

NOTE

1. This is the title poem from the author's *Tilting the Jar, Spilling the Moon: Poems from Koryo, Choson, and Contemporary Korea* (Seoul, Universal Publishing, 1988). Several other poems included here previously appeared in that collection.

THOMAS HARDY IN KOREA

AGNITA TENNANT

In this paper I intend to present a brief survey of the process by which the works of Thomas Hardy were introduced to Korea and to suggest that he may have left some tangible marks on the development of modern Korean literature. I will also aim to bring out some features in Pak Kyöngni's novel sequence *Toji (Land)* that can be compared with Hardy. The works of Hardy are only a small part of the Western culture that flooded into Korea following the so-called "Kabo Innovations" of 1925. It seems that *An Imaginative Woman*¹ was the first story published in Korea—in a magazine called *Kongyong* in 1923. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Hardy was the author most frequently translated. A chronological list of Western literature in translation and articles relating to it up to 1950 by Kim Byung-Jol [Kim Pyöngjöl] shows 21 items of Hardy's work.² It is significant that of these, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was by far the most frequently published. Such short stories as "To Please His Wife", "The Son's Veto" and "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", all from *Life's Little Ironies*, were also popular. From this early stage it seems clear that *Tess* was going to be Hardy's monument in Korea, and that in the case of *Life's Little Ironies*, the title itself had a strong appeal.

Tess was first serialized in 1926 in a daily paper, the *Chöngoe Ilbo*, between 7 November and 24 December,

under the title of *Pönnong* using two Chinese characters which mean to tease or taunt.³ Like most translations of this period, it was a re-translation of a Japanese version by Nakaki Teichi first published in 1924 under the title of (in translation) *A Woman of Fate*. The two chosen titles seem good examples of differing views expressed in translations of the same novel. They also indicate the possibility that, in paraphrasing, the translators can to some degree manipulate the text to express their own perspectives. From the title *Pönnong* one might guess that the translator, Kim Kijin, found particularly appropriate the last paragraph of *Tess*: "The President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." But in fact he misses out this passage completely and in its place puts his own point that Tess had been wickedly tantalized and that she had at last parted with such a weary life for good.

Tess was serialized again in 1929 in six instalments in the *Chosön Ilbo*.⁴ This version is full of little inaccuracies and it consequently looks as though the translator was using a text already far removed from the original. The translator succeeds, however, in producing a picture of the tragic life of an innocent woman and portraying what happens when a maiden is seduced.

Another version of *Tess* was serialized in five instalments in the *Chosön Ilbo* in 1934.⁵ Kim Kwangsöp was the translator and commentator. While Kim showed a sophisticated understanding of the novel and made many interesting comments, often bringing in his own metaphors to illustrate the points, there are so many textual mistakes that again it makes one wonder what kind of source text he was using. He begins with an introductory note about the sad lot forced upon women in a patriarchal society: "...this world still seems an unsuitable place for a woman of purity", and ends with a passage after the black flag has gone up: "A child of nature who would love according to nature's will and ways

without compromise and without revision has been sacrificed by faults in the morality of society, the law and civilization."

Between 1928 and 1932, about ten articles on Hardy appeared in journals and newspapers. The most impressive and significant of them is a thesis entitled *Thomas Hardy as a Novelist* by Yang Chudong. This was serialized in 26 instalments in the *Tonga Ilbo* at the end of 1928.⁶ It turns out that Yang had written a dissertation entitled *The Technique of Thomas Hardy* for Waseda University in Japan earlier that year. The dissertation is listed in the bibliography on Hardy compiled by Fukushima Bunnosuke (later he was to call himself Yamanoto Bunnosuke) in 1936.⁷ Yang Chidong opens his dissertation with these words:

Readers will remember that January marks the first anniversary of the death of Thomas Hardy, poet and writer, a literary giant not only of England but of all the world. We remember sadly that when he died only a few reports of his death appeared in the literary columns of the press, with hardly any mention or review of his literary works and ideas. I will not point out here our need to pay constant attention to the study and introduction of foreign literature, yet on seeing such an omission within our literary circles I could not help feeling sad. Therefore, though admittedly too late, I submit this thesis on the occasion of the first anniversary with the intention of commemorating Hardy and to reflect once again upon his literary achievement.

Followed by a list of sources from which he frequently quotes, Yang's thesis consists of a scholarly and highly erudite discourse on the principles of literary criticism and on Hardy's technique of expression, style, structure, and so on. Considering Yang was writing in the 1920s, it strikes one that the account does not sound at all archaic. It is rather familiar, because it uses observations which have now become commonplace in Hardy criticism. Yang went from strength to strength throughout December of that year, bringing his discourse to an end with the highest praise of *Tess*:

Tess is undoubtedly Hardy's greatest masterpiece. It could be said that in its setting, *Tess* is inferior to *The Return of the Native* or *Far from the Maddening Crowd*... However, in this work, Hardy perfectly simplifies the plot and his expressive techniques reach perfection ... Above all I would like to point out the great pathos running through this work. The author's great pathos concerning the fate of the woman Tess will find, I dare say, no parallel in any other great literary work in all the world. It is by reaching this form of pathos and truthfulness that Hardy's art marks a departure from mere technique into artistic maturity, and the artist becomes an integral part of his art and witness to the great strength of humanity...

The whole dissertation is very significant not only for its own merit but also because by writing in *Tonga Ilbo*, one of the most important daily papers, Yang spoke to a wide readership and guided them as to what they should look for in Hardy, above all setting the tone for the appreciation of Hardy in Korea in the future. The importance of this was echoed when in the following year a critic called Kang Sŏngju wrote an article in the same paper, entitled *In Anticipation of the Second Anniversary of the Death of Mr. Thomas Hardy*.⁸ At the end of it he urged his readers to read Yang's discourse of the previous year again.

In 1935 Pak Hwasŭng, a well known woman writer, wrote an article in the *Tonga Ilbo* under the title of "Native and foreign writers whom I most admire." In this, she expressed her indebtedness to Hardy, saying, "... the Western writers whom I adore and who influenced my own writing profoundly are Thomas Hardy and Charlotte Bronte ..." ⁹ This is an important article in that Pak is the only writer I have come across who has openly admitted Hardy's influence.

As we consider the post-war period, we now notice that translations of Western literature which until then, under Japanese rule, had largely depended for their publication on journals are now published in volumes.

Leaving out the confusing years of the Korean war and the period immediately after when the compilation of

bibliography fell far short of full coverage, the National Bibliography shows new translations of *Tess* year after year as a single volume or as part of a series in some scheme such as *The Collected Works of World Literature*. Hardy's name becomes almost synonymous with *Tess*. During the twenty years between 1966 and 1986, no less than 64 translations of Hardy were published out of which 37 were *Tess*.¹⁰ There is a strong possibility that some items were missed out of publication lists, and that even more can be found. It must also be taken into account that by this time there were many Koreans able to read English texts.

Meanwhile, with the growing number of universities and colleges, Hardy became a very popular subject for study in the academic world. Between 1960 and 1985, over 60 dissertations were written for master's degrees and there were no less than five doctoral theses produced. The titles significantly indicate a very high concentration on the subject of fate.

In the 1950s, the Korean Society for English Language and Literature was formed. Its membership consisted largely of professors and teachers of English. Some sophistication in the field of English literature seems to have settled in, and some interesting articles were from then on written on Hardy.

From this brief history of publications and scholarship related to Hardy it clearly emerges that *Tess* is his most popular work amongst Koreans. And the question of the nature of its appeal—both in academic and in more general circles—poses an interesting problem. One way of looking at it is that the image of *Tess*, the beautiful woman with a pure heart, became for the Korean people a symbol that meant different things at different times. For instance, in the 1920s and the 1930s, *Tess* was emphasized in journals and newspapers as a symbol of the helpless women who suffered the oppression and

injustices of a patriarchal society. She could thus represent the sorrowful state of the country under Japanese occupation, especially after the 1 March Independence Movement in 1919 ended in bloodshed and persecutions and the appeal for sovereignty to the Paris Peace Conference miserably failed.

In the 1960s *Tess* could become a symbol of the rights of women, women now beginning to be liberated from their old yoke. The popularity of the novel seems to have reached its peak in the 1970s, when over 20 editions were published. One possible explanation could be that during this time Korea's industrialization was reaching its climax with the now well-known economic miracle. Many innocent country girls left their native villages to work in the cities as factory hands. Many of them suffered great deprivation as a consequence, and *Tess* must have held great appeal to them.

It is conceivable that the image of *Tess* may yet change again in the future to something more positive, as women's position in society improves. It is interesting to note that in recent years some of the dissertations on Hardy have been written by students from women's universities. This might be taken as an indication of an attempt by women to re-assess their position in present-day Korea.

The exact extent and nature of Hardy's influence in Korea is a complex and elusive problem about which I am not yet in the position to state any firm conclusions. But I have found a substantial basis for comparison with Hardy in a Korean novel sequence entitled *Toji (Land)* by Pak Kyōngni. Pak was born in 1926 and is considered one of the greatest living writers of modern Korea. *Toji* is about a traditional rural community faced with drastic change as a result of the Enlightenment period at the turn of the century. There is a certain affinity between Hardy and Pak both in subject matter and the way both handle their

material. When I first discovered this I was almost sure that Pak had been influenced by Hardy, but an interview with her during 1987 in Korea suggested otherwise. Yes, she admitted she had read *Tess* and other works by Hardy in Japanese translations many years ago, but she could not say that she was particularly influenced by him—nor by any other Western writer for that matter—though she had been an avid reader, and had read all the Western writers available in her youth. Her comments did not surprise me, nor did I take them as a final answer. Firstly, I believe that Korean writers are reluctant, consciously or unconsciously, to admit outside influence, partly because in doing so they would be admitting Japanese influence because what they had read as Western literature was in fact in Japanese translation. In the context of the complicated Korea-Japan relationship, Japanese influence of any kind is regarded as something of a disgrace. This makes the question of Hardy's influence a very difficult one indeed, even though in fact there can be little doubt that writers of Pak's generation, or of her parent's generation, were influenced by Western writers. The forerunners of modern Korean literature, the so-called New Novels, were clearly modelled on Western literature. During the 35 years Korea served as a Japanese colony, a large part of the reading material for the Korean youth consisted of translations of Western literature. Such translations had been popular in Japan since the Meiji era (1867-1912). Secondly, even if a writer has been influenced by another, it is probably for the most part an unconscious process which is consequently difficult to trace back and assess quantitatively.

Another difficulty in measuring Hardy's influence lies in the incomparability of the two languages. This would apply to translations of all European literature into Korean, and vice versa: it is difficult to compare the narrative style. Until very recently, I insisted that Pak's narrative style was definitely similar to that of Hardy. But then a question crossed my mind: how could I be so sure?

If you, as the reader, have already been influenced by Hardy, is it not possible that you might be reading Pak with a Hardyesque frame of mind? If so, your perspective is biased, and your judgement little more than make-belief. The question of influence became even more complex as I glanced through several different translations of *Tess* in which the narrative form actually differed. The realization of the problem gave me a shock and has led me to be more circumspect. Nevertheless, I would still claim that the affinity is there on certain specific grounds, and I believe these grounds can be used as general criteria for a study of comparative literature.

The areas in which I believe comparison to be possible are: types of characters and the environment in which they are depicted; an obvious philosophy running through the work; the time and stance of the author as he views the subject he is about to write about; the use of clear imagery such as the sun, moon and stars, nature and seasonal changes. It is with these areas in mind that I would like to examine some aspects of affinity between Hardy and Pak as it appears in *Tess* and the first volume of *Toji (Land)*.

In *Toji*, Pak's view of life appears to be mistrustful of God—not outright antagonism but scepticism. God is indifferent to individual human fate and predicaments. Such scepticism results in a fatalistic vision that regards man as trapped in his fate. This view is expressed well in chapter 37, where a foul scheme is designed by Kim Pyöngsan, a fallen and destitute gentleman. He finds out by chance that Chilsöng, a tenant farmer, is resentful of the wealth of the Ch'oe household, the landlords of the community, and that Kwinyö, the personal maid of Ch'oe Chisu, the master of the house, desires to be made pregnant by her master. Kim Pyöngsan brings these two characters together and a plot is schemed. Chilsöng will make the girl pregnant and, when it is done, they will dispose of Ch'oe Chisu. Kwinyö will claim that the child is

her late master's, thus becoming the mother of the heir to the house, and then the Ch'oe riches will be shared out. The sexual encounters take place while Kim Pyöngsan is on watch, inside the shrine for fertility gods, where there is a statue of a child Buddha as a symbol of the deity.

The shrine of the fertility spirits buried deep in the woods of Tang mountain solemnly kept watch over the night and, inside, the child Buddha, with smiling face, looked down on these ardent deeds of supplication. The bleak autumn wind whispered past the eaves of the shrine, the leaves rustled as they rubbed together, a nightingale cried like an elderly spinster, and an owl like the ghost of an old bachelor. The figure of the Buddha—was it no more than a lump of metal, melted by a craftsman and mindlessly poured into a mould?—never spoke but only smiled.

And then after these three characters had gone each on their own way,

... the moon, a piece missing, hung faintly above the roof of the shrine. 'Do they think it will all happen just as they wish?' Was the little Buddha saying something like this to himself?

When Pyöngsan got home,

... He entered the main room, took off his clothes and got into bed. After a while he fell into a deep sleep and dreamed he was sitting on top of a pile of gold. 'Do you think it will all happen just as you wish?' If the little Buddha had appeared in his dream to tease him like this, it would all have been well. But while Pyöngsan's miscalculation was infinitely pitiable, the Buddha must be rather mischievous. While they doggedly climbed perilous slopes in the hope of grasping the five-coloured rainbow, instead of giving them a hint of the disasters and pitfalls ahead of them, did he not beckon them on with 'A little further, just a little further?'

Compare these passages with Hardy's view on a similar occasion as it appears at the end of Chapter 5 of *Tess*, when Tess has left the Chase after going there to claim kinship with d'Urberville:

Nature does not often say 'See!' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doings; or reply 'Here!' to a body's cry of 'Where?' till hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game. We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social

machinery than that which now jolts us round and along: but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroitness sprang anxiety, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies.

Or, take the famous passage toward the end of chapter 11, after the seduction of Tess by Alec in the wood:, which begins, "Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around."

Both writers, then, share a view that a divinity is a disappearing if not an already vanished possibility.

One might also fruitfully compare the same passages from *Toji* with chapter 20 of *The Woodlanders*, where Fitzpiers and Duke Samson, with Grace as a bystander, participate in the Midsummer Eve ritual.

Like Hardy, Pak shows a certain mistrust and dislike of the social change taking place in what had been a static society, and is resentful of the crumbling of old values. Through the mouth of Yun P'o, a carefree old bachelor, we hear,

As I see it, so-called 'enlightenment' is nothing very wonderful. In a word, you can call it a good tool for killing people. Either that or a way to ruthlessly plunder other people's possessions...I am a simple man who does not know very much, but I know the old saying 'If it is not the right road don't go down it.' And this makes me wonder how it can be the proper way for anyone to hand over to strangers the land of rivers and hills that bore and bred him...(chapter 8)

This might well be compared to Hardy's dislike of the new threshing that has revolutionized the farming process (in chapter 47 of *Tess*).

In *Toji* and *Tess*, both Hardy and Pak are dealing with the world of the immediate past rather than their own time. Their material is based on stories told by and

gathered from their parents and grandparents. In an interview with a critic, Pak was reported to have said that the original seed of *Toji* was a story told her by an elderly cousin when she was young, about a farming village in which the landlord's family reigned for generations until the day when an epidemic wiped out the whole community. Acres of crops lay ready for harvesting but there was not a soul left to do it. This original seed germinated and grew into something quite beyond what she had initially set out to write; and it is still growing. As for Hardy, much has been said of a similar effect. Michael Millgate in his *Thomas Hardy—His Career as a Novelist* says,

The root of *Tess* lies deep. Early experiences such as his presence at the execution of Martha Brown may well have made their contribution... He once spoke of the profound effect made upon him by his father's story of a boy hanged during the 1830 agricultural riots simply for being near the scene of a rick-burning...¹¹

It is conceivable that this distancing of time gives the authors room for reflection and imaginative refinement so that even when they are dealing with social or political issues of immediate consequence, the quality of writing is in no danger of becoming journalistic. Both writers draw heavily on the mediating power of memory, and this process is again something which will receive further attention as my research progresses.

The idea of, in Millgate's term, "the victimisation of the innocent",¹² is a source of deep inspiration to both authors. As Yang Chudong pointed out as early as 1928, Hardy's pathos and tender feelings towards the victim give peculiar strength to his art. This applies also to Pak Kyöngni. To demonstrate, I will choose for the present discussion the tragic love between Yongi and Wölsön in *Toji*, though it is only one of the secondary plots. The plot is comparable to *Tess*, and also to some extent to *Jude the Obscure*. Yongi and Wölsön grew up together in the village as childhood lovers, but because Wölsön is the daughter of

a shaman, and so regarded as an outcast, she cannot marry Yongi, and is sent away with an older man from another region. Yongi has to marry a woman of equal status. He enters a loveless and childless marriage. Nothing is heard of Wölsön for many years until one day she rolls into the village like a fallen leaf carrying a little bundle, absolutely helpless. The old lady of the Ch'oe household who had been the patron of the now-dead shaman takes pity on her and sets her up in a little tavern by the market place. Yongi takes comfort from seeing her face on market days as he takes a cup of wine in her shop on his way to and from the market, usually in the company of other villagers. One day, their love is consummated when he stays overnight at her place. This marks the beginning of a tragic love that can never be complete in the conventional way, yet can never be broken. Yongi is a farmer who is extremely conscientious and sensitive, in many ways like Jude. His is a male-dominated society in which to take a concubine is no great scandal, especially when the legal wife is unable to produce a child to carry on the family line. But he cannot bring himself to break the decent farmer's code of behaviour, nor can he go against his dead mother's wish that he should never mistreat his lawful wife who offers sacrifices to his ancestors.

Wölsön is in many ways like Tess, or Sue in *Jude*—delicate, sensitive, helpless in one way yet set firm in another, absolutely uncompromising in love. She is physically assaulted by Yongi's wife and pitied by the villagers, but she rejects all proposals from other men who want to make her happy in the worldly sense. The author's tender feelings towards Wölsön are manifested through Yongi's feelings and behaviour. Even though a secondary theme, I personally think the chapters dealing with their relationship are the most beautiful and moving in the whole novel. Here, rivers and hills, the stars and the moon (but never the sun), the distant calls of

nightingales, and the crying of frogs in paddy fields and crickets underneath the wooden floor all play their part.

I pointed out earlier that both Pak and Hardy have a sceptical attitude toward transcendent gods. They are seen as not only indifferent to the individual fates of human beings but can appear to be quite mischievous, so that for both authors life is full of "little ironies" and "maladroit delays." For instance, in *Toji*, in the course of time Yongi's wife died in an epidemic. Now he could take Wölsön as his lawful wife and live happy ever after, but the author doesn't have it that way. Wölsön was away when the wife died. She had been thrashed by Yongi's jealous wife and had left the district. Yongi, distraught at the thought of her wandering about the world unprotected, helpless and miserable, tumbles into bed with another woman, Imin, who had been casting amorous eyes at him all along and is also now a widow. He fathers a son by her, thus barring yet again the way for Wölsön to join him. Imin is a sensuous, selfish, vigorous woman who thrives whatever the circumstances. In the words of the author, she is "like the weeds by the brookside." She is the exact opposite of Wölsön, and reminds one of Arabella in *Jude*. In this way Pak has created, quite incidentally perhaps, characters who find their counterparts in Hardy's world.

One should not be surprised at such an affinity for two reasons. Firstly, from what I have said about Hardy it is clear that there is much in his work which would strike a chord in the Korean mind. His vision of the world, I believe, finds a significant resonance in Korean culture. Secondly, the history of the publication of translations of Hardy's work, or indeed the response of the Korean academic community, well indicates both the extent and the character of Hardy's presence, so that if Hardy has only been explicitly acknowledged by one writer—Pak Hwasung—his presence has nevertheless been significant and his appeal marked. His influence can hardly be

doubted. And it is the precise nature of this influence that I shall be concerned to trace in my further research.

NOTES

1. I have not been able to trace this. The Korean title listed by Kim is *Tonggyōng hanūn yoōn*, which could be translated as either *The Well-beloved* or *An Imaginative Woman*. Taking account of the fact that the former does not appear to have been translated into Japanese during this period while the latter was published in 1923 for the second time (the first being 1919), and subsequently republished in 1925 and twice in 1926, I assume this to be the latter.
2. Byong-chul Kim (comp.) *A Chronological List of Western Literature in Translations and Articles about It* (Seoul, Eul-yoo Munwhasa, 1977).
3. Kim Kijin (trans.), *Pōnnang*. Serialized in *Chōngoe Ilbo*, 7 November - 24 December, 1926.
4. Shimhyang sanin (trans.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Serialized in *Chosōn Ilbo*, 9 November - 16 November, 1929.
5. Kim Kwangsōp (trans.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Serialized in *Chosōn Ilbo*, 31 October - 4 November, 1934.
6. Yang Chudong, *Thomas Hardy as a Novelist—A Study*. In, *Tonga Ilbo*, 1 December - 28 December, 1928.
7. Bunnosuke Fukushima (comp.), *A Bibliography of Thomas Hardy in Japan*. (Tokyo, Kowgakusha, 1936). The bibliography is appended to a translation of *The Distracted Preacher*.
8. Kang Sōngju, *In anticipation of the second anniversary of the death of Thomas Hardy*. In *Tonga Ilbo*, 15 November - 20 November, 1929.
9. *Tonga Ilbo*, 14 July - 18 July, 1935.
10. The National Central Library of Korea (comps), *Publications List of the Republic of Korea 1966-1986* (Seoul).

11. Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London, Bodley Head, 1971), p.267.
12. *Ibid*, p.286.