Eros and Modernity: Convulsions of the Heart in Modern Korea

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Modern and Loving (in) it

In a recent article sociologist Hahm chart the transition to current attitudes to marriage in Korea.

Love is essential, marriage is optional! Employment is necessary, marriage is a choice! These slogans clearly show the values of today's younger generation... Until recently, people married "as a traditional custom". Nowadays, more people give reasons like "to gain independence from my parents", "to gain psychological and emotional stability", or even "because I met someone I loved" (Hahm, 2003, p. 26).

Hahm writes of the decline of "arranged marriages" in favour of "love marriages". According to the Korean National Statistical Office the proportion of "love marriages" has increased from 36 to 55 per cent in the last decade. Based on survey data, Hahm contrasts traditional Korean marriage as a union of two families with modern Korean marriage as a union of two individuals founded on love (Hahm, 2003, p. 29). Similarly, Kim found that three-quarters of the upper-middle class couples in her sample in Seoul in the 1990s had entered into love marriages (Kim, 1993). This provides a stark contrast to the world of rural Korea forty years ago, where love marriage could, in the most extreme cases, mean banishment (Brandt, 1971, p. 96).

In South Korea the narrative of the transition from arranged marriage to love marriage resembles other such narratives elsewhere (cf Ahearn, 2001; Duben and Behar, 1991; Giddens, 1990; Stone, 1979; Collier, 1997; Shorter, 1975; Goode, 1965). My aim is to engage critically with this view of modernity and historical change.

In Korean modernity, class – rather than being status inscribed – is determined by education. Education was always at the forefront of Korea's modernisation struggle (Portzeba-Lett, 1998; Seth, 2003). Working-class parents invest their energies in...
educating their children, hoping that they will be admitted to one of the top universities. Changes in the economic system and open access to employment and education are seen as more important to status than one’s marital state (Kim Choe, 1998, p. 44). In exemplary narratives, individual choice, free from familial constraint, enables the formation of unions based on love rather than more “traditional” considerations. Such changes are seen as mirroring those in the Western family that most sociologists see as a product of urban industrial capitalism (Hart, 2005, p. 79). Hahn (2003) claims that Korean modernisation follows similar patterns to those documented for Britain by Stone (1977). Therborn similarly notes that due to the economic transformations that began in the 1960s “most South Korean marriages [in the 1990s] were basically decided by the couple themselves” (Therborn, 2004, p. 123). This forms part of a series of “epochal transformations” in the nature of the family, including the erosion of patriarchy under the aegis of modernisation as global secular change (Therborn, 2004, p. 19, p. 295). The social facts of the decline of patriarchy, the “high flat plateau of universal marriage” in East Asia, and the decline of fertility rates worldwide have led to debates over questions of evolutionary unilineal modernisation and opposing notions of multiple modernities. Despite cautions against evolutionary readings of their findings, both Therborn and Goode are still led to the conclusion that “a Western European vanguard of late modern change [is] something to be expected” (Therborn, 2004, p. 301), based on the right “for the first time to choose” (Goode, 1963, pp. 369–80).

Giddens believes that in modernity we see the birth of the self as narrative through romantic love (Giddens, 1992, p. 38). He writes of the “pure relationship” in modernity in which equal parties approach each other with a sense of self-disclosure. The idea that personal life is more intimate in the present has a long history, one that constitutes “an ideological simplification of social change particularly promoted by professionals with a vested interest in marital and relationship problems” (Jamieson, 1999, p. 480; cf Morgan, 1991; 1992; 1996).

The dominant narrative of Korean modernisation (Amsden, 1989; Haggard, 1990; Sakon, 1993; Song, 1990; Vogel, 1991; Woo, 1991) presents “a smooth process brought about by universal market mechanisms and concomitant social and cultural processes leading to a universal model of modernity” (Koo, 1999, p. 54). Sociologists declared the patriarchal inequalities of the Korean family defunct, together with “traditional” practices such as ancestor worship and the Confucianism that enforced them (Lee, 1969; Kim, 1990). Women’s participation in the public sphere is seen as “roughly replicating the Western experience in a compressed time frame” (Lie, 1998, p. 161). I understand “exemplary modernism” (cf. Kahn, 2001a; 2001b) to be this dominant narrative of modernisation. Koo seeks to depict an alternative “conflict driven” narrative (Koo, 1999). These narratives are exemplary through the pedagogical authority of their producers – social scientists, historians and even novelists – legitimised by academic institutions. Narratives of a universal modernity (whose trajectory is ultimately set by the West) are problematic because “modernity in Korea, as elsewhere, is not simply disseminated from the West” (Koo, 1999, p. 62).

This diffusionist view of historical change that Koo criticises follows a master template based on economic transformation. This view occludes the role of social struggles but also fails to acknowledge its own role within an ongoing narrative constitution of modernity. I do not necessarily dispute the interpretations that arise.
from these social facts, including Koo’s, but rather analyse the ways in which “social facts” are created as part of a narrative construction of modernity, whether “alternative” or hegemonic and exemplary. My concern with “social facts” is not with the evidence of historical transformation but rather with the mytheme (Levi-Strauss, 1955) of modernist narratives, establishing a diachronic relationship between the present and the past along binary lines of presence and absence. These narratives are part of a cultural production of the self-images of the age, a practice all too often occluded by the empire of empiricism.

As myth, modernity has a social currency in our informants’ lives, being “modified to accommodate individual needs” (Hart, 2007, p. 354). Modernity constitutes the grounds for human agency against the backdrop of which cultural practice is (in)formed. Kendall’s work on the changes in marriage rituals in Korea gives a good account of this process.

Kendall (1994; 1996) found a consistent opposition between practices understood as “modern” and those defined as “traditional”. Following Clifford (1988) she looks at wedding rituals as sites of cultural practice from which emerge “unresolved issues of gender and through gender, unresolved tensions between tradition and modernity” (Kendall, 1996, p. 227; Ong, 1988, p. 88). Discussions on marriage in Korea are “premised on the assumption of change” (Kendall, 1996, p. 227). One should be wary of “facile comparisons of a fixed and reified past and present” (Kendall, 1996, p. 227). Fixed oppositions between modernity and tradition, love marriages and arranged marriages, new and old weddings, the West and the rest are signs that seduce us with promise of logical order (Kendall, 1996, p. 224). The seduction of signs leads to their organisation into narratives of development, progress and modernisation following an authoritative exemplary structure.

Exemplary modernisms and their reified oppositions are sites for contestation in the lives of my informants. We can see the taken-for-granted quality of these oppositions in Kendall’s informants’ description of the transition to the new-style wedding. Kendall was told:

that marriage custom had “developed” with everything else . . . or that Korea is now an “enlightened culture”. A ceremony in the wedding hall was considered “better suited to modern life”. “The whole society has been Westernised, and marriage just follows other changes in social life.” The customs changed “naturally” . . . “this is what present day society is like” (Kendall, 1994, p. 172).

Modernisation cast as a narrative of the inevitable triumph of rationalisation, the enlightenment and Westernisation, attains the status of a paradigmatic metanarrative cutting across the social imaginary. A core structural component of this myth is the mutually constitutive binary division of the world into tradition and modernity (cf. Dirks, 1990; Berman, 1998). Modernity is part of the process by which we try to make sense of the world by imposing narrative form. In so doing we create “explanatory fictions” (Kermode, 1968, pp. 35–36) and in believing them’ these explanatory fictions “degenerate into myth” (Carr, 1991, p. 13; Kermode, 1968, p. 39). Narrative, as symbolic organisation, is an inescapable condition of human life (Fisher, 1984; MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201; Ricoeur, 1991, p. 434). Contra Giddens, it is not that we discovered narrative in modernity but that narrative is “a condition
of our conscious being-in-the-world” (Cohen and Rapport, 1995, p. 7), which “is simply there like life itself” (Barthes, 1977, p. 79).

In this paper I focus on one aspect of this exemplary modernist myth – the role of romantic love. Underlying this seductive exemplary modernism lies a much more ambiguous reality; that of the “messier stuff of experience” (Kendall, 1996, p. 224). My case studies were selected to prove a theoretical linkage between modernity as narrative and its relation to social practice. Within such case studies “the validity of the extrapolation depends not on the representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning” (Clyde-Mitchell, 2000, p. 183).

In the Korean context, the first president of Korea, Syngman Rhee, presents the most powerful depiction of the authoritative formation of the exemplary narrative of modernity:

The Orient at this time, figuratively speaking, in the dawn of its development. Eventually, every place will be in the sunlight since no one can stop the rising of the sun. We cannot stop by ourselves the new light of civilization that has risen in the West and shines and moves on like sunlight. Any thoughtless attempt to avoid coming into the new light at all cost would only lead to the permanent extinction of the nation and eventual annihilation of the race (Rhee, 2001, p. 254).

This “dawn” extended to the emotional life of partners. In Mujeong (1917), conventionally understood to be the first stylistically modern novel in Korea (Kim Uchang, 2003; Kim Yung-Hee, 2003; Lee Ann Sung-Hi, 2005), Yi Gwang-Su evocatively describes this modern state of consciousness as a dichotomy between the old and the new. In the following scene the heroine Yong-Chae is being instructed by her friend Pyong-Uk, a character who “exemplifies the new woman” (Lee Ann Sung-Hi, 2005, p. 63) about the evils of arranged marriage.

Yong-chae, you have been daydreaming all this while. How could you give your heart to someone whose face you don’t even recognize and whose heart you don’t even know? That’s a totally old and wrong notion, which has chained you up. People live their own lives. How can any woman take a man as her husband whom she doesn’t love? (Yi Gwang-Su quoted in Kim Yung-Hee, 2003, p. 204).

Yi Gwang-Su saw literature as part of an overall pedagogical project of modernity:

New Western culture is flooding into Korea. Koreans ought to divest themselves of their old garments and wash old grime, and then bathe their entire body in the new civilization. From now on a new literature should be created to express Koreans’ refreshed thoughts and emotions and to produce their first legacy to be handed down to posterity (Yi Gwang-Su cited in Kim Yung-Hee, 2003, p. 192).

These narratives at the dawn [sic] of Korea’s modernisation present modernity in metaphors of cleanliness and light, contrasting with the darkness and grime of the outdated traditional world.
Modernist narratives share a dialectical bifurcation of the world in a new progressive present standing opposed to a surpassed outmoded past. In the context of interpersonal affection, this is constructed by the symbolic cluster *yeonae gyeolhon* [love marriage]: *jungmae gyeolhon* [arranged marriage] – Modernity: Tradition.

I use the term “popular” (cf. Kahn, 2001a) to distinguish a type of modernism that is not part of a pedagogical project. It has different and more ephemeral sites of production. Narrative finds its completion with reference to the world of the “reader”, and “life cannot be understood other than through the stories we tell about it” (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 435). It therefore makes sense to speak of the “real” narratives of my informants in tandem with “fictional” narratives as “modern imaginaries that make [modernity] possible” (Kahn, 2001a, p. 11). These narratives emerge from the spaces between exemplary modernist narratives. In order to elicit them, the anthropologist of modernism must trace the contours of a narrative shaped by the gaps in the structure of metanarratives.

**The Space Between**

The reflexive imperative of anthropology should mean a questioning of Western assumptions about the nature of modernity. We should consider romance as a narrative device in the construction as well as the contestation of modernity. In exemplary narratives the transition to the nuclear family and the capitalist mode of production is the direct causal factor for “love unions”, rendering “Love, like other emotions, subsidiary to and dependent on economic motivations” (De Munck, 1996, p. 701), and courtship “a market and exchange system” (Goode, 1970, p. 8). We cannot deny the objectification of brides in exchange relations (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 63) and the role of marriage in subordinating women (cf. Young, 1997, p. 123; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Hartmann, 1981). But reducing women to a sign or an object in an exchange system obscures a number of crucial problems, and robs them of agency (Jolly, 1997, pp. 115–40).

In Western discourse, talk about emotions has been caught in dichotomies that place women in a double bind in which they are expected to be emotional but are devalued for it (Lutz, 1987; 1988, pp. 73–76; Hochschild, 1979; 2003; Lupton, 1998, pp. 105–36). Differential expectations of emotional control are the basis for a division of labour in the capitalist economy that engenders emotional labourers (Hochschild, 1979; 2003).

The focus on the reproduction of structural inequalities of gender and class in critical narratives of modernity has meant that love has tended to be ignored as a “culturally legitimate motivation” (De Munck, 1996; cf. Jankowiak, 1995; 2006), being reduced either to the celebratory product of modernisation, or to the ideological reproduction of inequality in more critical narratives. This paper sees love as an emotion in its neglected “phenomenological and communicative aspects” (Lutz and White, 1986, p. 429). Focusing on emotions as “embodied thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that I am involved” (Rosaldo, 1984, p. 143), I analyse the discourses that are produced via these embodied thoughts. Both *sarang* [romantic love] and *jeong* [companionate love] are a central aspect of contemporary Korean subjectivity that speaks against history just as it is steeped in its narratives.
Before I discuss popular narratives of love I illustrate the process by which exemplary narratives of modernity organise social facts into reified dichotomisations in an authoritative cut of the real.

Kim reports that 75 per cent of her Korean sample had love marriages. However, she finds it necessary to clarify that these marriages would not easily fit into the category of “love marriages”: she defines them as “half-arranged and half-love marriages [jungmae ban yeonae ban], where young couples meet through quasi-formal introductions [mat son]” (Kim, 1993, p. 72). In her study, Kim Choe divides attitudes to marriage into either “modern” or “traditional”. She concludes that “men have a more traditional attitude about the necessity of marriage [and] women’s attitudes are more modern” (Kim Choe, 1998, p. 53). While her actual questions to respondents were far more subtle, “uncertainty” has no place in the narrative into which she organises her findings (cf. Mody, 2006, pp. 331–44, for a similar plea for ethnographic complexity). Reading her results as modern or traditional uses “facts” to construct symbolic categories in a historical narrative form establishing, in the process, a regime of truth and value authorised by social scientists and historians (cf. Foucault, 1970; 1980). Creating “facts”, if only to validate narrative, we use symbolic oppositions in their mythological potential, forcing onto the social landscape a dichotomous reading from above.

Focusing on marriages that do not fit neatly into the exemplary dichotomies of love-marriages and arranged-marriages – Kim’s “half-love and half-arranged” and the “not sure” category in Kim Choe’s survey – I argue that it is through these ambiguous spaces that dichotomous mythologies of modernity are both contested and reproduced. Studying a Bedouin community in Egypt, Abu-Lughod documented the process whereby love contests but reproduces the discursive oppositions of modernity and tradition. Love poetry became the vehicle for a generational conflict “played out in the language of love” and a defiant discourse against paternal authority (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 39). Warnings are issued against the authority of elder agnates by young men protesting about the injustice of forced arranged marriages and tribal ideology (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 36). This was not a discourse of rebellion, however. Love is an emotional protest that reaffirms the fact that its very existence is contingent on the persistence of that authority which denies it. As I shall argue, among my informants, talking about love reasserted the exemplary and celebratory narrative of modernity while at the same time highlighting its “lack” through its dissonance with the messier stuff of their emotional experience.

Yu Mi-Nam is thirty years old and works in a computer company. He is a graduate of a prestigious Korean university, and when we first talked was getting married in a few months. He met his wife through a friend from university: the relationship developed from sogaeting.12 At the time he was sitting for his GREs, hoping to fulfil his dream of a doctorate in the United States. The couple were introduced to “help each other to study”. At first they started chatting via the Internet and Mi-Nam saw her photo and learned more about her through her Cyworld page.13

After a period of such contact, he fell in love: they met in person and became a couple. He has been asking her to marry him for the last year and she has recently consented. He first told her he loved her on their 100th day anniversary, when he gave her a ring. He believes that love, coupled with money and trust, are essential for marriage.
Mi-Nam’s parents are members of the Unification Church. Originally from South Cholla province, they moved to Seoul on the instructions of Reverend Mun. Mi-Nam’s father has worked at all sorts of jobs, and is at present a real estate agent. Mi-Nam’s parents’ marriage was arranged by the Unification Church, and they did not know each other before marriage. They were married in a mass wedding with 450 other couples. Their marriage could thus be seen as one of the several possible forms of arranged marriage [jungmae gyeolhon].

The story of Mi-Nam’s family is one of generational social mobility. Mi-Nam has had five relationships in the past. He attributed their failure to stopping loving [sarang] his partner, or to having started loving someone else, which he considered a form of cheating. He felt a strong contrast between his parents’ marriage and his own. This contrast lay in the emphasis on sarang in his relationships. When I asked what would happen if he stopped loving his wife, he told me that sarang is something that fades with time. When love goes away there will always be jeong, which unites the couple in an inseparable bond. Love comes and goes whimsically, but jeong, when lost, is impossible to regain. Mi-Nam saw love as the essential first step towards marriage. I pressed him on this by pointing to his parents’ marriage, which was not based on sarang. Pausing to reflect, he explained that his parents had jeong, which increases with time and is fuelled by memories. Trying to explain the difference between jeong and sarang to himself as much as to me, he drew the following graph on the back of a napkin, which I reproduce as Figure 1.

I challenged the picture of Mi-Nam’s own marriage as yeonae gyeolhon [love marriage]. His marriage, like that of his parents, came about through brokerage. For his marriage Mi-Nam considered the gunghap [matching of horoscopes], as well as an analysis of his and his future wife’s blood types, to determine their compatibility.

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Sarang is characterised by high intensity, the brief and necessary emotion for marriage (at around 27 years), while jeong only happens much later in the relationship (at around 40 years of age) and is much more stable.
A recent invention, this blood test is a widespread practice. Its basic premise is that each blood type corresponds to a different personality type. Mi-Nam’s marriage, though narrated as a modern love marriage, contests the exemplary reading of “love marriage”. It is accompanied by a host of “traditional” practices such as a visit to the fortune teller to determine an auspicious wedding date. While guided by sarang, Mi-Nam’s love story shares features of what exemplary modernists call a “traditional” order; where reason did not “replace arbitrary mysticism and dogma” (Giddens, 1992, p. 40). While his love is distinctly modern, it complicates the picture of romantic love as the herald of reason and individual control over one’s destiny.

Gyu-Won is a tall, confident woman in her mid-twenties who attends a prestigious women’s university. She had only been to the fortune teller twice before and was somewhat embarrassed about it, considering it superstitious nonsense. Unlike her friend Myeong-Jin, who accompanied us to the fortune teller’s, Gyu-Won dismissed any insight that the fortune teller might have. She did “sort of believe” that blood type corresponded to personality type.

Gyu Won’s mother had married at Gyu-Won’s age. The union was arranged through a matchmaker, an old woman in their village. “In the old days the elders used to decide marriage and they used to match people pretty accurately!” The first time her parents met each other they were accompanied by their parents. Gyu-Won said her parents had jeong [deep affection] for each other. Jeong came from being very familiar with each other, “too familiar” she added. It is the feeling one gets when one cannot get away from the other person.

My parents have jeong because they have lived together for so long – being a family is beyond love [sarang]. If you just like somebody [johahadda] you do not obsess about him, but if you love [sarang] somebody then you can not take the person out of your mind. With someone you love you are free to be childish and shameless.

Love, unlike jeong, can come and go any time, while jeong is hard to eradicate. According to Gyu-Won, to get married one must first love [sarang] one’s partner.

In Gyu-Won and Mi-Nam’s stories sarang, while essential, is fleeting, and not enough. The reified opposition between arranged and love marriages is a symbolic cluster that structures modernist narratives of both the exemplary (celebratory and critical) and the popular kind, turning reality into narrative, and organising emotions into history.

How to Get a New Pin-Stripe Suit

In Korea contemporary marriage through a formal jangmein [broker] has become restricted to the upper classes (Portzeba Lett, 1998). Amongst my middle-class informants the common way to find a partner was through sogaeting. Almost all of my informants tried it at least once in their lives, usually at university.

Through my conversations with Hwang-In, I could clearly see the failure of the dichotomies of arranged and love marriages to account for contemporary Korean courtship patterns. At 31 years old, Hwang-In worked as a consultant at an
engineering company. The most knowledgeable of my informants regarding *sogaeting*, he was a self-confessed amateur *jusonja* [matchmaker].

We are sitting in an empty restaurant having an early Sunday lunch. Hwang-In’s parents are to meet his girlfriend’s parents today, the prelude to marriage. I jokingly ask if he is any good at *sogaeting*. Laughing loudly, he waves his fork towards his suit and tells me that actually his pin-stripped suit is proof of his skill. If *sogaeting* eventually leads to a marriage, the *jusonja* [matchmaker] is usually given a suit as a token of appreciation. He boasts that three couples have wed through his match-making endeavours. After I politely decline his offer to test his *jusonja* skills first hand, he carefully slices his steak: “To make a good match, it is important to make sure that the *hakbol* [educational pedigree] matches”. SKYE\(^{15}\) graduates and students only date other SKYE graduates. It is a standard practice to have group blind dates arranged between the men from Yonsei and the women from Ewha women’s university. A match between a SKYE graduate and a graduate from another university is an anomaly, while a relationship between a SKYE graduate and someone who didn’t attend university is frowned upon if not forbidden by the parents. An education from a prestigious university is not only an opening to good jobs, but also a potential one-way ticket into the middle class.

For women, however, an educational pedigree is not enough. Women must also conform to the *agassi* [young miss] aesthetic (Cho H.J., 2002). Hwang-In washes down his steak with beer: “My ideal woman has to be tall and skinny with high cheekbones and a kind personality”.

The informal match-making represented by the likes of Hwang-In does not conform to the idea of a love marriage free from third-party interventions and based solely on love. It cannot be described as an arranged marriage either: the step from *sogaeting* to marriage requires the couple to form an emotional bond.

In the Korean emotion-scape, the emotions of *jeong* and *sarang* form the core of contemporary understandings of marriage. Mi-Nam and Gyu-Won’s contextual narration of the differences between “traditional” and “modern” marriage casts doubt on the characterisation of earlier unions as “loveless”, with women represented as mere objects. Mi-Nam’s narrative suturing of *sarang* and *jeong* contests exemplary narratives while he seeks to bring into his own relationship the emotional bond that unites his parents (see Figure 1). Mi-Nam transposes the exemplary transition to the emotional bond of modernity as a personal process. He turns history into biography by reversing the narrative structure and thereby allowing love to spring again in the coming generation as a “new” emotion that differentiates young from old, the stable authority of the elders from youthful desire for rebellion.

**Jeong and Sarang**

*Jeong* does not have a direct equivalent in English (see Kim, 1985), but can be roughly translated as “deep affection”. The term could describe a relationship which is not exclusively “romantic” but could also, for example, describe the bond that unites friends. In this paper I limit myself to its usage as a bond between lovers or married couples. *Sarang* on the other hand is not a Sino-Korean word and encompasses the range of meanings of “love” in the West. Without wanting to place
undue weight on etymology, as a native Korean word, sarang’s original meaning was “I think” (Jo, 2001, p. 64). When applied to couples it describes a love that can be measured in degrees of intensity.

Words themselves are important semantically but also symbolically. In the informants’ narratives, jeong symbolically forms part of the world of tradition, the past and the parents’ generation, while sarang is a “modern” emotion. These terms demarcate a realm of tradition and a realm of modernity in the affective life of lovers. Semantically jeong differs from sarang in important ways. While sarang is centred on the spoken word, jeong is a bond that does not need to be spoken. When asked whether their parents said “I love you” to each other, my informants would usually laugh and shake their hands saying “No, no... but they have jeong”. I subsequently asked one informant “So can you say ‘I have jeong for you’?” to which she replied “No, no you don’t say I have jeong”. One speaks about jeong when reporting on the quality of a relationship and it cannot be used as a declaration towards an object. Jeong’s salient features are its permanence, its stability and its gradual nature. Sarang, on the other hand, is unstable and comes quickly. Jeong is used as a noun, whilst saranghada is a verb. The latter is centred on the active subject and specifies what one feels towards the object, while jeong lies in the space between the subject and the object. Verbs that are commonly coupled with jeong are ittda [exists] or deulda [enter].16 Sarang is a hada [to do] verb that linguistically requires the active “I”.

As a modern emotion love becomes rationalised and comes under control, no longer subject to potions and charms. Saranghada is characterised by freedom of choice in partners. For my informants, the transition from arranged marriage to love marriage is the transition from jeong to sarang, extending the symbolic cluster of Tradition: Modernity: Arranged Marriage: Love Marriage. This extension undermines celebratory narratives of modern love, creating an ambiguous space in the project of modernity.

Love, Soap Operas and Gendering Modernity

Popular modernism is embodied in a sceptical attitude to love, coexisting with a negation of the possibility of marrying without love. In Korea, new institutions have emerged, ensuring the endurance of arranged marriages. International marriage agencies offer the Korean beyond “normal” marriageable age brides from Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. Local marriage agencies set up meetings between couples. Sogaeting and brokered marriages are common. While love is important, one would want to fall in love with the “right” sort of person. To quote one of Kim’s informants:

I married through jungmae ban yeonae ban [half-love half-arranged]. My father-in-law asked one of my distant relatives for a mat son [interview with a view to marriage] with his son. I went to the meeting by myself without letting my parents know about it – to make a quick decision. I decided to date him for a while and marry him. I got attracted to his good educational background because, I thought, he would not make me hungry (cit. in Kim, 1993, p. 73).
In her ethnography of Korean women who came of age in the aftermath of the Korean war, Abelmann argued that “a melodramatic sensibility has been pervasive in contemporary Korea” (Abelmann, 2003, p. 23). Abelmann defines melodrama as:

A complex of theatrical, literary, and cinematic conventions characterized by excess – of affect (the overdrawn, overmarked) and of plot (strange, almost unbelievable twists, coincidences, connections, and chance meetings) (Abelmann, 2003, p. 23).

My field notes are similarly laced with references to soap operas. The distinction between narrative as fabrication and narrative as lived experience is further blurred: if every epoch has its narrative form through which the self finds meaning and expression (cf. MacIntyre, 1984), in contemporary Korea this form is the melodramatic soap opera. Comparing Korean forms with American soap operas, one of Lee and Cho’s informants states: “[American programs] don’t look real as compared to the Korean programs” (Lee and Cho, 1990, p. 486). What is seen as real is defined through what is most unbelievable (cf. Abelmann, 2005, p. 47; cf. Ang, 1982, p. 38; Dissanayake, 1993, p. 2). Sarang in Korean modernity is “overdrawn” and “overmarked”, and it is as such that its possibilities are realised: “[T]he drama of excess highlights the unreal and by extension the constructedness of the real” (Abelmann, 2005, p. 47).

During my stay in Korea the most popular soap opera was Nae ireumi ‘Gim Sam-Sun’ [My name is Gim Sam-Sun]. Its central character, Gim Sam-Sun, is a plump, loud and aggressive woman approaching middle age. She embodies the anathema of the standards of femininity in Korea. Working in a restaurant as a pastry chef she begins a “fake” relationship with the arrogant, young, rich owner of the restaurant that turns into love. However, Gim Sam-Sun is also in direct competition with the manager’s ex-girlfriend, who has left for the United States to study medicine. The restaurant owner eventually falls in love with Gim Sam-Sun, his mother cannot agree to the marriage. The ending is a dream sequence with Gim Sam-Sun and the male protagonist getting married, complete with a family photo over the fireplace. We are told, however, that even though his mother prohibited the marriage the couple still see each other in secret.

The theme of cross-class marriage is pervasive in the Korean social imagination. But while the heroine usually comes from a poor family, at least she excels in some feminine virtues – good looks, chastity – rendering cross-class marriage conceivable. Ha-Na, one of my informants, is in her late twenties. She has never had a boyfriend and her father is urging her to find one. She has just graduated but cannot find a job. She likes Sam-Sun because “she is fat and loud and is true to herself”. I could see through her passionate description that Ha-Na identified with Sam-Sun, as I am sure thousands of other Korean women do. Like Sam-Sun, Ha-Na’s family is not well off. Her father owns a small rice-cake shop and her mother helps around the shop. They moved from a small island when the children were young for access to better education.17
I first met Ha-Na in Melbourne two years ago, and we have been in regular contact ever since. Her university is not a top-ranking one so her marriage and job prospects are slim. She said:

You know here [Seoul] is not like Australia. We have to put on make-up and pay a lot of attention to the kind of clothes we wear even when we go to University. It takes me at least two hours to get ready.

I would be reminded of this after trying to change our meetings to an earlier hour. Although expressed in melodramatic terms, Ha-Na’s anxiety about her future is very real. She is worried about the stress she is causing her father. If she remains unmarried and unemployed after thirty, it will become progressively harder for her to achieve these two goals. Not finding the right person to marry for a while “may result in passing the prime age for marriage and then becoming less attractive to potential husbands” (Kim Choe, 1998, p. 59). Ha-Na’s sister recited a Korean saying:

Women are like a Christmas cake, everyone wants to buy one before the 25th but after 25 it becomes harder to sell one and at 30 no-one buys them anymore.

Ha-Na alternates between saying that she does not want to get married and saying that she wants to, for her father’s sake. She is headstrong and open-minded but feels stifled. Her father is pushing her to get a postgraduate education in Australia to increase her job and marriage prospects.

Gyu-Won (see above) was also a fan of soap operas. Her favourite soap opera was Dae Jang Geum [Love in the Palace], set in Choson-dynasty Korea. According to Gyu-Won, dramas set in this period tended to be based on stories about queens vying for attention from their king. Dae Jang Geum was different. The female protagonist wanted to be a professional cook, and after trying hard she eventually succeeded. “Her work and her love were important for her, and she succeeded in her work and in love. She was so independent. She managed to have a meaningful life without a husband, she was a self-made woman.” What Gyu-Won admired most about the heroine was that she had “a perfect sense of timing”. The conversation then turned to a discussion of Gim Sam-Sun, the soap opera heroine of the hour.

Gyu-Won did not like Sam-Sun because of the way the soap opera ended. She was hoping that Sam-Sun would succeed without her boyfriend. She wanted her to “show independence”, but the soap opera ended with her and her partner still together. Gyu-Won disliked the man Sam-Sun fell in love with: “He was not a good man at all! He deserted and betrayed her. He was not clear in his emotions!”

Gyu-Won had had two earlier relationships. Her relationship with her first boyfriend, Cheol-Su, was as melodramatic as those in soap operas. Cheol-Su was a Christian like her, whom she had known since she was small, and they attended the same church. They started dating when she was twenty-one and their relationship lasted one year.

Gyu-Won said that she did not really love him, but he loved her too much. In a way, she said, “That made me not love him”. She saw him more as a friend. Cheol-Su took the relationship far too seriously and even brought up marriage. “I did not
want to love him, he was poor. Even though he was sort of smart his family was way too poor”. Cheol-Su was shy but very possessive. He kept calling Gyu-Won, asking her where she was, distracting her from her studies. Her parents did not know that she was dating him, but when they found out, after six months, they told her: “He is not a good man for you, he does not go to a good university and his family is too poor!” She wanted to break up but “He did not let me”. She went to America for a few months, staying with relatives to get away from him. “He was sort of crazy [michida], he even stalked me!” Once, he brought a knife and threatened to stab her if she left him. Eventually her parents handled the situation by talking to his parents and sending Gyu-Won to the States. After Gyu-Won broke up with him, Cheol-Su demanded his gifts back. Gyu-Won did not want to see him again so she mailed them to him.

For Gyu-Won the most important thing about a man is his intelligence and opportunities for the future. The ideal man is like her father, Il-Gyun. Laughing, she said that Il-Gyun probably liked her mother more than his children. According to Gyu-Won, Il-Gyun was accommodating, loving, generous, trustworthy, and responsible to his family. He was a hard-working man whose success was due to his own abilities.

The character of Gim Sam-Sun the patisserie chef endorses a bakery chain, and huge cut-outs of her can be found at all outlets. Walking through the streets of Sinchon, the main youth district in Seoul, one can see soft toy shops selling piglets like the one given to Sam-Sun by her boyfriend in the drama. This drama provided an expression (or at least a discursive arena) for discussions about love, class and gender within modernity for young Korean women.

As feminist scholars have noted, the myth of the conjugal couple based on bonds of romantic love occludes the patriarchal nature of power differences, replacing it with a superficially gender-free discourse that promises to subsume inequalities of class, race and gender under notions of affective/romantic individualism. The notion of romantic individualism leaves the young woman with a gendered expectation of “ruthless individualism” in the pursuit of her man, abandoning the “catty company” of other women. At the same time she is expected to leave this individualism at the doorstep when she meets her boyfriend (McRobbie, 1991, pp. 67–118). Like some earlier feminist critics of romantic love (e.g. Firestone, 1972), Lee has argued that in Korea “the concept of the couple-centred family serves to conceal the patriarchal nature of the modern family” (Lee, 2005, p. 169). According to Hampson, the domestic sphere in Korea still defines womanhood. While “the future looks brighter” (Hampson, 2000, p. 186) for Korean women, “the individuals [involved in a marriage] will consider the impact of their relationship on the status of their family” (Hampson, 2000, p. 172). Through their engagement with soap operas, my informants were making a statement about modernity as a gendered process (cf Stivens, 2002, p. 192).

Abelmann discusses the soap opera Adeul kwa ddal [Son and Daughter], in which the heroine, Hu-Nam, comes from a poor family. Eventually becoming a high-school teacher Hu-Nam marries Sok-Cho, a handsome, educated lawyer. The writer of the soap opera did not want a fairy-tale happy ending. But, due to public pressure in the form of letters and calls to the station, she was forced to make the protagonist marry up (cf. Abelmann, 2003). Like the Sam-Sun soap opera, this tale is about love
defying class boundaries. Similar Cinderella narratives of young women rescued by a “prince” have been studied in relationships between Asian women and Western men in mail-order arranged marriages. Such narratives present family values and sex together without having to refer to sex in any overt way (Dundes, 1982; Preston, 1994; Constable, 2003, pp. 91 – 115). The global Cinderella fantasy (Preston, 1994) represents women as chastity personified, “poor women to be rescued from menial labour and shabby clothes by way of marriage to a hero prince” (Constable, 1994, p. 96). It is for this reason that Gyu-Won liked the heroine of Dae Jang Geum and disliked Sam-Sun, for Sam-Sun depended on her partner without having her own agency. At the same time Ha-Na liked Sam-Sun because she defied idealised notions of femininity that hinge on the maintenance of beauty and youth for success in marriage.

The Cinderella I am comparing Sam-Sun and Mi-Nam to is not the Cinderella that has been “unjustly distorted by storytellers, misunderstood by educators, and wrongly accused by feminists” (Yolen, 1982, p. 297). Early variants of the Cinderella story depict a less passive protagonist (Bettelheim, 1991, p. 264; Yolen, 1982); indeed, the different oral versions come from a “matriarchal tradition” (Zipes, 2006, p. 46). While it may be that “the wrong Cinderella has gone to the American ball” (Yolen, 1982, p. 297), it is with this mass-market, bourgeois American appropriation of the fable that I am concerned.

The rags to riches story of Cinderella is the tale of an insipid beauty waiting for prince charming (cf. Minard, 1975). In the Walt Disney version, the narrative has a woman waiting to be rescued, with love affirming with impunity the irrelevance of class barriers. The “original” tale is about the restoration of a social order where a princess is restored to her social position. When transformed into a fable of modernity, the mass-market version becomes a gendered tale of love. Without labouring the point Sam-Sun and Hu-Nam could be seen as the Cinderellas of a Korean popular modernism. In these soap operas rigid endogamous class boundaries are defied in the name of love.

Such tales speak of the power of individual beauty and character, depicting a relationship between a lower-class woman rescued by an upper-class man. In these narratives, as in Korean society, a woman achieves social mobility through marriage based on the strength of her looks and the refinement of her educational pedigree (cf. Hampson, 2000, pp. 180 – 81). Inversely, when a poor, uneducated, working-class man marries a middle-class educated woman he does not become upwardly mobile. Instead, his wife loses her class position. Soap operas and movies dealing with such narratives often end in tragedy. In Balli-eseo Saenggin Il [Something Happened in Bali, 2004], the story revolves around a love quadrangle. Jung Jae-Min and Choi Young-Joo are a betrothed upper-class couple. The other two protagonists are Lee Soo-Jung, a poor, orphaned tour guide in Bali, and Kang In-Wook, Choi Young-Joo’s former partner with whom she broke off the relationship in order to marry Jung Jae-Min, selected for her by her parents. Both Kang In-Wook and Jung Jae-Min fall in love with Lee Soo-Jung. Jung Jae-Min tries to be firm with his family, declaring his love for Lee Soo-Jung. But in the end, the relationship cannot proceed since she is an unacceptable match. In the final scene we see Lee Soo-Jung in bed with Kang In-Wook as a deranged Jung Jae-Min breaks into their Bali hotel room and shoots them both, as Lee Soo-Jung in her dying breath declares “I love you” to
Jung Jae-Min. In the preceding scene In-Wook tells Soo-Jung that he knows that she left her heart in Seoul. I discuss this soap opera’s narrative about the relationship between love and class and gender in modern Korea in order to highlight the intersections between class and gender in the Cinderella narrative. While Choi Young-Joo unquestioningly acknowledges the impossibility of marrying Kang In-Wook, even though she loves him, Jung Jae-Min aggressively pursues Lee Soo-Jung and showers her with gifts, while employing her in his firm; at one time he had even given her an apartment to live in.

In these modernist versions Cinderella must await salvation from the knight in shining armour, a passive object of the man’s power. What defines these narratives as modern is their use as pedagogic and melodramatic fables of modernity imparting a “civilizing process” (Zipes, 2006) where the order of gender and class is created through the possibilities of love. Impossibilities are enshrined in a melodramatic tragic order balanced with a desire for the realisation of this order in a fantasy that sometimes spills over into real life. These modern-day Cinderella stories constitute popular fantastical reproductions based on an exemplary historical form representing the seduction of love as it transcends social inequalities. These popular modernisms, however, are tempered by a recognition of their existence in a melodramatic order that straddles the boundaries between the real and the fantastical. While emphasising the importance of love, Gyu-Won, coming from a well-to-do family and attending a prestigious female college, spoke of her past relationship in terms of a “choice not to love” due to her partner’s inferior social position. Ha-Na, coming from a lower-tier university and a poorer family, in turn, spoke of her open admiration of Sam-Sun as a woman who defied the gendered stereotypes but still managed to move up on the social ladder through marriage with her prince – although the ending itself is ambivalent about this success.

There is more to the story, however, than its narrative structure. As these popular modernisms are used to frame the lives of my informants they become discursive products that are used to discuss the engendering of modernity. Abelmann points out that the people she interviewed regarded the fairy-tale ending of Adeul kwa ddal with scepticism, but nevertheless demanded it. It is “perhaps precisely this tension between viewers’ desire for the unrealistic and their demands for the realistic that keeps viewers tuned in” (Abelmann, 2003, p. 105). The unrealistic desire is the affective individualism of romantic love in the pure relationship but the demands for the realistic are the recognition of the mythological character of modernity, in which the inequalities of class and gender are merely transmuted. This tension can be seen clearly in the ambivalence of the ending in Gim Sam-Sun and the reactions of my female informants to these popular texts. Ha-Na admired Sam-Sun for the ways in which she undermined the dominant notions of femininity and the agassi aesthetic.19 Gyu-Won, however, disliked the character of Sam-Sun because she needed a man to succeed. Gim Sam-Sun was working for her partner-boss, making cakes for his restaurant. As Gyu-Won noted, the ending of Nae ireumi Gim Sam-Sun presents the protagonist as still depending on her boyfriend manager. In the concluding scene of the drama, however, Gim Sam-Sun tells viewers:

Mother is against our marriage but we still love each other. We still bicker and fight but we make up after… Since our meeting was coincidental I sometimes
think we may break up one day. Being in love is like this but there is nothing to be afraid of. I now understand the things that I have to do; to keep on working hard making my cakes and to keep on loving with all my heart, just like every day is our last, just like we have never been hurt before.

While the drama ends with Sam-Sun still seeing the manager, there is no hope for marriage due to their class incompatibilities. While the soap operas represent a desire for the unreal idealised pure relationship of modernist myth, as popular modernism these narratives speak of ambivalence. This ambivalence is reflected in Ha-Na’s life, as she alternates between saying that she does not want to get married and worrying that if she moves to Australia she will not be able to find many Korean men. She complains about the unfairness of Korean requirements for feminine appearance while at the same time going to great lengths to try to conform to these standards. Gyu-Won speaks of an open desire for independence, admiring soap opera heroines who still manage to make their own way in life, while at the same time she reifies class boundaries by seeking in marriage the preservation of her patrilineal class status.

Sarang forms part of a narrative of modernity as a belief in the possibility of marrying up and the idea that love conquers all. These ideas, however, are combined with an inner scepticism that old class endogamies have been replaced by others based on educational pedigree. Jeong, in turn, while seen as an emotion of the past, is also seen as the only lasting form of love, thereby constituting a sceptical attitude to the notion of romantic love that forecloses love in arranged unions. In the following section I shall discuss one more case, in order to highlight the ways in which the melodramas of modern love spill over into life as narrated praxis.

The Tragedy of Ah-Reum

In exemplary modernist narratives, romance is “no longer, a specifically unreal conjuring of possibilities in a realm of fiction. Instead, it is a potential avenue for controlling the future” (Giddens, 1992, p. 41). Popular modernist narratives, both within Korean melodrama and in my informants’ narratives, resist this hegemonic dichotomy.

Around five years ago Ah-Reum’s parents divorced. After cerebral surgery her father’s personality had changed completely and he started drinking and squandering their small amount of money. In the end her mother sought a divorce. Four or five years ago Ah-Reum got to know Gim In-Uk at a hagwon [private tuition institute]. She found a lot of comfort in their friendship. In-Uk lived in the well-to-do area of Gangnam. A lawyer’s son and a student at Yonsei University, he can easily be identified as middle class. Ah-Reum, the daughter of an unemployed technician, could never be an acceptable match. She told me that they liked each other but they had not discussed it because that would have meant the end of their relationship. “His mother would kill me!”, and In-Uk’s personality was not “strong enough to go against his parents”. His mother, suspicious that In-Uk was having a relationship, waited for him outside his hagwon. When she saw him come out with Ah-Reum she pulled her aside and asked her for her phone number. Hissing at her, she told her “Do you think this is the right time for this sort of thing?”
Dragging In-Uk away, she forced him to change his hagwon. Following this, Ah-Reum decided that their relationship could never be and, resolving not to contact him, left for New Zealand for one year to study English.

As a graduate of a two-year college, Ah-Reum’s job prospects are limited. Her dream was to become a flight attendant. She applied to Korean Airlines but was told that at twenty-four she was too old. She began attending courses designed to help people pass the flight attendant interviews. She felt miserable throughout, being snickered at by her classmates for insufficient attention to her appearance. Short and not particularly slim, she was starting to despair of ever being able to work as a flight attendant, a job that is itself representative of the exploitation of women’s emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003). After months of trying, she secured a job with a new airline in Abu Dhabi, but had to migrate there on a two-year contract. Happy about finally having succeeded, she worries about leaving her mother alone and deposits part of her monthly wage in an account for her.

Exemplary modernisms speak of the triumph of individuality and freedom but may deliver very little. Where beauty and educational pedigree become attributes of desirable femininity, we learn that perhaps the only woman who can really have her Mr Knightley must occupy a similar position in the social structure. While family pedigree is becoming less important, social mobility through marriage is only possible when a woman satisfies an image of the feminine. Popular modernisms look with a sceptical eye at modern romance as “a potential avenue for controlling the future, as well as a form of psychological security” (Giddens, 1992, p. 41).

Love in Modern Myth

My informants sought to read love into arranged marriages (cf Uberoi, 2001, pp. 178–82 for parallel processes in India), refusing to see loveless unions in the marriages of their parents. As critics have noted, the historical argument regarding the emergence of modern romantic love as something Western and Northern European “constitutes data about long standing prejudices” (Rebhun, 1999, p. 95). Feminist critics saw romantic love as the rise of a new form of women’s oppression. These critical versions of the history of modernity share with their celebratory exemplary cousins an essential structure. This concluding section will address the structural properties of this narrative as a magical formation.

I have argued that emotions are part of a discourse rather than “an organic condition influenced by social and economic forces” (Rebhun, 1999, p. 95). For my informants, speaking about love was one way of speaking about modernity. In its narrative form, this discourse uses symbolic oppositions between tradition and modernity, arranged and love marriages, sarang and jeong, engaging with the meta-narratives of modernity. As such, they constitute “modern imaginaries that make [modernity] possible” (Kahn, 2001a, p. 11).

As a metaphoric tool, love is inseparable from “the phenomenal objectivity of emotion”, as it serves to construct the world “by and with feeling” (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 301). By imposing a narrative structure on human feeling, through narratives of presence and absence, exemplary modernist narratives, as well as their popular and ambivalent engagements, institute what Lacan would call a “cut in the real”. As he notes in the Écrits: “It is the world of words that creates the world of things – things
which at first run together in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of becoming” (Lacan, 2006 [1953], p. 276). This symbolic creation of modernity is a fundamentally magical process. As a process of formation, magic is “essentially the art of doing things... the domain of pure production *ex nihilo* With words and gestures it does what techniques achieve by labour. All efforts are avoided by successfully replacing reality with images” (Mauss, 1972, p. 175). The exemplary sociologist and historian of modernity fulfils the same function as a magician who “does nothing, or almost nothing, but makes everyone believe that he is doing everything, and all the more so since he puts to work collective forces and ideas to help the individual imagination in its belief” (Mauss, 1972, p. 175). As Edgar Morin notes, “there is no pure magic, no pure sentiment, no pure reason... Magic and sentiment are also means of knowing. And our rational concepts themselves are still imbued with magic” (Morin, 2005, p. 182).

The symbolic opposition between the past and the present is achieved through the opposition of arranged marriages and love marriages. This symbolic cut constitutes the “heart” of modern subjectivities in Korea. It bifurcates time into tradition and modernity diachronically, and the *kiseong saedae* [established generation] and the *sinsaedae* [new generation] synchronically. In popular narratives this cut is realised through the metaphoric opposition of *sarang* and *jeong*, an opposition that becomes sutured in individual biographies.

History presents symbolic narratives as real. While the symbolic may appear to “spring from the real”, one “shouldn’t think that symbols have come from the real” (Lacan, 1991, p. 238). Exemplary modernist narratives appeal to social facts, legitimating a narrative symbolic order used to lend a meaningful narrative to the social structure. This is an illusory process, creating the mythical foundations of modernity by effecting a symbolic misrecognition.

This process is crucial for the formation of modern subjectivities. In literary theory Scholes rediscovers “fabulation” to describe a modern literary genre which “like ancient fabling, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy” (Scholes, 1967, p. 11). The melodramatic popular narratives of modern love function as fabular representations. The soap operas watched by my informants are not an engagement with the real, but rather with the symbolic order of modernity, constituted by its exemplary narratives. By using them to make sense of the messier *hic et nunc* of their experiences, melodramatic fantasies become the stuff from which modern subjects are made. My informants participated in the ethical control of these fantasies by bringing them to bear on their own lives, and those of their parents. This fabular process undermines the exemplary hegemonic order instituted by the mythical attributes of exemplary narratives and their symbolic dichotomisations.

Lévi-Strauss argues that, in the passage from one society to another, a myth becomes transformed and exhausts itself. In this process two options remain: “Fictional elaboration and re-activation with a view to legitimizing history” (Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p. 268). In Korea the birth of love in modernity is an exhausted myth undergoing both processes. Through fabular elaboration in the Cinderella soap operas, the myth is appropriated in a process of ethical engagement with gender and class inequalities. As an exemplary narrative, the birth of modern love is re-activated as a prospective myth that “makes [the] past the beginning of a future which is starting to take shape” (Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p. 268).
The symbolic categories of modernity and tradition are themselves highly gendered categories. Tradition has been conveyed on the back of female chastity and virtue. As feminist scholars have noted, the gendering of modernity is not merely the differential experience of modernity, but also the ways in which its discursive terms are constituted along gendered lines (Stivens, 1994; Jolly, 1998). In looking at love as a discourse about modernity I have for the most part focused on female voices and genres whose main audiences are women.

The question remains whether critical and fabular (re)presentations of the romantic myth of modernity can ever be more than a symbolic gesture if the mythical foundations themselves are never de-realised, and history is never (re)cognised as myth. At the very least, the restoration of the historic to its proper mythical order must be effected. We must leave the hatchet of history behind, if only so that we may recognise the phantastical role of love in the formation of the subjects of modernist mythology.

The dialectic between jeong and sarang, the emotional underpinnings of arranged and love marriages, questions the narrative of the evolution of the modern family on two fronts. It reconstitutes the debate on emotion, away from the Apollonian and the Dionysian (Williams, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996), constituting an emotional dialectic through and through. In the process, the myth of modernity is re-inscribed to one of life passage, as the palpitations of youthful romantic passions and desires for rebellion give way to a stable love marked by maturation and a transition in the generational order of power. It is true that we have never been modern (Latour, 1993) but we cannot deny the role that the myth of modernity has in forming the backdrop for the emergence of subjectivity as it engages with myth via fabular presentations.

Notes

1. This paper is based on fieldwork conducted among young Koreans in June 2005 – June 2006 in Seoul, South Korea.
2. Where applicable the names of authors are left romanised as in the sources cited. Otherwise, the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2000) romanisation system is followed.
3. Although she is a sociologist Hahm’s article, published in a non-academic journal, is an example of a particular type of discourse on the nature of love in modernity.
4. I do not discuss here the important dichotomy between Seoul and the countryside in the construction of the “modern” and the “traditional”.
5. See Hart (2005, p. 89) for a criticism of Therborn’s conception of patriarchal power (Therborn, 2005, p. 94).
6. See Gillis (1979) for a critique of this view.
7. This process is a transcription to the register of the real, “the domain of whatever exists outside symbolisation” (Lacan, 2006, p. 324). In transforming what is narrative and symbolic into that which we perceive, and experience as real, we are effecting an illusion of mythical proportion.
8. See Chaplin (2001, pp. 56 – 75) and Davis (1996, p. 53) for a discussion the emergence of the moga [modern girl] as a symbol of rebellion against the stifling patriarchal order in early twentieth-century Japan.
10. See Deuchler (1992) for an alternative dating of Korean modernity.
11. This kind of argument is, of course, an old one (see Engels, 1985, pp. 58 – 115).
12. Sogaeting brings people together through a third party, with the intention of forming a couple. The word is a combination of the Korean verb sogae-hada [to introduce] and the English suffix
“ing” to form a noun signifying a novel dating practice that differs from more formal arrangements.

13. Cyworld is a website in which individuals create a small virtual world that contains their photos, a diary and a “noticeboard”. The computer constitutes an important forum for contemporary Korean youth.

14. It is even a requirement when consulting a marital agency. Blood type B is considered the worst possible type for a marriage, indicating a very unstable sort of person who is likely to cheat.

15. SKYE is an acronym made up of the first letter of the top four Korean Universities (Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University, Ewha Women’s University).

16. Deulda/aa is a dialect term. When used with jeong, it is only used when jeong is the subject – for example, jeongi deulda [entered].

17. See also Abelmann (2003) for similar narratives.

18. It is a common practice for college students to take a year off university to study English abroad to improve their job prospects.

19. A recurrent joke in the soap opera centres on the way in which Sam-Sun keeps getting called an ajumma [“auntie” – a term used to designate an older woman usually already married] and Sam-Sun’s angry reaction.

20. “One should say above all don’t touch that H, the initial of history” (Lacan, 2006, p. 46; cf. Bruce Fink’s notes to the text, p. 46, n. 27).

21. Phantasy has a contested history within psychoanalysis. I am using it in the Freudian sense. See Bott Spillius (2001) for a discussion of phantasy in its Freudian psychoanalytical usage.

22. See Goode (1959) on the theoretical importance of love “in the socio-structural patterns which are developed to keep it from disrupting existing social arrangements” (Goode, 1959, p. 47).

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