

Article

“Literature as Symptoms”:
Three Short Stories of Yi Chungjun
and the Order of Discourse
in the mid-1980s in Korea*

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Literature for Alibis, Literature as Symptoms

Yi Chungjun (1939-2008) was a Korean novelist who defended the humanistic value of literature and wrote many works including novels, essays, poems, plays, reportage, and others until his death.¹ However, he wrote only a few novels and short stories in the 1980s² and these are regarded as a different style from his earlier texts of the 1960s and 70s. These works of fiction from the 1980s have usually been considered as old-fashioned stories dealing with universal sentiments and folksy subjects filled with nostalgia such as the home and the Korean traditional emotion *han* 恨, rather than contemporary social problems. Three short stories published in 1985, “The Tale of Bug” (*Beolrae Iyagi*), “Hidden Finger” (*Sumeun songarak*), and “Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?” (*Nugeundeul chojangbuteo kkuneuro taeonarya?*), that will be discussed in depth in this article, were written during this period. As one poet has stated, this period was not only a time when “too primitive and anatomical tragedies occurred,” but also a time when “terrible modernity” operated to justify the Gwangju Incident (1980) as a sacred action for purifying the impure power and for building a new social order (Hwang 1992). However, this period was also a time when the public power of the June Democratic Struggle (1987) was being amassed as a great potential which could demur to the USA, capitalism, and modernity which were linked to offenders of the Gwangju Incident.

In short, “The Tale of Bug” (1985), “Hidden Finger” (1985), and “Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?” (1985) were written between the Gwangju Incident and June Democratic Struggle. However, these texts do not seem to deal with the social issues or political problems of the mid-1980s. A religious

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1. His poems, plays, and reportage are relatively less known than his novels and short stories. And it is rather difficult to list completely all his works since they were continuously revised throughout his life. Kim Nam-Hyuk’s dissertation gives some information about the total list of his works including paratexts such as poems, plays, reportage, and practices written before his debut in literary circles (Kim 2015).

2. Around this time, journalist Cho Sun-Hi stated [translated from Korean]: “Everyone wanting to read his new work may be disappointed, because he has published only one short story, the title is *Seom* (*Island*), this year. To be exact, *Seom* is a modified work which was written last year.” When Yi Chungjun had an interview with a novelist Ku Hyoseo, Ku was also astonished with the fact that he wrote only three short stories during two years [1986-1987] (Cho 1986; Yi and Ku 1988).

subject is considered in "The Tale of Bug," and the Korean War is central to the plot of the "Hidden Finger." And one may ascertain from the title that a comic mood rather than tragic one stands out in "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" Therefore, the following questions could be posed: Why did Yi Chungjun concentrate his narratives on universal themes such as religion in this "primitive, anatomical and terrible" time? Why did he focus on past events such as the Korean War at the most urgent time? Did he try to escape from the modernity of the 1980s? Although it was spoken in a different context, let us consider his answer:

For example, *Gwangjang* (*The Square*, 1960) has the purpose not to represent or discover events of the 1950s that are currently being forgotten, but to reread or translate them through a novelist's hermeneutic view and spirit that are continuously being adjusted to the contemporary problems of the 1960s. In other words, the Korean War in *The Square* is not the Korean War in the 1950s, but the Korean War that is experienced again in the 1960s.... Therefore characters in a novel live in the double world that is a combination of both the fictive life of the narrative and the traits of the current period when the novel is being written. (Yi 1978, 206-07; author's own translation)

Although it is not quoted above, Yi Chungjun wrote in other parts of this essay that "literature for alibis" only serves as a representation of past affairs. But the novel he aimed to write was "literature as symptoms." Characters in the latter live in two periods of time: one is the time of the narrative, the other is the time of the actual writing. There is only one type of time (the past) in the literature for alibis, but the two types of time overlap in the literature as symptoms. Thus, in the literature as symptoms which Yi Chungjun supports, the more he represents past affairs, the better he can refer to contemporary affairs. As his narrative delves into the past, it can also mirror the present. Therefore when he stated in this essay that "I strongly advocate for literary action," a novelist like him "analyses social condition or historical context first" and then reveals contemporary features "as a consequence." Here, this literary action can be performed by literature as symptoms. This statement was expressed in the context of the Pure-Participation Controversy in the 1960s. So anyone who has preconceived notions about him and his novels—for example, that they are abstract or intellectual—may be astonished that he strongly asserted that

“I agree with the participation of literature” (Kim et al. 1968, 83). However, the participation of literature he supported was not a mere slogan or a rough campaign against the government. His participation was a result produced from analysis about social structure and historical patterns. So, his particular participation was neither literary purity nor literary participation.

Although he wrote fewer novels during the 1980s than before, he still advocated his own literary participation and wrote literature as symptoms. If one reads his three short stories published in 1985, “The Tale of Bug,” “Hidden Finger,” and “Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?” regardless of their historical and contemporary contexts, he or she will not understand his unusual literary style defined as literature as symptoms. The reader may only think about universal problems such as religion, or about past events such as the Korean War. Thus this article concentrates on the overlapping timeframes of literature of symptoms. In other words, this article will consider not only the events that appeared in narratives, but also various contexts and the discourse produced in the 1980s.

The Order of Discourse

The year of publication written in a book may seem like collateral information for ordinary readers. Such information is often forgotten and ignored by the public. However, especially in Yi Chungjun’s novels, information on the date of publication is very important for true understanding of his novels. For example, to appreciate the kidnapping narrative of “The Tale of Bug,” one must consider the circumstances of 1985, although they are not depicted in the story. Similar to *The Square* (1960) where the reader should think about “the Korean War which is experienced again in the 1960s,” one must think about the kidnapping which is experienced again in 1985 when reading “The Tale of Bug.” First of all, let us consider the author’s opinion on this short story:

I wanted to think about love and religion in my little tale “The Tale of Bug.” The main narrative is about a kidnapping. A mother becomes a Christian after her son has been kidnapped by a brutal criminal. Her son is eventually killed and the police capture the abductor. The mother finds peace of mind by aid of religion, and then she decides to forgive the kidnapper.

When she meets him in prison, however, he has also already found peace because of a Christian redemption. She despairs of the situation where he has already obtained God's pardon before she forgives him. She finally kills herself. This short story was based on a real incident that happened a few years ago. Then, what does God's love mean?³ (Yi 2005, 244; author's own translation)

As alluded to by Yi Chungjun above, the main inspiration of "The Tale of Bug" was the case of Yi Yunsang's kidnapping and murder which shocked many Koreans and was one of the top news stories of 1981. Yi Yunsang was very similar to Al-Am who is the character in "The Tale of Bug." Like Al-Am, Yi Yunsang—a student at Gyeongseo middle school in Seoul—had a limp as a result of contracting polio during his childhood and his teacher was the one who abducted and killed him. This affair was a shock to many people, because of many extraordinary facts. For example, a teacher kidnapped his student and a major cause of crime was a gambling debt. In addition, he had committed illicit acts with female students before the kidnapping. And the fact that the President released an official statement of this criminal act might be the most extraordinary one.

The facts of the kidnapping case are as follows. Ju Yeonghyeong—a physical education teacher at Gyeongseo middle school—was worried about his gambling debt. So he decided to kidnap Yi Yunsang. Because he thought Yi was a son of rich family. He enticed Yi to his apartment on 13th of November, 1980 by offering to give advice on school life. Yi was then caged in an apartment that Ju had previously prepared and died as a result of exhaustion in just three days. The police launched an investigation around this time. Ju and his female student, Yi Hyeonok, who had immoral relationship with him, telephoned and mailed to Yi Yunsang's family with the purpose of making a threat. In the early stage of the investigation, the police formally thought of Ju as one of the suspects. However, the police scarcely doubted him as a kidnapper because they believe that a teacher could not kidnap his disciple and that such

3. There is another paratext or anecdote regarding "The Tale of Bug": in his diary, a literary critic Kim Hyun (1993, 97) wrote about the poet Park Namcheol's eccentric behavior. According to his diary, Park asserted that "The Tale of Bug" had been written on the basis of his own experience and therefore he would kill Yi Chungjun. However "The Tale of Bug" is the short story based on the case of Yi Yunsang's kidnapping.

an intellectual (Ju had a superior academic background as a graduate of Seoul National University) could not commit a brutal crime. He also assisted the police faithfully during their investigation. In consideration of Yi Yunsang's safety, the police performed a closed investigation. But their work was at a standstill for 100 days. At this time, more precisely on 27th of February, 1981, the police started an open investigation. Just one day later, President Chun Du-Whan released a statement on the kidnapping. President Chun promised "a mild punishment if the kidnapper returns Yi Yunsang to his home before the presidential inauguration [3rd of March, 1981]." And he said "my heart aches from this kind of affair. I will sentence the maximum penalty allowed by law, if such a brutal kidnap recurs." It was highly unusual for the President to make a remark about an abduction case. He even visited the police station on 1st of March, where he stated that "the police should establish the state where there is no kidnap and murder. Kidnappers will be sentenced to the maximum penalty in the future. In this country, parents bringing up children should be able to live with an easy mind." Leaving the police station, he emphasized the ideal of the state and the duty of the police to pursue security and justice (Investigation 1986, 82-83).⁴ He immediately went to Yi Yunsang's house at Geongdeok-dong with two ginseng boxes in his hand. He told Yunsang's parents that the criminal would be caught.

This performance and the statements by President Chun may seem very comical from the current standpoint. But his hypocritical actions and words may be "terrible modernity" itself to anyone who had family members murdered during the Gwangju Incident or killed mysteriously in the Samcheong Re-education Camp. It is because the most brutal perpetrator not only emphasized justice but also comforted the most miserable victim. The major reason why modernity in the 1980s was so "terrible" was that the fundamental and structural violence of the state was concealed while the guiltiest perpetrator was free to forgive (or punish) both the other kind of

4. This book was edited by Nam Sangryong. He started his new post as the chief of police at Mapo police station on 15th of November, 1980, two days after the case of Yi Yunsang's kidnapping was initiated. According to his opinion, it is "the first instance since the state has been established" for the President to make a statement on an abduction case. Nam (2000) also highlights the President's considerate character in later book. However, for thinking about the order of discourse in the 1980s, we should first consider this: why did the President perform "the first action since the state has been established" for this particular criminal case during this period?

perpetrator and the victim.

As we saw in Yi Chungjun's quote above, Al-Am's mother "despairs of this situation that he [the criminal] had already obtained God's pardon before she forgives him." But her situation is no different from the circumstances of many people in the 1980s who despaired of a cruel world where the criminal had already become President before so many victims forgave him. So we can pose Yi Chungjun's question like this: if the criminal has already gotten salvation or peace even though his victims are still tormented, "then, what does God's love mean?" Here, we don't have to limit God to the religious meaning, because the order of discourse in the 1980s which was connected with diverse opinions also performs the same function as God. Many texts including Yi Chungjun's "The Tale of Bug" were linked to the kidnapping of Yi Yunsang. Some texts among them assisted a specific discourse in making the modernity of 1980s, regardless of their intention. Before analyzing "The Tale of Bug," let us discuss other texts dealing with this kidnapping.

First, there are the texts or opinions produced by the press and intellectuals in the wake of the capture of physical education teacher Ju Yeonghyeong, 383 days after the abduction. The press rapidly produced many articles as soon as the criminal was caught. The government-magazine *Jeonghwa* (*Purification*) published a special feature on education. It was strongly influenced by the Yi Yunsang affair. In the preface, the article "Gratitude for an All-Korea Meeting of Educationists" written by the President Chun was quoted:

Did our educational system properly prepare for the many side effects caused by modernization? I can't readily say "yes."...Today, we are living in a highly industrialized society and a period of mass education. Thus it may be hard to request you to be the most perfect teacher during this period. But you should not jump on the bandwagon too readily. If you do, you are not a teacher whom many students admire, but a mere technician who teaches them just simple knowledge and skill. (Chun 1982, 6; author's own translation)

The above paragraph was amazingly critical of Korean modernity. Key words such as "modernization," "a highly industrialized society," "a mere technician," and so forth, were written not by a victim of modernity but by a perpetrator jumping on the bandwagon of modernity. The perpetrator pursued violent

modernity in secret on the one hand, while using this kind of speech in public on the other hand. This paradoxical speech gave him the ability that extorted the opportunity to criticize Korean modernity from many victims because the perpetrator (in this case, President Chun) had both benefits from modernity and the opportunities to criticize it. So, though articles in the magazine *Jeonghwa* were strongly critical of Korean modernity, all their criticisms were misaimed. In this book, many intellectuals made several suggestions such as “overcoming the dehumanization caused by industrialization,” “the true humanization by harmony between schools and families,” “making the society where teachers are admired,” “the humanistic education rather than teaching knowledge,” and so on. However, these topics were not substantially different from President Chun’s opinion.

Novelist Han Malsook also wrote about the kidnapping in other media. But her opinion was quite similar to intellectuals’ thoughts in *Jeonghwa*. While criticizing Ju Yeonghyeong’s crime, she also emphasized the poor social conditions of the 1960s and 70s when he had grown up: “In the chaotic 1960s and the distorted 1970s...it was a common thought that attaining success was the most important aim in life. The ways and means to attain this goal were of no matter to most people. So, such people were not human beings” (Han 1981). Here, the social environment during the political regime of Park Jung Hee was strongly criticized. Criticizing modernity in Korea came to the same criticism of the Park Jung Hee regime. And it paradoxically became to defend the Chun Du-Hwan’s new military regime insisting the social purification and the order of state. In other words, these intellectuals did not realize the paradoxical logic in which the more they criticized modernity in Korea, the more they supported the biggest perpetrator of modernity. Unlike the conservative psychiatric discourse⁵ or the yellow

5. Psychiatric discourses convicting Ju Yeonghyeong are as follows: “People belonging to the dullness of emotion are dull of the moral sense. So if they commit a crime, they do not regret it. I think Ju Yeonghyeong murdering his student Yi Yunsang may belong to this type of people” (Psychiatrist Yi Sihyeong at Korea University Hospital); “It is a common thought in the field of psychiatry that the major causes of crimes have something to do with a mental disease” (Psychiatrist Yi Byeongyun at Korea University Hospital); “Though there are no exact data on Ju Yeonghyeong, I think he has suffered from an epileptic personality disorder” (The dean of the medical school at Chung Ang, Mun Byeonggeun). These psychiatrists expressed very professional opinions. However, they ascribed the kidnap only to the personal problem. They did not consider the more fundamental and structural problems (Investigation 1986, 334-39).

journalism,⁶ they criticized more fundamental problems such as social structure and modernity. But in doing so they assisted the real perpetrator of modernity, Chun Du-Hwan's new military regime.

Second, there was a text produced by the police. The purpose of this text was different from the opinions spoken by intellectuals. The police placed an emphasis on the scientific detection and the humanitarian investigation through this text. Nam Sangryong who had been the head of criminal investigation and the chief of police at Mapo police station at that time edited the book *Jipnyeom Susa 383il* (*Intensive Investigation for 383 Days*) in 1986. This book and Yi Chungjun's "The Tale of Bug" (1985) were published around the same time about 4 years after the kidnapping. This time gap allowed them to understand the crime objectively. In short, both texts dealt with the kidnapping which was experienced again in 1985 and 1986. They could be regarded as literature as symptoms. However, though Nam Sangryong used much material and data for editing *Jipnyeom Susa 383il*, he only focused on the scientific and humanitarian investigations. For example, the lie detector test played a crucial role in getting a confession from Ju Yeonghyeong.⁷ If someone reads this book, he or she could realize that the police investigations involving the lie detector test were performed very enthusiastically. However, this text was easily used for justifying the Chun Du-Hwan's new military regime. At that time, ideological state apparatuses including the police committed violent actions. Especially, the police often tortured innocent people. In *Jipnyeom Susa 383il*, the duties of the police performing the scientific and humanitarian investigations stood out, but the negative sides of them were concealed. Though both *Jipnyeom Susa 383il* and "The Tale of Bug" were

6. The yellow journalism also ascribed the abduction only to personal problems. It depicted Ju Yeonghyeong and his accomplice Yi Hyeonok as heinous criminals. Its opinions are as follows: "the most brutal criminal even told that it's too bad I can't watch the 88 Seoul Olympics"; "While Ju Yeonghyeong reenacted the crime, the accomplice Yi Hyeonok laughed loudly, chatting with detectives"; "Yunsang's teacher Ju Yeonghyeong. It transpired that he was a wolf in human's clothing" (Investigation 1986, 311-18).

7. After about 14 years later, a popular TV program *Gyeongchalcheong Saramdeul* (*The police*) dealt with this kidnapping case. It realistically represents Yi Yunsang's kidnapping with various materials. An interview with Yi Yunsang's mother Kim Hyegyong, criminals' voice on the phone, and the TV news of the time are used in *Gyeongchalcheong Saramdeul*. Although this TV program approaches the kidnapping objectively, it does not examine the order of discourse in the 1980s. *Gyeongchalcheong Saramdeul* was broadcasted on 25th of May, 1994 by MBC.

published around the same time, the former only represents the past affair objectively. This text did not avoid the paradoxical result of helping the new military regime. For example, many people protested against the government, as one could guess from the various events such as the election of members for the national assembly on 12th February, 1985, the demonstration at the U.S. cultural center, and so forth. Ignoring these contemporary contexts, *Jipnyeom Susa 383il* representing the past objectively is a biased text. Although this text is not literature, it shares some weaknesses of “the literature for alibis.” In other words, “analysis of social conditions or historical contexts” is omitted in *Jipnyeom Susa 383il*.

Finally, there are more personal texts written by Yi Yunsang’s mother Kim Hyegyeong and religious individuals. While the discourse produced by the police strongly emphasized the scientific and humanitarian investigation, the suppressed facts were not only the fundamental violence of new military regime. Another suppression was come out in Kim Hyegyeong’s text. She published *Bijeongieora (Heartless)* three months after the police investigation ended. In this book, she revealed that serious problems were not solved by the end of investigation. Kim Hyegyeong’s memoirs made an issue of something that remained even after it. According to her book, it was rumored that she had had a love affair with Ju Yeonghyeong during the police investigation. Consultants on the investigation, who were composed of psychologists, psychiatrists, and linguists, even advised policemen to investigate Yi Yunsang’s mother. Policemen even said lightly that the criminal might be hidden under Kim Hyegyeong’s skirt (Investigation 1986, 155-67). Along with this rumor, many people frequently made prank calls to her family. Recalling these events, she said “I thought the world was like an enormous ward in the psychiatric hospital.” In her book, she insists that Ju Yeonghyeong was a product of this society that resembled a psychiatric hospital (Kim 1982). Her memoir reveals that the human rights of women were repressed by the scientific and humanitarian investigations of policemen. However, referring to the cause of the crime as society is quite similar to the intellectuals’ opinions as mentioned above. They all involving her book do not judge Ju Yeonghyeong to be evil. This kind of thinking is also shared with Christian individuals. Christians, such as the priest Mun Jangsik, met Ju Yeonghyeong while he was in prison and wrote about their meeting. According to their books, Ju Yeonghyeong in prison did not act like a villain. He sympathized with juvenile delinquents in

confinement and considered donating his own organs after execution of the death penalty.⁸ Unlike the yellow journalism that described him as "a wolf in human's clothing," these texts overcome a dichotomous way of thinking such as good and evil.

As examined until now, there are many texts dealing with the abduction case of Yi Yunsang. Then, what does Yi Chungjun's "The Tale of Bug" have to say about the kidnapping? Why could this short story be regarded as literature as symptoms unlike the other texts written by intellectuals, yellow journalism, psychiatrists, policemen, Yi Yunsang's mother, Christians, and so forth?

However, it would be better to stop speaking about the abduction itself. This short story's main purpose is not to detail the brutal incident...but to think about another victim, that is to say, my wife [Al-Am's mother]. Although the kidnapper has been arrested and the whole story of crime has been revealed, she thought that many problems are still not resolved. (Yi 1985b, 103; author's own translation)

The narrator's statement above is in line with Yi Chungjun's intention of writing literature as symptoms, because literature as symptoms was not the mere representation of "the abduction itself." It aimed to target the remaining problems after the police investigation. In other words, when he wrote of the abduction case that was experienced again in 1985, the purpose was not to represent a past case in detail, nor to denounce perpetrators of kidnapping and modernity in the 1980s. Similar to Kim Hyegyeong, he thought that the arresting the kidnapper did not give closure to the abduction. A more important problem to him was the order of discourse in 1980s. In this environment, the more that people criticized the order of discourse, the stronger it became. That was the major problem in writing "The Tale of Bug." If someone emphasizes the scientific and humanitarian investigation, if someone criticizes the highly industrialized social system, if someone makes people interested in Ju Yeonghyeong's brutality or whatsoever criticism someone offers, Chun Du-Hwan's new military regime never felt threatened. The new military regime had rather established its own legitimacy

8. One can read texts written by Christians in the following sources: diaries written by the priest Mun Jangsik (2006) and essays by the member of educational division in prison Kim Hyewon (2005).

of domination through those criticisms. Therefore, the scene which Al-Am's mother committed suicide in the short story shows an ordinary person's situation in 1980s. Speaking about repression only makes them in actuality more repressed.

Mrs. Kim who is a Christian and neighbor of Al-Am's mother advises her to forgive the kidnapper. Mrs. Kim said, "if you feel resentment, only your soul will be destroyed." Half this advice is right, but half is useless to help her overcome her situation that can be interpreted as the order of discourse formulated by the new military regime. As Mrs. Kim's advice, only victims such as Al-Am's mother will suffer torments, if they feel resentment or offer criticism toward perpetrators. If so, what can victims do under this paradoxical situation? Should they unquestioningly forgive perpetrators? Forgiveness itself is useful to think about the strange situation in which both criticism and resentment can't be appropriately applied. But insisting on blind forgiveness, in a state where perpetrators can save themselves or have already been saved by God, has a weakness. Because saved men do not need forgiveness. Furthermore, such forgiveness can't stop the strange order of discourse working. No matter how many victims forgive their perpetrators, it is impossible to alter the paradoxical order of discourse in the 1980s under which a kidnapper like Ju Yeonghyeong and a dictator like Chun Du-Whan can redeem themselves. So, forgiveness had similar weaknesses as criticism and resentment in the 1980s. "The Tale of Bug" was written under this situation and raised an important question about it. When both forgiveness and criticism failed to overcome this order of discourse, anyone who committed suicide in response was not only Al-Am's mother. How can literature save victims like her? Yi Chungjun asked that question through "The Tale of Bug."

Allegory and Politics

I like to emphasize our new security and stability that have been accomplished for the last four years. They are different from the oppressive stability made in the past. The system operated by the long-term seizure of power also achieved social stability, but that stability suppressed many people's liberty. So, I can't say that that kind of stability was the true stability....It is an old-fashioned thought that liberty is incompatible with

stability. Our 5th republic has built the base of democracy that can make liberty compatible with stability and security. Lifting a curfew, school autonomy policy, and so on. These examples prove the 5th republic to be democratic.⁹ (qtd. in KBS Labor Union 1989, 114-15; author's own translation)

The above quoted passage is part of an address performed by President Chun Du-Whan on 9th of January, 1985. This statement was released again in a television program called <Teukbyeol Gihoek—Gukungaecheok 1,460il(The Special Project—Pioneering National Destiny for 1,460 Days)>. KBS made this special program for the purpose of celebrating the 4th anniversary of the 5th republic and broadcasted it on 4th of March, 1985. Here, we need to pay attention to two features. One is the fact that the new military regime sought its legitimacy by criticizing the Park Jung Hee's political regime. And the other feature was the fact that it makes use of television broadcasting for manipulation of the regime's image. "The long-term seizure of power" and "the oppressive stability" were severely criticized by President Chun Du-Whan. According to his statement, the new military regime was the only government that can solve the dilemma posed by an interweaving of liberty and stability. However, the social situation of the 1980s in Korea bizarrely suppressed many kinds of freedoms. In other words, though the liberty got greater seemingly as anyone can extrapolate on the basis of "lifting a curfew, school autonomy policy" and so forth, the public was actually placed in a repressive situation.¹⁰ As we mentioned above, it was useless to criticize the new military regime depending on modernity since it also criticized modernity itself.

Under these strange conditions of 1985, there was another character taking the decision to end his own life like Al-Am's mother: Na Dongjun in the "Hidden Finger" (1985). In the ending of this short story set during the Korean War, Na Dongjun confronts Baek Hyeonu in the presence of the villagers. Na Dongjun reveals to them the fact that Baek had created the terrible conditions of village under which they were forced to point out neighbors as enemies. After the truth is revealed by Na Dongjun, Baek Hyeonu shows his

9. President Chun Du-Whan's speech on 9th of January, 1989.

10. For understanding this strange situation, we should consider not the liberty itself but the concrete function of liberty in the 1980s. For further details, see Shin 1999; Kang 2003.

severed finger to the villagers. Baek Hyeonu tells them that he cut off his own finger in order to save them. In short, he insists that he sacrificed his finger for the villagers' life. Like this, Baek Hyeonu made a brutal situation in his village and, by concealing this fact, distorted the truth. Yi Chungjun established Baek Hyeonu as a member of the North Korean People's Army. However, if anyone was reminded of the many acts of brutality by the 5th republic such as the green policy and the torture of political activists,¹¹ he or she could also easily associate Baek Hyeonu with the new military regime.¹² From the fact that Yi Chungjun had to set up the character as a North Korean soldier in order to target his criticism, we can see how difficult it was for people at that time to criticize the government. Furthermore, we can speculate that the modernity created by the 5th republic, not the communism supported by North Korea, was the very object that he intended to criticize in his short story. In short, though the setting for "Hidden Finger" was the Korean War and this story seemed to criticize the North Korean system, it simultaneously raised the same question about modernity in the 1980s that made Al-Am's mother kill herself.

Although this short story allegorically criticized the 5th republic, it was paradoxically used by a television drama for the very purpose of justifying the power of the new military regime. The KBS television channel planned to make "special dramas" for the presidential election in 1987 and, as part of this plan, adapted Yi Chungjun's "Hidden Finger." KBS disclosed its intention in selecting this particular short story: "we modified 'Hidden Finger' by not making merely an anti-communism drama but to create a high quality human drama. Audiences will observe the process that a man falling into a leftist thinking destroyed his own humanity" (Unknown 1987). Here, we need to think about reasons why KBS planned "special dramas" at this time. The 5th republic government often used broadcasting to manipulate its image and television drama was no exception. The intention to criticize leftist thinking could assist the candidate Roh Tae Woo—another member of the new military

11. The new military regime arrested many student-activists and forced them to point out other colleagues. Policemen and soldiers even tortured them to make the false truth. This brutal conduct is referred to as the Green policy. For further information about the illegality of this policy, see Yi 1987; Han 2003; Jeong 2004.

12. A literary critic Kim Byeongik (1997) also mentioned that the thematic meaning of "Hidden Finger" was focused on the order of discourse in the 1980s: "Although the setting of 'Hidden Finger' was the Korean War, Yi Chungjun was allegorically dealing with the military dictatorship in the 1980s."

regime—who addressed that “if the opposition party come into power, South Korea will be paradise for violent leftists” (KBS Labor Union 1989, 270).¹³ Thus the drama *Hidden Finger* is a very interesting example of a ruling clique misreading Yi Chungjun’s short story “Hidden Finger.” People supporting the government read “*Hidden Finger*” as a work blaming North Korea and communism, even though Yi Chungjun had allegorically criticized the modernity and the 5th republic system.

However, sometimes dramas turn out differently than how they were intended. In the drama *Hidden Finger*, actors having a vicious look are cast as characters belonging to the leftist, while actors appearing wise play the role of the right. When the North Korean soldiers deceive Na Dongjun (actor Baek Jun-Gi) cunningly, the scene is depicted horribly. Thus this drama at first look seems to be anti-communism drama. However, the antagonist Baek Hyeonu (Yu Donggeun) is a weak man who can’t overcome his inferiority complex, rather than a horrible villain in this drama. In the ending of it, Baek Hyeonu confesses to Na Dongjun: “I have been completely ruined. I can’t fight against you anymore. I can’t do anything. I’ve made a situation which you and I can’t live together in our village” (8th Episode of *Deurama chodaeseok*, December 5, 1987). In confessing his deceptive behavior, he tells Na Dongjun to shoot him with a pistol. Though the North Korean Soldier Baek Hyeonu is defeated, this scene doesn’t evoke a gratifying atmosphere since he becomes a pathetic man by the ending of drama.

Nevertheless, we need to remember the fact that this drama was broadcast only 10 days before the presidential election. It might have stimulated audience to hate the North Korean system and make them associate communism with the opposition party. In other words, KBS adapted Yi Chungjun’s short story criticizing the 5th republic for a drama supporting the same 5th republic. What did Yi Chungjun think of this adaptation? Perhaps, he also felt oppressed like Al-Am’ mother in “The Tale of Bug” and Na Dongjun in “Hidden Finger.” Although he intended something critical to the government and society through his allegorical short story, the ruling powers distorted or used it for

13. This extraordinary book proves the back-scratching alliance of government and broadcast, on the basis of TV news. However the restriction of research material to TV news makes this book including fundamental limits, because the new military regime used various entertainment programs as well as TV news for the purpose of manipulating public opinion.

their own justification of power. When both criticism and forgiveness could not work appropriately, he resorted to writing allegorical stories. Although his allegory also could not always be interpreted as the writer's intention, it aroused his passion again. Since allegory is not an aesthetically interesting technique but an important method that enables him to write the literature as symptoms. Here is another allegorical story written around the same time.

"Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" (1985) also criticized the order of discourse that was created by the new military regime. First of all, it is very surprising that this short story could be published in 1985, because many publications were heavily censored by the government during this period. Particularly, it was nearly impossible to deal with rural problems in public. For example, the fact that farmers were burying their onions because of the price slump of agricultural products appeared in MBC drama *Jeonwon Ilgi* (*Country Diary*) broadcast on 23rd of August, 1983. Onion price had nosedived and many farmers had committed suicide on account of this. *Jeonwon Ilgi* might have reminded audience of this rural state. After the broadcast, the police investigated the director and writers of *Jeonwon Ilgi*. They were questioned whether they were connected with rebellious groups or not (O 1994, 341-42). The new military regime prohibited everyone from discussing rural problems. These instructions were the media guidelines which government conveyed to the press from October to December of 1985 when "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" was published: "Don't report—'rural communities on the brink of collapse, the rural exodus of over 600,000 people every year'"; "Don't report—'the rapid expansion of the farmers' rebellion, the biggest rebellion since the Dong Hak Peasant Movement'"; "Erase the following congressman Kim Bongho's opinion—'the city dwellers' resistance is expressed by demonstration and violence, but the farmers' resistance is expressed by suicide and death'"; "Don't cover the rural economy" (The Council 1988, 250-72). At this time, the new military regime banned the press from reporting any rural economical conditions. If anyone violated this rule, the government severely punished violators. If so, how could Yi Chungjun deal with rural problems—especially the price of cattle—in his short story in 1985?

The answer lies in the allegorical writing. He established the protagonist Gong Manseok as an unreliable character. Gong Manseok liked to talk with villagers about current issues. But they often neglected his opinions since he was always boasting about everything around him. He seemed to follow a

great cause, but he actually sought fame and fortune. It is easy to associate his deceptive behavior with the antagonist Nolbu in the Korean classical novel *Heungbu-Jeon*. His speech and behavior are very humorous but do not implant trust in readers' mind. For example, as everyone can see in the following quotation, he planned to make a speech on television (although the television station eventually doesn't broadcast him). He practiced his opinions in front of his wife:

Is the decision [to import beef] made for our farmers? Did bigwigs worry that we might not eat meat? No. It is only for townies. In other words, the secret intention is to dispossess farmers of property, and after that, to give townies our very property. So, please stop importing beef from foreign countries now....If bigwigs continue to do so,...we can't forbear any more. Then, townies should eat their products and we eat ours....We eat rice, barley, vegetables that we ourselves cultivate. Townies eat agricultural chemicals, machinery, televisions, refrigerators that they produce....Why do we always suffer? Why is there discrimination? Why does someone always push? Why is someone always pushed? Can anyone be born an expert? (Yi 1985c, 170-71; author's own translation)

If readers considered the situation of the 1980s, they might think his statement was incredibly political. But it couldn't also be a reliable speech because of his vagarious and selfish character. If someone belonging to the ruling forces reads this short story that described that "townies eat chemicals, machinery, televisions, refrigerators, and so forth," they would see only humor and not criticism.

However, at this time, many farmers actually did kill themselves because of the collapse of beef price. For example, farmers living in the Du-Am village of Jeollanado province demonstrated against the government's import policy. Like picketers, they walked along the road at distances up to 10km with their cows. On their message boards, criticizing slogans were written: "the Korean beef price is dog-cheap, the Korean beef price is a giveaway price"; "Are farmers slaves of advanced countries?"; "farmers are in the shit-field, chaebols are in the money-field" (Unknown 1985, 45). Yi Chungjun could allegorically depict this tragic reality by using a comic character. In other words, although he may have wanted to write about the actualities of the 1980s, he was under a repressive situation like Al-Am's mother and Na Dongjun. However, he

could still reveal the truth by allegorical writings unlike them. The humorous title—"Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?"—might have been of help to pass censorship since this title itself does not relate to agricultural problems. Thus, if readers consider the politics of allegory, they can't be amused with this humorous short story.

Then, how did the television news programs report on the Du-Am villagers' demonstration?

In the evening, farmers sat together in front of the television. Because so many cameramen from television stations and newspapers recorded them while they demonstrated for four and a half hours. They thought their demonstration would appear on television news programs. However, there was not a single word about their action on television.

"All participants of demonstration watched television. But, nothing appeared on the television. Why weren't our political actions broadcast? How would we convey our opinion to the world?"

A farmer Yi Eungju went on with anger.

"So, we couldn't help distrusting newspapers and television. From that day, we found that the broadcasts only were telling lies." (Unknown 1985, 46; author's own translation)

Like Al-Am's mother and Na Dongjun, the farmer Yi Eungju was also under the order of discourse in the 1980s, which precluded the revealing of truth. And Gong Manseok in "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" was also under the same situation. His deceptive attitude was changed when he found his son and daughter in Seoul had been oppressed by the modernity. "Suddenly, he [Gong Manseok] comes to realize that television broadcasts are not on his side. They weren't on the farmers' side either.... They weren't even on his children's side. Conversely, they stand only on the oppressive and repressive side" (Yi 1985c, 178). Like this, Gong Manseok sitting in front of the television was experiencing the same situation with a farmer Yi Eungju. Though Yi Chungjun's allegorical short story "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" seems to be merely comic fiction, it has intervened into the political situation of the 1980s. Thus we can regard this fiction, like Yi Chungjun's previous two short stories, as part of the literature as symptoms.

And Again, "What is Literature?"

"Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?" ended when Gong Manseok made a decision to get into a "real fight with television". Here, what is "the real fight with television"? Of course, the expression of the fight with television may remind readers of the boycott on the KBS license fee in the mid-1980s. If we understand this expression metaphorically, its meaning can be grasped as a fight with the order of discourse in the 1980s which the word "television" associates with. However, we may ask again: what is "the real fight"?

As everyone knows, the question "what is literature?" was the most important topic to Yi Chungjun. He wrote many essays and novels such as a novel sequence *Eoneosahoehak Seoseol (Prolegomenon of Sociolinguistics)*, to attempt to answer that question. He felt great satisfaction when he read his colleague Kim Hyun's criticism in the 1970s. Kim Hyun (1977) argued in his book *Hangukmunhak ui Wisang (The Status of Korean Literature)* that literature can liberate people from repression since it dreams of something useless. Yi Chungjun quite agreed with Kim Hyun's thought. For example, he spoke the same opinion in a guest lecture at Seoul National University: "it is a most important cause for literature to liberate people from repression and to dream of uselessness" (Yi 1976).¹⁴ However, he wasn't satisfied with Kim Hyun's opinion for very long:

But I could not forget my question [what is literature?] though I had agreed with it [Kim Hyun's remark]. I still agreed with the great idea that the point of literature is to dream something useless. What I could not agree with was the fact that the answer to my question was solved completely. If it was the unquestionable truth that literature involved all kinds of efforts to liberate from all kinds of fixed answers and from the official order, my question also should not be answered easily. How can literature be satisfied with only dreaming? (Yi 1978, 196; author's own translation)

In the late 1970s, Yi Chungjun asked again what literature is. More precisely, in addition to liberating people from repression, he thought about literature

14. Yi Chungjun lectured as a guest at the Department of Domestic Science of Seoul Nation University on 13th of May, 1976.

having other functions. If we are permitted to speak in the same context of this article, one function was that literature could also effectively fight the order of discourse in the 1980s. Literature as symptoms became an answer to his question in the 1980s. And three short stories published in the same year—"The Tale of Bug," "Hidden Finger," and "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?"—are supreme examples of literature as symptoms.

As we mentioned above, both literature for alibis and literature as symptoms take on bygone days and past events. However, only the latter can engage in the contemporary situation. For example, both *Jipnyeon Susa 383il* and "The Tale of Bug" dealt with the same event: the case of Yi Yunsang's kidnapping. Though *Jipnyeon Susa 383il* was published in 1986, however, it did not mention anything that happened after the end of investigation (November 1981).¹⁵ In *Jipnyeon Susa 383il*, Nam Sangryong did not describe how people directly involved with the case lived after the end of investigation. The events of this book finished as if nothing tragic would happen any more. However, Yi Yunsang's mother Kim Hyegyeong lived under a lot of stress and she finally died of cancer on 12th of March, 1985. His father Yi Jeongsik had a social phobia. The criminal Ju Yeonghyeong's family also lived under big stress. Literature for alibis, like *Jipnyeon Susa 383il*, concentrates its thoughts only on past events and suppresses open thoughts connected with fundamental or contemporary problems. Yi Chungjun wanted to overcome this suppression by writing the literature as symptoms. "The Tale of Bug" is the most important example of it.

However, the new military regime and the order of discourse in the 1980s could not be altered fundamentally by literature itself. Though many revolutionary actions involving literary works were sporadically performed, the 5th republic strengthened its control through manipulation of public opinion, torture of democratic activists, anticommunism, and so on. However, as everyone knows, after initiating the June Democratic Struggle in 1987, the public could alter the new military regime into a more democratic regime. Between the methodology of liberal literature and the revolution of the June Democratic Struggle, although Yi Chungjun could not write many works as before, he put more effort into writing literature as symptoms. So when we read

15. About their lives, read the news article "Sageon Geuhu" (After the Abduction Case) of *Kyunghyang Shinmun* published on 5th of May, 1991.

his works published in this period, we should consider the historical context. It is the most important element in interpreting literature as symptoms.

The number of articles and other researches dealing with Yi Chungjun's works are extensive. But articles reading his works in historical and concrete contexts are rare. Almost all researches have interpreted his works in an aesthetic manner. Of course, such interpretations are also interesting reading that can help to discover the secrets of Yi Chungjun's literature. However, such readings don't disclose an extraordinary feature of his works. Literature as symptoms, that is the particular answer to the question that "what literature was in the 1980s."

After publishing the three short stories that have been analyzed in this article, he often wrote children's stories rather than novels and short stories. For example, in the same year, 1985, he published four fairy tales (Yi 1985a).¹⁶ The collection containing four fairy tales is called "Bame ingneun Dongwapung" (Fairy Tale-esques Read at Night). Yi Chungjun, who had pondered what literature was and had loved the genre of novel and short story more passionately than other writers, was also writing fairy tales, or more precisely fairy tale-esques, in the period between Gwangju Incident and June Democratic Struggle. We would like to argue that, in this period, it was not important for him to distinguish the genre of literature. In other words, it was a trivial problem whether he wrote a novel or a fairy tale or even a fairy tale-esque. What was most important for him was to write literature as symptoms since he thought that literature as symptoms could struggle against the order of discourse weaved by the new military regime. Thus in conclusion we would like to say that the three short stories—"The Tale of Bug," "Hidden Finger," "Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?"—are important examples of literature as symptoms.

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Abstract

Yi Chungjun is known as a prolific writer who wrote many works until his death. So, it may appear strange that he wrote only a few works in the 1980s. Three short stories, “Beolrae Iyagi” (The Tale of Bug), “Sumeun Songarak” (Hidden Finger), and “Nugeundeul chojangbuteo kkuneuro taeonarya?” (Can Anyone Be Born an Expert?) were written during this time. More precisely, these stories were written during the difficult period between the May 18 Gwangju Incident and the June Democratic Struggle. At this time, the new military regime established a strange order of discourse that did not permit people to either criticize or forgive the rulers’ hypocrisy. Under this order of discourse, the ruling powers could distort people’s criticism into a justification of their rule. Thus, they also had no need of people’s forgiveness. As a means to overcome this discursive situation, Yi Chungjun aimed to write literature as symptoms. He distinguished between literature for alibis and literature as symptoms. The former can only represent the past. However, a novelist writing the latter analyses social conditions in historical context first and reveals contemporary features as a consequence. Thus an analysis of contemporary events is allegorically performed through discussion of past events. For example, the case of Yi Yunsang’s kidnapping in 1980 is alluded to in “The Tale of Bug” (1985), and the time setting for “Hidden Finger” (1985) is the Korean War of the 1950s. However, these short stories are not mere representations of past events. Although they seem to be just interesting stories, they embrace intensively political features. This is because literature as symptoms intervenes in contemporary problems through the methodology of allegory.

Keywords: Yi Chungjun, the order of discourse, literature for alibis, literature as symptoms, allegory, politics