

31. SAVING FACE: IDENTIFYING KOREAN LITERATURE AND GETTING THE BACKGROUND

Select Annotated Bibliography on Twentieth-Century Korean and Korean American Literature

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

AUTHOR : by Louise Maher-Johnson

SUBJECT: Literature

College professors in East Asian Studies departments have recently been scrambling with some embarrassment to identify Korean works for inclusion in their curricula. These departments have long histories of courses on China and Japan, but Korea was not included in world literature, wasn't out there, in part due to the suppression of Korean literature and even language by the Japanese during their colonial reign in Korea (1910-45). High school English teachers should also feel some shame or loss of face that they are not presenting students with readings from the wide and excellent body of Korean literature now available.

Speaking as a New York City teacher, I can attest that we discovered diversity decades before the Republican Party in its summer 2000 convention. We long ago realized that students who are denied the opportunity of seeing themselves in literature are also being given the subtle message that their stories are not worth reading or that their history, or perspective on history, has no place in the curricula of their democratic country of which the constitution states "We the people" and "freedom and justice for all." European American students are likewise underserved when they are denied the chance to explore the cultures and literatures of peoples who are different and interesting, and who will soon become the largest segment of the population of this country.

Thirty years of teaching English in this city's public high school system have been thirty years of instruction for me on what is good and even great literature, especially among the multi-cultural offerings that have found a wide market during the last four decades. These years have also been a laboratory on how students respond positively to and need to see themselves reflected in literature, on what students like to read and why they mostly don't read, on how students appreciate not being only taught the same Cliff-noted classics they've viewed in movies, cartoons, and comics for many of their young years, and on how students want to learn and to be challenged to think critically about global themes.

Three years of teaching an elective to seniors on Asian and Asian American literature (in a school with a 40 percent Asian American student population) have reinforced my judgment on both the need and effectiveness of teaching new and challenging works that are non-Western. They have also increased my respect for the difficulty of understanding and teaching works from cultures that are not one's own. Making important connections and comprehending major themes and motifs in literature that is not European American in origin and content requires the English teacher to be better equipped than usual with historical time lines, with good history and art history reference books, and with an open, curious, and unbiased mind.

What follows represents many months of reading and research, including three weeks of travel and university lectures in Seoul and other parts of South Korea, but is by no means complete. However, it is select in that I eliminated a number of works deemed unsuitable for the high school classroom for various

reasons. Most or all of the books listed here should be purchased for the high school library. The works with settings in Korea are listed before those set solely in America. All works are listed in order of literary merit and accessibility, rather than alphabetically. The asterisk indicates the work is feasible for outside reading with minimum teacher input.

SELECT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY KOREAN AND KOREAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Biographies and Autobiographical Fiction

- Kang, K. Connie. *Home Was the Land of the Morning Calm*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

A journalist for several decades and an editorial writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, Korean born and Japanese and American educated, Kang tells of five generations of her family's history and generates an amazingly detailed and riveting tale of twentieth-century Korea. Her family history includes living under and protesting Japanese imperialism, fleeing North Korea after partition, suffering as refugees during the Korean War, studying in American schools on Okinawa, being one of the first Koreans in U.S. colleges, and opening a news bureau in Seoul for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A serious student of Korean culture and literature might benefit from reading this amazingly comprehensive history of twentieth-century Korea and of the Korean American experience of the last three decades as an introduction to Korean cultural identity. Kang's style is polished and rigorous, understated and well paced. Her text lends itself to exploring ideas such as Confucianism, and its high regard for education and filial piety; the coexistence of many religious beliefs among Koreans and the high degree of both tolerance and syncretism; the identification of the manifold contrasts between East and West in everyday life; the extent of and reasons for Japanese deculturation of Korea; how and why the West permitted Japan's aggression; why college students in Korea committed suicide to protest the division of Korea; and even why the author broke off her engagement with an American student. Immensely informative and provocative reading. For good readers in upper high school grades. (300 pages)

- Kim, Richard E. *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Childhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Simple yet poetically written, this is the author's attempt to recreate his childhood up to the age of thirteen when the Japanese defeat in World War II meant the end of the harsh colonization and deculturation of his homeland, Korea. He recounts the suffering and insult inflicted by the occupiers on his rural village, and his family's attempts to save its dignity and preserve its native culture even when forced to speak only Japanese, to take Japanese names, send their children to Japanese schools. Cataloged as a novel, this very historical book has heroes, such as the Korean underground that follows news of U.S. battles and prepares to retake the nation at the war's end, and the young protagonist who stands up to the Japanese for which he is severely beaten. Accessible for the junior high student, *Lost Names* is an important offering for the high school classroom as well. (The Fall 1999 issue of *Education About Asia* includes useful articles about *Lost Names*, one by a middle school teacher, a second by a high school teacher, and a third by a college professor, all testifying to the successful and satisfying use of this single small book in their classrooms. An excellent interview with Richard Kim, one that makes you admire his personality as well as his talent, appears in the same issue.)

Kim's style is clean, sparse, and suitable for the young protagonist who is not more than eleven during most of the plot. This child is recording the adults in his life in scenes that are strong and could be used as separate vignettes. The chapters consist of understated but powerful images, like the image of villagers spontaneously gathering at the cemetery after they have all been forced to give up their Korean names, or the scene where the painfully battered protagonist sneaks his bandaged self from the safety of his bed to take his lead role on stage in the Japanese play, thus halting the production and making a defiant statement to all. Nothing is melodrama or cliché in this brief tale, told with beauty and simplicity, about honor and dignity; a story that will empower the reader. (195 pages)

- Hwang, Sun-won. *The Descendants of Cain*. Translated by Suh Ji-moon and Julie Pickering. New York: Sharpe/UNESCO, 1997. Originally published 1954 in Seoul.

The 1997 introduction by this novel's translators notes that Hwang is "currently the most translated Korean author" (ix), and that his stories are "among the best-loved classics of modern Korean literature" (v). Set in North Korea after World War II and the division of Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel, this semiautobiographical novel is a story of forbidden and unspoken love between a young landlord, who would rather be a teacher, and the married but mistreated daughter of his cruel tenant/overseer. The book takes place in a rural farm village. Communist officials arrive to organize peoples' tribunals and to initiate land reform, i.e., the confiscation of land from the *yangban* (landowner or aristocratic class) for purposes of division among the peasant class. It is a study of a village being manipulated politically through fear and guilt, through greed and desire for power, and confusion. An outstanding and important book. Suitable for any high school grade. (181 pages)

- Stout, Mira. *One Thousand Chestnut Trees*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998

This novel is another example of autobiographical fiction, an excellent genre for motivating students who want a story that is real, honest, and as far away as possible from the usual fare on TV. Much history can be culled from this narrative focusing on a single protagonist and her extended family, but it lacks the breadth of Kang's saga. This novel is also removed from Kang's objective journalistic style and is dotted with metaphors and beautiful descriptive passages. It is also true to the author's emotions as well as the facts. Both poetic and historical, this book is useful along with other autobiographical-fiction in the interdisciplinary English-history curriculum. It is a skillful construction from the author's recollections and from the collective memory of family members.

Stout uses the daughter in her midtwenties as the main narrator. The daughter experiences deep alienation from her difficult Korean-born mother, and tours the west as a successful classical violinist during most of her boarding school and college years. These aspects of her life only foreshadow the deep alienation from both her family and the New York City scene that she feels during her postcollege sojourn there while looking for work in the artist community. She then spends two months in South Korea during the 1990s to try to gain a perspective on herself, family, and career. She doesn't find the symbolic roots she's searching for, i.e., her great grandfather's grave set off by rows of chestnut trees, but she does learn to appreciate her mother, and she develops a strong sense of Koreanness in general. She becomes interested in the differences between the East and the West, and will never again be embarrassed by her Korean half, or identify completely with her Irish American father and her European American friends.

The mother and the grandfather are also narrators. The mother recalls her aristocratic childhood on large estates of orchard farms and of mountains bordering oceans, tells of estates that are first taken by the Japanese and then divided by the thirty-eighth parallel thus separating family members for the last fifty years. The mother ends her recollections when her job at nineteen on the American base during the Korean War provides the chance at a scholarship to study music in the United States.

The grandfather narrates his youthful induction into politics on March 1, 1919, with his arrest by the Japanese during the Independence March, and the problems of raising his children, and also his work in the South Korean presidential cabinet between liberation in 1945 and the Korean War.

The characters of the grandfather and the daughter, especially, are so fully and carefully drawn that students will empathize with them. Identity, independence, and East/West contrasts are other themes of this well-written novel. For the better readers. (319 pages)

- Kendall, Laurel. *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

This book is well described by its anthropologist author's subtitle *Of Tales and the Telling of Tales*. The shaman whom Kendall studied and interviewed over a number of years tells stories of dire poverty and denial of schooling during her childhood, of danger and near starvation as an adolescent during the Korean War, and of oppression and lucklessness as an adult in both her marriage and her in-laws. But this shaman is a fascinating storyteller/folk psychologist, and is skillful in the practice of her calling. Somewhat repetitive and dry; this is a documentary. Best for outside reading or for specific chapters used in class. Very informative. (157 pages)

- Kim, Elizabeth. *Ten Thousand Sorrows. The Extraordinary Journey of a Korean War Orphan*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Students will be deeply moved by this painful autobiography of a California journalist who recalls watching her Korean village relatives' ritual hanging of her mother because she refused to allow her then four- or five-year-old illegitimate daughter (by an American soldier) to be sent away into servitude. But this scene of horror is offset by recollections of earlier daily shared hours filled with delightful games and affectionate cuddling and bonding between the ostracized mother and daughter. Next are remembered sketches of the months in a Seoul missionary orphanage, wasting away and neglected. The story progresses as she describes the years of living with adoptive fundamentalist Christian parents in a Southwest U.S. town, parents whom students would at the very least label control freaks. The housewife mother controls Elizabeth's every waking moment with housework, prayer, and schoolwork. The minister father controls her with religious studies and piano lessons, so she will perform and be the emblem of his good works at Sunday worship. The high school graduate and would-be writer Elizabeth escapes these parents by entering an even more abusive situation, a bad marriage that yields a young daughter, who Elizabeth will do anything to protect.

Well written and never maudlin, but there is much psychological material herein to discuss, ruminate upon, and write about. (228 pages)

- Lee, Helie. *Still Life with Rice*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.

Written by the California-bred granddaughter as an actual biography of her Korean grandmother, this work is broad in scope but limited in literary merit. It is a full century of Korean history drawn from the life of one woman, a woman who seemed to view life more as her own private struggle for independence and empowerment than for something larger or more idealistic than the personal. She does take a stand on religious freedom, and all of her endeavors are risky; but instead of supporting the underground, she was running an opium trade, opening an exclusive restaurant in China, or buying an estate cheap during World War II, always making unilateral decisions and supporting both her husband and family.

The segment wherein the grandmother and some of her children are bombed daily by U.S. planes while they are escaping the communist North with thousands of other refugees at the onset of the Korean War is one of the most memorable and heartbreaking scenes of the narrative. (320 pages)

- Kim, Elaine H., and Eui-Young Yu, comps. *East To America. Korean American Life Stories*. New York: New Press, 1996.

Each of the thirty-eight oral histories by Los Angeles Korean Americans of all ages, professions, and immigration experiences averages ten pages in length and is edited to be concise and informative. Each reflects in some way the speaker's views on racism and the aftermath of the 1992 Rodney King verdict. Other running themes of the immigrant experience involve class, gender, language, and generation.

Although I thought twenty-three of the thirty-eight accessible for high school students, I recommend choosing the ten best essays and having each of five groups of students read two oral histories, exploring and contrasting them in terms of the themes just noted, and then reporting to the class. Among my choices would be “Pilgrimage,” “A Higher Ground,” “Perpetually Marginal,” “Black and Korean,” “Getting Real,” “Urban Impressionist” (pp. 2-11, excerpted), and the essays by each of the compilers. They will make for fascinating reading and discussions.

Contrasting a single oral history and a single short story for genre differences related to creative freedom and to the use of literary devices, as symbolism, would be a worthy class activity. The single best Korean American short story I know, a masterpiece by Chang Rae Lee, was first published in *Granta*, 49, Fall 1994 (available at 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107) and then reworked into a chapter of *Native Speaker*, Lee’s first novel. Another contrast lies in the Korean immigrant experience Lee describes in the 1970s with that of the 1990s in *East to America*.

Novels

- Ahn, Junghyo. *Silver Stallion*. New York: Soho Press, 1990.

This is another coming of age narrative, like *Lost Names* (Richard Kim), *Ten Thousand Sorrows* (Elizabeth Kim), *One Thousand Chestnut Trees* (Mira Stout), and *Our Twisted Hero* (Munyo Yi). Set during the Korean War, it depicts a boy, Mansik, whose widowed mother is raped by GIs and consequently dishonored and ostracized by everyone in the village, except the two newly arrived “UN ladies,” Korean prostitutes who have been following the newly arrived western troops. Mansik must try to understand his mother’s shame and his own rejection by his four close playmates. In this excellent translation into English by the author, the beautifully descriptive passages on the landscape and the simple way of village life are deeply effective, but best is the parallel structure of the subplots and themes. Shame is experienced in different ways and for contrasting reasons by the mother, the son, the village chief, the prostitutes, and the son’s gang members (in fact, everyone but the *bengkos* or long-nosed foreigners, who are peripheral in the narrative). Also, like Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, war is also a multilayered theme; the boys have both their traditional war games (including the Silver Stallion myth) and the new varieties involving Western weapons, as well as their warlike strategies and power plays that mirror those of the North Korean and Chinese troops and their counteroffensive against the UN forces. The village, led by Old Huang, has its losing battle to stay removed from real war as it wages war on Mansik’s mother and the prostitutes. A subtle and wonderful book. Excerpts from the movie *Spring in My Hometown* would provide excellent visuals of South Korean village life with the Korean War as a backdrop.

One caveat is that the young boys in this narrative spy on the prostitutes while they are entertaining the GIs, and the author is brief but honest, though not graphic, about what the kids see in their peeping. Otherwise, suitable for all high school grades. (269 pages).* (I have viewed this author’s other book, *White Badge*, in its movie version, and I found it very powerful but mature in its flashback scenes of Korean soldiers fighting in Vietnam for the United States and in its story of the psychological impact several years later on one of the soldiers.)

- Yi, Munyo. *Our Twisted Hero*. Translated by Kevin O’Rourke. Seoul: Minumsa, 1987.

This tale of the careful, subtle, but very complete manipulation of sixty students, an entire fifth grade class, and its teacher by the class monitor is a well-drawn psychological portrait, briefly told in 119 pages, that “succeeds with masterful single-mindedness in depicting the acquisition and collapse of power” (novelist Yi Pyoungju, book jacket). It would be interesting to have students compare this

novel with *Animal Farm*. *Our Twisted Hero* also speaks of political systems involving tyranny and loss of democratic ideals. Other issues involve the narrator's brave but failed attempt to stop the class bully, and his eventual submission to the monitor.

Another comparison lies in the use of political allegory, whether it is structured as psychological realism or as fable. There is one sentence in *Our Twisted Hero* that connects this novel with an actual event, i.e., that the April 19th Revolution in South Korea (1960) occurred, the reader is told, just after the fictional class revolts against the monitor. The story does parallel this historical eruption of thousands of high school and college students protesting rigged elections (which is how the monitor was elected and reelected) and calling for democracy. One week later, President Syngman Rhee was deposed; so was the monitor.

There is also an Asian cultural issue for American students to dissect. Namely, *Our Twisted Hero* takes place in a classroom where respect for the teacher, as well as for the value of education under the neo-Confucian system in Korea, discourage criticism or protest. Indeed, it is these values that empower the monitor under one teacher but bring about his downfall under a second more observant teacher who finds that cheating on exams has created the enormously high grades that permitted his popularity and control. For all levels.

- Kim, Richard E. *The Martyred*. Seoul: Si-sa-yong-o-sa, 1968.

The language and style of this Korean War novel are straightforward and accessible to the high school student. Solving the mystery of how twelve imprisoned priests faced torture and death at the hands of the North Korean communists, and why the surviving priest chose to contradict himself about these circumstances, gives this novel suspense. Friendships abound between clerics and atheists, and across generations and cultures, as do metaphors from the Old and New Testament, including Job and Christ's Agony in the Garden.

The student philosopher will be well rewarded by this book about war and propaganda, and war and courage, but mostly about positing, if not answering, questions about the means justifying the end; questions about disbelieving, doubting, or affirming religion in a time of dire need and chaos; and questions about honor and honesty. Although currently out of print, my hope is that its reissuance will soon follow the recent republication of *Lost Names*, Kim's other outstanding book. (316 pages)

- Lee, Chang Rae. *A Gesture Life*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.

The author is a writer's writer, one of the best stylists today. The storyline of this novel, accessible only to the most mature readers because of its syntax and vocabulary, is also about war, as are many plots by Koreans who can scarcely be unaffected by the consistent oppression and turmoil of Korea's last century. But this Korean-born author, who arrived in New York before kindergarten age, adds to his plot the complexity and irony of a Korean protagonist who knows nothing of his culture, having been raised in Japan by a Japanese family and having lived in Westchester (New York) as a Japanese American businessman. The war connection begins when, as a respected retiree, the protagonist begins to remember his distant career as a medic and officer in the Japanese army of World War II where he fell in love with a Korean sex slave, or, euphemistically, comfort woman. Recalling the repressed happenings of his youth helps the protagonist realign his priorities and reestablish contact with his adopted Korean daughter. The ending is one of the most beautiful of any book I've ever read, a book which several of my seniors agreed was a reading experience that had changed their lives. (356 pages)

- Lee, Chang Rae. *Native Speaker*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1995.

Chang Rae Lee's first novel is, likewise, for the best of high school readers who will benefit by

exposure to this exquisite prose as well as to insights that are stunningly original. It is a spy thriller, a love story, a generation gap turned chasm, but most importantly, it is a morality tale. I would have students consider what's wrong with having a job as a political spy, and what's wrong with the workings of the campaign for New York City's first Korean American mayoral candidate, or with the timing of the wife's leaving, or with the father's attitude about work and about child rearing.

The father and son's immigrant story of the 1970s, which unfolds as the elder is suffering from a stroke twenty years later, was originally published as a separate piece in *Granta* magazine. It can be used in an American lit classroom to uncover the cultural differences as well as the communication and identity problems occurring between the first- and second-generation immigrants.

- Kim, Ronyoung. *Clay Walls*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987.

Well written, although the style is slightly mundane without the poetry of descriptive passages and without metaphor, in general (except for the title). This novel is very informative about the early Korean immigrant social and cultural experience. The aristocratic wife, Haesu, narrates the first ten years of their lives together; the educated farmer, Chun, carries the plot line on for the next several years; and then their teenage daughter moves the story into her experiences during the World War II years. A family visit to Korea of 1930 complicates the narrative by juxtaposing the traditional village culture, Japanese injustices, and the brave work of the South Korean underground with the family's Americanness. For all three sections and narrators, three themes are interwoven: Korean culture, Korean nationalism, and American racism. All high school grades. (301 pages)

- Keller, Nora Okja. *Comfort Woman*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

The teenage narrator of this novel tries to enjoy her social life in a Hawaiian public school as she tries to seek comfort in the memory of her Caucasian father who died when she was five. She also attempts to comfort her Korean-born mother whose work as shaman and healer does not ward off the nightmares of her comfort-woman experiences for two decades in Korea under the Japanese, and then the communists.

The mother herself is the alternating but more difficult narrator to follow, with her trance-like states and her difficult history of mistreatment at the hands of the Japanese, followed by hardships in North Korea after the Japanese defeat because she had been rescued and boarded by missionaries in a Christian safe house targeted by the atheist, nationalist communists. A beautiful book that appeals more to girls because of the double female point of view, it is for the careful reader. The mother's work as a shaman/healer will need explication. Refer to the Kendall book and to the three videos on shamanism included in this list . (213 pages)

- Choi, Susan. *The Foreign Student*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.

Susan Choi lives in New York City, but this novel is about the friendship in 1955 between a New Orleans socialite (Katherine) and the Korean scholarship student (Chuck) who has just arrived from South Korea at a small denominational college in Tennessee. In addition to the initial setting, the book is also set in Chicago and three locations in Korea (Seoul, Incheon, and Cheju-do). The protagonist's story, which includes many flashbacks to his teen years when the Americans first arrived after World War II , and to his struggles during the ensuing Korean War, is a more poignant and historical narrative than Katherine's compelling tale of her early sexual awakening and even earlier battling with her mother. The novel is adult in theme and recommended for mature readers during the last two years of high school. Its triumph is how the author brings history to life, and it is true to the cultural and class differences of the characters. A time line and summary of twentieth-century Korean history is impera-

tive for students to understand the war backdrop, including the close relationship the protagonist, Chuck, has with the young activist student, possibly communist, in Seoul. An understanding and discussion of the racial situation in the American South of the 1950s is also needed. Difficult but rewarding reading; however, it doesn't measure up to the preceding titles in terms of literary merit and accessibility. (325 pages)

- Kim, Patti. *A Cab Called Reliable*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998

Ahn Joo, whose stepmother deserted her and her father to return to Korea, lives through troubled years dealing with abandonment, poverty, and rejection by her peers during early elementary school years in Baltimore on up to the end of college. It takes her almost that long to learn to understand and appreciate her father due to their cultural differences. His stories of back home and her love of writing become a strong but invisible bond when she unites the two. It was difficult at times getting there, but the ending is amazing and fully worth reading. This is the only book selection in this bibliography that is not directly connected to war and the psychic battle scars of the Korean twentieth-century experience, but the intense poverty and dislocation in the aftermath of the Korean War almost certainly led to the migration of this family. (156 pages)

Short Stories

- Hwang, Sun-Won. *Shadows of a Sound*. Edited by J. Martin Holman. Translated by many. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1990.

Professors I met at Korea University and many American translators and editors concur that Hwang is the master short story writer of twentieth-century Korea. He is my favorite of the many writers I've read. (I'm amazed given the oppression of this century how so much writing has gotten published in Korea. The reader must bear in mind, though, the necessary indirectness and use of symbolism in these stories, given the restrictions of freedom of speech prior to the 1990s.)

Hwang is also the most accessible writer for students because he is less grim and more concise than most. The student reader must be helped with the history and the culture of Korea in order not to miss the symbolism, very creative and beautiful, of this writer.

The stories by Hwang that I most recommend include:

- "Masks" (1971)

This is a two-page winner, a political allegory of one soldier in a farming area (South Korea?) being killed in wartime by and eventually becoming part of—through an interconnected Buddhist life-cycle idea—a second soldier. At war's end the latter soldier, now armless, is in an industrial area (North Korea?) trying to get his old job back running a lathe. He thinks his lost arm is still there, and his only problem is the leg wound he doesn't have but actually inflicted on the first soldier. The two soldiers are one, that is, brothers. Stunning understatement and symbolism. Themes include the inhumanity of war and the Buddhist interconnectedness of all things.

- "Cranes" (1953)

This story must also be read with hidden meaning or subtext in mind, and it too is about brother hurting brother, about Korea needing to return to one family. Time and place are imperative; students must puzzle out that the location is a village north of the thirty-eighth parallel, and the time is just after the South Korean forces have successfully captured some towns in the North. It is about two former

childhood playmates who are now enemies. The first had escaped the village when the communists arrived and is now back to take prisoners to the South. His former friend, now his prisoner, had stayed behind years ago at division (1945) to care for his ailing father and had been drafted into the Communist Farmers' Alliance.

As they pass through the DMZ (one of their former boyhood haunts) on their way south, the first unshackles his former playmate when they see cranes being hunted; and they both begin a rerun of their old "catch a crane to save it from being shot" game. Cranes are symbolic of happiness and of longevity (Jon Carter Covell's book is handy for looking up symbols) and, therefore, anti-war.

- "Clowns" (1951)

This story is autobiographical about a teacher, his wife, and their four children, who are refugees during the Korean War after the North has invaded the South. On the eve of being ejected for no good reason from their second temporary shelter, the family summons their courage by spontaneously improvising a humorous circus act or skit. Survival humor; laughing and crying at the same time. Excellent writing.

- "Time for You and Me Alone" (1958)

Three Korean soldiers are separated from their outfit, lost in an unpopulated mountain region (Korea is 70 percent mountainous), and facing death. The three behave very differently. Good character studies. Very human and strong.

- O'Rourke, Kevin, trans. *Ten Korean Short Stories*. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1981.

O'Rourke's introduction begins with Frank O'Connor's theory about how the short story develops in countries where "the national attitude is basically pessimistic" because this genre "sees man as trapped by history, economic and political forces, man trying to escape his destiny but pre-doomed to failure" (*The Lonely Voice*, place of publication, publisher, date, pp. 1-2). O'Rourke's point is that Ireland and Korea have similar histories and that the short story is their main literary genre.

It is certainly true the short story is Korea's twentieth-century genre and that it is difficult to find ones that are not bleak and grim. Teachers need to be careful not to choose too dark a narrative and not to allow students to develop and reinforce negative stereotypes about a violent or desperate "other."

"The Rock" by Kim Tong-ni is, however, one grim tale that becomes beautiful if carefully taught. It is about the results of the Japanese land grab of farms on which a sharecropper-type system existed, and the Japanese confiscation of crops to go to their war effort in China in the 1930s and during World War II. Tremendous dislocation, poverty, and starvation resulted. But none of this is said in the story. Instead the reader only knows the elderly mother, who is a leper and who has been deserted by her grown son. Her husband tries to poison her because he can't care for her now that they are homeless and he can't find work.

One colleague taught this piece as a Confucian society's disregard for and cruel treatment of women. He ignored Korea's history and the story's subtexts: the beggar children singing sarcastic songs about teachers (Japanese) who don't know the Analects or Mencius (Confucianism philosophy texts). Two other references to the Japanese place this story during colonialism: "They say the Japs are going to kill off everyone suffering from paralysis" (i.e., the cripples and lepers who are homeless together in the scene), and "Did you know that Sur-i is getting out for good?" "Didn't he get six months?" (This is the only indication about where the son has been, i.e., imprisoned along with thousands of other colonized Koreans and hasn't been able to tell his parents and/or is ashamed to.)

Also, the significance of the title must be fleshed out. The rock where the mother prays and dies is

the shamanist praying stone where women go to pray for the birth of sons. The mother's only concern while dying has been to see her son again. She doesn't.

This grim story about a potential mercy killing of a woman dying of leprosy and starvation whose son has been imprisoned with thousands of patriots is a good way to teach students not to assume negative stereotypes, to pay attention to history, and to read between the lines.

These five annotated stories (the four by Hwang plus "The Rock") could be used by five class groups to explore themes of suffering, of inner strength, and of hard decisions that are exacted by war or oppression. Also, symbolism. All high school levels.

- Pihl, Marshall R., Bruce Fulton, and Ju-Chan Fulton, eds. and trans. *Land of Exile: Contemporary Korean Fiction*. New York: ME Sharpe Inc., 1993.

This book came recommended to me, but the grimness factor rules out most of these stories and their lengths also make them inaccessible to high school students.

Poetry

- O'Rourke, Kevin, ed. and trans. *Looking for the Cow. Modern Korean Poems*. Dublin: Dedalus Press. 1999.

There are several important anthologies of Korean poetry out there, but I like the accessibility of Kevin O'Rourke's translations. His work captures a mix of playful irony, subtle sensuality, and, of course, protest against injustice, but it does not get overly sorrowful. The themes to look for in Korean poetry almost always include nature as harmony and as "healing principle" (O'Rourke, p. 17), and the hidden subtext of nationality. Korea has had a very rough century.

O'Rourke's introduction is most helpful in that he gives a concise overview of twentieth-century poetry in terms of the traditions from which it sprang and the influences of the West. The two poems "Untitled" and "Poetics" by So Chong-Ju demand analysis in juxtaposition; they speak of nature and its sensuality. Ku Sang's "Shame" and "Wings" capture the Korean duality of nature and freedom. Other very famous poets are Han Yongun (Buddhist), Yi Yuksa (Confucian), Yun Tongju or Yoon Dong-Joo (Christian); some professors contrast these three. Also, Kim Kirim or Kim Ki-Rim, and Yi Sanghwa or Lee Sang-wha, are renowned.

- Lee, Peter H., ed. and trans. *The Silence of Love*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980.

Lee tells of the influence of Tagore's (India's Nobel Laureate) "voice of freedom" on Korean poets after the March 1919 Independence Movement (p. xiii). This cross-cultural connection might be interesting to teachers who also present Tagore's writing. Another recommendation for a poetry lesson: Lee's translation of So Chong-Ju's "Self Portrait" and "The Huge Wave" to demonstrate both characterization and political subtext.

- Hyun, Peter, trans. *Voices of the Dawn. A Selection of Korean Poetry from the Sixth Century to the Present Day*. London: John Murray, 1960.

Videos/Visuals

- *An Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman*. Diana S. Lee, filmmaker, and Laurel Kendall, anthropologist. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991. (36 min.).

- *Kut: Korean Shaman Rite*. Korean Broadcasting System. (24 min.). Available at the Korean Culture Service, New York.
- *Korean Shaman Rituals*. Kim Young-Jae, director. Korea Film Production Center. (20 min.). Available at the Korean Culture Service, New York.

All three videos, and others by Laurel Kendall available at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, depict the combination of colorful traditional clothing, music, especially with drums and gongs, dance, and decorated altars filled with food offerings, all of which provide the language or medium of communication with spirits. *Kuts* are performed for good fortune (usually spring and autumn), exorcism of evil, and prayers for “bliss” of the dead. Shamanism often tolerates and assimilates with other religious traditions, even those of alien cultures. The rituals of shamanism date back to the age of primitive tribal societies in what is now Korea. (For visuals with Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Kim Tong-ni’s “The Rock”).

- Slides of Korean art and architecture are available at the San Francisco Art Museum and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul.
- The Korean Culture Service has an extensive collection of full length movies in their free lending library (www.koreanculture.org or 212-759-9950). Also, the Korean Cultural Service (202-797-6343) in Washington, D.C., will make video copies on request, if you send a blank tape. I found four very accessible videos for excerpting or full viewing:
 - *Seopyunje of Sopyonje*—The final scene depicting the reunion of brother and sister after a ten-year search is stunning for their *p’ansori* together. The sister sings and the brother accompanies on the hourglass drum. If this scene is carefully set up, students will be fully impressed by the deep sadness, the exquisite uniqueness, the enormous talent and preparation, and the emotional self-control and discipline that are part of Korean blues music, the national folk music of the soul. It is poetry, music, drama, and amazing. Show this in conjunction with poetry or short stories to emphasize the national sorrow stemming from political causes. I use it with poem entitled “P’ansori” by Sue Kwock Kim that I found in *The Nation*, April 17, 2000.
 - *White Badge*—For mature audiences because it is a stark psychological drama about a Korean journalist writing a book on, and thereby reliving, his experiences during the Vietnam War. It addresses the grave moral dilemma of soldiers in Vietnam who committed atrocities against innocent civilians. Scenes could be shown after students read the author’s *Silver Stallion* to underscore the honesty and objectivity and courage with which he writes. Or it could be part of a Vietnamese literature unit.
 - *Ose Hermitage* and *Spring in My Hometown* both are very good coming-of-age stories, but I excerpt them for their beautiful photography. The former shows Buddhist temples and hermitages in both colorful autumn and snow-covered winter mountains; the latter, views of a rural village in the South during the Korean War. The Western military presence is always in the background (and there are many plot similarities but also differences to contrast with *Silver Stallion*).

Web Sites

- www.naatanet.org
- www.aaartsalliance.org
- www.pbs.org

- www.asiancinevision.org
- www.koreanculture.org

These Web sites are excellent resources for locating videos about the Korean and the Asian or Asian American experience. May is Asian Culture month on the PBS TV network, and one film aired in May 2000 was *Silence Broken*, a video about the plight of the estimated 200,000 Korean comfort women of the Japanese. Anyone who missed the airing could go to the naatanet site and get information about renting this video or to the site of the Korean Culture Service for information on borrowing privileges.

- www.curriculum.edu.au/accessasia

This Australian site has some lessons on Asian culture to download and two inexpensive books--*Reflections* and *Sharing Fruit*--that include some Korean lit lessons.

Reference Books

- Kim, Elaine H., and Eui-Young Yu, comps. *East to America*. New York: New Press, 1996.
Appendix C: Brief Overview of Korean History.
- Covell, Jon Carter. *Korea's Cultural Roots*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1981.
For art history, cultural symbols, history of religions. Lots of illustrations.
- Covell, Jon Carter, and Alan Carter Covell. *Korean Impact on Japanese Culture. Japan's Hidden History*. Seoul: Hollym, 1984.
This married team of researchers out of Columbia University have compiled an excellent resource tracing connections between Korean and Japanese art, in particular. Pilfering and large-scale kidnapping of artists by the Japanese was part of this close connection. An interesting detective-like research project for students.
- Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun. A Modern History*. New York: Norton, 1997.
This book was the top choice among American-authored histories of Korea by most Korean professors I spoke to. Some did take exception to the section on the Korean War though. It's more readable than most history books.
- Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore. A History of Asian Americans*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.
Chapters on Korean Americans during different phases of immigration. Very necessary for information on laws affecting immigrants. Many oral histories, reprinted chapters from autobiographies, letters, songs, and the like, make this very readable. A good research tool for students. There is a new updated 1999 edition out.
- Lee, Peter H., ed. *Anthology of Korean Literature from Early Times to the Nineteenth Century*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981.
I like to work with twentieth-century literature and allow references in modern literature to bring the students back to cultural history and literature of previous centuries. One section in Lee that is useful is women writers, including notes and explanations of *p'ansori*, as well as a reprint of large segments of some of these songs.
- Smith, Judith G., coord. ed. *Arts of Korea*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998.
This is considered the best of the oversized art history texts because it contains four excellent essays.