

Tanner Rogers
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Coming of Age in the New Urban Space: *The Dwarf* as Bildungsroman

This paper analyzes the groundbreaking and mixed-genre South Korean novel, *The Dwarf* (*Nanjaengi ka ssoaollin chagŭn kong*) by Cho Sehŭi, with a particular focus on youth and development during the era of Park Chung Hee's developmental dictatorship (1961-1979). In this novel, the familiar structure of the *Bildungsroman* (typically referred to as the coming-of-age novel) is reshaped to perform a social critique of the South Korean context of this time. This novel is exemplary of what South Korean scholar Kim Hansik calls the "urban coming-of-age novel" (*tosi sŏngjang sosŏl*), depicting physical space, the new urban center and its peripheries, industrialized class structure, and various types of education in an emerging urban milieu. Importantly, it is told via Bakhtinian polyphonic narratives of the (mostly) young characters and an omniscient narrator. I discuss the subjectivity of these voices, which provide us with multiple vantage points on South Korea's social and economic structures and hierarchies. I contrast this polyvocality to South Koreans' "subjectification" under the Park regime, which forced upon citizens an arbitrary divide between the traditional and the modern and depended on an ideology of militarized and aesthetic moral education. *The Dwarf* is a coming-of-age novel that offers us a detailed and socially critical snapshot of the intricate ways in which the youth of the Park Chung Hee era experienced both growth and suppression.