

# Policing Literary Theory

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# Dear Leader! Big Brother!: On Transparency and Emotional Policing

*Sowon S. Park*

## Abstract

Damned to silence or condemned to compliance: these are the two options open to writers in North Korea – the ultimate police State, whose panoptic perfection of power is a living example of what Bentham and Foucault theorized. So as an example of how literature reacts to policing, or how it participates in it, North Korea may seem like a dead-end, providing little that could generate discussion about the varied and complex interplay between disciplinary mechanism and artistic will-to-expression. For one might assume, what is there to say about the *1984*-like party-sanctioned Newspeak novels that faithfully and unswervingly patrol the borders of socialist-realist-nationalist-didacticism? Or about theories that line up to embody the ‘four legs good, two legs bad’ literary school of the loyal Orwellian sheep? But while the North Korean political classes continue to posture in unsplendid isolation from the rest of the world, there has been a growing exploration of ordinary lives under total policing that have produced more nuanced readings. This chapter examines how totalitarian policing shapes emotional identity in a North Korean defector’s memoir (by Shin DongHyuk) with reference to emotional authenticity, George Orwell and western ideals of public transparency.

## Keywords

transparency – emotional policing – 1984 – brainwashing – Shin DongHyuk – North Korea – panopticism – visual surveillance

## I

Damned to silence or condemned to compliance: these are the two options open to writers in North Korea – the ultimate police State, whose panoptic perfection of power is a living example of what Bentham and Foucault theorized. So as a case of how literature reacts to policing, or how it participates in it,

North Korea may seem like a dead-end, providing little that could generate discussion about the varied and complex interplay between disciplinary mechanism and artistic will-to-expression. For one might assume, what is there to say about the party-sanctioned Newspeak novels that faithfully and unswervingly patrol the borders of socialist-realist-nationalist-didacticism? Or about theories that line up to embody the ‘four legs good, two legs bad’ literary school of the loyal Orwellian sheep?

But while the political classes continue to posture in unsplendid isolation from the rest of the world, the ways in which totalitarian policing impacts on the lives of ordinary people have been the object of inquiry for many a writer outside of North Korea. Barbara Demick’s remarkable semi-fiction, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, the winner of the Samuel Johnson prize in 2010, offered for our scrutiny the surprisingly normal ways in which people make sense of their lives under the totalitarian regime. A growing body of criticism has produced insightful readings that redeem North Korean fiction from straight condemnation.<sup>1</sup> And in recent years memoirs by defectors have provided raw accounts of the emotional lives of people, offering an uncommon view of how state propaganda impacts on private lives.

With such works in the background, this paper will examine a memoir of a North Korean total-control zone internment camp: *Breaking Free from the World* (세상밖으로 나오다, *Escape from Camp 14*) by Shin Donghyuk.<sup>2</sup> Shin’s life-writing provides an exceptional opportunity to examine questions about private emotions with reference to policing. As not all readers will be familiar with North Korean history, the next section will provide some context.

## II

In December 2011, North Korea announced the death of Kim Jong-Il, its leader, or Dear Leader, since 1994.<sup>3</sup> Kim’s funeral, which was broadcast across the

1 For publications in English, see A. David-West, “Archetypal Themes in North Korean Literature.” *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche*, 5.1 (Winter 2011): 65–80; Tatiana Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010); Han S. Park, ed., *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996); Young-min Kwon, “Literature and Art in North Korea: Theory and Policy.” *Korea Journal* 31.2 (1991): 56–70; Yon-ho Suh, “The Revolutionary Operas and Plays in North Korea.” *Korea Journal* 31.3 (1991): 85–94.

2 Shin’s memoir, published in Korean, is titled *세상밖으로 나오다* (*Breaking Free from the World*); Blaine Harden’s English adaptation of the book is *Escape from Camp 14*.

3 Kim Jong-Il (16 Feb 1941–17 Dec 2011) was the Supreme Leader of North Korea from 1994. The cause of his death was reported as heart attack.

world, gave a rare sighting of this hermetic garrison state. The spectacle was arresting. Lining the snow-covered avenues of Pyongyang were an estimated 200,000 people in an extraordinary display of grief – grown men and women, weeping, wailing, breast-beating for hours on end, *en masse*, in sub-zero temperatures.

North Korea was born out of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, immediately following the dropping of the second atomic bomb in Nagasaki. Anticipating the unconditional surrender of the Japanese empire of which Korea had been part for the previous 36 years, Truman proposed to Stalin at the Potsdam conference that each of them occupy one half of the Korean peninsula, creating the division drawn along the 38th parallel.<sup>4</sup> After the divide, the North constructed itself as an ideological frontier against the Western Bloc, while the South embraced state-led capitalism. When the Cold War ended and, one by one, the rest of the world turned ‘free,’ North Korea found itself cleaving to its stand as the last bastion of communism. It has carried on preparing for its hour of heroism against the ‘American imperialists’ in the spirit of the Japanese imperial soldiers who continued fighting World War II in some islands of the Pacific until as late as 1974.

To many viewers of the funeral outside of North Korea, the spectacle was perplexing. Dear Leader, who succeeded his father, Great Leader Kim Il-Sung, led a disastrous ‘military-first’ (선군, *songun*) policy, which led to an extended famine in the 1990s. It has been estimated that as many as three million people starved to death during this period.<sup>5</sup> It has also been assessed that, at the time of Kim Il-Sung’s death, as many as 200,000 political prisoners were held captive without charge or trial in six political concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> The number of lives he took defies computation. As Christopher Hitchens wrote, Kim Jong-Il’s abuse of power “surpass[es] Roman, Babylonian, even Pharaonic excesses” (Hitchens 2001, 27). His legacy of human rights abuses has recently been identified in the 2014 UN report as on a par with Nazi Germany.<sup>7</sup>

4 The second bomb was dropped on the 9th of August 1945. For a discussion of the division along the 38th parallel, see Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (1986), 15.

5 BBC News (Feb 17 1999: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news>). The BBC’s figure of 3 million is from data held by the Public Security Ministry, the Supreme People’s Assembly, North Korea. While Amnesty International has a lower estimate, 3 million is consistent with the figure stated in the memoir of Hwang Jang-Yop, the architect of the North Korean *Juche* ideology and the highest ranking North Korean to defect to South Korea. See 황장엽 회고록 (*The Memoir of Hwang Jang-Yop*) 2006.

6 See David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea’s Prison Camps* (US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003).

7 *The UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Report*. (March 2014: <http://www.ohchr.org>).



FIGURE 4.1 *Citizens of Pyongyang mourning on the 28th December 2011 at the funeral procession for Kim Jong-Il.*



FIGURE 4.2 *Military personnel at Kim Jong-Il's funeral.*

The stark facts did not prevent an outpouring of grief from the people of Pyongyang.

Naturally there were questions raised about the authenticity of the emotions apparently triggered by the death of one of the most merciless dictators in history. The standard interpretation in western media was that the images of sorrow broadcast to the world were fake – a theatrical, ostentatious, stage-managed performance dictated from above and maintained by surveillance. ‘The Great North Korean Crying Game,’ was the assessment made by *Time* magazine; a surrender of ‘emotions to the implicit commands of the state,’ wrote *The Atlantic*; a ‘display of state-controlled grief’ in an ‘orgy of synchronized sorrow,’ averred the *Daily Mail*.<sup>8</sup> The Western perception was that an unparalleled exercise in emotional policing has taken place in North Korea.

### III

Of course emotional policing is not confined to totalitarian police states. Broadly speaking, no civilization is free of a certain amount of emotional policing, if by that one means the disciplining of one’s inner drives. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that the edifice of every civilization is founded upon policing, as Freud’s concept of the superego recognized.<sup>9</sup> In everyday life, we all cautiously circumscribe and guard what we recognize as unacceptable or inappropriate feelings.

And if the spectacle at first sight gave us pause, there were reassuring explanations with which to make sense of it. After all, the profusion of tears could be attributed to a wide range of emotions none of which necessarily involves feelings towards Kim. For example, they could have been evoked by memory about something altogether different, or a sense of panic about the future, or buried inchoate grief which had not previously found a focus. Herd mentality and mass hysteria are both plausible explanations. In addition, demonstrative mourning is part of the Confucian funeral rites, the exaggerated form of which the citizens of Pyongyang could be seen to be observing.

Yet what was distinctly eerie about the images from the funeral was the sense that individual emotions had been overwritten by a single code from

<sup>8</sup> See *Time*, 27 December 2011; Max Fisher, ‘The Gulag of the Mind,’ *The Atlantic*, Dec 22 2011; *The Daily Mail*, 29 Dec 2011. The *Economist* also wrote, ‘every player seems to outperform each other in the mourning stakes.’ ‘Guilt and Fear,’ *The Economist*, Dec 31 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), trans David McLintock (2002), *passim*.



which no one could opt out. The homogeneity, the ferocity, and the competitiveness of the behavior seemed to indicate that to *not* demonstrably mourn would amount to a violation, a crime, or, in the Orwellian Newspeak, a “thoughtcrime,” subject to the disciplinary powers of the State. It is in this sense that the affective state of the citizens of Pyongyang could be said to be policed, that is to say, enforced by the law as a function of the state.

As such, the scenes offered a compelling testimony to an authority that appears not only to do the thinking for the people but to engineer the feeling for them as well. Yet, this was not a blockbuster film-set from a dystopian drama or the pages of *1984*. To accept the mourning in Pyongyang at face value would be to acknowledge that the State controls not only the outward behavior of the people also but their minds. But can sorrow actually be drilled into existence, pain felt upon command, loss pretended into being? Interpretations of the scenes as staged, coerced, formulaic or hysterical seem like partial explanations that do not account for the full horror of the spectacle. For one could not say with confidence that it is possible to distinguish the cases where the display of emotion is fake from those where it is not.

A word one often hears in this context is ‘brainwashed.’ Appropriately enough, the idea of ‘brainwashing’ was a product of the Korean War, like the country whose people’s behavior the term hovers around.<sup>10</sup> Coined by CIA agent, Edward Hunter to describe Communist coercion tactics, it has subsequently become a sprawling term as often employed to describe behavior that we find inexplicable as much as to identify scientific processes of mind manipulation. As Kathleen Taylor argues in her book, *Brainwashing: The Science of Thought Control*, it is a word “often used as a concept of last resort... (there is) no evidence for a “magic” process called ‘brainwashing’... the studies suggest that brainwashing, in its aspect as process, is best regarded as a collective noun for various, increasingly well-understood techniques of non-consensual mind-change” (Taylor 2004, 23).

Ironically one of the important social functions performed by the word “brainwashing” is itself a kind of policing. It is a term of exclusion. The label delimits and distances those who are thus labelled – i.e., the ‘brainwashed’ – from the user of the word, creating a mental barrier between “them” and “us.” Once applied, the word reduces the labelled to the level of sinister zombies or programmed robots, whom “normal people” do no longer esteem as fellow human beings. It reduces those it describes to improbable automatons.

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10 Kathleen Taylor in the *Guardian* enquired, “Has Kim Jong-Il brainwashed North Koreans?” (20 Dec 2011).

The dominant interpretative frame of the funeral scene testify to this view. The scenes were cast as freakish anomalies restricted to totalitarian states or to religious cults. Consequently, it simultaneously propped up the idea of supreme control exercised by normal people who are immune to emotional policing and the notion of dehumanized automatons. As Taylor has persuasively argued, the term brainwashing “draws its power from our preferred view of ourselves as free, rational, decisive individuals” (x). Since the word functions to diminish the threat of mind manipulation, and to keep ‘them’ on the other side of the mental border, it is no surprise that the term often has the effect of shutting down inquiry, such as that prompted by the funeral scene, rather than furthering understanding of it.

It is commonly thought that emotion emerges from a kernel of a private mental state. To experience a profound emotion is to experience the concrete and the particular about being oneself. The emotional self remains protected from the incursions of externally-imposed diktat, we like to think, not least because the authorities cannot ascertain whether regulations have been enforced internally. But are private emotions quite as recalcitrant to disciplinary pressures as is often thought? We have all experienced being swept up into varying levels of exaggerated emotion under the general influence of a crowd. Though it is indisputable that emotion cannot be policed and patrolled quite like bodies, the force of group emotion encountered commonly in spectator sport, a political rally, or a music festival, complicate the assumption that feeling is an entirely individual and private affair.

This is what makes the scenes from North Korea so imponderable. It is not only that the hundreds of thousands of malnourished people had been corralled into an epic display of bogus grief, as if they were filming the finale of Dear Leader’s life. What really draws the spectator’s eye and holds it is the bewildering relation between external pressure and inner dynamic, the space between outward avowal and private feeling, which cannot be untangled as neatly as the two threads of the real and the fictitious. The scenes disturb and transfix because it is not clear to what extent feeling and emotion can be choreographed and mechanically executed like the movement of arms and legs just as in the faultless motor skills of the 100,000 children that we see showcased every year in the May Day Mass Games.

#### IV

How vulnerable a private mental state can be to group coercion was famously examined by George Orwell in 1984. In the ‘Two Minute Hate’ scene, Orwell

portrays the swift surge of emotion experienced by Winston Smith when he is surrounded by others avowing hate and condemnation. What induces Winston to display emotions appropriate to the context is the knowledge that he is being watched and assessed according to life-threateningly punitive criteria. This is natural enough. All humans modify their behavior according to the estimate of punitive measures they believe to be in force. Society requires a continual outward avowal of inner states as Goffman's classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* so penetratingly charted. But what Orwell explores in addition is the fact that the larger frame of reference then produces emotions which are experienced as real. He wrote:

As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed onto the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience.... Before the Hate had proceeded for thirty seconds, uncontrollable exclamations of rage were breaking out from half the people in the room.... In its second minute the Hate rose to a frenzy. People were leaping up and down in their place and shouting at the tops of their voices in an effort to drown the maddening bleating voice that came from the screen.... In a lucid moment Winston found that he was shouting with the others and kicking his heel violently against the rung of the chair. The horrible thing about the Two Minute Hate was not that one was obliged to take a part, but, on the contrary, that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretence was always unnecessary.

ORWELL 1949, 9–11

There is no incongruity between the emotion Winston declares and the emotion he actually comes to feel. Orwell's uncompromising stand here is that no clear account of how the imposed and the genuine fit together can ever be extracted. In Oceania, the knowledge that one's every move and every utterance are being scrutinized makes the people police their own inner thoughts and feelings, turning themselves into apparently willing self executors of external disciplinary powers.

It is precisely in this way that the mechanism of surveillance was explicated by Michel Foucault in his thesis of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*. As he stated in a famous passage: "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 1977, 202–203).

Like the inmates in Foucault's elaborations of the panopticon, the people of Oceania conform to the structure of exposure, as the eye of Big Brother blasts and flattens the layers of private thought and feeling into a transparent sheet of accountability to the State. 'They can't get inside you' is Julia's message to Winston (224). She believes herself to be free to be herself in private, as long as she feigns the outer behavior required by Oceania. What shatters her private world isn't that her secret relationship with Winston has come to light. It is the knowledge that her entire life has been seen. Such exposure precludes the possibility of durable personal relations, established on the basis of qualities intrinsic to the relationship. This is because the knowledge that one is being observed transforms private interpersonal exchange between two subjects into a public non-personal performance between two objects of surveillance. Foucault thought that hypervisibility of this kind is vital for what he calls 'perfection of power,' as the systematic erosion of shared bonds between individuals ensures there are no defenses left against the power of the State and the only relation that remains for anyone is with the authority. The ending of *1984* testifies to the ultimate panoptic violation of a person. After being broken, in the Ministry of Love, by an extended torture, which culminates in Room 101, she is reduced to a transparent ghost of her previous self and there follows what are surely the two saddest lines in the book.

'I betrayed you,' she said baldly.  
'I betrayed you,' he said.

Having betrayed and been betrayed by Julia, a quiet closing scene leaves our protagonist in a resigned but settled state for the first time since we joined him, gazing up at the portrait of Big Brother and thinking:

Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the side of his nose. But it was alright, everything was alright, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.

ORWELL 1949, 230

The prescience of Orwell's insight illuminates much about the psychodynamics of the funeral scene with which this discussion began. Winston's tears are linked to those of the people of Pyongyang, in that they are both the

consequences of knowing that their private lives are open to view and subject to policing. The totalitarian authorities of North Korea, like their fictional counterparts in Oceania, exercise control through the surveillance of the inner life of its people. The emotional life of the individual cannot but be shaped by the knowledge that their private lives are exposed to state surveillance.

V

So far this chapter has examined the impact of totalitarian policing on the private lives of individuals. This section will bring the matter to bear on North Korean literature, in particular, the aforementioned memoir by Shin. A picture of a typical North Korean literary education is found in the pages of *This is Paradise!: My North Korean Childhood* by Kang Hyok:

A poem or a song could not be considered satisfactory, our teacher said, if the Great Leader or the Dear Leader were not mentioned in it. For us, it gradually became unthinkable that any kind of artistic work could be produced without the two Kims at its centre. In actual fact, it was even forbidden to sing a song or write a poem that didn't mention the two Kims at some point or other.

KANG 2004, 53

Unsurprisingly, there isn't a great deal of the 'polyphonic' or the 'dialogic' in official North Korean literature. Nor do we find much room for 'textuality' in the *Juche* theories of art.<sup>11</sup> However, the growing body of literature by defectors and North Korean specialists offer compelling accounts of experiences under totalitarian control. In addition to the aforementioned book by Demick, *Nothing to Envy*, Adam Johnson's 2013 Pulitzer award-winning novel, *The Orphan Master's Son* (2012) recreate the unlikely combination of a Stalinist offshoot, an apocalyptic doomsday cult and a paternalistic Confucian order that is North Korea. And in the last two decades, a subgenre of North Korean defector's memoir has been steadily gaining ground. For example, Lee Soon-Ok's *Eyes of the Tailless Animals* (Korean 1996; English tr., 1999); Kang Chul-Hwan's *Aquariums of Pyongyang* (French, 2000; English tr., 2001), Hwang Jang-Yop's *The Memoir of Hwang Jang-Yop* (Korean 2006, English tr., 2010), Kang Hyok's *This is Paradise!*

11 *Juche* refers to the official state ideology of North Korea. 主體 / 주체, which translated literally, means 'self-reliance.' The philosophy has its origins in Marxism and emphasizes self-agency in the making of one's own destiny.

(2007), Kim Yong's *The Long Road Home* (2009), and Shin Dong-Hyuk's *Breaking Free from the World* (Korean 2007; the English adaptation: Blaine Harden, *Escape from Camp 14*, 2012).

Shin (1982-) spent some years in a concentration camp for political prisoners, Kwalliso 14. He began the memoir not as part of a campaign to reveal the atrocities of the camp to the western world or even to recount his life-story to the public in Korea but as part of his treatment for severe PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder).<sup>12</sup> Kwalliso is what is known as a 'total-control' internment zone, where the prisoners have been taken from their homes without judicial process for their anti-class beliefs, and where they are detained usually for life. According to the 2013 Amnesty International's Annual Report, "Many of those held in political prison camps had not committed any crime, but were related to those deemed hostile to the regime and were held as a form of collective punishment."<sup>13</sup> This is according to the law laid down by Kim Il-Sung in 1972: "the seed of enemies of class, whoever they are, must be eliminated through three generations." (Harden 2012, 11)

No information from the outside world reaches the prisoners, while the world remains largely ignorant of what goes on inside. The prisoners have no freedom of speech or movement, rights, access to basic information or recourse to law. On grossly inadequate rations, they are required to work, with no rest days, between 12 and 15 hours a day on coal extraction, timber production, attending to crops and the like. The children sew military uniforms and mix cement. They are *bona-fide* twenty-first century slaves. Enclosed by high-voltage electric barb-wire fences, patrolled by armed guards, overseen by a high watch tower and run by a secret police agency, they live in a closed and self-sufficient community with a degree of controlled conditions worthy of laboratory status. Like Oceania, it is an ultimate transparent panoptic society where private thoughts and feelings are not allowed to exist. In February 2014, the UN Commission of Inquiry (ICC) gave the judgment in their 372-page report, that "The gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a state that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world."<sup>14</sup>

12 In 2015, the English adaptation, Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14*, was recanted by Shin, who admitted he had been unable to prevent some sensationalization of his life-story. The aftermath of the publication of *Escape from Camp 14* does not affect the present discussion.

13 Amnesty International (<http://www.amnesty.org.uk>).

14 In the publication the UN commission states that 'the crimes against humanity entail extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the

Shin was not only an inmate in a total-control camp but was actually born inside it to two inmates who were rewarded with marriage for good behavior. He had had little experience of contact outside of prison camps before he escaped at the age of 23. Before fleeing to China, and claiming asylum in South Korea (and subsequently moving to the US for a period), Shin had never come across words like money or holidays; nor had he ever heard words like happiness or fiction or resistance or love. In the pages of the appendix where the range of his vocabulary as a child in the camp is compared with the list of acquired words after he escaped it, one finds laid bare the discrepancy between the limited ingrained world that he knew within the electric fences and the subsequently cultivated world of new thoughts and feelings.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the memoir provides a rare opportunity to re-examine existing ideas on the relationship between language, emotion and totalitarian control.<sup>16</sup> So for example this is from the list of affective vocabulary acquired only after he defected: “Happy, loving, loveable, attractive, sympathetic, fun, cheerful, capable, talented, pure, optimistic, broad-minded, relaxed, encouraged, hopeful, considerate, mild, fulfilled, enjoy, ecstatic, gorgeous, moved, humble, trustworthy, reliable, cooperative, confident.” These weren’t inner states that were beyond Shin’s expectation till the age of 23, they were simply beyond his conception.<sup>17</sup> Here are selections from other categories of words he had not encountered in the camp:

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forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhuman act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation.’ *Op. cit.* footnote 2.

- 15 This study was conducted by the *Centre for Information on North Korean Human Rights* in Seoul and is provided as an appendix in Shin’s memoir, *Breaking Free from the World* (세상밖으로 나오다).
- 16 When Shin’s memoir was published in Korean with the title *Breaking Free from the World* (세상밖으로 나오다) in October 2007, it barely sold. He had been out of the camp for two and a half years. Blaine Harden’s English adaptation of the book, *Escape from Camp 14* was published five years later in 2012. As yet, there is no faithful English translation of this memoir.
- 17 Here is a selection from the list of words he knew in the camp: sad, pitiful, abject, abandoned, dissatisfied, defeated, despairing, worried, stifled, useless, ignored, confused, painful, fearful, anxious, excited, nervous, terrifying, shameful, shy, unstable, unnatural, rejected, angry, intimidated, dismissive, dismayed, distasteful, cursed, insulted, dislike, destroy, lonely, depressed. On the more positive, if shorter, side are: satisfied, comfortable, friendly, polite, warm, stylish, generous, understanding, truthful, confident, courageous, conscientious, respectful, important and proud.

wages, savings account, bank, interest rate, stocks and shares, consumerism, the rich, the poor, law, police, tax, post, fire service, the national weather service, office, court, government, museum, gallery, parliament, jewellery, glasses, leather shoes, toothpaste, shampoo, photograph, calendar, makeup, coffee, beer, milk, noodle, drama, bookcase, vase, doll, author, human rights, justice, democracy, elections, voting, party, responsibility, politics, citizen, freedom, peace, friendship.

If the word-study gives us snapshots of his mental landscape, his life-writing joins up the pictures. Perhaps what is most striking about his narrative is that Shin did not see his condition in the camp as unjust or unfree. He wrote:

The reason why the inmates don't rise up as a group has ostensibly to do with the fact that there are guards to prevent such eventualities. But more fundamental is the deep-seated conviction of their own sins. For the guilty, such a life is only to be expected. I believed as much when I was in the camp and over 90 per cent of the inmates think their lives are unworthy because of the crimes they bear. The camp environment produces such beliefs. When I escaped it was not because I had justifiable criticism against the system, it was just that work was hard and I was tired.<sup>18</sup>

Shin's only crime was "associative," that is to say, his parents were related to people who were seen to be ideologically impure. But he, like most inmates, appears to have accepted his life's circumstances without questioning their legitimacy.

Of course there was a high level of discontent in the camp but while individuals had personal animosity towards other individuals, the disquiet was not directed towards the system. Again this is astonishing when one considers some of the punishment meted out to Shin for minor or non-offences. For example, when he dropped a sewing machine in the factory where he worked, damaging it beyond repair, his punishment was to have his right middle finger cut off. When he was 13, Shin was forced to watch the public execution of his mother by hanging and his brother by firing squad. He was then thrown into a tiny, low-ceiling underground cell where it was impossible to stand or lie down for eight months and tortured periodically. Torture involved being trussed and

18 See Shin Dong-Hyuk, *세 상밖으로 나오다* (*Breaking Free from the World*, 2007), 312. My translation, S. S. P.



hung over an open fire like a hammock and being burnt. But, as he wrote, such treatment is only to be expected.

The torture leads to another extraordinary feature of the memoir – that Shin felt no bond or loyalty towards another person, even his own family members. It was revealed after he wrote his memoir that he himself had informed on his mother and brother's plans to escape, which led to their deaths. At that time, he believed in the righteousness of his action and felt no particular compunction, even at the execution. He believed they should be met with punishment for harboring such thoughts. His only sense of loyalty was towards the authority, like the citizens of Oceania. He simply had no conception that families are bound by mutual attachment. His attitude towards his mother and brother was simply that they were competitors for rations.

On the one hand, Shin's memoir bears out the thesis, so central to twentieth century- thought, that the self is constituted by social and linguistic processes within fields of power and that what we regard as natural in our thoughts and emotions is in fact produced by concrete relations and language. What we assume to be natural emotions – a sense of self, friendship, love, for example – are nowhere to be found in this memoir, at least on the surface level of the narration.

In *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* Julian Barnes considered the ontological status of love in human history and pretended to wonder: "Is love some luxury that sprang up in peaceful times, like quilt-making? Something pleasant, complex, but inessential? A random development, culturally reinforced, which just happens to be love rather than something else?" (Barnes 1989, 235) Love as a random inessential luxury activity, like quilt-making, would be an analogy that the inmates of Camp 14 would have no problem accepting insofar as they can conceive of either. So there are solid grounds for interpreting the inmates' subjectivities as the sum effect of a totalitarian disciplinary discourse. Shin's narrative more than justifies the view that the prisoners have been reduced to Foucault's idea of docile bodies, that they are brainwashed, misbegotten and dehumanized by the North Korean symbolic order. It also strongly supports the theory that what we assume to be basic universal human emotions are in fact social constructions shaped by identifiable forces within a specific historical context; as it credits the hypothesis that under extreme conditions personal identities can be policed, homogenized and regulated to the point of extinction with little left in the way of a core or an essence.

Nevertheless, there are minute indicators in Shin's plainly-told narrative that unsettle such a comprehensive judgment. Underneath the crust of his story is a kernel of interiority and, as with Winston's coral paperweight, we have glimpses of an autonomous self that is resistant to the discourse of policing. So, for example, we see it when he describes his classmate being

beaten to death but also notices her beauty, we see it again when Kim, his co-defector, teaches him a song and he is opened up to a new emotion, we see it when we understand that it was actually curiosity more than anything else that led him to escape, and we see it most strongly when he resolves to escape and we see that that fed his confidence, his purpose, and sense of self, none of which existed as words in his mind at that point. Though Shin was born within a hermetic totalitarian police order with not even memories to stem the colonizing tide of indoctrination, he possessed an agency greater than he was aware of. His blind striving for a life beyond his world was not driven by reasoned logic as he did not have the conceptual apparatus with which to construct an alternative worldview. But the onslaught of thought-control to which he was subjected still left intact a will for a different life about which he could not have known in any concrete terms.

As such, his testimony props the door open to the kernel of human nature that is not subject to being produced and shaped by social processes, an idea that is largely absent in Foucauldian or other theoretical elaborations. His escape from Camp 14 reminds his examiners that there is a perspective in which the “situatedness” of an individual is in fact external to the self, however punitive, wrathful or rigid the authority may be. While the workings of the ‘ideological and repressive state apparatuses’ internalized by Shin may appear all-pervasive, there is a parallel if inchoate self that is not subsumed. Shin’s self that remained unseen by the panoptic eye reminds us that it is precisely this private self which requires most shielding against the surveillance of public scrutiny.

For we in the free world are not so free from panopticism as to remain impervious to its general effects. We live in an age of ever-increasing exposure and the boundaries between the private and the public are becoming ever more permeable. Many of us actively participate in the growing transparency of our private self through social media. We also live in a mass surveillance society of big data and information monitoring where our movements and communications leave a trace. These changes in our environment are central issues of our times.<sup>19</sup>

It would be ludicrous to draw a direct link between the punitive panopticon of North Korea and the digital panopticon and cyber surveillance of the free world. But there are nevertheless useful parallels. In both worlds, the structure of public surveillance is accepted by the majority as a necessary part of life. Both are united by a large scale belief in public transparency as a social good. The reasons and justifications differ: in the free world, the justification for surveillance and transparency are based on public accountability and freedom of

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19 See Sherry Turkel’s *Alone Together* (2013).

information, while in North Korea, transparency to the state is tied to ideas of citizenship and history. While the degree of public surveillance varies hugely between the two in intensity and, more importantly, consequence, the effect on private psyche is similar insofar as public exposure erodes the layers of private thought and feeling into an exhibit for the panoptic eye, whether the subject be Foucault's inmate, Big Brother's citizen, the Dear Leader's comrade or the online social networker. Of course people in the free world participate in voluntary self-exposure and are not policed by a centralized power. But exposure undercuts personal relations for the awareness that one is being watched or exhibited transforms private exchange between subjects into a public performance. If the capacity to trust develops to the degree to which one is prepared to share one's vulnerable private self with another being, hypervisibility and public transparency erodes trust between individuals and, by extension, all great emotions that require the condition of trust in order to emerge.

Of course, there is an enormous difference between the totalitarian enforcement of transparency and the voluntary self-exposure of digital social media but it is good to be aware that an unquestioning endorsement of hypervisibility and transparency, often in the name of freedom of information and expression, creates conditions that obliterate the threshold between imposed feeling and a private mental state, which when pushed to extreme becomes something like the stupendous simulation of sorrow of Kim Jong-Il's funeral, from which it may be impossible to avoid joining in.

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