

From National History to Subject in Writing: Reading the Colonial Korean Poet Yoon Dong-ju with the *Zainichi* Korean Writer Yi Yang-ji

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Context

The year 2017 marked the centennial of the birth of the Korean poet, Yoon Dong-ju 윤동주 尹東柱 (1917-1945).¹ Long the most beloved and widely cited poet of the Korean people, Yoon was born in Manchuria under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). He received higher education in Seoul, Tokyo, and Kyoto as the stringency of Japanese colonial rule peaked during the period of “total mobilization” for the Pacific War. Just months before Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allies and relinquishment of control over Korea and other colonies, Yoon died in Fukoka, a political prisoner wrongly accused of underground political activities against Japanese rule. Yoon’s poetry, emphatically situated within the historical context and delicately modulated by youthful pathos, almost seems to have augured his death, whose tragic appeal lies precisely in the absurdity of the portrait of a young, and by all accounts extremely sensitive, man of literature hounded by colonial violence. In short, it is the lack of rapport (between poetry and violence), and the simultaneous bond of necessity (poetry as response to violence) between the sensing subject and the blind drive of national-colonial ideology that render Yoon’s case singularly affecting and resonant not only for his Korean compatriots but, as I will argue, for *all* subjects. On the occasion of the centennial, numerous events were held to commemorate his life and poetry in the historical context of colonialism and national resistance, from lectures, conferences, and art exhibitions, to Christian services, concerts, and theatrical performances.² Even a commercial biopic was released a year ahead, as if to prepare popular consciousness for the sober work of remembrance: *Dong Ju: The Portrait of a Poet* (dir. Yi Joon-ik). While South Korea was the chief venue for these events, Japan, China, and the US also hosted a number of them.³ Against the backdrop of this understandably national program of valorisation with its appeal to the historical, political, and cultural collectivity of the Korean people, I propose to highlight the properly universal question of the speaking/writing subject which, at once a theme and the site of poetic practice, constitutes the very *literary* property of Yoon’s legacy.

Furthermore, as I will argue, Yoon's significance as a literary subject, situated in colonial history, acquires a more definite contour when juxtaposed with Yi Yang-ji 李良枝 (1955-92), a second-generation *zainichi* Korean writer. The Japanese term *zainichi* (在日) designates ethnic Korean residents of Japan, both immigrants and their descendants. This group's diasporic roots began during Japan's colonial rule, i.e. during the course of Yoon's life; and as such the term is pregnant with historical, political, and cultural tension, indicative especially of discrimination regularly practiced if not fully avowed even today. In 1989, Yi received the Akutagawa Prize for *Yuhi* (由熙), a novella approaching an elemental articulation of *zainichi* subjectivity, thus becoming the first *zainichi* woman to be honoured with the most prestigious award in Japanese literature. While her earlier works may seem more thematically forceful and narratively sophisticated, the way in which they chronicle issues of identity, historically, socially, and culturally determined, could have the effect of alienating readers in Japan who might identify their positions as those of the antagonists appearing in their pages. *Yuhi*, on the other hand, takes the notations of *difference* all the way to the level of the senses and thus accommodates a wider, more universalized appeal, which I take to have been an important condition for its official recognition culminating in the Akutagawa Prize. Yet, this is not at all to say that Yi thereby diluted the particularity of the *zainichi* experience. To the contrary, the arrival at *Yuhi* was the result of long struggles, precisely with the *limits of particularity*.

In short, Yi's and Yoon's authorial strivings confronted different moments but the same logic of history. Yi's biography as a colonial remnant—born of Korean parents in postwar Japan, speaking Japanese as her “mother” tongue, yet without an ethnic-national claim to it, all the while excluded from her *other* mother tongue, i.e. Korean—contains, ferments, transforms Yoon's, woven as it was directly into the production *cum* destruction of colonialism. For it was this same colonialism which led to an unprecedented volume of overseas migration, forced by either the Japanese government policy or economic circumstances, of which Yi's parents each exemplified one instance. Unsurprisingly yet remarkably, Yi's narrativity and Yoon's poetics demonstrate the same *quest(ion)s* posed between the writing subject and the historical world. Most importantly, the ultimate drive of these quest(ion)s, we discover, is of and for language, which allows the particular-historical, individual as well as worldly, to encounter the universal-infinite. The astral realm, i.e. sky, wind, and stars features in Yoon's celebrated “Prologue” (서시 序詩), and the depth of the “being of the human” (人間という存在) is central to Yi's repeated statement of authorial purpose (“Interview” 81). Reading Yoon and Yi side by side, we confirm once again that the problem of (post)colonial national

history ought to, and can only, be finally engaged and resolved as subjective process and arrival.

Poetry

In considering the conventional designation of Yoon Dong-ju as a “national poet” (*minjok siin* 민족시인 民族詩人), we ought to be determining the singular relation between Yoon the individual (*in* 인 人), poetry (*si* 시 詩), and (Korean) nation (*minjok* 민족 民族). A cursory survey will reveal, however, that the cherished epithet is internally bifurcated: the nation (*minjok*) is the premise and the confirmation of the actuality of the poet (*siin*). In short, if Yoon is first and foremost a poet, an ontological determination, Yoon-as-poet is exalted to the extent of his/its national value. What gets lost in this hasty nominalization is the *relation internal to the poet*. To begin with, in both the Korean and Japanese renditions, the “poet” is composed of two semantic components: “poetry” and “person.” Perhaps we have ceased to heed language. Having acknowledged this distance *qua* relation, we can then bring them back together *differently*, each now radiating in its being *qua* becoming (each other), to designate the *subject*. For what is a poet if not a subject in the most primary sense, i.e. the subject of language? What is a subject if not a constant tarrying with the Other, the locus-premise of language and therefore the subject? At the same time, the relation between nation and poet, which has subsumed nearly all commemorations in the name of Yoon Dong-ju, needs to be approached afresh.

We ought to know by now that the nation, insofar as it is a concept born of modernity with its violent demands of and against identity, cannot be thought without the Other, who calls it into being. What is the authenticity, autonomy, of a nation, national consciousness, when the Other is its unwanted, unacknowledged, *origin* and the continuing target of appeal? This temporality *cum* actuality is the first complication in thinking the nation, a complication all the more urgent and delicate in the context of (post)coloniality. Much of postcolonial criticism in the past several decades was devoted to illuminating this complication, to arriving at strategies with which a new nation might claim authenticity and autonomy even while owning up to its deep history of the Other (see Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought; The Nation*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*). Central to this task were such binary, and as such mutually integral, terms as universal and particular, global and local, and (historical) discourse and (material) life-world. Cosmopolitanism seems to have been the last in the series of conceptual innovations and practical visions, expected to encompass *all* of the above contradictions: as a mode of experience, negotiation, and reordering of spatial reality (a thoroughly globalized yet

nonetheless divided world) and of temporal violence (constant [re]inscription of particular pasts into the universal future). Encompass it did, if only to create new tensions. As Sheldon Pollock *et al.* noted two decades ago:

It is fundamentally facile to claim (as many do) that new media and market technologies have ushered in undreamed of possibilities of access and connectivity on a global scale, rendering the postcolonial paradigms of justice and redistribution obsolete in the face of choice, opportunity, and enterprise. Yet despite our discontents and discomfitures, we are properly resistant to a radical revanchism that seeks a return to the certainties of a world of the either/or: either First or Third World; either communism or capitalism; either planned economies or free markets; either the secular or the sacred; either class politics above all other differences or a betrayal of the spirit of History itself. (578; 580)

We have already moved on. Today the critical preoccupation is with the single order of capitalism and science and technology, and what it prescribes for the anthropological and ecological future. In short, the universal future has become too pressing for us to dwell on particular pasts.⁴ This reasoning is not merely apologetic. True, any “universal” future almost invariably takes form as a “particular” problematics rooted in and defined by the legacy of the past. Yet, note the recent upsurge of nationalism in fully developed “Western” nations. This nationalism cannot be confused with that of the 20th century marked by (post)colonial legacy but must be interpreted as part and parcel of the systematic acceleration affecting the economic, scientific-technological, and ideological spheres in the 21st century. The earlier “modernist nationalisms with their tendency to connect cultures and identities to specific places” have thus given way to “a world increasingly deterritorialized by migration, mediatization, and capital flows” (579). As such, “nationalism” more often than not has transmogrified into a claim *against* postcolonial subjects *qua* global subalterns, formerly serious students of (First World) nationalism and now alienated both internally by their own nations set on the developmental course of growth at all costs and externally by the more “advanced” nations which like to wear “humanitarianism” on their sleeve. As Pollock *et al.* put it, “[t]he discriminatory perspectives of an older form of globalization—colonization—seem to have revived themselves at the point at which we readily consider ourselves to be worldwide citizens forever ‘hooked up’ (connected) on-line” (581). It is precisely the *logic* of nationalism that persists in violence. We need genuinely new theoretical formulations beyond the distribution of culpability, questioning the logic itself.

To keep pace with the lessons of postcolonial criticism in the context of Yoon Dong-ju then, we cannot but question *once again* the entrenched value of the “national poet.” As Heo Jung established in 2009, Yoon largely remained a canonical author in respect to his place within the resistant ideology vis-à-vis Japanese colonialism (573); and

thus it remains a critical task to read the “difference between the meaning of [his] works and the meaning that has been added to [his] works on account of their canonical value” (575; my translation). Indeed, efforts to interpret Yoon and his poetry away from the particularist ideological premise of “Korea(n)” soon followed Heo’s appeal. Jinhee Kim reads the varying reception of Yoon in the three national/regional locales—South Korea, Japan, and China (mainly Northeast China where the ethnic Korean population is concentrated). Huh Hyun Sook compares Yoon with Seamus Heaney, considering their differing poetic vocations within the respective colonial contexts of Korea and Northern Ireland. The upshot of these comparative approaches is precisely a discursive wedge between author and nation, not to disregard the importance of their relation but to accommodate *poetics* to emerge in that gap. The popular cultural industry has not been a bystander in this new awakening, producing some surprising new takes on entrenched historical perceptions. Films like *Spirits Homecoming* (귀향, dir. Cho Jung-rae, 2016) and *The Handmaiden* (아가씨, dir. Park Chan-wook, 2016) can be read simultaneously as an oblique intervention into statist-nationalist history and a ludic tribute to the so-called “comfort women” (wartime sexual slavery) issue at the traumatic kernel of national memory. At this hopeful juncture then, we have the privilege to further invent connections, conceptual, theoretical, biographical, historical, and more, which will shed new light on not only Yoon’s poetry but also these terms themselves.

An apposite point of entry into one such connection is found in Kim Shi-jong’s Japanese translation of Yoon’s poetry, which appeared as an Iwanami pocket edition in 2012. Not only is the accessibility of this form significant, inviting as it does personal engagement with the material frequently privileged for its public value, but the inclusion of the original Korean poems in the volume—highly unusual for a Japanese mass-market paperback—demonstrates a heightened awareness of language as poetic medium as well as Yoon’s historical situated-ness. In an interpretive essay appended at the end of the collection, Kim repeats Heo’s concern cited above, yet there is a particular immediacy to his critique as it is uttered from the position of “someone who [like Yoon] writes poetry,” which proves instructive in its difference from academic discourse.⁵ Furthermore, Kim’s status as a *zainichi* Korean furnishes a poetic mediation between Yoon and Yi Yang-ji. Indeed, Kim’s volume seems not only to warrant the kind of juxtaposition intended by the present discussion but also to arise from the long-simmering demand for it, if necessarily unarticulated because subliminally transmitted. It is my claim that Yi completes a certain historical *cum* subjective trajectory that Yoon began. The arc commences at poetic sensibility and arrives at discursive judgment, both junctures shining in the same clarity of purpose—clarity precisely

on account of lacking objectives or goals, possessing only the devotion and sincerity of search.

It is in this sense that I see a necessity that Kim, who critiques the nation—if only peripherally, and for good reason—be someone who does not *belong*. Let us not ask “to what?” For, if “belonging” designates an object qua destination, “not belonging” should be less a failure to arrive at the object than a withdrawal from objectivity as such. This is precisely the lesson I want to draw out by the end of this discussion, i.e. how true belonging must occur *in the absence of an object, place, or name as destination*. Kim first reminds us of Yoon’s biographical circumstances:

Although we say ‘symbol of national resistance,’ strictly speaking Yoon Dong-ju was a grandson of settlers, living in a foreign country separated from the ancestral land; the images of nature woven in Yoon Dong-ju’s poetry are the landscape and scenery of northern Jiandao, i.e. Mingdong and Longjing, in Manchuria of Northeast China where he was born and raised. (167)

This is not a mere detail but a crucial condition of Yoon’s lyricism (*jojō* 抒情), which necessarily arose from sensory engagement with the world that he inhabited. Expanding this view, we shall recognize how Yoon’s “national” imaginary had to be mediated by the “foreign” locales where he spent periods of his short life, all “Japanese” to varying degrees, whether Manchuria, Seoul, or Kyoto. Alternatively, the very distinction between native, foreign, and enemy is exploded by the colonial diasporic subjectivity of Yoon and his contemporaries.

Kim then goes on to problematize how the characterization of Yoon as a “national poet” has persisted in disregard for his poetics: “Too little has been done toward perceiving the true form of that ‘resistance’ in Yoon Dong-ju’s works” (168). This failure is attributed to a kind of historical desire:

Overwhelmed by impatience with the Japan of the past, which mercilessly killed a poet who was neither political nor an anti-Japanese [propagandist], we gnash our teeth. This is the reason, for the readers, why Yoon Dong-ju has to be a ‘symbol of resistance.’ (168)

Kim’s interest in Yoon’s poetics, on the other hand, is for its subjective significance, what he calls “spiritual suffering” (*seishin no kunō* 精神の苦悩), long “overlooked” by (national) critics (169). Take “Self-Portrait” (자화상 自畫像), whose subject, “I,” finds a man sitting at the bottom of a well and feels repulsion and compassion in alternation, because the man is really “I”—hence, “Self-Portrait”:

Coming around the mountain, I go up alone to the solitary well
at the edge of the rice field
and peer in, quietly.

Inside the well, the moon is bright, the clouds flow by,

the sky spreads out, and a light blue wind blows;
autumn is there.

And a man is there.
I turn away because I hate the man, somehow.

Pondering over him as I set out to leave, I feel sorry for him
and go back and look in: he is still there.

Again I turn away hating the fellow.
I think of him, again setting out, and begin to miss him.

Inside the well, the moon is bright, the clouds flow by,
the sky spreads out, a light blue wind blows;
autumn is there, and a man, like a memory. (Yun, *Sky, Wind, and Stars* 64)

산모퉁이를 돌아 논가 외판우물을 홀로 찾아가선
가만히 들여다 봅니다.

우물속에는 달이 밝고 구름이 흐르고 하늘이 펼쳐지고
파아란 바람이 불고 가을이 있습니다.

그리고 한 사나이가 있습니다.
어쩐지 그 사나이가 미워져 돌아옵니다.

돌아가다 생각하니 그 사나이가 가엾어집니다.
도로가 들여다 보니 사나이는 그대로 있습니다.

다시 그 사나이가 미워져 돌아옵니다.
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우물속에는 달이 밝고 구름이 흐르고 하늘이 펼쳐지고
파아란 바람이 불고 가을이 있고
追憶처럼 사나이가 있습니다. (Yoon, *Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poetry* 107)

Kim's interpretation of this poem illustrates his overarching understanding of Yoon's poetics as "the expression of a quietly dignified soul that wished for nothing aside from living sincerely; shot through with sincere questioning ... to his powerless self; objectifying even himself as a 'thing' to gaze upon; continuing to ask of himself the meaning of what it is to live" (Kim 165; 169; 175; 183). The arc of this reading goes from personal-historical reality as a particular problem to the task of living as a subject as a universal problematic. This opening of one to all undergoes intensification through particular others, to arrive at the Other *qua* All that includes the poetic subject himself. "A Consolation" (위로 慰勞) (Yun, *Sky, Wind, and Stars* 67) and "Hospital" (병원 病院) (68) zoom in on two others, strangers in their distinct otherness, a sick man in one and a sick woman in the other, only to refocus on the narrator himself as the other, wanting to give consolation, offer company, yet despairing, seeing that there is nothing he can do. He nonetheless does some things whose value, however, lies not in the others' reception thereof but a kind of sending forward (whereto?) the space, time, and pain through which his being coincides

with theirs. So he “[messes] up the spider’s web” that he can see that the sick man can also see; and “[tries] lying where [the sick woman] has just been lying” in the hope that “she will quickly regain her health—and [I] mine.” This movement from others to the poetic subject to the Other in whose otherness All are identified seems to be the ethico-poetic logic operative in much of Yoon’s poetry.

This is how we are called to understand Yoon’s resolution in his most beloved poem, “Prelude” (서시 序詩):

Wishing not to have
so much as a speck of shame
toward heaven until the day I die,
I suffered, even when the wind stirred the leaves.
With my heart singing to the stars,
I shall love all things that are dying.
And I must walk the road
that has been given to me.

Tonight, again, the stars are
brushed by the wind. (Yun, *Sky, Wind, and Stars* 1)

죽는 날까지 하늘을 우러러
한점 부끄럼이 없기를,
잎새에 이는 바람에도
나는 괴로워했다.
별을 노래하는 마음으로
모든 죽어가는것을 사랑해야지
그리고 나한테 주어진 길을
걸어가야겠다.

오늘밤에도 별이 바람에 스치운다. (Yoon, *Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poetry* 107)

Consider the movement from “my heart” to “all things that are dying,” “given to me,” and finally “the stars ... the wind.” It is a variation on the structure of “A Consolation” and “Hospital” whereby the poetic subject displaces the others as the starting point; and the depth of the ethical demand on himself opens with a calm yet decisive leap to the Other *qua* All whose *com-passion* is constituted precisely by the temporality of Death. With poignancy and freshness, I would add, this little stanza offers an appropriately *negative* lesson, for positivity has a way of putting us on the wrong footing, towards nominalisation, projection, destination: a lesson on how to efface *neither* particular condition/pursuit *nor* universal vocation/Truth as the work of the subject. The passivity written into the figures of death and fate is not one of mournfulness but serenity in the face of the absent object(ive). The “road ... given” is fully embraced precisely *as that of death*, insofar as the poetic subject is always already a “dying” “thing.” In this sense, we can even venture, Yoon’s resolution is to love *himself* precisely as a being always already under erasure and thereby communing with *all* things, constituting a point of arrival from “Self-Portrait.” Thus he traverses from one who “suffered” to All who (he)

“shall love” by which point subject (who loves) and object (that is loved), and one (of the poetic subject) and All (of his truth and aspiration), slide on the Moebius strip of the Other and the subject, and trauma and redemption inherent in the subject.

We may rephrase the lesson of this return from the “national poet” to the poet Yoon Dong-ju, by borrowing postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak’s instructive words:

In fact, tokenization goes with ghettoization. These days, I am constantly invited to things so that I will present the Third World point of view; when you are perceived as a token, you are also silenced in a certain way because ... if you have been brought there it has been covered, they needn’t worry about it anymore, you salve their conscience.... (61)

Taking the individual as a token of a historical reality defeats the very political purpose of illuminating the far from straightforward relation between the individual and history, i.e. by reducing them to each other, presuming that the mutual representation exhausts their significance and resolves their entanglement. What is needed is then precisely the liberation of the individual subject *as well as* historical reality beyond the ideological presumption, appropriation, of their commensurability. For, as Spivak continues, “[the] person who *knows* has all the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, seems not to have a problematic self” (66). This is why few, *least of all* those who know, inhabit, negotiate daily a given reality, can easily speak of it. The more authentically, i.e. as a problematic self, the subject situates himself or herself in that reality, the less can he or she represent it. Speaking, representing, or being a token, are different forms of treachery—treachery against the “self” that persists precisely to the extent that it remains indeterminate even while determined—to do what, if not search? Searching in this instance is less an action in the service of an object than a mode of being, which ever opens to others, the Other, All.

Nevertheless, we continue to speak, because *we cannot do otherwise*. How we might speak *differently* then becomes the crucial question. Taking Spivak’s lesson to heart, we shall now speak less of what is known about Yoon but rather of what Yoon knew and *for that reason* did not cease to question, examine, and make demands on himself. The gestures of questioning, examining, and demanding are condensed in one of Yoon’s most intense poetic instantiations, titled “Eight Blessings—Matthew 5:3-12”

(팔복 八福—마태복음 5장 3-12) :

Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.
Blessed are they who mourn.

Blessed are they who mourn,

They shall grieve forever. (Yun, *Sky, Wind, and Stars* 66)

슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니
슬퍼하는 자는 복이 있나니

저희가 永遠히 슬플것이오. (Yoon, *Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poetry* 124)

In reading this poem, Heo considers the historical context in which the Korean Christian Church began to submit to, even actively collaborate with, Japanese colonial rule, and how that might have deeply affected Yoon, a devoted Christian, causing the fifteen-month hiatus in his poetic production from September 1939 to November 1940 (588-589). It was, in other words, from the deep despair felt during this period that Yoon penned the uncharacteristically ironic, even deliberately injurious, yet quiet outburst that is “Eight Blessings,” the same month of December 1940, when he wrote “A Consolation” and “Hospital” whose redemptive message is no more godly, indeed infinitely human, humble, and melancholy (588). Heo is correct to detect an instance of semiotic displacement (*à la* Julia Kristeva in her theory of revolutionary language) in the conspicuous repetition giving form to the poem. Yet, what is displaced in this instance cannot be the “repressed unconscious” in the familiar Freudian sense. Where Heo describes repressed “sadness . . . despair and religious disillusionment,” a more faithful Freudian reading would only identify affects detached from the repressed *idea* (591). As Kristeva observes, it is indeed the drive (*Trieb*), which is part of *signifiance* and therefore makes the latter a “heterogeneous process” but, as such, repressed when this process culminates, is enclosed in meaning (Kristeva 17). In this sense, the semiotic tension of the poem must indicate *jouissance*—the pain-pleasure of what Kristeva designates as “revolution,” the discharging of the repressed drives, thus revelation of the truth of *signifiance* as more and less than meaning. Moreover, revolutionary language is directly generative, constitutive, and consequential of the revolutionary subject in a temporality that disallows chronology. “Eight Blessings” then, with its poignant distance from the narrative meaning central to Yoon’s other poetic work, and explosive confrontation with language qua limit, is a radically intimate plunge into the being of language, which throws brief yet intense light on the subject arising from and stranded in the depth of *signifiance*. This is indeed a supremely poetic moment in Yoon’s oeuvre that instructs us to witness, beyond or

beneath the historical, narrative, and affective meaning, the subject standing bare before language as such.

This is the procedure, work, and ritual by which Yoon's particular position is delivered to its universal truth, i.e. the problematic of language, the self qua speaking subject. Yoon's poetic truth lies in this register. It *speaks* (the language) of the problematic of the "self" who *cannot speak* the reality that at once propels and repels him, makes and unmakes him. We ought then to resist the understandable impulse — impulse not only to speak "for" Yoon but perhaps even to "let" him speak for himself. We might instead try standing where he stood (much as the young man tries lying where the sick woman has just lain in "Hospital"), where poetics arises as this impossibility *and* drive *nevertheless* to speak. Put differently, we need to attend to the ways in which the particular extends to the universal which then returns to the particular *ad infinitum*—a sequence that cannot be linear to the extent that the terms meanwhile undergo radical—dialectical—transformation. Once again Spivak elucidates this dynamic: "The space I occupy might be explained by my history. It is a position into which I have been written. I am not privileging it, but I do want to use it" (68). For, what is its "use," if not to traverse the "position" to which she accords no privilege? Where does the traversal lead, if not the universal? Why take particularity seriously, indeed how, if not for its promise of, for, the universal?

Inheritance: From Yoon Dong-ju to Yi Yang-ji

If Yoon Dong-ju's poetry was laconic, like a far night sky studded with bright solitary stars, the novels and essays by Yi Yang-ji seem driven to fill even the interstellar distances with light, darkly burning. Whence this devotion, indeed madness? Is not authenticity a plight?

While national (post)colonial history occupies a privileged place in various formalized discourses, other life-worlds have been afforded little discursive attention precisely for the reason of their *difference*, indeterminate, volatile, and searching, in the shadow of the nation. One such difference, the *zainichi* status, redoubles the problem of the self (see Wender, *Lamentation; Into the Light*). It has to be, at least in part, from his personal-historical situation as *zainichi* Korean that Kim Shi-jong is able to see through the significance of the "national poet" as a complex of desire, fantasy, and deception to arrive at the universal problematic underwriting Yoon's poetics.

Yi Yang-ji, differently from either Yoon or Kim, resolutely plunges into the depths of *zainichi* reality. She diverges as well from the women activists, who from the 1990s approached the *zainichi* issue from feminist perspectives, displacing the operative binary from "Self and Other, coloniser and colonised" to women and men in patriarchy,

whether Japanese or Korean (Chapman 353). Yi's pursuit was to demonstrate binaries *as such* to be inoperable. This was accomplished by meticulously enumerating the culpabilities of *all* parties involved in that reality through voracious historical study and, in the process, fully owning that reality, for all its cruel intimacy and deceptive license for victimhood, as a *personal* responsibility, as the problematic of existence as such:

I must not use my own weakness to excuse or encourage the fact that the repressive condition for the *zainichi* Koreans is caused in spite of all. I must not under any circumstances live in a fluttering way. I will live greedily until something becomes visible. As one *zainichi* woman. (Yi, *Complete Works* 591)

在日朝鮮人の抑圧状況が不本意に引き起こされているという事実を、自分の軟弱さをもって許し、助長させるわけにはいかない。... ひらひらとは決して生きまい。何かが見えてくるまで貪慾に生きてやろうと思うのだ。在日朝鮮人の一女性として。

This resolution to *live*, articulated with such clarity as early as 1975 when Yi was only twenty, persisted until the end of her life from a sudden illness in 1992. The mode of that persistence ranged from her relations with her family members to her absorption in traditional musical instruments like *kayageum* and *daegeum* and folk-spiritual and religious dances like *salpuri* and *seungmu*, to her writerly production.

Yi's writings illuminate in particular what we might call, after critic Watanabe Naomi, her desire/predicament to "repeat" (反復する): "accompanied by leaps and gaps, she continued writing nearly the same things as her debut work" (飛躍と破綻を伴いつつ、処女作とほとんど同じことを書き続けてゆく) (366). An oft-noted feature of her novels is their invariably autobiographical nature. Responding to the echo of Freud's notion of "compulsion to repeat" in Watanabe's terminology, we might then ask: What is the trauma that simultaneously afflicts and enables Yi to repeat? An obvious answer is, as Yi herself testifies, *zainichi* reality, brutal awakening to her self-portrait, to borrow Yoon's metaphor, as a "'dirty and barbaric' Korean" ('不潔で野蛮な'朝鮮人) as the Japanese (post)colonial perception would have it (*Complete Works* 584). Interestingly, however, *Yuhi* reveals another trauma, indeed a trauma that redoubles the challenge of the *zainichi* identity externally inscribed. *Yuhi*, the titular heroine and a *zainichi* student in Seoul, is confronted with resistance *within* herself to "becoming" Korean. Her body revolts against the vulgarity of "Korean" life that assaults her from all directions; and, in the end, without completing her studies at Seoul National University, she returns to Japan.⁶ Melissa Wender cites Yi's own experience to the same effect: "[Yi] talks about how 'Japanese' her motions were when she began Korean dance and admits that she had hoped her study of

Korean dance and music would allow her to express a ‘dogmatic nationalism.’ Unfortunately, however, her body’s resistance had made it impossible for her to be nationalist” (*Lamentation* 130). Having come to Korea with the hope of finding her national—ethnic, cultural, and historical—roots, Yuhi and Yi only suffer a second trauma.⁷

As is well known, Freud defines trauma as comprising two events, with the traumatic significance of the first emerging only with the second. Repetition is thus inherent in trauma’s ontology as well as the psychical mechanism of processing it. I do not mean to say that Yuhi’s or Yi’s encounter with her *zainichi* identity in Japan was not traumatic in and of itself. Rather, its most injurious truth comes to the fore with their inability to assume “genuine” Korean identity in Korea. The lesson of this (literal) *contre-temps* is properly philosophical. For what Yi recognizes is the single problem of “how to live”: “One must live, no matter where one is” (生きていくことはどこにあっても変わらない) (*Yuhi* 103). For instance, concerning her captivation with Korean dances in the midst of “all kinds of sufferings [she] had to experience in the motherland” (母国で味わなければならなかったさまざまな苦しみ), Yi states:

[They] hinted at a way to overcoming the *particularity of the position of zainichi* countrymen, and something like the narrowness of the viewpoint regarding the modern history of the relation between Korea and Japan, which I could not but encounter in thinking about my own existence as a *zainichi*. (*Complete Works* 649; emphasis mine)

在日同胞という立場の特殊性とか、在日同胞である私自身の存在を考えるときぶつかるしかない韓日間の近代史に関する視野がもつ、ある意味における狭さのようなものを克服できる道を暗示してくれた....

More strikingly, Yi overturns the notion of cultural heritage by saying:

[Korean dances] delivered with real impact the irony that, for me, it was the more national and folk world that ultimately allowed the transcendence of the framework of nation, and truly taught me the fundamental source of the problem, namely, *spiritual universality*. (649; emphasis mine)

[韓国の踊りは]私としてはより民族的で土俗的な世界のほうが、究極的には民族という枠を超えることができるという逆説を実感をもって提供してくれる、まさに精神的な普遍性という問題の根源を教えてくれた....

What we have here is the same traversal found in Yoon Dong-ju’s poetics, that is, from particular reality to universal aspiration by way of deep engagement with the O/others.

The crisis that paralyzed Yuhi is not entirely despairing, *unfulfilling* though it is of her naive pursuit of identity—*home*. For

precisely in that crisis does she discover the singularly individual relation to language (Korean 韓国語; Hangeul ハングル) and voice (声) as distinct from the imperative category of “Korean.” Yuhi exclaims, for instance, “I like Onni’s (older sister’s) and Ajumoni’s (auntie’s) Korean. ... Just knowing that there were people who spoke this kind of Korean was worth my staying on in this country till today” (オンニとアジュモニの韓国語が好きです。... こんな風な韓国語を話す人たちがいたと知っただけでも、この国に居続けてきた甲斐がありました) (Yuhi 323; see also 335; 353). Moreover, Yuhi’s encounter with these singular instances of enunciation reverberates with Yi Yang-ji’s own rediscovery of language as such. At first she experienced language as an object of repulsion: “Whether Japanese or Korean, my body rejected words and the sounds that come from words” (日本語だろうと韓国語だろうと、身体中が、言葉や言葉から来る音を拒否していた). Later, however, she came to find it an object, better, a more-than-object, worthy of profound reflection *cum* inhabitation: “What is called language has a deep connection with the entire being of the human beings who use it. ... It is altogether like a living organism” (言葉というものは、それを使用する人間の存在のすべてと深い関わりがある...まるで生きている生命体のようなものです) (*Complete Works* 645; 663). Yi’s novelistic production was an answer to this call of the highest order.

Finally then, Yi’s rediscovery of language parallels her rediscovery of the “motherland” (*bokoku* 母国), which was no longer in “places, which are visible to the eyes and resounding with noise that stimulates the ears” (目に見え耳を刺激する騒音がざわめく場所), but “a place that is both frightening and peaceful, enveloped in a thick darkness ... a place that I can find not with my head but with my body, my entire body ...” (恐ろしくもあれば安らかな感じもする、濃い闇に包まれているところ.... 頭ではなく身体で、身体全体で出会えるところ...) (646). That is, a place beyond ready-made meanings, what she calls “slogans” (*hyōgo* 標語) and “professed values” (*taigi meibun* 大義名分), i.e. the stuff of nationalism, we might add. In this sense, it would be inadequate to conclude that “[t]rapped between the idealized homeland and its alien reality, [Yuhi finds herself] snugly, if inescapably and troublingly, at home in Japan” (Lie 55). Such a conclusion fails to situate the novel in the context of Yi’s overall oeuvre, which forcefully demands autobiographical interpretation. On the other hand, it would be just as inadequate to argue that binaries, national or otherwise, disappear in Yi’s hand. Catherine Ryu is right to guide our attention from the “reductive binary paradigm” of the order of national identity toward the Lacanian difference between the symbolic and the real, concepts capable of encompassing the full range of subjective constitutions

(315). The trouble is that Yi's concern is not any mythical "unity" between or arrival "beyond the distinctions of Self and Other" (322; 327); just as Lacan's is not. Indeed, Ryu's offhand evocation of "spirit possession" seems to take her Lacanian analytics away from Lacan's insistence on the Real as consequential *and* interruptive of the Symbolic and as such never able to culminate in the Other of the Other, precisely what the said "unity" fantasizes (315; 327). As I have argued, the issue relevant here is the work of the subject, which ever arises *as* difference of the Other. There is no other way to be a subject. Yi's vocation is precisely to *sustain* this difference inherent to the subject, which is also the gap that can never be sutured between versions of "Korea"—韓国, 祖国, 母国, ウリナラ—as well as Yi's uncountable identities—Korean, Japanese, *zainichi*.

Thus we arrive at the "motherland" as the place of subjective (re)birth, not on account of the "maternal" metaphor which can facilely take on Real pretension, but because precisely through Yi the "motherland" becomes endowed with reality, singular and *real*. From this newly found "spiritual autonomy" (精神的な主体性), Yi could embrace Japan newly, as neither a particular object nor opposed to Korea, for neither is Korea a particular object nor opposed to Japan (*Complete Works* 650). In what seems like a fitting afterword to *Yuhi*, Yi reflects:

It was an unexpected change in my heart to begin to think while in Seoul, 'I want to see Mt. Fuji.' Having actually come [to Mt. Fuji]...I was constantly surprised by how I felt. It was nothing. The Mt. Fuji that I had hated, resented, and rejected; the Mt. Fuji that I had nonetheless adored, which aroused such nostalgia as to stab my chest, had been reduced to something distant, a distorted figure in my passing memories. Mt. Fuji *simply was*. I myself, gazing at it, whispering, 'Beautiful,' was also *simply there*, tranquil. (624; emphasis mine)

富士山を見たい、とソウルで思い始めたのも、意外な心の変化だったが、実際に来て...自分自身の心の状態に驚かされ続けていた。何でもなかった。憎み、恨み、拒んで来た富士も、それでもいとおしく、胸が衝かれるほど懐かしかった富士も、過ぎ去った記憶の中の歪んだ姿として遠いものになりきっていた。富士山はただ在った。それを見つめて、美しいと呟いている自分も、ただそう在り、平静だった。

Reverberations

Reflecting on Yoon Dong-ju and Yi Yang-ji side by side, it is hard not to be astounded by the way they seem to speak to each other, as if they had written to the same planetary movement and the same rhythm, light, and fragrance of the world as it unfolded to the subject persisting in the praxis of being. The purity of Yoon's poetic imaginary and the

intensity of Yi's commitment to reality together constitute what I would like to call the possibility of being in the world as *other than* the sum of discourses, national or otherwise—other than, that is not to say to escape their violence, an impossibility, but to traverse fully, with utmost determination, the logic of their formation and dissolution. The lesson then is Yoon's and Yi's relation to language; their refusal to "use" it, add to so many hardened "meanings" which lay waste to it; their simultaneously innocent and serious uncertainty over what it means to *speak in the world*; their perception of the truth of any particular reality as arising from this universal predicament and opportunity; and their courage to fully inhabit that reality and thereby locate therein channels of living *qua* loving. The affinity shared by these writing subjects is not reducible to the (post)colonial or national-ethnic context, although this discursive reality has its own significance, whose potential to open up to what lies beyond itself is not to be underestimated. It is rather the genuinely subjective process of traversing—à la Lacan—the identitarian fantasies so as to arrive at the inextinguishable antagonism between the subject and language, which constitutes precisely the *ex-timate* Other of the speaking subject. It is the gap within the Symbolic that Yoon and Yi respectively yet in unison engage indefatigably, to demonstrate how the subject finds profound, and perhaps the only possible, freedom precisely there. I take this to be a radical lesson in our neoliberal times where the subject increasingly resorts to something other than itself, seeking identity over subjectivity, safety over adventure, security over love, and discourse over language.

Notes

1. The sources cited in this article transliterate Yoon Dong-ju's name in a variety of romanizations. My citations follow suit, without unifying their orthography. All Korean and Japanese names are given in their original order, i.e. surname followed by personal name, except when they are the authors of works written in English.

2. For a list of exemplary events, see the website of the Yoon Dong-ju Memorial Association (윤동주기념사업회) based at Yonsei University, formerly Yonhi College 연희전문학교, which was Yoon's home institution between 1938-42: [<http://yoondongju.yonsei.ac.kr/anounce/anounce.html>].

3. One widely publicized event was the dedication of a monument to Yoon in the town of Uji in Kyoto, Japan. See Suzuki.

4. For an instructive debate on the conceptual praxis of universality and particularity, see Butler, Laclau, and Žižek.

5. Kim 167. This and all subsequent translations from Japanese are mine.

6. On the subject of the body as a distinct feature of Yi's novelistic configurations, see Tsuji.

7. Yi gives details of her own experience similar to Yuhi's in an essay first delivered as a talk in Korean, published as "Motherland and Japan According to Me" (私にとっての母国と日本) (*Complete Works* 648-668).

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