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Journal

European Review, 23(3)

ISSN

1062-7987

Author

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Publication Date

2015-07-01

DOI

10.1017/s1062798715000113

Peer reviewed

European Review

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European Review / Volume 23 / Issue 03 / July 2015, pp 426 - 438
DOI: 10.1017/S1062798715000113, Published online: 02 June 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1062798715000113

How to cite this article:

Sowon S. Park (2015). An Unknown Masterpiece: On Pak Kyongni's *Land* and World Literature. *European Review*, 23, pp 426-438 doi:10.1017/S1062798715000113

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An Unknown Masterpiece: On Pak Kyongni's *Land* and World Literature

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This article explores some of the issues that prevent the existence of a more diverse canon in the field of world literature. It discusses extra-literary issues that have been effectively displaced onto the question of literary quality and outlines some of the concrete hurdles that face minority literatures, with reference to the literature of modern East Asia (China, Korea and Japan). The final section examines Pak Kyongni's *Land* (1969–1994), a novel virtually unknown outside of Korea but revered there as the national epic. The discussion of a work that is regarded as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' by one nation yet remains practically unknown to the world will bring to the fore issues of ranking and status produced by the 'worldification' of literatures. In the process, it will consider some of the dynamics between nationality and universality, the relations between literature and nation, and what it means for literatures to be in dialogue when literatures and literary histories have been defined along national lines.

1. Introduction

'The best that has been thought and said in the world' is a quote from *Culture and Anarchy* by the English cultural critic, Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), which has had an abiding influence on literary discourses since it was proposed in 1869.¹ It has accrued renewed relevance today in the emerging field of world literature, where debates about exactly what world literature is are lively and ongoing. Among the many arguments, the Arnoldian principle provides the bedrock for the widespread view that world literature is a body of masterpieces and classics of such quality and insight that they transcend their local contexts to establish themselves as universal. The 'best in the world' idea certainly befits the international global culture of the twenty-first century, implying an ideal higher and less limiting than those restricted to national, regional boundaries. It is also in keeping with the notion conceived by Goethe, now commonly acknowledged as the father of world literature, who defined *Weltliteratur* against the parochial and the provincial, as represented by national

literatures. ‘National literature means little now,’ Goethe is recorded as having said as early as 1827. More famously, he is said to have proclaimed ‘the age of *Weltliteratur* has begun; and everyone should further its course. ... We should not think that the truth is in Chinese or Serbian literature, in Calderón or the Nibelungen.’²

Nearly two centuries on, the age of world literature may finally be upon us but its renaissance has by no means occluded the future of national literature, as predicted by Goethe. On the contrary, world literature is constituted strictly along national and linguistic lines, which reinforce the very categories it attempts to transcend. And, to date, few people have made the argument that Chinese or Serbian literature has the monopoly on ‘truth’, for it is still the literatures of the five major European states, Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Italy, and those of America and Russia that comprise the majority of the ‘best’. Not only are the works of ‘peripheral’ nations, to borrow Wallerstein’s term, signally absent in most world literature collections, but also works written in non-European languages, including major languages, do not often overcome the hurdle of translation to aspire to the ‘universal.’³ So when the universalist ideal of world literature is compared with the reality of the ‘best’ works found in anthologies of world classics, one flatly contradicts the other. And questions emerge: ‘best’ by what measure? On what grounds? Authorized by whose criteria?

This article seeks to examine what some of the issues are that prevent the existence of a more diverse world canon that lives up to Arnold’s definition. It seeks to bring to the discussion some extra-literary issues that have been effectively displaced onto the question of literary quality. It will do so with reference to the literature of modern East Asia (China, Korea and Japan) about which there has been little debate in discourses of world literature. For even the advances made by postcolonialism have so far brought to light mostly the literature of former European colonies, where at least one European language is official, leaving the literature of China, Korea, Japan and other nations using the Chinese script unilluminated. To give a concrete account, the final section of this article will examine Pak Kyongni’s (박 경리) *Land* (토지: *Toji*, 1969–1994), a novel virtually unknown outside of Korea but revered there as the national epic. The discussion of a work that is regarded as ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’ by one nation yet remains practically unknown to the world will bring to the fore issues of ranking and status produced by the ‘worldification’ of literatures. It will also examine some of the concrete hurdles that face minority literatures. In the process, it will consider some of the dynamics between nationality and universality, the relations between literature and nation, and what it means for literatures to be in dialogue when literatures and literary histories have been defined along national lines.

2. East Asia and World Literature

World literature is a recently revived area of inquiry in the West but it has been an intensely studied and debated concept for well over a hundred years in East Asia. The meaning, however, does not overlap precisely across the two regions. In Europe, the concept of ‘world’ is rooted in the German Kantian idealist tradition, to which

Goethe's and Arnold's thoughts can be traced, whereas in East Asia, world literature (世界文學) originated as a term to refer to the literatures of the advanced nations – in other words to those of Western Europe, Russia and the US (so in this sense there is a factual overlap).⁴ World literature was simply another discipline, alongside all the other imported fields of knowledge that came as part and parcel of Western modernity, such as engineering, a modern legal system, a constitutional political system, science and technology. And the understanding and application of all of them were considered crucial to the reconstruction of East Asian civilization.

It needs stating here that by placing Japan, Korea and China in the same category, it is not implied that the three cultures are homogeneous or that modernity occurred uniformly across these diverse societies. But different though they are, it is possible to identify enough likeness to formulate a thesis across the cultures. First, they share the Chinese-based script. In addition, they faced the common threat of Western imperialism and responded in a similar way by a momentous reorganization of every aspect of life – political, economic, social and cultural. Although the specific transformations vary across the region, the most patent difference being between that undergone by imperial Japan and those undergone by colonial Korea and semi-colonial China, the upheavals and transitions that accompanied the entrance of these cultures into the global capitalist system produced a shared experience. Modernity arrived in the common form of electricity, railways, cheap paper, guns and battleships as well as modern universities, mass media, ideas of equity and nation states. It was in this spirit of enlightened reform that world literature (or European literature) was received by the mainstream in nineteenth-century East Asia.

The speed and the magnitude with which canonical European literature was embraced in this region were nothing short of historic. Indeed the whole history of East Asian literature is often divided into the period *before* the advent of westernized modernity, and the period *after*. One could even go so far as to say that it was contact with European literature that gave birth to modern Japanese, Korean and Chinese literature. Li-Hua Ying writes of this epochal transition, 'the introduction of Western literature into the intellectual and popular discourses played a crucial role in fundamentally changing the direction of modern Chinese literary development.'⁵ Of Japan, *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature* notes 'With the influx of new ideas and new literary forms from Europe and America, the landscape of Japanese literature quickly began to change.'⁶ Similarly, In-Sob Zong has said with reference to Korean literature that 'Korean literature can be segmented into two distinct periods with some overlapping. There is the literature produced before Korea was subject to western influence and the literature subsequent to this influx.'⁷

Based on its systematic reception of, and aspirations towards, the West European canon, one might arrive at the judgment that East Asian literature is possibly more 'Eurocentric' than European literature. But this would be a facile understanding. While it is true that models of literature from Europe (such as the novel) were systematically and voluntarily adopted in the Far East and that the reception of European literature provided the foundation for modern East Asian literature, that is

not to say that modern East Asian literature is a passive receptacle for, or practices a slavish second-hand imitation of, European norms (although a spectrum of crude imitations certainly exists). When we talk of Eurocentrism, distinctions need to be made between the kind of ideas and judgments that are based on a normative and teleological substrate that bolsters European interests at the expense of non-European ones and the kind that merely refers to an idea or a literary form that originated in Europe. This distinction is important if we are to clarify the relations between nationality and universality, which is often presented as a binary (a point to which I will return) when provenance is conflated with ideological bias. Literary forms, such as the novel or the haiku, may have emerged within fixed national and linguistic boundaries, but they are not necessarily tethered to their origins.

One feature that facilitated the transformation of European literature in East Asia is that it was, at first, nearly entirely in Japanese translation and adaptation. This is first due to the fact that unlike other 'peripheries', this region did not officially adopt any European language. More fundamentally, East Asia was the only major region of the world not to be colonized by a European state, and indeed was itself an empire, the Pan-Asian Empire (1894–1945), also called the Japanese Empire or, later, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.⁸ That it was the only non-Western empire in the modern world is a crucial difference, which accounts for many of other differences from other 'peripheries'. As such, the distinctive features of East Asian literature pose a challenge to some of the assumptions and norms of world literary discourses, including postcolonial studies, which were mostly constructed without reference to this region. It also provides an atypical comparative context. For one, unlike other regions such as South East Asia, Africa, and Australia, East Asia did not have European metropolises as its centre. In this region, Tokyo was the immediate cultural centre – a 'peripheral centre' – of imperial Japan, colonial Korea, semi-colonial China, Taiwan and occupied Manchuria; and the selective and contingent nature of translation, publication and distribution of western texts was, in the first instance, shaped by the economic and political climate of the Japanese Empire, which set the agenda for interpretation and the validation of the meaning of those texts.⁹ Not unrelated is the highly successful and creative role in this region of adaptations (翻案), which were just as important as translations (翻譯).¹⁰ Without recourse to the 'intentional fallacy' of New Criticism or the 'death of the author' thesis of poststructuralism, the creative flourishing of adaptation in this region effectively undermines the centrality of authorship and ideas of authenticity that prevail in a certain Western scholarship. Adaptation also presents itself as a serious and viable genre alongside translation, especially for literary forms such as poetry and the short story that lend themselves less readily to translation.

Another notable feature of the literature of this region, which may have more commensurability with other peripheries, is that active appropriation of Western texts impacted on traditional literary forms in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, the productive adoption of Western forms and ideas directed the literary culture away from indigenous styles, producing genres such as the 'new novel' and 'new poetry'; on the other, the reception of Western culture directed the cultural focus back

onto the vernacular, dismantling the old sinocentric Confucian order. Throughout East Asia, enlightenment reformists who propounded a theory of modern literature based on Western texts simultaneously insisted that literary authenticity entailed a break with classical Chinese and a return to the vernacular. In Japan and Korea, pro-Western intellectuals attacked the sinocentric worldview according to which Confucian culture represented the flower (*hwa*) of civilization, which rendered all else barbaric. Likewise, in China, pro-western intellectuals wanted to sever ties with the outdated conventions of the feudal past to make way for the modernized present by rejecting classical literary Chinese (*wen yan*) in favour of the vernacular Chinese (*bai hua*).

The third distinctive feature of the literature of this region is the relative absence of the idea of hybridity, a key postcolonial concept, often assumed to be a feature of all 'peripheries'. In this region, however, the converse idea of a 'pure' nation-state developed rapidly with Westernization and the peoples of Japan, Korea and China all came to think of themselves in a more unified way, along national and even racial lines. This is reflected in the national literatures of all three states, where the question of a national consciousness has been central throughout the twentieth century. The supposed homogeneity of the states has many implications and a benighted biological fundamentalism is undoubtedly among them. However, one of the reasons why national homogeneity remains a sanctified belief, even in progressive circles, is because the myth provided the central belief around which the anti-colonial independence movements were constructed (or in the case of Japan, the discourse of imperialism) and therefore cannot but be a defining feature of how modern states think of themselves now. Hybridity was mostly regarded with extreme suspicion in this region. The collective pride in a unifying homogeneous identity derives from chauvinism in some cases but it also comes from a respect for the historical struggle and suffering of those who resisted feudal and colonial tyranny for the greater good, not only in the name of their nation-states but also for nation-states around the world.

Related to the anxiety of hybridity is the threat of imperialist ascendancy, against which modern East Asian literary nationalism was constructed. And here, the East Asian literary nationalist dynamic clearly bears comparison with the European model in the sense that John Neubauer has argued: literature was defined 'as the embodiment of a nation's intellectual life.'¹¹ Although it cannot be overemphasized that the origins of a sense of national unity have a long history, the recognition that advanced industrialized and armed states were pressing in on the semi-unified pre-capitalist feudal societies galvanized a modern national consciousness into a unity. So, for example, Japanese empire building can be seen as a reaction to and a strategy against western imperialism. Korean nationalism was most robust under the Japanese occupation. And China, which had little sense of nationalism before the twentieth century on account of its belief that it was a world in itself, came upon ideas of national unity and agency in China as a consequence of imperialist incursions. Contact with the European narratives of a literary history, which constructed a tradition of national literature, was a spur to discourses on nationality, and modern literature quickly came to be seen as a means for self-definition, as the expression of the spirit of a nation.

Of course, in Europe, the primary organization of literature had been drawn along national and linguistic lines since at least the early nineteenth century, the validity of which has been under attack in recent years in the context of its relation to world literature, most notably by Pascale Casanova in her seminal study, *The World Republic of Letters*. She stated the aim of her study thus:

The purpose of this book is to restore a point of view that has been obscured for the most part by the ‘nationalization’ of literatures and literary histories, to rediscover a lost transnational dimension of literature that for two hundred years has been reduced to the political and linguistic boundaries of nations.¹²

Casanova maintains that the predominant interpretation and classification of literature along national lines is at the expense of what she calls the ‘world republic of letters’, an ‘international literary space’ unconstrained by political borders.

While the nationalization of literatures that she outlines has great explanatory powers in relation to the historical development of the European literary field, its relevance falls short of interpreting the development of literatures that captured, fostered and sustained anti-colonial, anti-feudal national consciousness elsewhere. On this level, comparison between European nationalism and East Asian nationalism has limited usefulness. Unless an account of the national literatures in other regions is incorporated into the theoretical frame of nationalization, a ‘world republic of letters’ unfettered by political borders only serves to repeat the imperialist mythology, obscuring the large and important body of works that speak not only for their local contexts but for larger universalist values, which the ideal of world literature consistently upholds – humanity, equity, the inviolability of the human spirit. National literature of this kind should be sharply distinguished from nationalist literature, promoted by right-wing nationalists whose rhetoric revolves around a dubious ‘essence’ or a ‘spirit’ of a nation, which is rightly treated as suspect. But not all nationalization of literatures is reductive, constraining, nostalgic or chauvinistic. Some are necessary and fundamental and not merely for parochial national interests.

As a case in point, the theory of national literature by Paik Nak-Chung, a powerful authority on the discourse of Korean national literature (*minjok munhak*), offers a different model to Casanova’s, which provides a model of national literature that defies the binary between nationality and universality. In his landmark essay ‘Toward a Concept of National Literature’ (1974), he defines national literature as ‘a product of the realization that a nation’s autonomous existence and the welfare of the majority of its members are faced with a serious threat.’¹³ National literature, in this light, is not constituted by texts that stand free of their history, migrating freely in an ‘international literary space’ only to be forcibly corralled into reductive national boundaries, it is constituted by acts of engagement with the concrete national reality of economic invasion and political oppression and embodies the struggle against incursions into the autonomy of a nation. Paik defines the national not as a local category but as part of a universal struggle against hegemonic world systems that dominate the majority in the interests of the few. As such, national literature is, Paik admits, ‘a significant concept only insofar as the historical circumstances which give it

substance continue to exist' (Ref. 11, p. 559). At the same time, he maintains, 'the concept of national literature must under no circumstances be abandoned' in the current global framework (Ref. 11, p. 557).

So what it means for literatures to be in dialogue when literatures and literary histories have been defined along national categories depends very much on whether the national boundaries are secure enough for authors to be able to dispense with them. Few people would define literature solely by its nationality. But, in many regions, the relation between literature and nation is still vital. In the face of global political and economic threat, the idea of nation orchestrates a sense of common identity to secure and sustain continued existence and it continues to provide the foundation for an authentic literary culture in regions where independence is at stake, not only in terms of how people think of themselves as a nation in a nationalist sense, but as an autonomous body of people able to withstand the process of decolonization in the age of globalization.

That these features of East Asian literature are rarely discussed in both post-colonial studies and world literature studies has something to do with the fact that European languages have had, and still have, little currency in this region, making both primary and secondary texts relatively difficult to access, dependent as they are on translation. This explains in part the paucity of exchange between 'world' literature studies, including postcolonial studies, and East Asian 'area' studies. The gap between the two even widens when it comes to literary texts themselves, which the final section of this paper will examine.

3. An Unknown Masterpiece: Pak Kyongni's *Land*

Since the eighteenth century, no other genre has been so closely aligned with ideas of nationality as the novel – the English novel, the Russian novel and the great American novel are some that have acquired sub-generic distinctions. But while thriving as a national literary form, the novel has, at the same time, developed a transnational, intertextual tradition. For example, Dickens wrote with an awareness of Cervantes, Tolstoy wrote with an awareness of Dickens, Pak Kyongni wrote with an awareness of Tolstoy and so forth. World literature theorists, like Casanova, Franco Moretti and David Damrosch, emphasize the latter, looking to refigure political and spatial boundaries into a higher literary geography; and while their reconfigurations have brought new issues and themes to bear on literary studies, questions remain about whether the new is radically different from the old. V S Naipaul argues,

Romantic and beautiful though the idea is, there is no such thing as a republic of letters where ... all bring their work and all are equal. That idea of equality is of course false. Every kind of writing is the product of a specific historical and cultural vision. The point is uncontentious.¹⁴

That not all historical and cultural visions are equal is demonstrated by the undeniable presence of unknown masterpieces all around the world. Many of 'the best that

has been thought and said in the world' do not transcend their local contexts to establish themselves as universal. Pak Kyongni (1926–2008)'s *Land*, for example, typifies both the national and transnational nature of the novel, being widely revered as the epic that embodies the totality of modern Korean history, while also brimming with both the Confucian and Western European literary traditions. It is also a masterpiece effectively unknown to the world. Having boldly asserted *Land* as an unknown masterpiece, the scope of this article does not permit the development of an argument to substantiate the claim on literary grounds. However, there are primary facts external to discussions of quality I will outline for the purpose of this discussion, beginning with a basic introduction to the work.

Land is a novel that was published in instalments over a 26-year period, between 1969 and 1994, serialized in various magazines and newspapers. In book form, it is a five-part, 21-volume work, 7000 pages in length, amounting to nearly 6 million words.¹⁵ It reflects the social history of the six crucial decades of East Asia's transition from the feudal to the modern, focusing on the lives of five generations of a Korean rural landowning family and the surrounding community, sweeping across Japan, Korea, China and Russia. It is an epic and it poses epic questions about freedom and destiny, history and nationhood, change and identity, agency and stoicism, and most of all, about life and love. It begins with the Tonghak Peasant Revolution in 1897, through the 36 years of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) and to the birth of the modern Korean state in 1945. In tracing the momentous historical transitions, Pak reveals not only the broad brushstrokes of history but introduces us to the individual lives of some 600 characters that bustle through that history.

Among the scores of theses and volumes of monographs devoted to this work, one of the most frequently-made observations of *Land* is the unity of its interlocking structure. All the themes of the five parts tie in, in continual motion, and each character is revealed to be connected to every other character on some level, as if Pak had a complete picture of *Land*'s unfolding from the beginning. The dramatic unfolding of the novel is, of course, no accident. Pak Kyongni argued all her professional life, rather unusually for a modern novelist, that drama was the most important component of fiction. She was a prolific writer. In addition to *Land*, she published 25 novels, 30 short stories, three volumes of poetry and four volumes of essays. However, most of them were written before *Land* and many of the characters and preoccupations in her work prior to *Land* anticipate the characters and themes to be realized later. She herself has said that everything she wrote before *Land* was in preparation for this work.

The majestic rhythm of the novel has invited comparisons with Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the mental breadth with Sima Qian's *Shi Ji (Historical Records)*, and the psychological exactness of experience that she captures with the works of Dostoevsky. Other critical perspectives analysing *Land* range from Ecofeminism to the classical theories of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, to postcolonial Marxist theory, to materialist feminism and to Confucian ecology. Dante, Rabelais, Hardy and Proust are but just a few of the writers with whom Pak has been compared. One might also mention that no other novel has managed to capture both the critical and

popular readership in Korea in quite the same manner as *Land*. Excerpts from *Land* are included in textbooks, and films, TV dramas and an opera have been made from it, and there are also separate children's versions. It has been referred to by public figures, including the late President Kim Dae-Jung, to allude to national identity. And there are official organizations devoted to maintaining the legacy of *Land*: the Toji Cultural Foundation, the Pak Kyongni House and Literary Park, and the Pak Kyongni Memorial Museum. Furthermore, there is the Association of *Land* Studies, devoted specifically to the academic study of *Land*, and the Annual Pak Kyongni Literary Award, established in 2011, of which the latest winner, in 2014, was the German novelist Bernhard Schlink. Finally, one might add that Pak was posthumously awarded the Geumgwan (Gold Crown) Order of Cultural Merit, the highest honour for South Korean citizens and that *Land* was selected in the Unesco Collection of Representative Work. That *Land* speaks for the Korean nation is not in doubt.

However, it is effectively obscure to the world. The most obvious reason for this is that the complete text is not available in translation. And works written in minority languages, which are not translated into a major European language, rarely cross the border to the republic of letters. If world literature is 'writing that gains in translation', as David Damrosch has observed, translatability emerges as a key evaluative measure within a system where translation is not a neutral exchange but a criterion of value.¹⁶ In this structure, the world literary field not only privileges texts that are translated into major European languages, it reconstructs the criterion of translatability to a major European language into a central *literary* worth. Thus, translation into a major European language becomes the passport every text written in a 'minority' language must hold to qualify for entrance into the field of world literature. The implications are wide-ranging. Andrew Jones has argued that this literary system mirrors the unequal global system of transnational trade and raises the question, 'Do developing nations supply raw material to the advanced literary economies for the "First World?"'¹⁷ Other questions follow. How does the criterion of translatability impact on autonomous traditional literary fields around the world? What are the relations between translatability and universal validity? There are no standard answers to these questions but in relation to *Land*, the qualities that make it untranslatable are the very qualities that make it great. For example, the scale of *Land* is a problem. Despite the support of the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, an English translation of the first one-third of the novel was only published in 2011 (Global Oriental), after 30 years of painstaking labour by Agnita Tennant, and the rest remains inaccessible to English readers. There are partial translations into German (Secolo), French (Belfond), Japanese (福之書店) and Chinese (民族出版社) but no full official translation of the whole work yet exists, although there are translations in progress. While the panoramic sweep is one of the main achievements of *Land*, it is also the first obstacle to reaching a global audience.

Secondly, and not unrelated, is the fact that *Land* was written and published in instalments, mostly monthly but sometimes weekly. The fact that it was serialized in magazines and newspapers, and not published in book form, as we are accustomed to, is an essential and constitutive part of the work. But the form it took was

dependent upon and was, indeed, only made possible by, historically specific technological advances in mass publication and the media: there were only a handful of national daily papers during the period of the novel's publication and this limitation focused the readership. The novel was written by a single author but was responded to by a national readership, which breathed life back into the work via the pulse of a weekly publication and distribution. In this sense, it has a special claim to the status of the national novel. The serialization also impacted on how the story was told. *Land* is an epic but because it was serialized, tiny episodic cross-currents and counter-rhythms exist underneath the large tidal movements of the narrative. The themes she tackles may be cosmic and the 21-volume length may be daunting but Pak's supreme story-telling and imaginative energy, structured around mini arcs, propel the reader on, page after page. Even if one has absolutely no interest in the Korean reform movement of the 1880s or the global capitalist system and its effects on the Japanese Empire, within a few chapters the need to discover what happens next drives the reading. Will the calculating maid-slave, Kwinyo, be successful in luring Ch'oe Ch'isu and take over the House of Ch'oe?; what is Lady Yun's secret?; what happens to the two boys after their layabout father Kim Pyongsan is executed and their saintly mother hangs herself on the village tree out of shame?; will the tormented lovers, Yongi and Wolson, ever be reconciled? The pace and drive of the narrative make for compulsive reading, and, on that level, it has potential to travel well across cultural and linguistic frontiers.

But the serial form is also an obstacle. *Land* was serialized but not by a single publisher, perhaps understandably so given that it was written over 26 years, during which time Pak Kyongni was twice treated for cancer. But even so, the work's publishing history is a lot more complicated and remarkable than one might assume. Pak changed publishers with each volume, and sometime in the middle of the volume – for example when she was writing Part 4, she changed publishers twice from *MaDang* (마당) to *ChungKyung Culture* (정경문화) then to *KyunhHyang Monthly* (월간경향). For part 3, there was a competition between rival periodicals as to who would get the publishing contract and a highly unorthodox compromise was reached: *Housewives' Life* (주부생활) and *Reading Life* (독서생활) published the serial simultaneously. In total, Pak changed publishers nine times. This means nine different editors with nine different policies and house styles. The serial was also re-edited into book form at the completion of each part. There are five parts in total (vol. i, 1969; vol. ii, 1972; vol. iii, 1977; vol. iv, 1983 and 1987; vol. v, 1993), which means five different editorial procedures. The complete series was published for the first time in 1994 by Sol publishers. Consequently, there are ten different versions of *Land* currently in circulation in Korea. Large parts of the original manuscript are missing because the author did not keep them. Sections from the later part of the novel are currently in the possession of a few individuals, but their survival was only possible because the author started to fax her copy to the publishers. There is as yet no definitive version of *Land*.

And the variations between versions are considerable, especially between the Nanam, Sol and Jishik versions. The absence of a definitive version has produced a

great deal of discussion, the gist of which is that all the editors who were involved with *Land* revised the manuscript to varying degrees, primarily out of a desire to present the reader with a readable text without typographical errors. Corrections, additions, substitutions, and deletions were all made by editors to conform to the correct grammatical and lexical standard. Unfortunately, between 1969 and 1994, several reforms were issued by the Korean government regarding Hangeul orthography, which kept on changing the standard of Korean, affecting spelling, punctuation, regional dialect, honorifics and speech levels, including a major reform in 1988. The attitude of the editors to the Ministry of Culture's injunctions varied significantly – some took great pains to keep up with them, others more or less ignored them. A key issue that revolves around the reform is that *Land* is mostly written in an extremely heavy South Gyeongsang dialect. Some versions have corrected this to the shifting standard, so that in a single edition you will find variations in the tone of a single character. Some critics have pointed out that the liberties taken by some of the editors are not justified because they erase and distort the highly expressive tone of the novel. Other liberties have been taken. For example, Pak's characters are left ambiguous. There is a great deal of room for redemptive interpretations of even the most unsympathetic characters, such as Kwinyo or Ch'oe Ch'isu. Some versions, in a search for clarity, have inserted whole sentences where there were none before, to mould these characters into the more clearly-cut role of the antagonist. Professor Choi Yuchan of Yonsei University, who has written extensively on *Land* and is regarded as the authority on Pak Kyongni, is currently collecting the complete record of the textual revisions and variations but, for the foreseeable future, the MunHak and Samsung editions are likely to remain the standard works of reference. And it is generally agreed that the Nanam edition is the one with the highest level of creative editorial intervention.

I have outlined the complicated textual history of *Land* to draw attention to some more general points. First, the reconstruction of the world literary field according to the criterion of translatability to a major European language distorts and diminishes the rich heritage of literatures in the world. Second, for a local work to transcend its particular context and achieve a position of universality, the fact that it is the 'best that has been thought and said' is not sufficient. The workings of various literary cultures, where production, circulation and reception of texts differ substantially from the dominant standard, ought to be taken into account, along with a measure of the social, economic and institutional structures that preserve and ensure the availability of the 'best' works. Without such considerations, works in certain genres (for example, adaptation), forms (for example, the oral tradition) and languages (non-European) that do not lend themselves easily to the governing literary standard will continue to be marginalized on grounds of insufficient literary merit. The two main barriers to world recognition I examined in relation to *Land* are also typical of other works that reside in unvisited tombs.

In this article I have tried to draw the traditions of minority literatures into the world literature debate. For, captured within the fate of unknown masterpieces around the world, are key issues that face the field of world literature today. If world literature is to

reflect experiences more capacious than those typical of Western Europe, the idea of it as constituted by universal ideal-types must be tempered by the issue of translation and various modes of literary production. The gap between the theory and the practice of world literature, as I have tried to show through the example of *Land*, is not created by a single factor. And the growing good of the literary world is dependent on countless acts of attention, preservation and discussion to ensure the circulation, survival and renewal of texts that are relegated by the ‘worldification’ process.

Acknowledgements

This article originates from a workshop, ‘In: Quest of a New Paradigm: A Dialogue of Cultures’, held at the University of Belgrade from 18–20 March 2013.

The article is greatly indebted to the works of Professor Choi Yuchan on *Land*, which are in Korean.

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