan" speculate that Soradan originates from the assimilation with the word "shell of a turbo" (sorattachi), or from its original name, "field of pine trees" (songjeonnae/solbatan). In the adult narrator's eyes, that "no man's land" as Soradan used to be referred to, has changed beyond recognition. Elementary schools have been moved there, and the luxurious pine grove has transformed into a dense forest of high apartment buildings. Even though the predominant theme of this story, as well as its socio-historical background is the division, the writer notes the subsequent phenomenon that occurs in the South Korean society—rapid industrialization:

> "So it seems that nothing worthy is now left in our entire hometown! It is said that due to the development, the old appearance of the hometown will change to a certain extent. Nonetheless, is it really all right if things completely lose their former appearance?" ("The Road to Soradan" 2003, 229)[14]

The narrator experiences a conflicting desire to see the hometown both developed and intact; at the same time, his attitude towards the effects of industrialization is unambiguously negative. In describing the influence of the tragic past on these schoolmates' lives, the effects of industrialization aggravate the effects of war and division, reinforcing the feeling of nostalgia for the past and at the same time creating a sense of instability. This paradoxical set of feelings weaves together the memory of a cruel and difficult past with the nostalgia for a lost childhood.

Apart from the hometown image the adult protagonists attempt to reconnect with, they also reconnect with the memory of the people who were once there. In "The Levee from Nongnim School," Kim Jigyeom recollects the image of his former teacher, Park Gyeongmin, the one who was once there and influenced his psychological maturity through exposing him to different emotions, but has now departed. In this story what disconcerted the child narrator and also foreshadowed the "scene of carnage" that would soon take place at the levee was the connection created between the teacher and the

[14] The gaze of the adult narrators encapsulates a long span of time. The time reference is not limited only to the childhood, but also adds associations with a closer past—the time of industrialization. Moreover, due to rapid industrialization, the latest changes within the hometown topography transform the narrators' images of home, as well as of themselves, provoking a gamut of emotions.

levee. In the beginning a regular setting where the Nongnim school students' playing activity would often take place started rendering different connotations soon after their new school teacher suggested for the first time to have an outdoor class there. The levee seemed to transform under the teacher's sorrowful glance. As if in a mutual interrelation, the levee became fully impregnated with his depressive disposition, bestowing the place with an ambience of gravity and bad omen. At the same time, the child narrator's state of mind was affected by this emotional linkage between the teacher's psyche and the levee with its embedded affective implications caused by division. In this case, even though too young and inexperienced to fully comprehend the external circumstances and their devastating effects on people's state of mind, the teacher's presence at the levee completely changed the narrator's impression about it. Moreover, the appearance of an infant's corpse that interrupted the children's playing at the levee clashes with the expected qualities of a common playground. Moreover, the morbidity of such an image – doubled by the stupefaction at seeing a black infant's corpse – is verified by the children's reactions of yelling and throwing stones at it. At the same time, Jigyeom's turning his head away from it indicates the traumatic impact that scene had on him.

Believed to have left the country, the adults now refer to their former teacher's action of leaving the country as self-exile and not as immigration. As illustrated in the following excerpt, according to the protagonists' suggestion, "the land of the morning calm" as Korea is often referred to, becomes only an empty metaphor for a country that can alienate its inhabitants and force them to exile.

> "I cannot imagine why we used to fight so much during those days. I wonder about the use of these beautiful expressions such as the beautiful land of Korea, the land of the morning calm, or our Korean nation. Of course, nowadays too we lead our lives fighting assiduously, but isn't this fighting skill that we learnt during those days? Isn't this a chronic habit that we are already accustomed to?" ("The Levee from Nongnim School" 79)

Another memory about the hometown people is Choe Dalsik's recollection of Yeom Muhwan, the dominating leader of all the kids from the whole Kŭnnambau area. Even though he died after being hit by a train during a combat play, he is described as a victim of guilt by association. The adult narrators reconnect with and reinterpret Muhwan's trauma. Villagers' prejudice and hostility towards communists misshaped into a cruel intolerance even against the family members of the latter. They acknowledge how innocent children, such as this orphan were doomed to exclusion, contempt, and even the extermination of the entire family, which makes them wonder about the possible origin of such people's sin: "What on earth is my sin or those people's sin? Is it the sin of a traitor

or the sin of blood relation?" ("Kŭnnambau Railroad Embankment" 112) Their own rhetoric question leaves them completely outraged and disheartened.

In spite of the impossibility to fully comprehend the reality of war in relation to human's belligerent nature, what the adult protagonists of *The Road to Soradan* realize is a recollection of traumatic memories that are turned into narrative-explicit memories (Hunt 2010, 78). Through it, they therefore reconnect with their traumatic past which they reinterpret and absorb into their present lives. Apart from its significance of traumatic memory and catharsis, Yun Hŭnggil's narrative can also be viewed as encompassing an element that is generally characteristic of a formative narrative – the formative role for the readers. Regarding the lessons implied by the contemporary narratives on the Korean War, the writer admits the evilness and destructiveness of all wars, and expresses the hope that children and youths will be made to understand the atrocity of war and clearly realize that wars have to be prevented at all costs.[15]

The adult protagonists' case was discussed in relation to their homecoming and past memories recollections. Their cathartic attempt to reconnect with their traumatic childhood was interpreted in connection with the "alliances" they realize with their hometown image, the memories of the hometown people and with themselves.

Conclusion

The adult narrators' homecoming was interpreted as a cathartic attempt. The shared recollection of memories of a traumatic past, both prompted by and set against the backdrop of a highly charged hometown venue – the schoolyard – brings about a delayed reconnection with the childhood hometown, the memories of the hometown people, and, moreover, with their own selves. It gives them the means to reevaluate their traumatic past and integrate it into their present mental schemata. For the adult narrators, the return to these places – now transformed by the passage of time as well as by the protagonists' mature perspective on them – also provide new meanings and reinterpretations of the hometown as a site permeated with the memories of a traumatic childhood and its effects upon their lives. They recollect episodes of their childhood which make them aware of their hometown people's mental disposition and affective implications caused by division, of those people's indifference or critical perception towards refugees from the North, as well as gain and share their new understanding of the repercussion of the GI culture.

[15] Ideas expressed at the Korea/America Dialogue on the Korean War, organized by the Mansfield Center, June 19-25, 1999, in Missoula, Montana, and compiled by Suh Ji-moon in "The Korean War in the Lives and Thoughts of Several Major Korean Writers," in Philip West and Suh Ji-moon, 2001, 105.

Their shared experience has a cathartic quality, induced and enhanced by elements pertaining to the background. Silence is one such element, lending itself to interpretation both in a stylistic key, and as an essential device in trauma narratives, as a gesture of mourning for the victims of a tragic incident the adult narrators witnessed in their childhood, or a means to alleviate the psychological burden of the traumatic memories. At the same time, the voice of the writer himself was highlighted as Yun Hŭnggil's confessional tone doubles the voice of his adult narrators. The motif of catharsis was discussed in relation to how one of the most prominent contemporary writers relates himself to the trauma of the war and division he witnessed as a child few decades ago. Moreover, the reason of his return to this division narrative through his latest novel sequence after he mainly wrote most of his stories on this subject in the 1970s was considered in close relation to the significance of *hoegap* – an important aspect of Korean culture.

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