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Fields of Revision: Adaptations of *Wren's Elegy* by Mo Yun-suk and Kim Ki-young¹

IRHE SOHN*[●] AND KI-IN CHONG[†]

Abstract This essay investigates the ‘field of revision’, in which multiple texts permeate each other to question and transform a given story. To do so, it examines the adaptations of *Wren's Elegy*, a South Korean epistolary poem that narrates the story of its titular character's love for a married man named Simon. The decades-long development of its story—from Mo Yun-suk's initial publication in 1937 as a revisionist project based on Yi Kwang-su's *Heartless*, to three revisions made by the author herself, to its film adaptation by Kim Ki-young—shows how adaptation involves multiple texts, authors, and historical and cultural conditions that create broader networks of elements for stories. By identifying and exploring the blind spots of previous versions, each revision updates the story of Wren and Simon to introduce a different vision. Through our analysis of Mo and Kim's works, we argue that revision is not just about newly introduced ideas and perspectives, but also about critiques of a story's previous forms. By viewing revision as such a method, the study of adaptation can become more than an inspection of the difference between texts based on a rigid hierarchy of originals and adaptations.

Keywords: *Wren's Elegy* (*Ren ūi aega*), revisionist adaptation, Mo Yun-suk, Kim Ki-young, Yi Kwang-su

In Thomas Leitch's discussion of adaptation as a spectrum of textual relations, revision sits somewhere between ‘celebration’ and ‘allusion’. This textual transformation also requires revisiting the source texts, reassessing them, and selecting elements suitable for revision. In doing so, however, it seeks to ‘alter the spirit’, as Leitch has noted, claiming its own right to the texts in question (107). In that sense, revision provides a vantage point from which the multifaceted process of adaptation can be observed. In this essay, we examine the comparative scope that the process of revision provides by mediating a variety of modes of textual migration. We focus on adaptations of a South Korean story, *Wren's Elegy* (*Ren ūi aega*), as a case study that illuminates the processes involved in revisionist adaptation. Instead of examining these adaptations as a linear progression, we investigate them as a product of what we call the ‘field of revision’, in which multiple texts permeate each other to question and transform a given story.

In this essay, we suggest that adaptation goes beyond an exclusive relationship between two sources to include multiple texts, authors, and historical and cultural conditions that create broader networks of elements for stories. Our notion of the ‘field

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of revision' is a spatial metaphor that plays on a concept from optics: a 'field of vision' is the range of human visual perception, which inevitably includes blind spots. A revisionist's work is to move away from previously occupied positions to find other perspectives and to superimpose their own vision onto the given landscape. Exploring a field of revision, thus, involves an investigation into the moments when the perspectives advanced in the previous text are reviewed and revised.

The decades-long development of *Wren's Elegy* from a poem to a film offers a unique field of revision to explore. First published in 1937 as an epistolary narrative poem by Mo Yun-suk, one of South Korea's most renowned female writers, *Wren's Elegy* describes the romantic love a woman named Wren harbours towards a married man named Simon. Against the backdrop of Japanese colonial rule, Wren's unrequited love was received as a euphemism for the adversities of a colonized nation, particularly for a woman's experience of the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. After its initial publication, Mo Yun-suk revised the story three times: in 1949, 1954, and 1959. These revisions extend the lives of the protagonist Wren and her lover Simon against the backdrop of major political transformations taking place on the Korean peninsula, including decolonization in 1945, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and its end in 1953.

After this series of revisions authored by Mo Yun-suk herself, *Wren's Elegy* was adapted as a film in 1969 by Kim Ki-young, who is well known for his 1960 South Korean film classic *The Housemaid*. Like any film drawn from a literary source, Kim's film provides a conspicuously different perspective from that of Mo's work rather than being a faithful adaptation. The film begins with a camera following a man walking down a narrow alley, speaking in a voiceover: 'When I first met her, I learned that we had been living in the same neighbourhood for the same reason'. The viewers, who are familiar with the famous source text, know that the man is Simon, the object of Wren's impossible love. This opening, which privileges Simon's voice over Wren's, has already violated the very premise of Mo Yun-suk's poem, which, in contrast, never represents the voice of the man to whom Wren's letters are addressed. Decidedly failing the fidelity test, Kim Ki-young's adaptation of Mo's work could be evaluated as unethical for its neglect of the mission underlying the source text (S. Kim 2020) as it subverts the enunciative space that Mo secured for her female protagonist Wren—and thus for herself as a female writer—in favour of a male-dominated audiovisual realm.

As we navigate a broader textual network in the field of revision for *Wren's Elegy*, however, our inquiries go beyond an evaluative model with which to judge the ways that the film differs from its source text. The difference manifested in revision is not merely a marker of the filmmaker's own vision. Insofar as a story hinges on others from which it draws, such difference should be understood as a product of the film's conversation with its source text. In that sense, we are interested in how different perspectives are enabled and espoused in the process of revisionist adaptation and how multiple texts participate in renewing the life of a story.

In the analyses that follow, we investigate historical and textual connections in a series of revisions of *Wren's Elegy*. As mentioned, Mo Yun-suk's poem is already a plural text with a series of revisions authored by Mo herself even before the film adaptation. But our exploration of the story's field of revision begins by complicating the very origin of

Mo's *Wren's Elegy*. In our discussion of the personal and artistic connections between Mo Yun-suk and Yi Kwang-su, the so-called founding father of modern Korean literature, we analyse *Wren's Elegy* as a revisionist project based on Yi's foundational story, *Heartless* (*Mujöng*, 1917). The female perspective laid out in Mo's *Wren's Elegy*, as we show, is a product of her textual appropriation of Yi's work. This analysis highlights how a revisionist project is precipitated by identifying the source text's blind spots and projecting a new perspective onto them. We then move on to discuss the decades-long process of revision by Mo Yun-suk herself. Each of these revisions reflects historical transformations and changes in the author's cultural and political status, offering a series of self-apologetic responses to the changing discourse about her own life as well as the story of Wren. Lastly, in our discussion of Kim Ki-young's cinematic adaptation, we explore how the film's differences are the result of a reappraisal of Mo's story and the discovery of its blind spots. In our examination of the representation of humans as corporeal beings in both Mo and Kim's works, we argue that revision is not just about newly introduced ideas and perspectives, but also about reinterpretation, if not critique, of the story's previous forms. In doing so, we show that the study of adaptation can become more than an inspection of differences between texts based on a rigid hierarchy of originals and adaptations.

SOURCE TEXTS AS REVISION²

Alongside its role as a source text for Kim Ki-young's film adaptation, *Wren's Elegy* has an even more complicated history in terms of its textual relationship with the literary works of Yi Kwang-su. A notable cultural nationalist during the colonial period, Yi achieved celebrity status in his own time through his writings. His works are considered to have shaped conceptions of Korean literature as well as the literary enlightenment movement (Lee). Among them, *Heartless* is particularly important not only as the first modern fiction written in Korean, but also as a basis for Mo Yun-suk's *Wren's Elegy*. The story of *Heartless* revolves around the love triangle of an English teacher named Hyöng-sik, which intersects with his participation in the enlightenment movement in colonial Korea. The story's male protagonist is indecisive in his love for two women from different backgrounds: Sön-hyöng, the daughter of a wealthy Christian, and Yöng-ch'ae, the daughter of a Confucianist scholar. Ultimately, he decides to marry the former and leaves for the United States to further his education, with the goal of contributing to the enlightenment of the Korean nation.

While it has influenced many subsequent literary works over the decades, Yi Kwang-su's *Heartless* has a special connection to Mo Yun-suk's *Wren's Elegy*. From its initial publication in 1937 until Mo's last revision in 1959, *Wren's Elegy* was a widely discussed bestseller partly because the poem was believed to be a confession of a love affair between Mo, a single woman at the time of its publication, and Yi Kwang-su, a married man. Since the beginning of her literary career, Mo had considered Yi to be her mentor, and Yi also respected the young female poet's artistic prowess, writing a preface for her debut collection. In fact, his endorsement helped bring Mo to the centre of the Korean literary world (Chong 149).

To the extent that this relationship between two notable writers was known to the public, *Wren's Elegy* attracted readership through scandals related to their alleged love

affair. Throughout the multiple revisions of *Wren's Elegy*, two aspects encouraged such rumours. First, the poem is full of narrative and character elements that evoke the lives of the author and her literary colleagues, as we discuss in detail later, leading its readership to conclude that it is a confession by a female writer in the form of literature. Second, this link between Mo Yun-suk's personal history and her fictional characters was reinforced by paratextual elements in the publication. The 1937 edition, for example, was labelled *sanmun*—literally 'prose' in Korean, but with the connotation of 'essayistic prose', implying that the work was based on the author's personal experiences rather than total fiction. Furthermore, on the first page, Mo Yun-suk included a dedication to 'S, who's wandering in a foreign country'. Readers guessed that the 'S' referred to the last initial of Yi Kwang-su, who at that time was staying in Japan (An). Together, these textual and paratextual elements led readers to identify Wren with Mo Yun-suk and Simon with Yi Kwang-su, tightening the connection between fiction and real life.

In colonial Korea, which was going through a transition from a traditional society to a modern one, suspicion of an affair between an unmarried woman and a married man could have been detrimental for a female writer. Even as she advanced the rumours about herself through both the text of *Wren's Elegy* and its paratextual elements, Mo Yun-suk must have understood the danger, especially as a female writer. She later recollected how much she hesitated to accept an offer from a publisher to collect her writings into a book because they were 'honest confessions of my soul, which I have written without being conscious of anyone other than myself' (Mo 1986, 266).

Given this self-awareness, why then did she present Wren's love story in a way that evoked her own relationship with Yi Kwang-su? In early modern Korea, women's writing was already considered scandalous. In this environment, many writings by female authors were interpreted by assuming a connection between the fictional characters and the writer's personal history. Whether fiction or non-fiction, they were largely viewed as the author's confession of an exploration of modern culture and society, and thus also as a confession of unseemly behaviour. For female authors, using a confessional mode of writing presented a paradox: they felt compelled to use the device because it helped them make room to speak out about the conditions that limited their enunciative space, but it also left them vulnerable to accusations from the very readership they sought to attract. Mo's confessional mode of writing in *Wren's Elegy* was a strategic decision to pander to the sensationalism surrounding writing women in order to join other female authors in their efforts to secure a voice for women (Chang 9–10).

As much as *Wren's Elegy* was received as Mo Yun-suk's self-reflexive work of poetry, it also represents her desire as a female author to rewrite, if not redress, a story of enlightenment that restricted the position of women in Korean society. In the first edition in 1937, Wren appears as a faithful disciple of Simon, a male teacher. Throughout her letters to Simon, Wren contemplates her teacher-lover's words to learn the world of ideals, art, and religion. The hierarchy of a male teacher and a female disciple was already familiar to Korean readers who had read Yi Kwang-su's *Heartless*. In her appropriation of the character dynamic of *Heartless*, however, Mo seeks to subvert the relationship between them. Reminding readers of the teacher Hyōng-sik's love for his student Sōn-hyōng in Yi's *Heartless*, Wren's character in the poem describes how Simon

begs her, his female disciple, for sympathy for his sad plight as a married man who has fallen in love with her. In Simon's implicit plea for love, Wren recognizes the fall of the man she admires. She then criticizes how Simon's 'ideal' has actually been his selfish indulgence in conveniently neglecting the problems of Korean women like herself. Similarly, in *Heartless*, Hyöng-sik studies biology, Yöng-ch'ae and Pyöngguk study music, and Sön-hyöng studies mathematics. These academic fields that represent universal ideas about modern civilization, however, fail to explain problems particular to Korean women. In *Heartless*, women are portrayed as passive recipients of their male teacher Hyöng-sik's message of the greater cause of the enlightenment movement, not as agents with awareness of their own inner conflicts and concerns. Inverting the power dynamic between female student and male educator, *Wren's Elegy* brings to the fore Wren as a self-aware woman who lays out a sharp critique of her male teacher—which, in turn, is a critique of Hyöng-sik in *Heartless* and thus of its author Yi Kwang-su—for leaving women's issues out of 'all of your stories'.

The turning point of *Wren's Elegy* as a narrative poem comes with Wren's murder of the Soviet female agent Salome in her effort to save Simon after he has given in to sexual temptation. Added in Mo's 1954 revision, this violent act directly references the rape scene that serves as the climax of *Heartless*. In Yi's story, the male protagonist Hyöng-sik rescues Yöng-ch'ae, but, after saving her, Hyöng-sik's interior monologue focuses on whether his lover has already been violated or was only on the verge of being raped. This view of chastity, which prioritizes the 'purity' of the woman he loves, reveals that Hyöng-sik, despite his claims of having a modern education, holds male-centric ideas about women's sexuality. In *Wren's Elegy*, Wren's murder repeats the rape scene in *Heartless* but overturns the gender dynamic. Here, it is Simon who is taken by North Korean soldiers and has sex with a seducer from the Soviet Union. Through Wren's eyes, however, their sexual intercourse is viewed as a communist woman's violation of a noble Korean man. Thus, her murder of Salome is justified as a rescue of Simon. Like Hyöng-sik in *Heartless*, Wren delivers a long monologue about the killing. But unlike Hyöng-sik, she only agonizes that her true inner motive for saving Simon may have been her jealousy, and she never speaks of the loss of Simon's 'purity'. Mo's play on gender norms is clear in this episode. It inverts male-centric views of sexual violence by placing Wren in the position of a saviour and Simon in the role of a victim. Although Wren offers a diatribe similar to Hyöng-sik's, Mo's eschewal of the idea of 'purity' effectively reveals the male-centric view embedded in Yi Kwang-su's story.

In the 1959 edition of *Wren's Elegy*, Mo Yun-suk brings the denouement to the story by mirroring the last scene of *Heartless* at an important moment in which Wren realizes her own agency in the post-war rebuilding of her nation. In perhaps the most famous scene in the history of Korean literature, *Heartless* offers a summary of Yi Kwang-su's version of enlightenment: 'Right. We must teach and guide them through education and actual practice. However, who will do this?' Hyöng-sik closed his mouth. The three young women felt shivers run over their skin' (Yi 341). In this passage, Yi depicts his characters as elites who lead the Korean nation. However, the male character

Hyöng-sik is the main agent of enlightenment, whereas the ‘three young women’ are recipients.

In *Wren’s Elegy*, Mo includes a twist:

If you and your friends become great, this small country shall become great as well. The idea to elevate the country is out there; the power to expand its reach diligently as well. Simon, what action should we take? Who will stand with the power as its ally? (Mo 1959, 229)

This passage shows a stylistic and rhetorical affinity with *Heartless*. As in Yi’s story, Wren and Simon are elites who assume the task of leading the nation, and power dynamics related to the gender hierarchy overlap with the power dynamics of teacher and student. Also, both passages use a rhetorical question as the vehicle of their message. However, unlike *Heartless*, in which the gender hierarchy is maintained in the male protagonist’s position as the teacher of three women, *Wren’s Elegy* stages a scene in which Wren enlightens Simon, overturning the traditional gender roles. There, Wren is able to overcome the male-centric teachings of Simon and the axiom of a man as a saviour and a woman as one in need of salvation. And, together with her fictional character, Mo Yun-suk is able to develop a critique of Yi Kwang-su, with regard to both their own teacher–disciple relationship and Yi’s role as an important figure in modern Korean literature. Thus, in addition to being the source text not only for a film adaptation, the origin of *Wren’s Elegy* was already complex as a revisionist project based on a South Korean literary classic. In her rewriting of Yi Kwang-su’s iconic work, *Heartless*, Mo identifies the male-centric view embedded in the story and uses this blind spot as an opportunity to insert her perspective as a female writer.

REVISION AS SELF-APOLOGY

As seen from the previous section, Mo Yun-suk’s revision of *Wren’s Elegy* demonstrates the author’s decades-long project of revision of Yi’s *Heartless*. With such a larger aim, however, each revision to the initial edition of *Wren’s Elegy* was made in response to political changes in Korea, including its division after decolonization, the Korean War’s devastation of the entire peninsula, and the post-war reconstruction period that coincided with Korea’s political and economic development as an independent nation-state. Such rapid political changes in South Korea after 1945 exposed Mo to serious criticism when *Wren’s Elegy* was read as a reflection of the author’s real life. Much as *Wren’s Elegy* grew out of Mo’s critique of Yi’s blind spot as a male author, each of the revisions of *Wren’s Elegy* responded to potential, and sometimes actual, accusations regarding Mo’s political involvement. In this section, we examine each of the revisions penned by Mo Yun-suk herself in relation to its historical, cultural, and political context.

Mo’s first revision of *Wren’s Elegy* was released in 1949, four years after Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule. At that time, the Korean peninsula was in political chaos. In 1945, the Allied Forces had divided the former Japanese colony along the thirty-eighth parallel, and this division has been maintained since the North Korean and South Korean governments were established in 1948. The 1949 edition of *Wren’s Elegy* reflects this context in its depiction of the political turmoil that surrounded Wren as a female intellectual who ambitiously participated in the nation-building process. Like her fictional character Wren, Mo was active in politics beyond her writing. She

aligned herself with the right-wing politicians who supported the first president of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, and she was also famous for convincing K. P. S. Menon, the Chairperson of the United Nations' Temporary Commission on Korea, to support the establishment of an independent government in South Korea.

In this revision of *Wren's Elegy*, Mo's initial feminist vision in the 1937 edition is transformed into a nationalist vision. While Simon is still identified only as a religious leader, some new information is added to hint at his involvement in the anti-colonial movement and his nationalist thoughts about imagined historical unity. Simon's teachings, which were about more or less abstract ideals in the 1937 edition, are now reshaped to include specific references to the Korean nation, such as a map of the Korean peninsula and the mythology of the nation's origin (63). The 1949 revision offers clear indications about its protagonist's trajectory as well. For example, the place where Wren fled was merely named the 'North' in the 1937 publication, but the new edition clarifies that her destination was Manchuria. This new information not only reaffirms the connection between Mo Yun-suk and her fictional character, but also emphasizes the nationalist involvement of the character, and thus the writer, since many Korean nationalist activists resided in Manchuria during the colonial period.

In the 1949 edition, Wren often makes a direct appeal to her readers by using the pronoun 'we' to include both Wren herself and her people, creating a sense of unity among the character, the writer, and her readers (Mo 1949, 64). For readers in the immediate years after liberation, however, this use of 'we' may have seemed to stand in contradiction to Mo Yun-suk's activities during the late colonial period. In fact, both she and Yi Kwang-su were among the collaborators, whether willing or forced, who advanced Japan's wartime propaganda. After liberation in 1945, these activities were the subject of the decolonial prosecution by the Special Investigation Committee of the Anti-National Activities. In the face of these allegations of collaboration with Japanese imperialists, Mo's revision in 1949 foregrounds Wren as a woman oppressed under colonial rule due to her strong sense of national consciousness. The pronoun 'we' designates Wren's, and thus Mo's, imagined community as a means of denying the author's activities during the colonial period. Thus, this revision of *Wren's Elegy* was driven by Mo Yun-suk's need to rewrite her own past during the late colonial period.

The 1954 edition revolves around a newly added episode during the Korean War, which includes the murder scene discussed above. After the outbreak of the war, Wren and Simon are imprisoned in North Korea. Simon, a religious and national leader of Korea, is now gradually enticed by a communist woman. Witnessing Simon's fall, Wren turns into a warrior who decides to save Simon by murdering Salome, the femme fatale who represents the destructive seduction of communism (Mo 1954, 126). Interestingly, however, readers of the time might have associated Salome's deadly seduction with Mo Yun-suk's role as a lobbyist in highly right-wing international politics after Korea's liberation. As previously mentioned, she had strong ties to the Syngman Rhee administration, and at Rhee's request, she founded the political support group called the Nangnang Club, through which she recruited elite women to 'escort' high-ranking foreign male officials. Although they were never formally implicated in any sexual favours, news of these beautiful women serving as escorts for foreign guests captured the public imagination with rumours about powerful women exerting political influence by weaponizing their bodies and sexuality (Kong). Keenly aware of such views of her activities, Mo

used these women as the inspiration for her communist duchess. In Salome's murder at the hands of Wren—and thus Mo—Mo presents a counterargument against accusations of 'disgrace'.

After the rescue of Simon from North Korea, however, Wren continuously attempts to increase her distance from him, partly because she has witnessed Simon's vulnerability. Stating 'I begin to wake up from my dreams of Simon that I cherished since when I was young' (Mo 1954, 173), Wren realizes the negative impact that her relationship with Simon has had on herself. This shift in Wren's relationship with Simon in the 1954 revision aligns with Yi Kwang-su's trajectory during and after the Korean War. During the war, Yi was abducted around 1950 and taken to North Korea and imprisoned in Pyongyang (Hughes 234). Mo Yun-suk put all her energy into looking for him when the Allied Forces advanced into Pyongyang, but her efforts were of no avail (An). It is unclear if Yi succumbed to North Korean seduction like Simon in *Wren's Elegy*. However, it was crucial for Mo to distance herself from him as long as suspicion of Yi's defection to communism lingered, particularly since Mo herself faced potential accusations of collaboration with communists because she could not flee when the North Korean Army advanced to Seoul. In order to prove her loyalty to the South Korean political entity, her revision of *Wren's Elegy* in 1954 is saturated with anticommunist sentiments, even more so than her 1949 revision. Wren's murder of Salome in the 1954 edition was not only the killing of a communist enemy, but also an attempt to put an end to rumours about her dubious whereabouts during the war and her relationship with Yi Kwang-su.

The 1959 edition, which marks the last revision by the author, continues to explore Wren's relationship with Simon, but only to end the story. In the new content added in 1959, Wren shows her great disappointment with Simon, who is 'living mindlessly, putting aside his morality and conscience' (Mo 1959, 224). Simon, who used to be the bearer of her ideals and worthy of respect and faith, now reveals the frail and negative side of Korean men. Wren is persistent in educating Simon, providing earnest advice and sharp counsel. At this point, Wren serves as Simon's teacher. She scolds him for his 'weak', 'narrow', 'self-centred', and 'passive' mind, due to which he keeps 'losing the self' (225). And when Wren dies at the end of the story, she leaves a final lesson for Simon about his duty in the post-war reconstruction of the nation. In this way, Mo completes her revisionist project of inverting the gender hierarchy—revealing the irony that a project to give women agency has come to fruition only when the female character has disappeared from the story.

After its initial publication in 1937, *Wren's Elegy* was continuously revised in the context of South Korea's political transformations. It evolved to present Mo Yun-suk's vision of politics at multiple junctures in history—as a nationalist in 1949, as an anticommunist in 1954, and finally as a deliberate seeker of the nation's reconstruction in 1959. These revisions were made as Mo's response to the rumours from which she constantly had to protect herself. The death of Wren in the 1959 edition, in that sense, marks Mo Yun-suk's decision to finally end her relationship with the fictional characters—underscoring her decision to distance herself from Yi Kwang-su and the red scare in South Korea. With the killing of Wren as a final self-justificatory claim, the journey of revision finally came to an end by the author's hand.

BLIND SPOTS AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR REVISION

The field of revision was reactivated by Kim Ki-young's film adaptation, which was released in 1969. As discussed above, the readership of *Wren's Elegy* gravitated towards the allusive paratext as well as the context of gossip, interpreting its story as a literary rendering of the actual scandals that surrounded the author. The extent to which these rumours had saturated readings of the poem presented a major obstacle for Kim in introducing his own vision in the film. As the first step in his revision, therefore, Kim Ki-young had to divorce the author from her story. To do so, Kim reduced the grand scale of Mo Yun-suk's poem. In the poem, Wren's story unfolds over a long period of time, from Korea's colonial period through the Korean War in 1950 and post-war nation-building in the late 1950s. In contrast, the film begins in a shanty town in Seoul right after Korea's liberation in 1945 and then moves into the characters' difficult journeys in the midst of the Korean War, during which the story comes to an end. Against such a limited backdrop, Kim introduces Wren and Simon as if they are entirely new characters. The film clearly identifies their jobs and financial situations, which had remained ambiguous in Mo's versions, leaving readers to guess that they were intellectuals. In the film, Wren is a music teacher in a poor neighbourhood, and Simon is a painter who can no longer draw a single stroke because of psychological trauma from police brutality during the colonial era.

Such changes are intended to reduce Mo Yun-suk's presence in the story. Notably, the eras that Kim leaves out of his film adaptation—colonial history and the post-Korean War period—represent the origin and denouement of Mo's story. In an early scene in which Wren and Simon meet at a pawnshop, the film does insinuate that their relationship extends into the past, but it never uses any narrative devices, such as a flashback, to clarify that history, implying that whatever happened before the film is of no importance for the new story. Instead, the film seeks to renew their relationship at the very point when they meet again. It is a firm denial of the story's origin as an intellectual colonial woman's letter to her lover. Likewise, the film's ending, in which Wren dies on a road, distinguishes itself from the end of the poem. In Mo Yun-suk's story, Wren actually survives the Korean War and later struggles to participate in the post-war nation-building process, just like her creator. In contrast, Kim Ki-young's Wren does not survive the war. She never has a chance to contemplate women's role in the post-war recovery. If Mo Yun-suk's decision to end the story with Wren's death was a response to rumours about her relationship with Yi Kwang-su, the film curtails the post-war appendices in Mo's revisions as a means of achieving artistic independence. In effect, Kim Ki-young avoids the possibility that his viewers would interpret his film by connecting it to Mo's personal life, as the poem had been understood.

Amidst these changes, the war becomes a centripetal force in the story. After the outbreak of the Korean War, the film's protagonists, already burdened with their own financial and psychological hardship, find themselves in a more severe crisis. The film highlights extremes in the characters' actions, rather than developing their intimate emotions. Instead of pursuing and agonizing over abstract values such as spirituality or eternity, Wren and Simon act upon the immediate corporeal drive for survival, which serves as the structure for the film's narrative. By and large, such a narrative vehicle can be attributed to the filmmaker Kim Ki-young's own imprint as a film auteur who

persisted in critiquing modernity by placing his characters in eccentric and acute conditions for human survival (S. Kim 2006; Lee and Stringer).

However, the setting established in Kim's version of *Wren's Elegy* cannot be entirely separated from Mo Yun-suk's approach to the story. As a revisionist adaptation, Kim's film thoroughly examines the perspectives unfolded in the series of revisions already produced by Mo. The film's focus on the plight of corporeality—which is considered to be Kim's signature thematic emphasis in his other films, as mentioned—is an element that is present but understudied in Mo's poem. As we have discussed above, Mo identified Yi Kwang-su's blind spot in his neglect of women's rights with regard to their bodies, and she built her revision from Wren's self-awakening as a woman.

The way in which Mo Yun-suk describes human bodies in the poem is, for Kim Ki-young, itself a blind spot that provides an opportunity for revision. Despite being different from the poem in many respects, as described above, Kim's film adopts the same storyline as Mo's texts for Wren and Simon's North Korean prison camp experience, including the murder of Salome. As discussed above, this episode offers the most dramatic moments in Mo's poem and consists primarily of Wren's contemplative testimonies. As in the poem, Wren commits murder to rescue Simon from the prison camp. As the most extreme means of physical contact, murder produces a sensuous and dramatic moment for Mo's poem. In this scene, Kim discovered the pivot for his film's narrative. His decision to focus on a relatively short period of time, in contrast to THE poem's grand scale, only serves to highlight the characters' plights during the Korean War. Organized around Wren's murder and escape, Kim's film excessively emphasizes the conflicts of bodies, a motif that is present, yet often unnoticed in Mo's poem.

In comparison to Kim Ki-young's view of the material world as a physical setting of human existence, however, Mo's view of the corporeality of human beings is less developed. In her poem, human bodies are presented as a source of secular conflict and agony and as a vessel of pain. And thus, for Wren in the poem, her physical and material being should be overcome by the 'lofty' spirit and ideal, which she learns from Simon's Christian call for pursuing the 'eternal realm', in which human bodies are disdained and spirits are extolled. Following Simon's teachings, however, brings about complicated emotions: admiration for his ideals gradually becomes confused with romantic love for him and secular desire for his body. In this dichotomy between body and spirit, the description of secular and bodily desire is subdued in the early part of Mo's poem.

As Wren sees how Simon also agonizes over his unacceptable love for her, she notices that he is also merely a human being captured by his own corporeal desire. For her, Simon is no longer the sole bearer of an indescribable ideal, but rather a man whose body attracts her. Wren realizes that Simon's teachings about supposedly universal ideas cannot fully address the problems she experiences as a woman. From this point, Wren embraces the bodily conditions that lead her to agonize over her place in the world, and fully accepts her own self and identity. The bodies in the poem are the context in which Wren realizes her subjectivity as a woman in South Korea and that she holds the right to claim her place in a society that has denied her access to equal participation. As such, Mo Yun-suk bases the idea of enlightenment not on an abstract

ideal, but on the very specific locus of human bodies, revealing how teachings assumed to be universal have neglected problems specific to women.

In the film, however, bodies are not the location for realization of the self. Rather, the film's premise lies beyond the poem's dichotomy between body and spirit, hinging on the task of inscribing the bodies of Wren and Simon into the visible and audible world on screen. Wren and Simon, who now have tangible forms, are depicted as those who endure real-life problems. They live in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood near the Sŏdaemun Prison in Seoul. Wren teaches music to poor children, and Simon has long been unproductive as a painter due to being tortured in prison. Because of that, Simon's family is worn out by poverty. In this way, Wren and Simon embody the extreme living conditions of the world around them—the perceivable world foregrounds the problems of life, if not survival.

Simon was a religious leader in Mo's poem, but the film renders him as a painter. While the notion of art could be aligned with lofty ideals similar to those a religious leader would preach, the film's approach to a painter's job is instead grounded in worldly life. In the film, art is a distant object to which Simon is denied access as he suffers from his past so much that he can no longer paint. But this distance between Simon's reality and art does not imply distance between corporeality and spirituality because the film portrays art as belonging to the material realm. Simon's relationship with art is based on his own body and other materials as an extension of his artistry. His incapability as an artist is due not only to the psychological trauma of being tortured by the Japanese colonial police, but also, more physically, to his inability to move his hands. After he regains his health and starts drawing, he faces mundane obstacles such as a lack of pigments, rather than a lack of inspiration or insight. Art, in the film, results from the labour of human bodies and the supplies used to produce artwork. Rather than focusing on idealism, the film's notion of art is materialistic, as it is bound to material conditions.

If art emerges from the artist's physical and economic conditions, it also becomes the means by which artists support themselves in the material world. The film version of Simon is a neglectful patriarch who moans only about his inability as an artist, which limits his monetary gain from his art. Early in the film, Simon's wife, who feels she has suffered enough, asks him to sell some of his paintings to support the family, but Simon refuses, saying, 'I can hold my own exhibition with a few more paintings'. The implication of his 'own exhibition' is clarified by Kim Ki-young's earlier draft of the film script, in which Simon adds, 'I would accumulate a nest egg by selling my paintings at the exhibition' (Kim and Im 7). Here, success as an artist is based on the monetary value of his paintings. Art for Simon—and for Kim Ki-young—is judged by its exchange value. Hence, it is conditioned by material reality, and at the same time, conditions human survival as a means to support the living.

Kim Ki-young's reinscription of human bodies into the story of Wren and Simon as such appropriates Mo Yun-suk's own problem of corporeality as her character's source of anxiety. Taking this opportunity for revision, Kim contends with Mo's view by depicting Wren and Simon as people worried about starvation. Furthermore, through the crouching bodies of displaced individuals such as orphans, his film vividly presents the devastation of the war. Such a visceral depiction of the human condition delivers a

sharp critique of what is lacking in Mo Yun-suk's poem, that is, the visceral conditions for human survival. Mo's narrow perspective was partly due to her aforementioned social status among the literati of her day. She had always been extolled as one of the finest writers and, at the same time, had never been away from cultural and political authority. She had worked closely with politicians as a lobbyist in the 1940s and 1950s and had served as a congresswoman in the 1970s. For her, human existence was not associated with mere survival, but was understood in its dichotomous relationship with the spirit. Kim Ki-young's discovery of such a blind spot was the basis from which he could rewrite the story of *Wren's Elegy*.

CONCLUSION: REVISION AS METHOD

From Mo Yun-suk's own attempt to rewrite Yi Kwang-su's enlightenment story, to her revisions of the story over a period of decades, to Kim Ki-young's film adaptation, the multilayered development of *Wren's Elegy* shows how revision is a process in which multiple texts come together to produce, not only a renewed story, but also different perspectives. And the new visions espoused in each revision respond to the blind spots of their predecessors. Mo Yun-suk initiated *Wren's Elegy* by building on Yi Kwang-su's well-received narrative in *Heartless*, but with the twist of introducing a female writer's perspective. A series of later revisions penned by the author herself served as Mo's response to changes in the political and sociocultural milieu of South Korea. These revisions were necessary because the readership of *Wren's Elegy* was attracted to assumptions about ties between the fictional character and her creator. This link had to be broken for the filmmaker Kim Ki-young to avoid the association of his story with Mo Yun-suk's own life so that he could introduce his own vision in the film adaptation. While the reduced time span of the poem and the introduction of new narrative and stylistic elements is conducive to his revised story, Kim's revision revolves around an unnoticed trope in Mo's story, that is, human bodies as a problem. Delving into the visceral conditions for human survival, Kim introduces another way of interpreting Mo Yun-suk's *Wren's Elegy*.

Revision as discussed here in the case of *Wren's Elegy* is not simply a product of direct textual relationships, but is more importantly a process in which a text is produced in conversation with an entire network of sources. It is a process of adapting the pre-existing story to suit a new context (another historical juncture or even another medium). Through revision, one reassesses the environments under which the source text was conceived, including the author's personal and artistic trajectories as well as the historical conditions that simultaneously enabled and delimited the scope of the story. By thoroughly examining its predecessor's vision, a revisionist lays out a critique of the text being revised. Mo Yun-suk's revision of Yi Kwang-su's story reveals that Yi's progressive idea for the nation's enlightenment lacks an account of women's place in patriarchal Korean society—a blind spot only discovered by Mo's revision. Likewise, Kim Ki-young's meticulous descriptions of the protagonists' economic and psychological states take issue with Mo Yun-suk's elitist approach to the limits of human bodies as opposed to lofty spiritual ideals. Largely interpreted as a female writer's inner confession, the study of Mo's *Wren's Elegy* has been much less interested in the author's disengagement with the material conditions that enabled her to claim such an enunciatory space.

With Kim Ki-young's film adaptation, critics can reinterpret Mo Yun-suk's poem in light of this understudied motif, while at the same time acknowledging the limits of the poet's understanding of living under perilous material conditions.

In this way, revision becomes more than just a migration of a text into another form; it becomes a re-vision by which multiple texts become associated with one another and a new possibility for the story emerges. Such newly conceived stories can give us a new point of critical intervention. As a mediating process in the textual network, revision is a method for a text to articulate new perspectives that lurk in the blind spots of other texts. In the field of revision, 'students of adaptation' can truly 'abandon their fondness for huddling on the near end of the slippery slope between adaptation and allusion' (Leitch 126) and begin navigating conversations among texts.

NOTES

¹ Throughout the essay, Korean names are given with the family name first, following the convention of the language (e.g., Mo Yun-suk's family name is Mo, and her given name is Yun-suk). For transliteration, the McCune-Reischauer system is used, with the exception of names that are commonly known by other spellings, such as Kim Ki-young.

² The idea for this section is drawn from Chong (2019).

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