

Looking at Kim Dong Hwa's Color Trilogy through the Prism of Radical Change

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By Jonathan M. Hollister and Don Latham

Abstract

This essay examines Kim Dong Hwa's *manhwa* (Korean graphic novel) series the Color Trilogy using the critical framework of Eliza Dresang's Radical Change theory. This theory has had a significant impact on children's and young adult literature scholarship in the years since the publication of her 1999 book, *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*. In the book, Dresang devoted very little space to discussing graphic novels. However, in a subsequent essay published in 2008, Dresang states that had she been writing the book then, she would have devoted at least one full chapter to a discussion of the graphic novel format. We attempt to extend Dresang's work by examining Kim's trilogy through the prism of Radical Change theory. We argue that all three types of Radical Change—Changing Forms and Formats, Changing Perspectives, and Changing Boundaries—are evident in Kim's sensitive, poetic story of a young girl's sexual awakening in early twentieth-century rural Korea.

Introduction

Over the course of her career, Eliza Dresang made a number of contributions to scholarship on children's and young adult literature, but none has been more significant than her theory of Radical Change. In her 1999 book, *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*, Dresang outlines the theory, which she based on characteristics she had noticed in many books published since the advent of personal computers and the Internet. These books, she argues, both reflect and facilitate the digital age principles of connectivity, interactivity, and access. She categorizes the types of changes she observed as follows:

- Radical Change 1 (RC1): Changing Forms and Formats
- Radical Change 2 (RC2): Changing Perspectives
- Radical Change 3 (RC3): Changing Boundaries¹

While each type of change involves a variety of nuances, the overall concept suggests that these Radical Change books are offering new and exciting ways for young people to engage with texts and, in a broader sense, with the world around them.

Radical Change theory has had a widespread impact not only in library and information studies, but in education and literary studies as well. In a 2008 essay, "Radical Change Revisited: Dynamic Digital Age Books for Youth," Dresang notes that the digital age principles of connectivity, interactivity, and access continue to be incorporated into print books, and, in fact, "manifestations of these and other indicators . . . have matured considerably in the ensuing decade and are continuing to appear in more and more sophisticated forms and formats, promoting more and more active engagement of the user/participant/reader, just as is happening with other dynamic media."² She goes on to point out that Radical Change characteristics have continued to appear in the types of books she discussed in 1999 but are also evident in some types of books she did not discuss, including graphic novels. In fact, she writes, "I find no change has been more dramatic than that of the graphic novel."³ While her discussion of the format amounts to less than two pages in her original book, she states that "if written today, my discussion of this format would comprise at least one entire chapter, for with the interactivity and graphic dominance of much digital media, this print format has mushroomed."⁴

In this essay, we attempt to extend Dresang's work by examining Kim Dong Hwa's⁵ Color Trilogy,⁶ a well-regarded Korean graphic novel (manhwa) series consisting of *The Color of Earth*, *The Color of Water*, and *The Color of Heaven*.⁷ By looking at these books through the lens of Radical Change theory, we will demonstrate that Kim's series achieves synergy between words and pictures (RC1); offers new perspectives, in terms of history, culture, and gender (RC2); and expands boundaries in its frank depiction of the sexual awakening of its female protagonist (RC3).

We are considering the English-language versions of these books, which have been widely read, well-received, and marketed to young adults in the United States. Admittedly, we are considering these books from a Western perspective, but we do not see that as a weakness since we are interested in the interpretation of the books by Western readers, specifically young adults in the United States. In any case, Dresang's theory grew out of an examination of primarily Western and specifically English-language books for children and young adults in hopes of expanding their perspectives. Radical Change theory provides a particularly appropriate framework for analyzing the achievement of the Color Trilogy in employing images and text to present a culturally and historically unique perspective to Western readers.

Kim Dong Hwa and the Color Trilogy

With a career spanning more than forty years, Kim Dong Hwa is a celebrated manhwa artist in South Korea. Kim first gained popularity with female readers with romance manhwa such as *Our Story* (1970), *My Sky* (1975) and *Fairy Pink* (1984), and then with younger male readers, with titles like *Run, Thunderboy, Run* (1990), after changing his style in an effort to escape the focus on just the "pretty things" in his earlier romantic titles.⁸ Influenced by Im Kwon-taek's 1993 film *Seopyonje*, Kim again retooled his approach to comics seeking to emulate what he called a "Korean aesthetic" in a 2009 interview with Seo Chan-hwe,⁹ as well as to capture a broader audience. In this pursuit of a Korean aesthetic, Kim spent months relearning to draw women without the influence of Western standards of beauty.¹⁰ Kim also readopted a cursive drawing style that was once popular in the 1970s to entice older readers to rekindle their passion for manhwa.¹¹

Emerging from these efforts were acclaimed titles such as *The Story of Kisaeng* (1996), *Red Bicycle* (2003), and, of course, the series that would later become the Color Trilogy. All are titles that highlight emotive, uniquely Korean slice-of-life tales with universal appeal.¹² Since some readers may not be familiar with the Color Trilogy, we have included a brief plot summary for each book below.

Set in the rural South Korean village of Namwon sometime in the first half of the twentieth century, the Color Trilogy presents a coming-of-age story about a young girl, Ehwa, and her mother, a widow who owns and operates the village's tavern. In *The Color of Earth (CE)*, seven-year-old Ehwa begins to learn about what it means to be a woman, particularly the differences between boys and girls; as she grows up, she experiences love and loss with her first two major crushes—Chung-Myung, a young monk in training, and Sunoo, a student from the Kwangju Province. Ehwa's mother's romantic life also is rekindled when she meets a traveling artist, known as the picture man throughout the trilogy, who seeks refuge at the tavern one night.

In *The Color of Water (CW)*, Ehwa meets and begins to fall for a handsome and slightly older boy, Duksam, after he displays his strength during a wrestling match at the annual Tano Festival, a celebration of the coming summer. With guidance and peer pressure from her friend Bongsoon, Ehwa continues to learn more about her body and sex, by experiencing an orgasm for the first time. Meanwhile, the traveling artist and Ehwa's mother's relationship continues to blossom despite his infrequent visits.

As Ehwa and Duksam begin to get closer, the old farmer Master Cho, who happens to be Duksam's boss, takes a liking to Ehwa and sends an offer to purchase her as his wife from her mother, which she promptly refuses. Upon learning of Master Cho's plans, Duksam destroys the old farmer's property and must leave the village in fear of repercussions. Before leaving, Duksam promises to return to Ehwa with enough money to make a life together. Tearfully, Ehwa says she'll wait for him. As such, both Ehwa and her mother are left longing and waiting for their loved ones to return.

In *The Color of Heaven (CH)*, both Ehwa's and her mother's romances eventually come to fruition. During the wait for their significant others to return, Ehwa and her mother grow closer than ever through conversations about love and life as women, Ehwa's father, and Ehwa's future. The story ends with Ehwa's marriage at sixteen to

Duksam, and with the traveling artist's plan to settle down with Ehwa's mother, seemingly for good.

Kim has said he hopes that by focusing on the Korean aesthetic, his work, including the Color Trilogy, will appeal to a wide audience, from youth all the way through to their grandparents.¹³ Interestingly, the English versions of the Color Trilogy are most frequently recommended for and marketed to young adults ages fourteen and up, but also occasionally to those as young as eleven or twelve (according to the aggregated reviews of the series available in the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database).

Radical Change Type 1: Changing Forms and Formats

Dresang defines RC1 books as those that “convey information in a bold, graphic manner and in exciting new forms and formats.”¹⁴ She identifies several characteristics of RC1 books, two of which seem especially applicable to Kim's achievement in the Color Trilogy: “words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy” and “multiple layers of meaning.”¹⁵ In its beautiful and poetic interweaving of words and pictures, the books in the Color Trilogy not only exemplify characteristics of RC1, but also reflect and facilitate what the New London Group calls “multiliteracies,” a term meant to suggest “the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity.”¹⁶ Specifically, Kim's series employs three of the six design elements in what the New London Group describes as “the meaning-making process”: linguistic, visual, and multimodal, by which they mean patterns of meaning that relate the other modes to one another.¹⁷ Dresang and Koh, in a discussion of the relationship between Radical Change theory and youth information-seeking behavior, note that one characteristic of digital age youth is their “preference for graphic and visual information.”¹⁸ As Dresang explains in *Radical Change*, a new relationship between words and pictures, which she calls “synergy,” has emerged in the digital age, a relationship in which “words become pictures and pictures become words.”¹⁹ Moreover, Dresang points out the “visual and verbal layering of story”²⁰ that also characterizes the relationship between words and pictures in many RC1 books. Of course, comic books and graphic novels have always relied on readers' attraction to and understanding of the

relationship between words and pictures, and therefore are natural examples of RC1. While not unique among graphic novels in this respect, the Color Trilogy offers many notably skillful examples of RC1 in a graphic format.²¹

Despite its name, the Color Trilogy is published in black-and-white. As such, the synergy between words and pictures throughout the trilogy contributes additional detail and contextual clues to its expansive scenes. Early in *CE*, Ehwa is caught in a sudden downpour.²² Kim uses words, typefaces, and onomatopoeia to emphasize the sounds and feel of the storm: “**THUNDER**” in a bold, aggressive font over an image of dark clouds; “*plop, plop, plop*” in a playful font that seemingly bounces off of the page as the first rain drops fall; and “SHHH” hanging in the air, blended into the backdrop of rain with a ghostly, fuzzy font.

Kim’s lyrical approach to narration and fluid scene design matches well with the characteristics of RC1. Vollmar captures this notion in his review of the series: “Kim . . . uses a dizzying array of narrative tools to craft the story, moving seamlessly from poetic narration to dialogue in metaphor. He shows no reluctance, however, in turning the story over to the visual component in order to capture the rhythms of a particular moment.”²³ Throughout the series, Kim plays with the pace of the story and the delivery method of the narrative, often with varying panel layouts, text floating above the scenes with or without boxes, and changes in drawing style.

For example, in *CE*, we find Ehwa after just recently experiencing her first period reflecting on her new womanhood and what love awaits for her.²⁴ In this scene, Kim shifts from a full-page drawing of Ehwa walking in the rain with a closed text box floating above to a series of panels with various sizes as Ehwa gazes into the reflection pool hoping to get a glimpse of her first love. In *CW*, Kim abandons panels entirely for a two-page spread depicting Ehwa and her mother deep in thought and conversation across the span, overlaying the scene with a reflexive, poetic narration of a mother’s worries for her daughter’s future life.²⁵

In many scenes throughout the Color Trilogy, Kim utilizes his drawings alone to convey meaning and emotion. The Color Trilogy is rich with metaphors of rain, flowers, and the seasons to signify coming of age and feelings of love and longing. The finale of *CH* is a grand example of Kim’s use of images, and not words, as metaphors. As Ehwa

and Duksam consummate their wedding night, Kim sensitively and intimately combines lined drawings of their figures with flashes of light, glowing lanterns, waves and pools of water, fluttering butterflies, and clouds to capture the love, beauty, and ecstasy of the moment rather than offering detailed depictions of intercourse.

Additionally, Kim often creates contrast in his scenes by overlaying cartoonish, yet not overly exaggerated characters over a realistically detailed background. There are many examples of this technique in the trilogy. For example, in *CE*, Kim depicts Ehwa's mother sitting in the door frame of her tavern, waiting for her love to return.²⁶ The contrast between the detailed tavern and Ehwa's mother's pale face is stark, inviting readers to feel her loneliness. In his book *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argues that the more cartoonish, less human-like figures in comics make it easier for readers to identify with the characters and see themselves in the story.²⁷

The features of RC1 apparent in the Color Trilogy also enable readers to view and interact with new or evolving perspectives.

Radical Change 2: Changing Perspectives

Dresang defines RC2 books as those that offer “changing perspectives” to youth.²⁸ She argues that this type of radical change can be accomplished through “multiple perspectives, visual and verbal” and “previously unheard voices,” among other things, in books for youth.²⁹ As a fine example of manhwa, the Color Trilogy offers new and alternative perspectives of Korean culture, women, and history, using both thoughtful narrative and delicate artwork.

Manhwa as a graphic art form was able to develop since 1909 in its own right long before the external influence of Japanese manga, which was not imported into Korea until the 1990s.³⁰ While manhwa shares many characteristics with manga, such as the emphasis on emotion and the use of symbolism,³¹ there are many ways in which it stands out. For one, the Korean written language, Hangul, is written and read left to right, top to bottom, making manhwa more accessible for Western audiences to read and easier for publishers to translate for new markets; however, this often results in marketing manhwa incorrectly as “Japanese light” novels or “flipped” (or reversed) manga.³² More

specifically, while there are variations and exceptions, manhwa tend to be more realistic and conservative in artistic and storytelling approaches, and more focused on characters' development than plot.³³ Manhwa also feature characters that tend to have slender, more realistic bodies, sometimes with exaggerated faces (which, unlike manga, often have defined lips) and eyes; prominent use of screentone, shading, and texturing; and cultural annotations.³⁴

The English-translated version of the Color Trilogy features cultural annotations throughout the series that provide insight on and context for Korean culture and social norms, which do not appear in the Korean originals. In *CW*, for example, feeling slightly embarrassed after her first interaction with Duksam, Ehwa remarks that she and her mother had hung up a sweet rush doll to keep evil at bay.³⁵ A footnote tells readers: "The mugwort and the sweet rush are aromatic plants frequently used in Eastern Medicine. They were also believed to ward off bad luck. Koreans would often make figures out of them and hang them in their homes."³⁶ Early into *CH*, Ehwa is punished for sneaking out in the middle of the night to bid farewell to Duksam before he escapes on a train and then refusing to reveal whom she was with to her mother.³⁷ As punishment, Ehwa's mother strikes the back of Ehwa's legs with a stick several times before concluding the punishment and handing the stick to Ehwa to dispose of it. The footnote at the bottom of the page reveals the purpose of this gesture: "In Korean culture it is customary for the child to discard the rod that was used for discipline. It's symbolic of recognizing one's error and discarding the wrongdoing, never to make the mistake again."³⁸

These annotations, and those throughout the series, give young readers a glimpse into Korean culture and history, as well as many small inspirations and incentives to learn more. Dresang is a strong advocate for both international and multicultural literature for youth. For example, she praises the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) as a resource that offers children and libraries access to books from many languages, countries, and cultures throughout the world.³⁹ She argues that "in-depth explorations into various corners of cultural and personal life add new dimension to all children's lives."⁴⁰

In the example above, Ehwa's mother, of course, can tell that Ehwa is holding back her tears not because of the punishment, but due to loss of someone dear to her.⁴¹

Ehwa and her mother are often found throughout the series discussing their romances and their lives as women, as well as joking and otherwise enjoying each other's company. For example, in *CW* soon after Ehwa's crush on Duksam begins to unfold, Ehwa teases her mother, saying that even in his prime the picture man would have been no match for Duksam; she tells her his eyes are "droopy and full of misfortune" rather than "big and bright," insinuating that Ehwa's mother has low standards.⁴² Ehwa's mother takes this to heart, feeling mixed emotions of doubt about the picture man, as well as worry and hope for Ehwa's future relationships. Ehwa and her mother's familial bond and trusting friendship throughout the trilogy is a major means of connecting readers to their own lives and to the story. The ability to peer into the thoughts of both Ehwa and her mother help the reader to understand their perspectives, what they are thinking and why they feel the way do, potentially giving insight into readers' own relationships with one or both of their parents.

Kim is well known for his interest in and ability to write thoughtfully and sensitively about women.⁴³ However, Kim has still faced criticism for how some women are portrayed in his works, succumbing to or seemingly endorsing sexist, patriarchal culture and traditional gender roles: for example, portraying women as having only simple natures, being obsessed with beauty and romance, waiting on and for men (Duksam and the picture man), tolerating sexual harassment (the constant bombardment of inappropriate gestures and advances from patrons at the tavern), and feeling shame as an unmarried woman.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, sexist, patriarchal culture was as prevalent then as it is now, albeit perhaps more so, and this trilogy shows readers that sexist attitudes and behavior are nothing new, but there is still hope for change.

The final scene in *CH* depicts Ehwa's mother conversing with the traveling artist on her porch in the midst of a renewing, yet melancholic rain shower. She shares a bittersweet reflection, "I think it's a woman's fate to always be waiting. . . . It never dawned on me that there would come a time that I would be staring at the village entrance waiting for my daughter."⁴⁵ While dramatic, we interpret such a statement as speaking on the nature of love, rather than the nature of women.

Kim, reflecting on the Color Trilogy, remarked, "Since I was very young, I've been interested in expressing the growth and change (mentally and physically) of a girl in

manhwa form. . . . Ehwa is the result of tracing back my mother's youth."⁴⁶ Kim goes on to admit that it would be a lie if he were to claim that he completely understands women.⁴⁷ He continues, "I think there's a wide river between women and men that men can not immediately cross. So it wasn't easy for me to understand women's relationships and emotions, especially a mother and daughter's."⁴⁸ With the heavy use of metaphors and quotes (e.g., "The heart of a woman is really strange" in *CW*) throughout the trilogy,⁴⁹ Kim artfully pays respect to womanhood while seeming to admit his own shortcomings in understanding them and to leave room for the readers' own interpretations. Inspired by the life of his own mother and the reverence that Koreans hold for the relationship between mothers and their daughters, Kim spent a long time studying Korean art and literature in order to develop a meaningful understanding of the mother and daughter dynamic.⁵⁰

Despite the criticism of others and his own words of caution, Kim does portray Ehwa and her mother as independent and empowered women. Ehwa's mother owns and operates the tavern on her own, supporting both herself and Ehwa; maintains grace and dignity when dealing with condescending and misogynistic male patrons; denies the advances of an old man attempting to purchase Ehwa; and raises an independent daughter who marries of her own will and choice.⁵¹ Ehwa's mother serves as her guardian and champion by embracing independence and denying archaic traditions.

Kim offers glimpses into the tragedies of those who cannot escape such traditions. For example, in *CW* Ehwa finds her friend Chungja out late one night, sobbing at the base of a tree. Ehwa congratulates Chungja on her upcoming marriage, certain that these are happy tears. Chungja then explains that her marriage was arranged with a nine-year-old boy, and that she must live with her young husband and his grandmother to care for them and learn the ways of their household.⁵² Ehwa, shocked, relays this to her mother, partly in fear that the same fate awaits her. Her mother assures her that she would not let that happen to Ehwa, even if the bidder was wealthy (a promise she does keep), and that she would find a husband that Ehwa would like, or if Ehwa likes someone, she would like them too. While these situations and cultural traditions may be shocking to today's Western readers, Ehwa and her mother could be seen as examples of the transition from old to new ideas as Korea underwent enlightenment and rapid modernization during that

era—movements that owe much to the participation and contributions of women in regards to education, social justice, and civil rights.⁵³

Along with the characteristics of RC1, the new or alternative perspectives offered in the Color Trilogy help expand the boundaries of what can and should be considered valuable and important literature for youth.

Radical Change 3: Changing Boundaries

Dresang defines RC3, Changing Boundaries, as changes that push the boundaries of topics considered appropriate for and/or interesting to young people. These characteristics include (among other things) previously “forbidden” subjects, “overlooked” settings, and “new, complex” characterizations.⁵⁴ Through its setting in early twentieth-century rural Korea, Kim’s trilogy introduces Western youth (and perhaps many Korean ones as well) to a place and time with which they are likely unfamiliar, illustrating both key differences and striking similarities between the concerns of young people then and the concerns of young people now.

For example, today’s readers would find things like cooking on a wood-fired stove and traveling long distances on foot to be novel ideas. They would also likely be intrigued by the beautiful rural countryside and fascinated with Korean courtship practices and wedding rituals. By the same token, they might be puzzled by and uncomfortable with the strict patriarchal society and the sexist attitudes displayed by some of the adult males, and they would almost certainly be disturbed by the notion of an old man trying to buy a young girl as a bride, a fate from which Ehwa is saved by her protective, strong-willed mother.

They would also note many similarities to growing up today, although they might be surprised to find certain “forbidden” topics as bodily functions and sexual awakening dealt with in such a frank way. *CE*, for instance, opens with the image of two beetles copulating—and two young men commenting lasciviously about the scene. Soon the two boys are engaging in a peeing contest and asking Ehwa to show them her *gochoo* (literally, a chili pepper, but also a slang term for penis). As the book continues, readers witness a young monk’s first wet dream, Ehwa’s first period, and another young man

(repeatedly) masturbating. The book suggests that young people a hundred years ago were just as fascinated by bodily functions as young people are today—although contemporary readers might be surprised at how little change there has been in some aspects of growing up. But for many of today's youth, the connections between bodily functions and the natural world might be a new idea. From the copulating beetles on the opening pages to the implicit comparison of a penis to a *gochoo*, to the description of the female and male versions of the ginkgo tree and the erotic nature of the gourd flower that opens only at night, the book is filled with sexualized images of the natural world that parallel the sexual feelings of the characters, both young people and adults.

And this is another sense in which Kim's books push the boundaries of what might be considered appropriate for young readers, for the focus of the series is on Ehwa's awakening sexuality and her mother's reawakening sexuality. Early in *CE*, seven-year-old Ehwa compares body parts with her mother while she is bathing. Ehwa, after her disturbing conversation with the urinating boys, is concerned about not having a *gochoo*. Her mother assures her that women do not have one, but that they actually have something more precious—"the door where babies come from."⁵⁵ Later, after a conversation with a more worldly boy, we see an older Ehwa exploring her own body and wondering, "Is there really a persimmon seed hidden inside a woman's body?"⁵⁶ The evocatively simple, two-page line drawing shows Ehwa peering at herself as she holds her skirt in front of her.

A significant portion (approximately twenty pages) of *CW* deals with Ehwa's gaining information about sex from her friend Bongsoon.⁵⁷ This section culminates in Ehwa's first experience masturbating, and, again, the scene is rendered in a simple, two-page line drawing without shading or detail. The effect is to focus the reader's attention on the almost otherworldly ecstasy of the moment. This drawing style is continued in *CH* in the penultimate scenes depicting Ehwa and Duksam's wedding night. Highly imagistic, these scenes intercut between the two lovers and visual metaphors such as waves crashing, the sun beating down, Duksam plunging into a pool of water, a dandelion being blown apart by the wind, butterflies fluttering, and so on. The highly charged, erotic scenes of the young lovers are also intercut with highly comical scenes of an old man trying to make love to his wife. His failed attempts, rather than arousing her

wife's passion, inspire her derision. The juxtaposition of scenes with the young lovers with those of the old lovers adds a layer of complexity to the way love and sexuality are depicted in *CH*, alternating in this case between the sublime and the ridiculous.

A richer and more serious juxtaposition is seen throughout the series in the parallel between Ehwa's sexual awakening and her mother's sexual reawakening. Though the picture man's visits are infrequent, it is obvious that Ehwa's mother and he care for each other. Rather than showing intimacy directly, Kim suggests it through images of two pairs of shoes resting on the step outside the house and an increasing number of the artist's paintbrushes hanging on the wall. During long stretches when the picture man is traveling, Ehwa's mother's longing parallels her daughter's yearning when Duksam is away at sea earning money so that he and Ehwa can get married. By presenting these two love stories in parallel, Kim deepens and enriches the effect of each.

Yet another way in which the Color Trilogy pushes boundaries is in focusing on a strong, single female character and her daughter in a time and place historically and geographically remote for today's young readers. In many ways, the most compelling love story told in the Color Trilogy is that of the mother-daughter bond. The characterizations of Ehwa and her mother are thoughtfully and convincingly delineated. At times, they are best friends, such as when they discuss their love interests. At other times, they are clearly portrayed as parent and child, for example, when Ehwa's mother switches her daughter after she stays out late seeing Duksam off at the train station and refusing to tell her mother where she's been. And at yet other times, the relationship is more one of mentor-mentee: Ehwa's mother offers poetic descriptions of sexuality and love, often serving as a corrective to the misinformation that Bongsoon has provided. Not surprisingly, the two women experience complicated, bittersweet feelings about being separated from each other when Ehwa gets married.

Expanding the boundaries of what is (and is not) considered appropriate for young readers may meet with objections on the part of parents and other adults, especially when the boundaries being expanded have to do with sex and sexuality. While these topics are not new in books for young people, they are, according to Dresang, "being revisited with greater candor," especially in Radical Change books: "The focus is on what young people

want to know and how they want to know it, rather than on what *adults* want them to know and how they want them to know it.”⁵⁸

It should be noted that another of Dresang’s passions was intellectual freedom, and she was a tireless advocate for young people’s right to read what they chose. In fact, along with John S. Simmons, she coauthored *School Censorship in the 21st Century: A Guide for Teachers and School Library Media Specialists*.⁵⁹ Perhaps it is not surprising that the Color Trilogy was number two on the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom’s list of most frequently challenged books in 2011.⁶⁰ The reasons given for the challenges: “nudity; sex education; sexually explicit; unsuited to age group.”⁶¹ At the same time, the three books of the series made the Young Adult Library Association’s Great Graphic Novels for Teens list in 2010, and reviewers praised the books, noting about one that “indelicat moments” were “tenderly rendered”⁶² and that while “sexuality and puberty . . . are frankly depicted,” this “quiet, dreamy book” is also “a thoughtful coming-of-age story.”⁶³ No doubt, the fact that the books have been marketed to young adults and have received a number of accolades has drawn the attention and ire of some adults. It is also quite possible that what these adults find most objectionable is the *visual* depiction of sex and sexuality, which circles back to our earlier discussion of the multiliteracies reflected in and facilitated by these graphic novels. In any case, it is clear that the three types of Radical Change are closely interwoven throughout these books, offering a reading experience that fosters connectivity, interactivity, and access.

Conclusion

Looking at the Color Trilogy through the prism of Radical Change both deepens one’s appreciation for Kim’s achievement and confirms the efficacy of Dresang’s theory as a tool for critical analysis and evaluation. Through the coming-of-age story of a young girl in early twentieth-century rural Korea, Kim creates synergy between words and pictures (RC1), introduces new perspectives (RC2), and expands thematic boundaries (RC3). In so doing, he encourages the kind of interactive, thoughtful, engaged reading that Dresang argued was facilitated by Radical Change books. By stripping away the lines in his

mother's face (as he notes in the introduction to each volume in the series), he sees "her transform into a blushing sixteen-year-old girl."⁶⁴ In effect, he brings this "traditional" story into the digital age, making it accessible for today's young people and helping them connect with the life of a Korean girl from nearly a century ago.

Notes

¹ Eliza T. Dresang, *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1999), 19, 24, 26.

² Eliza T. Dresang, “Radical Change Revisited: Dynamic Digital Age Books for Youth,” *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 8 (2008): 295.

³ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ While he is credited as Kim Dong Hwa on the English version of the Color Trilogy, it is culturally appropriate to refer to him as Kim Donghwa, where Kim is the surname.

⁶ The Color Trilogy was originally published as a serialized comic strip in *Twenty Seven* magazine over three years before being gathered and eventually published as a three-volume set in 2003 under the title *The Story of Life on the Golden Plains* in the Korean edition. The English-language three-volume set, published in 2009, was translated by Lauren Na. More information can be found in this interview: Michael C. Lorah, “The Colors of Kim Dong Hwa—the ‘Color’ Trilogy,” *Newsarama.com*, April 16, 2009, <http://www.newsarama.com/2683-the-colors-of-kim-dong-hwa-the-color-trilogy.html>.

⁷ Kim Dong Hwa, *The Color of Earth, The Color of Water, The Color of Heaven* (New York: First Second, 2009).

⁸ “Dong Hwa Kim,” *MacMillan.com* (2014), <http://us.macmillan.com/author/donghwakim>; Chan-hwe Seo, “Drawing a New Korean Aesthetic,” *_list Books from Korea* 6 (Winter 2009), http://www.list.or.kr/articles/article_view.htm?Div1=9&Div2=&Idx=303&lPage=2.

⁹ Chan-hwe Seo, “Drawing a New Korean Aesthetic.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 19.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The New London Group, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” *Harvard Educational Review* 66 (1996): 63.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Eliza T. Dresang and Kyungwon Koh, “Radical Change Theory, Youth Information Behavior, and School Libraries,” *Library Trends* 58 (2009): 34.

¹⁹ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 88.

²⁰ Ibid., 22.

²¹ You can preview both *CE* and *CH* on Google Books for some of the examples we discuss below.

²² Kim, *The Color of Earth*, 20–21.

²³ Rob Vollmar, “Three Korean Graphic Novelists Reimagine the Genre,” *World Literature Today* 84 (2010): 58.

²⁴ Kim, *The Color of Earth*, 184–85.

²⁵ Kim, *The Color of Water*, 180–81.

²⁶ Kim, *The Color of Earth*, 70.

²⁷ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 36.

²⁸ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 24.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ In-ha Park, “100 Years of Korean Manhwa” *_list Books from Korea* 4 (Summer 2009), http://www.list.or.kr/articles/article_view.htm?cPage=1&Div1=8&Idx=177.

³¹ Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007); Elizabeth Kalen, *Mostly Manga: A Genre Guide to Popular Manga, Manhwa, Manhua, and Anime* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2012).

³² Michelle Martinez, “Manhwa: South Korean Comics,” in *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: History, Theme, and Technique*, ed. Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2012.); Kalen, *Mostly Manga*.

³³ Martinez, “Manhwa.”

³⁴ Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime*; Kalen, *Mostly Manga*.

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- ³⁵ Kim, *The Color of Water*, 25.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Kim, *The Color of Heaven*, 14–35.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 35.
- ³⁹ Dresang, “Radical Change Revisited.”
- ⁴⁰ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 133.
- ⁴¹ Kim, *The Color of Heaven*, 36–40.
- ⁴² Kim, *The Color of Water*, 48–49.
- ⁴³ “Dong Hwa Kim,” *MacMillan.com*; Lorah, “The Colors of Kim Dong Hwa.”
- ⁴⁴ Daniel D. Clark, “Color Trilogy, The,” in *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: Independents and Underground Classics*, ed. Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2012).
- ⁴⁵ Kim, *The Color of Heaven*, 310.
- ⁴⁶ Lorah, “The Colors of Kim Dong Hwa.”
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Kim, *The Color of Water*, 53.
- ⁵⁰ Lorah, “The Colors of Kim Dong Hwa.”
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Kim, *The Color of Water*, 175–79.
- ⁵³ Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, eds., *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Yung-Chung Kim. *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945* (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1977).
- ⁵⁴ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 26.
- ⁵⁵ Kim, *The Color of Earth*, 32.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 238.
- ⁵⁷ Another criticism of the Color Trilogy noted by Clark is the contrast between the sexual promiscuity of the less attractive Bongsoon and the purity, chastity, and beauty of Ehwa, where it is argued that Bongsoon’s behaviors and appearance seem to be portrayed as less desirable or acceptable. In an interview, Kim addresses this by stating he wanted

to have the contrast and friendship there to show different ways in life and to show the uniqueness of Ehwa, but not to say whether Bongsoon or Ehwa was necessarily better or worse than other. Clark, “Color Trilogy”; Lorah, “The Colors of Kim Dong Hwa.”

⁵⁸ Dresang, *Radical Change*, 190–91; emphasis in original.

⁵⁹ John S. Simmons and Eliza T. Dresang, *School Censorship in the 21st Century: A Guide for Teachers and School Library Media Specialists* (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001).

⁶⁰ American Library Association, “Frequently Challenged Books of the 21st Century,” 2014, <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Karen Coats, review of *The Color of Earth*, in *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* 62 (2009). Retrieved from Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database.

⁶³ Amy Luedtke, review of *The Color of Earth*, in *Voice of Youth Advocates* 32 (2009). Retrieved from Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database.

⁶⁴ Kim, *The Color of Earth*, 7.