

“North Koreans” and Other Virtual Subjects: Kim Yeong-ha, Hwang Seok-yeong, and National Division in the Age of Posthumanism

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This article examines the ways in which contemporary South Korean literature negotiates new forms of transnational identity by way of post-Cold War representations of “North Korea” and “North Koreans.” Focusing on recent best-selling works by the contemporary writers Kim Yeong-ha, Hwang Seok-yeong, and Kim Hyeon-jeong’s 2003 film *Double Agent*, this article shows how the figure of the “North Korean” no longer points to communist threat or anticapitalist, revolutionary potential, but to a generalized separating out of people from place. If the ethnonational/developmental coincidence performed daily in 1970s/1980s South Korea has been replaced by a certain cynicism/critical distance that informs the position of the neoliberal subject of globalization, the seamless movement of the “North Korean” into this regime in Kim Yeong-ha’s *Empire of Lights* (2006) demonstrates its powers of assimilation. In Hwang Seok-yeong’s *Princess Bari* (2007) and Kim Hyeon-jeong’s *Double Agent*, it is the very impoverishment of “North Korea” and its failure as a state that enables a reworking of a *minjung* subject in the form of a linkage with a transnational working class, an alliance that the text cannot locate in the now prosperous, technologized South. The adaptable, mobile figure of the “North Korean” thus becomes a contemporary site for the postnational, posthuman rearticulation of the grand recits of the 1970s and 1980s, developmentalism and anti-authoritarian resistance.

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Kim Yeong-ha¹ has written that his recent novel *Empire of Lights* (Bit eui jeguk, 2006) takes place in three separate countries: 1980s South Korea, contemporary South Korea, and North Korea (Kim 2006b: 58). Kim Gi-yeong, North Korean spy and protagonist of *Empire of Lights*, echoes this sentiment in the text, remarking that South Korea can be divided into two entities pre- and post-dating the advent in the mid-1990s of the “IMF Era.” In Kim Yeong-ha’s view, if there was still a sense in the 1980s that “we could follow our own course,” the mid-1990s Asian financial crisis inaugurated a much more visible, everyday imbrication with the process of globalization. The fall of the Soviet Union and the move to the first “civilian government” in over thirty years in South Korea in the early 1990s had already signaled a certain end to the grand narratives of revolutionary emancipation and reunification that had informed the lives of South Korean college students throughout the 1980s. The subsequent push toward restructuring and neoliberalization in the late 1990s and economic recovery in the early 2000s set in motion the creation of flexible, transnational flows and identities integrated into the world system in new ways.² The influx of migrant labor into South Korea and the rapid increase in “international marriages” (nearly 12% of all marriages recorded in 2006 were Korean/non-Korean, with most of these marriages taking place in rural areas) combined with the exodus from the South Korean education system in the form of the “early overseas education” and frequent, casual overseas travel by the middle class to introduce new kinds of cosmopolitanism and racialization to the class divide structuring the South Korean economy.³ Indeed, the temporal shift from the 1980s to the early 2000s has been accompanied by the production of a very different sense of lived space.

The elevation in South Korea’s position in the product cycle, the move toward high-tech research and development and the emergence of South Korean investment capital, occurred in tandem with the formation of a culture industry targeting not only the domestic but also the overseas market. The overseas success of *Hallyu* (the “Korean Wave”) in the arena of visual culture, the regular

1. Romanization in this article accords with the ROK system followed by *The Review of Korean Studies*.

2. For a discussion of late 1990s’ neoliberalism in South Korea, see Song (2006).

3. The South Korean context should be linked to broader movements both globally and in Asia. Aiwha Ong theorizes the deployment of new forms of neoliberalized identities in Asia in Ong (2006).

outstripping of Hollywood productions by South Korean films in the domestic market, and new forms of entertainment technology (South Korean youth spend an average of six hours per day on the internet) seemed to spell an end to the privileged position literature had occupied through the 1980s on the South Korean cultural scene.⁴

Noting a deepening loss of interest in the National Literature Movement and the literary and critical discourse on realism, scholars in the early 1990s had already declared the advent of “postmodernism” in South Korea. For many younger writers, including Kim Yeong-ha (who made his debut on the literary scene in 1995), the move away from the student movement and its associated cultural forms represented at once an opening for literary experimentation and something of a fall from what was now considered the naiveté of the emancipatory leftist-nationalist narrative. Writers and critics began to address what we might call the postdevelopmental condition, one informed both by what was now seen as the inadequacy of the totalizing narrative of anti-authoritarian, anti-U.S. resistance and the decreasing ability of the state to interpellate ethnonationalized, developmental subjects. If the opposing anti-authoritarian and statist-developmental narratives shared a rejection of exchange value (in the name of socialism by the left; in the name of export-driven, collective national benefit by the developmental state), what remained in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the sense that the grand recits had been lost amidst an increasingly expansive culture of consumption.⁵

The early 2000s have also witnessed a shift in the Cold War narrative of North/South division. Posters and recorded announcements exhorting mindfulness in national security continue to greet Seoul’s subway riders throughout the day, the DMZ remains the most heavily fortified border in the world, and all Korean males are still subject to conscription. At the same time, Geumgang Mountain has been opened to sightseeing tours, and North/South exchanges occur more frequently than ever at all levels and in all areas—in late 2006, for example, the North/South Writers Organization was formed (the first of its kind

4. A recent special issue of *Korea Journal* on the “ostmodern turn in Korean literature” addresses the ways in which contemporary writers negotiate the changed cultural scene. See UNESCO (2007). I would like to thank Professor Hwang Jongyon for bringing this issue to my attention.

5. Laura Nelson details changing practices of consumption in South Korea in the 1990s in Nelson (2000).

since the 1945-48 immediate postliberation period). Perhaps most conspicuous in the reworking of North/South relations is the joining of South Korean capital and North Korean labor at the Gaeseong Industrial Complex.

Certainly the North Korea state retains its Cold War position as communist totalitarian other. At the same time, the distinction between “people” and “state” has gathered increasing force, particularly among the younger generation in the South, which tends to view the North less in terms of ideological opposition than an ethnonational commonality associated with a certain sense of nostalgia. Particularly in its rejection of exchange value and consumption (the rejection that marked both of the former grand recits), North Korea offers an “outside” to the cynicism and commodification of human relations that informs everyday life in the South. If North Korea can be thought of as possessing a purity in its sense of purpose, its ethnonationalism, its assertion of autonomy, and its willingness to contest the West, it also is a hyperreal space, still off limits to South Korean citizens, who experience the “North” via images—clips of state-run North Korean television, brief South Korean special reports, and representations in South Korean literature and film. As has been the case throughout the history of divided Korea, the representation of “North Korea” and “North Koreans” remains a privileged site for writers aligned with a variety of literary camps to call into question a series of Cold War bifurcations, including the production of the statist, territorialized identity named the “Republic of Korea” (Daehanminguk).

Kim Yeong-ha’s *Empire of Lights*, Hwang Seok-yeong’s *Princess Bari* (Baridegi, 2007), and Kim Hyeon-jeong’s 2003 film *Double Agent* allow us to see the different ways in which the figure of “North Korea” remains central to a negotiation of the location of the Korean Peninsula in the post-911 regime of globalization and postdevelopmental consumption. In *Empire of Lights*, Kim continues in new form, via the figure of the North Korean spy, the project he began in the mid-1990s, the tracing of the shift away from the grand narratives of developmentalism and anti-authoritarian resistance in South Korea toward a global era of posthumanism. *Empire of Lights* transforms the otherness of the North Korean spy (a violent, duplicitous figure appearing for over fifty years on state-sponsored television and radio) into a consideration of lack or non-knowledge existing within the protagonist himself. Kim Gi-yeong, the spy, is less involved in Cold War intrigue than in a continuing exploration of sexualized identities and their everyday relation to technology and contemporary practices of consumption. In *Princess Bari*, Hwang Seok-yeong (a writer long associated with the National Literature Movement and its resistance to the succession of

authoritarian regimes in South Korea) dispenses with a position still held by many on the South Korean left and right, the need to adhere to a shared ethnonational identity as providing the quickest and easiest means to achieve North/South unification. *Princess Bari* tells the story of a North Korean refugee who finds her way not to the South, but to London, forging a series of transnational alliances with other migrants from former colonies, eventually converting to Islam and marrying into a Pakistani family (the text concludes with Bari’s reunification with her husband Ali following his release from prison at Guantanamo Bay). In different ways, both Kim and Hwang rearticulate the notion of the “North Korean” by locating this figure in sites and practices that exceed the borders of the Korean Peninsula. Kim Hyeon-jeong’s *Double Agent* follows suit in its move away from Cold War anticommunist narratives, its attempt to extract subjects from both North/South state formations rather than to privilege the “free world” location of the latter over the former. These texts, then, occur as part of a constellation of literary and filmic works that negotiate the ways in which shifting notions of time, space, and desire in a transnational, technologized world set in motion new forms of identification.

“People in a New Place”

The appearance in 2006 of a new term in South Korea to describe North Korean refugees, *saeteomin* (“people in a new place”), aimed to move beyond what was perceived as a polarizing appellation, *talbukcha* (“one who has fled the North”). *Talbukcha* itself is of recent coinage, used to refer to the increasingly steady flow of North Koreans across the northern border beginning in the late 1990s. *Talbukcha* thus replaced the earlier notion of *gwisunja*, an appellation for North Korean defectors making the “return” to the proper state formation, South Korea. Sanctioned by the South Korean government and achieving immediate widespread use in the mass media, the term *saeteomin* seeks to achieve at once a positivity and a neutrality, a movement toward a new life rather than an escape from a discredited regime. The term is at once explicitly future-oriented (no need to dwell on where one has been or what has happened in the past) and conciliatory (the new “place” is nameless). Still, the spatio-temporality organizing the notion of *saeteomin* cannot help but associate itself with the Republic of Korea, site of the new, the future, bearing the responsibility of integrating the North into its globalizing, capitalist trajectory.

Saeteomin should also be located in a longer history of dislocation from the North, one marked since the 1950s by the terms *weollammin* (“those who have crossed over to the South”) and *sirhyangmin* (“those who have lost their hometowns”). While both of these terms refer to the movement of people South during the immediate postliberation period and the subsequent Korean War (1950-1953), the latter signals less of a departure or crossing than what appears to be a more or less permanent loss, as we see in texts such as Yi Ho-cheol’s 1955 “Fleeing Home” (*Tarhyang*), which details the gradual realization by four young refugees from Weonsan who have landed in Busan during the Korean War that they will not be able to return to their village in the North. In Yi’s text, movement (“fleeing”) gives way to a sense of unavoidable loss: the three surviving *weollammin* become *sirhyangmin*.

Giorgio Agamben has written that

If refugees. . . represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, *nativity* and *nationality*, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain—bare life—to appear for an instant within that domain. (Agamben 1998:131)

Agamben, of course, does not take into account a case such as divided Korea, where the possibility of a refugee who does not fissure the nativity/nationality coincidence (a refugee accorded ethnonational belonging) structures the sovereign claim itself of each formation over both its own territory and that claimed by the other, namely the entire peninsula. While the term *saeteomin* seeks neutrality, it also attempts to overcome the sense of loss that has informed representations of dislocation from the North for over half a century. In its rejection of the past and its refusal to name the point of departure, however, *saeteomin* effects a new level of othering the North, its location as complete absence, neither to be named nor remembered—a removal of the North from post-1945 history. The *saeteomin* become a special category of migrant (Korean and yet lacking an origin), seeking, along with the increasing inflow of non-Korean factory laborers and marriage partners, what is often described in the mass media as the “Korean dream,” a better life in contemporary multiethnic South Korea.

It is important to remember that the notion of *sirhyangmin* and its accompanying sense of loss could, in fact, be appropriated to contest the Cold War privileging of life in South Korea. As Kim Weon-gil points out in his discussion of Yi Ho-cheol’s work,

The term *sirhyangmin* should be considered as referring not only to those from the North who relocated to the South, but should include everyone who left the countryside, both during the Korean War and in the 1960s as a result of the [South Korean] government’s pursuit of economic development. (Kim 1998:46-7)

In other words, the figure of the *sirhyangmin*, while usually referring specifically to “those who have lost their homes in the North,” can also, in the works of Yi and other writers in the 1950s such as Hwang Sun-weon, Kim Yi-seok, and Yi Beom-seon invoke a more general condition of “uprootedness” encountered by those from the South, one brought on by the upheaval of the rural order following the Korean War and the forced entrance of the South into the Cold War world. The contestation surrounding the terms deployed to describe those who have come from the North, then, can be linked to a broader history of legitimizing/calling into question the territorializing of the lived space south of the DMZ as a proper “home.”

North Korea as Metaphor

Paik Nak-chung has called North Korea “the other that is not an other” (*taja anin taja*). I think we can link this remark to a process of memory located somewhere between mourning (as Dominick LaCapra notes, the recognition of the other as other) and melancholia (in LaCapra’s words, “a specular relation that confuses the self with the other”) (LaCapra 1998:184). The figuring of division as national and as loss, that is, points to the ways in which “North Korea” and “North Koreans” are experienced in their absence by way of clips/documentary images, mostly voiceless or voiced-over. The notion of North Korea thus becomes marked by a certain encounter with death, or, more precisely, with a spectrality, a sense of something that is there and not there.

Empire of Lights—the title is taken from the 1954 Magritte painting, which adorns the cover of Kim Yeong-ha’s novel—concerns itself centrally with this

uncanny relationship between presence and absence, light and dark (Magritte's painting is of a house lit at night but covered by a daytime sky). The text occurs in the space of one day, tracing the lives of a North Korean spy, Gi-yeong, who has lived in the South for over twenty years but has been forgotten by his handlers and now lives an ordinary middle-class life as importer of foreign films; his wife, Mari, who works as a salesperson at a Volkswagen dealership and is having an affair with a younger man; and their daughter, Hyeon-mi. Gi-yeong's life is turned upside down when he suddenly receives word from the North that he is to return within 24 hours.

The text's explicit reference to Magritte's painting occurs when southern forces light up the sky with signal flares to interrupt the incursion of a northern submarine sent to retrieve Gi-yeong, who has become a double agent: "Lit up by the flares, the coastline was surreal. The sky was dark, but the world bright. It was reminiscent of Magritte's 'Empire of Lights'" (Kim 2006a: 383). Following the withdrawal of the submarine, Gi-yeong is given the okay to leave his position; as he walks away from the beach, a southern searchlight focuses in on him: "The light was so powerful that it erased the shadowy outlines of his face, making him appear ghostlike" (Kim 2006a: 385). This moment between light and dark, the space of the spy and ambivalent cathection (Gi-yeong is momentarily drawn toward his former comrades who have come to retrieve him), achieves no easy resolution in the form of a "return" (*gwisun*). The turn back toward the South is indeed a turn to the light, but in the form of surveillance, the projection of a technology that embeds itself upon him so powerfully, almost like an x-ray, that he remains "ghostlike," there and not there. The text, that is, disallows the Cold War dichotomizing of South and North and the accompanying return to presence and "home."

This moment in *Empire of Lights* points to another image, the nighttime satellite photograph of the Korean Peninsula frequently invoked to draw the stark contrast between the "backward" North and the "developed" South. The technological might of the South maps the peninsula, dividing it clearly in half in this image of the power grid, the South remaining completely lit at night, while the North is covered in darkness. It is precisely this play of presence (South) and absence (North) that *Empire of Lights* unravels. Indeed, Kim's text questions the ways in which the South Korean developmental trajectory has occurred as part of a broader modernity informed by the regime of an imperious light, one that in its very promise of transparency and presence is less emancipa-

tory than totalizing.⁶

Kim Yeong-ha has written that in *Empire of Lights* “North Korea” is a “metaphor for arrested adolescence” (Kim 2006b: 58). Kim’s assertion, however, does less to insert the North in the rigid framework of Cold War developmentalism/psychologism than to call attention, in a matter-of-fact way, to the ways in which “North Korea” can serve as a trope. Rather than reverse Jameson’s well-known formulation and “North Korea” necessarily as individual allegory, we can, I think, extend Kim’s lifting of this term away from the history of its would-be non-metaphorical Cold War referentiality toward a figure that defies easy or “proper” representation. As the reversal of light and dark in the Magritte painting on Kim’s cover suggests, the figures of both “South Korea” and “North Korea” in *Empire of Lights* are traversed by an alterity that disallows emplacement in a stable field of Cold War oppositional reference.⁷

Empire of Lights is less concerned with the production of a particular memory of North Korea, the Korean War, or national division than with a generalized exploration of how memory itself works to constitute subjects. The figure of the communist spy, one so familiar to South Koreans, provides a good example of how such an inquiry works in Kim’s text. Rather than asking “Who is the spy?” or even “Which side is the spy really on?” in *Empire of Lights* the question becomes “Can the spy ever really know which side he/she is on?” It is in this sense that the “North” enters the constitution of the “South Korean” subject in the text. Gi-yeong never really is “North Korean”—he is the site, the “metaphor,” for the alterity within disavowed by Cold War South Korean statism (which seeks to project the other north of the DMZ).

The activities of the spy, further, imply a form of “passing,” one which calls for the maintenance of the untenable boundary between performance and performative, precisely the line that breaks down in *Empire of Lights*. As with passing, the spy’s performance ends up revealing the ways in which all identities are performative. Gi-yeong has been trained to “pass” as South Korean in a giant sound stage in P’yŏngyang that replicates a Seoul neighborhood. The Seoul street

6. See Akira Lippit’s theorizing of the history of relations between visibility and modernity from the x-ray to atomic optics in Lippit (2005).

7. The title and cover of Kim’s text locate his work in a broader modern questioning of reference. For an analysis of Magritte’s critique of the relation between language and objects, see Foucault (2005).

scene intersects with the hyperreality of the theme park, but not in a way that provides “Seoul” with more of a reality-effect than its copy (Baudrillard 1983:25). The occupants of Seoul do not reveal themselves to Gi-yeong as originals opposed to artifice but as actors performing their identities on their own set, the city with its theatrical culture of hyper-consumption and commodification. *Empire of Lights* portrays a world of virtual identities in the South: daily interaction and communication with the digital world breaks down borders and posits identities that can be manufactured, changed at will.

The text moves away from the Cold War narrative of the North Korean spy as everywhere and nowhere at the same time, a constant danger marked by the communist inhabiting of a body that appears “normal.” In *Empire of Lights*, the spy becomes associated with the cyborg (a figure that appears frequently in Kim’s literary works), closely linked to new technologies of surveillance deployed in more sophisticated ways in the South than in the North (Kim 2006a: 102). The spy, that is, becomes a figure for a broader concern with the relationship between technology and visibility.

It turns out that Gi-yeong’s assistant, who has an internet pornography addiction, actually works for the National Intelligence Service. He has thus been spending nearly all of his time both gazing at naked images and monitoring Gi-yeong. The techniques of surveillance are pornographic insofar as they indicate a desire to fixate a bare, completely observable and clearly defined object—here we see the interrelation between surveillance, virtual entertainment, and erotic pleasure. This regime finds its way into the automated love hotel where Mari engages in group sex with several young men. The check-in is automatic, digital and therefore seemingly anonymous. The hotel owner, however, monitors all of the rooms via hidden cameras in order to create “real” pornographic films (the rooms become sets). Mari becomes, like Gi-yeong, an image to be reduplicated, observed, and consumed—technology enters her body in this way.

Changing one’s identity is compared at one point in *Empire of Lights* to changing hard drives (Kim 2006a: 78-9). At the same time, the narrator tells us late in the text that “Gi-yeong’s past in the North, which he thought he could forget, reemerged at a decisive moment, like a virus that had been laying in wait” (Kim 2006a: 325). The illusion of bodily integrity, a strict separation of inside and outside, breaks down: Gi-yeong has entered into something other than a subject/object or even subject/subject relationship with the world. He has, in fact, become a cyborg, tracked as he is by a high-tech bracelet the NIS forces him to wear. In such a world, memory is embodied in a series of continuous

relays between the activities of the brain, the movements of the body, and a constantly developing technology.

Empire of Lights confronts the issue of national division both in the age of the posthuman and in the era of increasing transnational mobility. In a moment of crisis, Gi-yeong thinks of himself as an “illegal immigrant”; indeed, Gi-yeong’s story is, on one level, less that of the spy than a *saeteomin* (Kim 2006a: 325). *Empire of Lights* points to a shift in imaging the North: the danger of the communist spy is replaced by a concern regarding the northern migrant. As at once illegal immigrant and cyborg, Gi-yeong shows how the breaking up of the “human subject” by way of technology intersects with the new forms of identity set in motion by the contemporary regime of globalization and its accompanying border crossings.

From Ethnonational Body to Non-aligned Affect:

The Guest and Princess Bari

Hwang Seok-yeong has stood very much on what he has called the “borderline” of Korean literature, responsible for major shifts in the South Korean literary field. In large part responsible for reintroducing laboring bodies—absent following the departure of proletarian writers to the North in the immediate postliberation period—to the South Korean literary field in the early 1970s, Hwang has also experimented with orality and performance in his literary works. Texts such as Hwang’s recent *The Guest* (Sonnim, 2001), for example, write themselves out of their material borders, attempting to effect a change in both consciousness and the body. The aim of the text is to dismantle the reader’s distance from the printed word on the page, just as the division between actors and spectators is eliminated in participatory theater. *The Guest* puts into play a performance very much concerned with the production of a space that will enable new forms of communality, reconciliation, an overcoming of state-sponsored narratives of division.

Written while in jail (Hwang was imprisoned for five years in the 1990s for violating the National Security Law by visiting North Korea), *The Guest* attempts to extract history away from the state—the story moves from New York to North Korea, following the return of an immigrant, Ryu Yo-seop, to his hometown in the North and his confrontation with the past—in this case the massacre that occurred during the Korean War in Sinchon, perpetrated, accord-

ing to the DPRK, by the U.S. The text is, on one level, plurivocal, narrating contesting experiences that refuse to align themselves with officially sanctioned history; indeed, statist narratives (in the form of the rigid anticommunism associated with the South Korean state, the free world narrative of the U.S. or the draconian anti-Americanism of the North) are relativized as particular voices, no longer able to stand the test as universal truths. The voices of the dead that return throughout the text, which occurs in the form of a Hwanghae Province shamanist ritual, become traces of violence, a violence so powerful that it moves from the level of abstract memory to embodied memory, quasi-corporeal. The text offers a shamanist performance meant to interrupt the hardening of the structure of violence embodied in the appearance of the ghosts—the voices of the dead must be invoked, understood, and put to rest.

In *The Guest*, it turns out that the Sinchon atrocity was largely self-inflicted, even as it is linked to a broader Korean experience of modernity, one informed by what the text portrays as a particular understanding and appropriation of Christianity and Marxism. *The Guest* thus represents an attempt to rethink the issue of national division and the anti-authoritarian struggle in a postdevelopmental context; the text calls for a new approach to the notion of “outside powers” (*wese*), one that moves away from the Korea vs. U.S. opposition prevailing in the 1980s. For Hwang, the pressing question now becomes less a reversing of the anticommunist “rescue” narrative of U.S. intervention in the Korean War and necessary South Korean “free world” alignment than a matter of interrogating modernity itself in the name of decolonizing the consciousness.

The “guest” refers at once to an idiomatic expression for smallpox, as well as to Marxism and Christianity, the two “guests” who mark the advent of a conflict-ridden modernity on the Korean Peninsula that eventually takes territorial form in national division. The title of the text, then, turns upon the trope of Marxism and Christianity as disease, a figure we can link to the “inversion” Karatani Kōjin has pointed to as enabling the construction of the modern subject in his discussion of the origins of modern Japanese literature in the late nineteenth century (Karatani 1993). In Hwang’s text, the guests, by way of inversion, create that which is supposed to precede their advent, the host (the healthy ethnonational body). An improper modernity has resulted from the inability to recognize and value this body as subject, that which must properly absorb and appropriate thought/religion which finds its way to the peninsula from without. In this way, *The Guest*, unknowingly perhaps, diagnoses the failure of modernity as arising from the inability to implement the inversion (the very structure

Karatani unpacks as part and parcel of modernity itself). The answer the text ends up giving in its critique of the failure of modernity is to become more modern—the text itself becomes, via the guest/host trope, an extended enactment of the inversion.

In the end, *The Guest* invokes, in the form of a shamanist ritual, polyvocal accounts of the past (the voices of the ghosts) only to subsume these accounts in an encompassing monologism—the narrator’s voice stands above all others as interpretive key. The performance of communality in the text relies upon this coincidence of host, narrator, and ritual. We can see, then, how memories in *The Guest* become memory, closely linked to space, the saturation of affect investing “North Korea” with ethnonational meaning opposed to the radical alienation of diasporic life in New York (a life located outside of history).

It is precisely this isomorphism of people and place that Hwang moves away from in *Princess Bari*, which we can locate both as a post-9/11 text calling for a realignment of the Korean Peninsula away from the U.S.-led coalitions engaged in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and within a longer history of Cold War texts calling for neutrality/nonalignment such as Choe In-hun’s early 1970s *The Tempest*. At the same time, *Princess Bari* occurs amidst the daily addressing in the South Korean television and internet media of the postdevelopmental issue of migrant workers, the emergence of a multicultural society, as well as the assertion (newly celebrated) that the Korean people are heterogeneous, “mixed” in origin (a move from blood-based to affective belonging). The tracing of Bari’s trajectory—her marriage to Ali, her conversion to Islam, the birth of her child—offers a new kind of global citizenship concerned both with the Korean diaspora and the articulation of new forms of identity emerging within South Korea (a large percentage of migrant workers are Muslim). At the same time, the text interrupts the continuing Cold War narrative of return (*gwisun/sae-teomin*). Bari evinces neither nostalgia for her lost home in the North nor a longing to pursue the “Korean dream” in the South; in *Princess Bari*, memory is no longer linked to place, but to the tracing of movement in the form of the transnational journey.

Princess Bari, like *The Guest*, draws on shamanist ritual and song. Bari’s affiliation with the famous shaman song, *Princess Bari*, however, allows for a very different figuring of the body as part of the process of identification.⁸ Bari

8. Over two hundred versions of the Princess Bari song are extant. The storyline is as follows: Although cast off by her father (angry at the birth of a seventh daughter), Bari undergoes a

is telepathic, able to communicate via the mind and to enter into a person's past by way of bodily touch (she works as a foot masseuse). The retelling of the shamanist song occurs not to recover a healthy ethnonational body or to "properly" incorporate "outside" thought/religion, but to dispense with the "inside," the racialized body as site of identification. Bari's healing powers turn upon her ability to allow feelings/affective histories of oppression to emerge from bodily touch. In this way, the text reconstitutes bodily presence in the form of a transnational, communal immediacy among women and the former colonized.⁹

Princess Bari's delinking of affect from territorialized space and its dismissal of the ethnonationalized body as repository of authenticity follows a history of appropriating traditionalist forms to address the issue of national division which extends beyond *The Guest*. Hwang's recent texts occur as the latest articulation of a contestation over the possession of "national tradition" between the state and the anti-authoritarian movement. The figure of the shaman, for example, became a contested site, appropriated on the one hand by the state in the 1970s and 1980s as one of a series of cultural icons making up the transhistorical "national spirit" and, on the other hand, by the anti-authoritarian, anti-U.S. opposition as the embodiment both of a history of *minjung* (people's) oppression and emancipatory possibility. While the former seeks to overcome division via a shared spiritual culture that will allow for the eventual assimilation of the North into the developmentalist narrative, the latter grafts tradition onto a unificatory *minjung* subject closely associated with labor.

Bari's movement away from the peninsula toward a transnational intimacy relocates the *minjung* subject in a global colonial and postcolonial history of dislocation and migrancy. The text addresses the end of the 1970s and 1980s grand recits by recovering the epic form outside of the Korean Peninsula's borders. In *Princess Bari*, the North Korean state appears as hopelessly authoritarian, incapable of offering, on any level, an alternative to contemporary neoliberalism. Here, even as the text links the North Korean famine to global structures of domination, we see a dismissal of the nostalgic appropriation of "North Korea," or North Korea as a metaphor in the way it functioned for some in the 1980s stu-

series of hardships to find medicine that will cure her father of his illness. She returns with the medicine only to find he has already died. Bari brings him back to life and thus becomes known as a deity traversing the earthly and spiritual worlds, consoling the spirits of the dead.

9. For a critique of the primacy of touch and its linkage to immediacy, see Derrida (2005).

dent movement as a proper revolutionary subject. At the same time, despite the Bari-Ali alliance, the text’s exclusion of South Korea from the epic leaves aside the question of how migrant labor and the formation of new identities in the South itself works to rearticulate the issue of the division of the peninsula in terms other than “national.”

Princess Bari’s move beyond national borders is one that occurs in many contemporary South Korean texts. Critics and writers associated with the National Literature Movement, for example, increasingly call for a broader linkage with post-Cold War Asia (as we see in the new South Korean journal *Asia*). Bari, that is, is less of a desiring woman subject than a figure calling for a post-911 realignment of affect. Rather than functioning, as in *Empire of Lights*, as unknowable or hidden desire, sex is made visible, observed by Ali’s extended family—the sexual act occurs to consummate the Bari-Ali union and secure Bari’s entrance into the Islamic community. In *Princess Bari*, the erotic takes the form of desire for a reworking of kinship relations on a global level, alliance with the Islamic world (Hwang 2007:206).

It is for this reason that the filiality informing the shaman song *Princess Bari* is retained in Hwang’s text, even as this filiality is redirected to a transnational intimacy in the form of respect for Ali’s father. Here, *Princess Bari* departs from Kang Yeong-suk’s recent *Rina* (2006), which also tells the story of a young girl’s refugee journey from a country that resembles North Korea into one that resembles China, but without offering any names, only initials to designate state formations. The absence of proper names in Kang’s text allows for a certain allegorization in the form of a linkage of the flow of refugees from the North to the more general global condition of dislocated peoples; at the same time, the text effects a de-allegorization, insofar as *Rina* cannot be reduced to a figure setting in motion a broader affiliation/new forms of kinship. The dismissal of statism/nationalism in *Rina* serves only to set the stage for the text’s central concern: the rejection of the patriarchal family structure and the exploration of shifting, bisexual identities. If *Princess Bari* concludes with Bari’s return to the home as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law, *Rina*’s end is nomadic—*Rina* wanders alone through an unnamed space.

Double Agent

Set in the early 1980s, Kim Hyeon-jeong’s 2003 film *Double Agent* also con-

cerns itself with the reworking of the Cold War North/South identities. The film tells the story of Byeong-ho a double agent from the North who has staged an elaborate *gwisun* in order to secure a position as a mole within the South Korean intelligence apparatus. Disillusioned by the power play of both states, North and South, Byeong-ho eventually flees to South America with his lover, also a North Korean agent. The film concludes with Byeong-ho's death at the hands of a seemingly friendly foreign agent on the street while his pregnant lover, Su-mi, waits for him to return from work—whether the hit man works for the North or South is deliberately left unclear. *Double Agent* thus follows a number of films in the late 1990s and early 2000s in its delinking of subjects from both North and South state formations.

If Byeong-ho's initial loyalty to the party and revolution, in fact, appears as a sign of his integrity, the declaration by South Korean NIS agents themselves that “as an operative you should know better than to think there is ‘freedom’ in the South” justifies his reluctance to truly “recant” (*jeonhyang*) and become a loyal anticommunist. As in Kim Yeong-ha's *Empire of Lights*, the film interrupts the Cold War ascription of treachery upon the North Korean spy to be found everywhere and nowhere at the same time in South Korea, while also showing the ways in which Byeong-ho is merely a pawn, easily dispensed with by the North Korean state. *Double Agent* thus produces a reversal—it is not the spy, but the state power of both North and South that takes the form of a conniving double (this reworked othering is perhaps best demonstrated by the appearance of the duplicitous foreign hit man as agent and embodiment of a combined North/South state violence).

Following the determination that he can be of use to the NIS, Byeong-ho appears at a public *gwisun* ceremony held in his honor and proceeds to wave the South Korean flag vehemently while shouting his allegiance to South Korea and the free world in a North Korean accent. An awkward silence is followed by laughter and then, eventually, applause. This “return” is actually a performative enactment of the authenticity of the subject that has supposedly never left, but the declaration of allegiance to the South Korean state in “North Korean style” interrupts the interpellatory moment. The audience, momentarily, is distanced from its own statist affiliation, but then laughter covers the abyss between silence and applause; the audience “returns” to itself, choosing to forget what it has just learned, that the “return,” and identification, are performed.

Double Agent, further, offers one of the most violent water torture scenes in South Korean film, one that exceeds Yi Chang-dong's *Peppermint Candy*

(2000). Torture, the attempt to enforce the coincidence of words with truth, works by baring the body. This pornographic scene, the attempt to produce and display truth in the form of a bodily reality, is accompanied by music, the song of the popular 1970s singer Hyeeyuni, associated with the upbeat, forward-looking popular culture promoted by the Park Chung Hee regime. The popular song accompanying the display of the naked, writhing body, however, becomes something more than a demonstration of how the authoritarian state seeks to dupe an innocent people/audience when one of the NIS agents pauses to adjust the radio dial so he himself can hear the song more clearly. The state itself can only operate by way of a certain deception, a belief not only in its own powers of illusion, but in a bracketing of its own disbelief, knowing and not knowing at the same time. The disciplining structure cannot separate itself from the subject effects it is producing.

Byeong-ho’s location at the end of the film as a laborer cleaning fish with other transnational migrants and local workers on the docks in South America points to the possibility of becoming other, creating a new, diasporic identity removed from both statist and ethnonational affiliation. The closing sequence prior to his death shows Byeong-ho and Su-mi happy with their new lives, comfortable with their surroundings. While set in the early 1980s, this 2003 film, then, intersects with a trajectory mapped out in a number of contemporary South Korean literary texts, the movement off the grid, away from consumption and a technologized lifestyle. At the same time, *Double Agent* offers a (romanticized) alternative both to the hypernationalism of the North and life in the globalizing, postdevelopmental South, would-be home for the *saeteomin*. Like Princess Bari, the rearticulation of the *minjung* subject must take place outside of South Korea’s borders. As in a number of “labor novels” of the 1980s, the intellectual overcomes alienation/bourgeois positionality by becoming worker, but now, in the early 2000s, the move is projected outward, to the space of a transnational working-class culture.¹⁰

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The figure of the “North Korean” in *Empire of Lights*, *Princess Bari*, and *Double Agent* points neither to communist threat nor to a site of anticapitalist,

10. For a discussion of the intellectual/worker relation, see Lee (2005).

revolutionary potential, but to a generalized separating out of people from place, to an adaptability and mobility. This figure becomes a site for the post-Cold War, postdevelopmental rearticulation of the grand recits of the 1970s and 1980s. If the ethnonational/developmental coincidence performed daily in 1970s/1980s South Korea has been replaced by a certain cynicism/critical distance that informs the position of the neoliberal subject of globalization, the seamless movement of the “North Korean” into this regime in *Empire of Lights* demonstrates its powers of assimilation. In *Princess Bari*, it is the very impoverishment of “North Korea” and its failure as a state that enables a reworking of the *min-jung* subject in the form of a linkage with a transnational working class, an alliance that the text cannot locate in the unnamed trajectory of the now liberal democratic, prosperous, technologized South.

If contemporary South Korean literature negotiates new forms of identity arising from the transnational movement of peoples, it also confronts a shifting readership. New forms of media, the *Hallyu* phenomenon, and the emergence of post-Cold War intra-Asian culture flows locate literary texts as part of a circulation of cultural products that extends itself through and beyond South Korea’s borders. The title of *Empire of Lights* appears in both Korean and English on the cover, and Kim Yeong-ha devotes a special section of his website, kimyoung-ha.com, to an open forum on the translation of his works. *Princess Bari* was already under contract to U.S., British, and French publishers as it was being serialized in the *Hankyoreh Newspaper* in early 2007. As with the making and marketing of contemporary Korean film, writers now truly anticipate a global readership, the entrance of South Korean literary works into this circuit of consumption signaling a mobility of texts that intersects with the new forms of transnational identities they produce.

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