Theories and Methodologies

Found in Translation

SUSAN CHOI

Disclaimer

I became involved in this conference because an e-mail intended for Susan Koshy came to me by mistake. Though I knew I was not the Susan addressed, I replied anyway. Why? That word, *monolingualism*, provoked me. I recognized it as belonging to a language I once struggled to master in the same way I struggled and failed to master Spanish in high school, French in college, and Italian in my twenties. Riding in the back of a cab I know when my driver is speaking French but don't know what he's saying. Intercepting Susan Koshy's e-mail I recognized *monolingualism* as academic language but mistook its meaning. I assumed it meant "the condition of only speaking one language" much as the term "invalidism" means "the condition of being an invalid." I read *monolingualism* through the lens of pathology just as I viewed my doomed struggles to master new languages as a failure of wholeness on my part, a sort of disease. "Monolingualism!" I thought eagerly. "That's a condition I suffer from!" And so although I was not Susan Koshy I invited myself to the conference. Soon I realized that I don't actually know what *monolingualism* means. It is jargon from a language I don't speak.

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Monolingualism as Impaired Identity

Why is monolingualism, as misdefined by me, a form of invalidism, a way in which I feel not just lame but also invalid, lacking, like some sort of imposter, and not just because I'm not Susan Koshy? Growing up, I imagined my "mixed" Jewish and Korean background granted me a dual identity, allowed me to be two authentic things instead of one. To be able to leave one space in which I was

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authentic—let's imagine a suburban synagogue—and enter another, very different space, in which I was also authentic: for example, a traditional tofu restaurant on 32nd Street in Manhattan. Language is the ticket to this travel. In the first space, I reflexively recite Hebrew prayers. In the second space, I order items not listed on the English-language menu. In both spaces, no one compliments either my Hebrew or my Korean because it goes without saying I speak both. But I don't speak either Hebrew or Korean, or any language but the one in which I'm writing to you now. This is because I suffer from a condition called monolingualism. This must prevent my being mixed, at least in the way I envision above. I can't move between language worlds with the seamless sophistication of the multilingual gal, back pocket stiff with multiple passports, metaphoric Travelpro suitcase gliding silently behind me bearing all my many lexicons. I never even tried to learn the languages that might match my potential identity parts, because I should have known them already. They should have somehow been innate. My trying to make them innate proved they weren't.

Authenticity as an Unstable Term

My use above of the word *authentic* may less convey one particular meaning than betray a multiplicity of wishes. What perceived lack in myself do I seek to supply, with the word *authentic*? It is linked above with another word, *innate*, as in "present from birth." A term entirely inapplicable to language but again in its misuse betraying a wish. I wish for my identity to be inherent or innate to me, I wish for language to communicate my identity to the world, I wish the world to find me authentic. But is authenticity innate? *Merriam-Webster* offers three principal definitions of *authentic*: "worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact"; "conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features"; and "made or done the same way as an original" ("Authentic" 1a, 1b, 1c). In each definition, what is centered is perception. Authenticity is not innate; it is a striving conformity that succeeds with its observers; it is a verdict. And is identity itself not a collection of conforming performances the performer only romanticizes as innate? In other words, should I not have studied Korean in college, then pretended to have learned it at home? But, as already noted, I didn't.

Monolingualism as Blamed on One's Parents

Nor did I learn Korean at home, it would seem by design. My father was born in Korea around 1930, one of six children and the first son of a prominent intellectual. My father's father made his name in the early to mid-1930s championing new Korean modernist writing as well as the European modernists and their critics. My grandfather had been born in 1908; in 1910 the Empire of Japan forcibly made Korea a colony and so my grandfather's education was conducted in Japanese; my grandfather also learned English, the language of his academic interests. My father also received his education in Japanese while continuing to speak Korean at home, and also gained such proficiency in English that by the time war broke out between the two newly created Koreas in 1950, my father—who was the age to go to college—with his English-language skills was able to get employment as a translator with the United States Information Service and so avoid combat. While I've never been able to pin down exactly how he and his siblings acquired their high-level English, my father has sketched a few vivid images for me over the years. My father once told me his father drilled him in his English by making him read aloud from Gibbons's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and also that his father, during a professional reversal about which more later, taught English to anyone willing to pay, using that week's issue of *Time* magazine for the text. It isn't clear to me, though, whether my father was one of his father's students at this time, or whether he had already graduated from some other paternal pedagogical arrangement. All my life my father has shared with me images of his lost boyhood and lost homeland imbued with such devastating clarity that my entire first novel was a vessel for disposing of my father's recollections. Yet the story of my father's journey into English, the only language

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we share, has never come into focus. I find myself believing he must have absorbed English effortlessly, from the erudition of his father, from the books filling the shelves of the floor-to-ceiling bookcases he always mentioned first when describing his family home. I find myself assuming he learned English as I did, without effort or thought, which is why I so resent him for preventing me from similarly absorbing Korean, or Japanese, or better yet both. Ruminating about this deprivation, I feel as though some natural process, as of water finding its level, or seeds sprouting, or dust coating bookshelves, has been thwarted.

Granddaughters Cross Paths

In January 2021 the comedian Karen Chee sent me an e-mail after getting my address from a mutual acquaintance in Brooklyn. Karen explained that she had recently realized my grandfather must be the man who had taught her grandfather English, in Seoul, seven decades before. Karen wrote, in part:

> My grandpa . . . became an orphan very early in life, and lived briefly with a cousin and then his grandparents, before going to the South. When he was in his late teens, in Seoul, he was friends with someone named Oh Sang-Nak, who was a classmate of one of your uncles at Kyungbok School. Oh Sang-Nak is the person who heard that Professor Choi was teaching English classes at home, and urged my grandpa to attend them.
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> Grandpa says there were three or four other students in his class, and they met at Professor Choi's home, because he wasn't teaching at a school at the time. He recalls that the tuition was pricey, because the professor was a very well-educated, formerly wealthy man, who was now teaching privately due to the pro-Japanese accusations that you mentioned. Grandpa says that whenever the professor left home, he had to wear a hat and sunglasses to try and go unseen around town. He says Professor Choi was a very well-composed, well-educated, proud man, and a very stoic, firm, but kind teacher.
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> Grandpa and the other students would come to the Choi home about once a week, and they would learn English via Shakespeare and American history. . . . The other classmates [were] from well-off families, as they had to afford the expensive tuition. My grandpa, though . . . worked as a night guard at a warehouse and a dishwasher during the evenings to attend your grandpa's classes in the day. He said this was worth it because Professor Choi was known for being one of the very few people in Korea who actually read, wrote, and spoke English well.
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> This all took place in the late 40's, before the Korean War broke out. . . . Grandpa says . . . the classes took place in a little annex [of Professor Choi's house], separate from where the family was. He says the family always seemed very serious and sober, likely unhappy because they couldn't freely move about in society.
>
> And regarding the pro-Japanese accusations! . . . My grandpa says . . . he would like for me to ask you not to think too harshly of your grandpa in this regard, because from what he recalls, your grandma and some of their children were (he thinks) very ill from tuberculosis. . . . My grandpa says that because he became an orphan early in his life, he personally was able to be more anti-Japanese because he had no dependents and nothing to lose beyond himself[.]

As is probably clear, the e-mail above wasn't the first Karen sent, but the second. In the first, she'd briefly stated her belief in the connection between her grandfather and mine. I'd replied with amazement and eagerness, corroborating her details and myself bringing up the charges of collaboration. I'd wanted to inoculate our exchange against any possible feelings of tact on Karen's part that might prevent her from sharing everything she knew. My strategy worked. From Karen—a total stranger decades my junior, whom I've still never met—I received two images, of my grandfather and of my father, as singular and intimate as if she'd shown me their ghosts. The first image Karen rendered explicitly: my grandfather skulking incognito in a hat and sunglasses. The second image Karen only implied, but I supplied its lines and texture and even its movement, as if I'd been Karen's young grandfather, catching the glimpse of the sickly and sober and silent young man, slipping through the courtyard separating the classroom from the family's quarters: my father. Like Karen's grandfather, with whom he

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shares a birth year, he must be eighteen or nineteen years old. It's 1947, or 1948. His father's disgrace is at its height. For a time my grandfather had been in prison. My father avoids the glance of the student with whom, under other circumstances, he might have shared a classroom. Under these circumstances, the orphaned hardworking student's dishwashing and night watchman's wages are what feed my father and his parents and siblings.

My father did have tuberculosis. His extreme frailty was his other insurance, along with his English, against conscription. My grandmother, during the war, made him carry his chest X-rays with him wherever he went, another detail I stole for my fiction. But I'd never heard that my grandmother, and perhaps his other siblings, were also ill. Karen's e-mail, a conduit from her grandfather's memory to my imagination, written in the language my grandfather taught to hers and that perhaps—I am only guessing here—significantly altered the trajectory of that orphan dishwasher's life to the point of his now having a granddaughter who makes regular appearances on *Late Night with Seth Myers*, feels like the most penetrating glimpse I have ever received into my father's and grandfather's lives in Korea.

Monolingualism as the Family Policy

When I was growing up in Indiana, where my father had taken a job teaching mathematics, I never heard Korean spoken. My father never used the language in my presence. We received no visits or calls from Korean relatives, and we socialized with no Koreans, who were thin on the ground in any case in Indiana at that time. My father never mentioned Korea on any of the evenings he spent absorbing the *PBS NewsHour* and *Time* magazine. When I was in college, the Korean mother of a classmate approached my father during parents' weekend speaking the language I had to that point in my life never heard, and my father said in English, interrupting her almost mid-phrase, "I don't speak Korean." This of course was a lie. But it was also a truth. My father didn't, as a matter of policy, speak Korean.

Throughout my childhood and young adulthood I had the impression that everything about my father's preemigration existence, including my grandfather, somehow shared the status of a private emotional experience: no part of it could be verified outside the accounts of my father himself. It came as a surprise to me, in my early twenties, to realize that my father's war stories could be corroborated with the historical record. This blindness of mine was my own fault to fix, but it was also fostered by my acquiescence to my father's message that the Korean language and its referents weren't for me. The absence of that language from my atmosphere created nonrealities of both my own Koreanness and Korea itself. My Koreanness took form only insofar as was required to invalidate it. Korea itself was similarly spectral, a sort of fable, made up and controlled by my father. The details were meager but vivid. An enormous estate of pear orchards, extending as far as the sea. A remote and brilliant father sequestered behind the doors of his private library. These details satisfied me for decades. I had gone all the way through college and graduate school before it occurred to me that I might confirm my grandfather's existence through simple research. But then, I found I couldn't spell his name. My name is spelled C-H-O-I, as is my father's, but of course this is a transliteration, and as it turns out not the same one the English-speaking scholarly world uses with reference to my grandfather. Despite his lasting infamy, I couldn't pick up my grandfather's trail until the mid-2000s, when I was invited to an academic conference on literary translation. There I found that my grandfather was widely known, though my connection to him wasn't. And I finally learned to spell his name as contemporary scholarship does, meaning I could finally start looking him up.

My family name's spelling yields a pronunciation entirely different from that used for our name in Korea and in the English-speaking scholarly world, the latter pronunciation being so strange in my mouth that I rarely attempt it. When I finally asked my father about this, his answer was simple. "Your grandfather decided we would be 'Choi spelled C-H-O-I' because it's easier for English

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speakers to pronounce," he said. Even before my father emigrated to this country, our family had its bags packed for a monolingual world.

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The memory palace my father built me is a two-story Western-style house in Seoul, in the 1930s. It's not the house of Karen's grandfather's lessons. In this house my grandfather is still an admired wunderkind, not even thirty years old. My father is still a boy. The war years have not yet arrived, the choosing of sides is not yet unavoidable. Three languages seamlessly coexist in the house: the Korean of immediate family, the Japanese of public life including school, and the English of my grandfather's library. It is there that my grandfather is unknowingly stacking up books for when I come along, a half century later.

Last year, during the pandemic, I joined a *Ulysses* reading group that met weekly on Zoom. As we made our way through the book I remembered an essay by my grandfather about *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, of which I'd read a description in a book by Serk-Bae Suh. Suh's footnotes translated the essay's title as "Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: The Birth of Art," and the source journal as *Inmun Pyŏngnon*, or, in English, *Humanities Review* (182n18). This was the Korean-language journal my grandfather had founded in 1939. While some contemporary Koreanists have made *Inmun Pyŏngnon* sound like a colonial Korean version of *The New Yorker*, Suh describes it as "one of the most influential journals for intellectuals in Korea" and also as the highly effective platform for my grandfather's justifications of Japanese colonial domination.

I wrote to Suh, with whom I'd corresponded on and off for years, asking if he had a copy of my grandfather's essay in English. He wrote back that it had never been translated, attaching a PDF of his own photocopy of the essay from the pages of the January 1940 issue of *Inmun Pyŏngnon*. Gazing at those enigmatic, ancient-seeming pages, less legible to me even than Egyptian hieroglyphics, I couldn't help thinking of the few things I've learned about Korean literary publishing under Japanese colonialism. In 1940, just a year after the founding of *Inmun Pyŏngnon* and the same year the essay appeared in it, virtually all Korean-language presses were shut down. It was the end of the so-called *bunka seiji* policy in colonial Korea, a time of relatively relaxed restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, which had led to a flowering of Korean-language publications and Korean political groups. The demands of Japan's escalating military aggressions put an end to this, although *Inmun Pyŏngnon* somehow survived the suppression of Korean-language publishing for another year, an anomaly that did not go unnoticed. Then, in 1941, it too was shut down by the government, on the pretext of rationing paper. Perhaps it's my imagination, but those pages from 1940 already look impoverished. The ink seems not to have adhered consistently to the pages, usually the fault of a rough surface. These inconsistencies don't, to my eye, appear in the same places they would in the case of low-quality photocopying. After the closure of *Inmun Pyŏngnon*, in 1941, my grandfather returned to publishing in 1942 with a new journal, *Kokumin Bungaku*. This one was, as its Japanese name makes clear, explicitly pro-empire and pro-war, and laid the foundation that survives to this day for my grandfather's reputation as a fascist collaborator.

Six years earlier I'd written what amounted to a mash note to the formidable East Asian languages and literature scholar, nonfiction author, and novelist John Whittier Treat, asking him for help with my research, and since that time I'd learned more from him about my grandfather than from any other single source, including my father. After receiving my grandfather's Joyce essay from Serk-Bae Suh I wrote to Treat again, and within days he'd put me in touch with HeeJin Lee, a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles, with extensive translation experience. By the end of that summer, and despite the serious obstacle posed to her by the closure of the university's library resulting from COVID, Lee had sent me her translation into English of my grandfather's essay on Joyce. The translation was excellent—but it also confirmed the excellence of Suh's recapitulation of the essay

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in his book. Initially I struggled to find something newly revealed there about my grandfather. But recently, reading Lee's translation again, I was struck by something that I'd previously not thought much about. In his essay, which concerns what my grandfather calls, in Lee's translation, "the contradictory anxieties at the crossroads of Joyce's artistic foundation," my grandfather of course quotes liberally from Joyce. Lee had not only supplied the quotations as they originally appear in Joyce's English but had also translated my grandfather's translations, from Joyce's English into Korean, back from my grandfather's Korean into English again. This made for unavoidable inconsistencies with Joyce's sentences, most of which were inconsistencies of form, but some of which struck me as inconsistencies of substance. My grandfather's translations of Joyce into Korean, and Lee's translations of his translations into English again, had left a residue behind, a presence where I had previously only seen absence, the absence of my unmediated access to my grandfather's language.

Almost all the quotations that drew my attention came from a single scene that had drawn my grandfather's attention, the one in which Stephen Dedalus's frenemy Davin famously asks him, "Are you Irish at all?" "'I can't understand you,' said Davin. 'One time I hear you talk against English literature. Now you talk against the Irish informers. What with your name and your ideas . . . are you Irish at all?'" (Joyce 206). In Lee's translation, my grandfather renders this as "I cannot understand you as a person at all. Sometimes you curse at English literature. Sometimes you curse at Irish spies. When I see your name and your thoughts . . . are you an Irish person at all?" (Ch'oe 15).

The exchange between Davin and Stephen continues, Davin urging Stephen to try to be an Irishman: "'My ancestors threw off their language and took another,' Stephen said. 'They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?'" (Joyce 207). My grandfather's rendering, in Lee's translation, is "Our ancestors threw away their own national language and borrowed the language of another nation. Were they not at peace even after having been conquered by no more than ten foreigners? Where is the reason that I must pay back the debt that they made willy-nilly with my own life and body?" (Ch'oe 15).

The next quotation my grandfather considers is the one from which he derives the central image of his essay: that of free flight. Stephen is still talking to Davin: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (Joyce 207). In my grandfather's version, Stephen says, "If a human soul is born in this country, then it is covered with nets so that it may not escape. You spoke to me of nationality, language, and religion. I intend to escape from those nets to fly high" (Ch'oe 16).

In Joyce, the nets are flung at the soul—but the implication is that they haven't landed. An effort is being made to net the soul, which Stephen intends to evade. In my grandfather's version, the effort is already complete. The soul has been covered, the deed is done. My grandfather is explicitly interested in the extent to which the Irish political context both encumbers and motivates Stephen's artistic development, and that of Joyce. Artistic development, my grandfather argues Joyce is telling us through Stephen, not only requires the forceful rejection of political concerns but is fueled by the very energy of that rejection. Suh makes a further argument about my grandfather's aims in the essay: Suh contends that my grandfather himself identifies with Joyce, as my grandfather claims Joyce identifies with Stephen. Hence, my grandfather also wants to fly free of politics, a stance Suh characterizes as self-serving and cynical, since my grandfather decidedly did not fly free of politics in his career, his motives and true political leanings having been a matter of speculation ever since.

The final quotation my grandfather cites is the penultimate line of the book: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (Joyce 257). My grandfather's version, translated by Lee, reads, "I go to face the truth of experience a million times so that I may

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temper the spirit that our people were previously unable to create in the smithy of my mind" (Ch'oe 16).

Again, it's a slight discrepancy—of the sort that perhaps only a writing teacher like me would take note of. But my grandfather was a writing teacher, and a multilingual one. I very much doubt he was unaware of the passive voice and its uses and abuses. Joyce, in his phrase "the uncreated conscience of my race," declines to assign responsibility for the uncreated conscience. It might have been God who left that conscience uncreated. In my grandfather's version, there's no such hiding of the subject. It's "our people" who were "previously unable to create" their own spirit.

I contacted HeeJin Lee and asked if we could speak briefly by phone about the translation; we ended up speaking for hours. Of course Lee had noticed the discrepancies—her interpretation of each of them was what had made them visible to me. But she had equally noted an aspect of my grandfather's work that it would have been impossible for her to make visible to me because of its very nature. "The thing that struck me the most was how easy it was to render his translation back into English, because clearly he'd been thinking in English. The mechanics were already there, the grammatical transition was smooth. It was doing the reverse exercise." In other words, Lee had felt certain, rendering my grandfather's renderings of Joyce back out of Korean into English again, that every alteration to Joyce's words he had made had been extremely purposeful. These alterations ranged from outright abandoning Joyce's grammar in favor of rhetorical flourishes typical of his particular intellectual milieu, to small but deft additions that heightened emphasis on certain themes, or overcompensated where a Korean reader unfamiliar with Joyce might miss out on the emotive quality of the original were it rendered directly (in the manner that is sometimes misleadingly called "faithfully"). In every case, Lee felt, he was thinking of his audience: Korean intellectuals living under Japanese colonial rule, and thinking, as he was, about the existential crisis facing Koreans as a people and as a nation.

Lee reminded me that material conditions in Korea were such that readers could not just go out to the corner bookstore and pick up a copy of *Portrait*: "Korean literary scholars of that period get a lot of flak from scholars today for being 'derivative,' for spending too much time on recapitulation," Lee went on, but such recapitulation, for a reader unlikely to ever obtain their own copy of *Portrait*, was one of the most important functions of an essay such as my grandfather's. Also, Lee said, at the time my grandfather was writing there was keen interest among the Korean thinkers of his circle in the Irish situation: my grandfather's interest in Joyce was hardly a unique and private project of self-justification for his politics, but part of a conversation. Today, the verdict among scholars of his period is that my grandfather was a collaborator, full stop. But such labeling—by design, I would venture—eliminates the possibility of nuance, both in the past and in our histories of it. Lee and I discussed the certain existence of nuance—along with confusion, debate, and evolving positions—among intellectuals not only struggling to frame the survival of their people and nation, but struggling themselves, personally, to survive every day. "Independence diehards" and "traitorous collaborators" weren't two teams, issued their jerseys at the start of the colonial era. They were two opposite ends of a spectrum, along which a sizable number would have been wondering, "If Japanese colonial domination of Korea *can't* be brought to an end—what might Ireland teach us, about the preservation of cultural independence under colonial rule?"

Lee and I talked about the place where my grandfather had twice added a noun meaning "person" to a quotation from Joyce in which the idea of the person is implied: "I can't understand you, said Davin. . . . [A]re you Irish at all?" becomes in Lee's rendering of my grandfather's translation "I cannot understand you as a person at all. . . . [A]re you an Irish person at all?" Lee confirmed that a literal translation of the Joyce into Korean did not require the addition of these nouns, and that not only had my grandfather made the addition, but in the first instance he'd also flipped the clauses: "You as a person, I cannot understand at all." "It's a rhetorical gesture," Lee explained, "emphasizing the 'you' over the 'I.' The rest of his translation is very close,

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and he could have done a more direct translation here, without the rhetorical flourish. He went out of his way to do it this way—and it captures the emotive undertone of the Joyce, in a way that the literal translation would not have." For her translation back into English, Lee flipped the clauses into their original order, but kept the emphatic double addition of "person," as these additions were so clearly intentional. My grandfather's insertion elsewhere of the rhetorical question "Were they not at peace. . .?" was for Lee a similar moment at which my grandfather had taken a liberty with Joyce in order to echo back to his fellow Korean intellectuals what was at that time their own prevalent style. "He's providing points of entry to Joyce, by appealing to what they are familiar with," Lee said. While scholars like Suh see my grandfather trying to identify with Joyce in some private act of self-justification, Lee sees my grandfather trying to encourage identification between Joyce and his fellow intellectuals, fostering debates in progress. Suh had emphasized the capacity of *Inmun Pyŏngnon* to elevate my grandfather's divisive political views, but Lee pointed out that even in the course of its very short life, the journal went through striking fluctuations of editorial direction, constrictive at some times, expansive at others. My grandfather "was publishing people in that journal with the opposite politics from his own—leading Marxist critics, historical materialists, people all over the political spectrum. There was dialogue for sure. They're all reading each other's work, they knew each other on the page and socially."

Regarding my grandfather's startling alteration of Joyce's penultimate sentence, Lee assured me that here again there had been no mistake, on my grandfather's part or on hers. "My translation is a direct reflection of his Korean, and in the clause he is very specific: 'the thing that was not created by the people.' *People* are explicitly identified as those who are unable to create." Lee agreed with me that my grandfather would have been fully attuned to the ambiguity of Joyce's "uncreated conscience"—an ambiguity he resolved in favor of his own preoccupations. "He's giving us his thoughts about the predicament of the Korean people, about the question of nationhood—he's giving us his very clear gloss on Joyce." I was surprised less by the boldness of such an act than by the biases of my own that my conversation with Lee had laid bare. I had been reading my grandfather's essay as if it were an X-ray of his soul, for the clues it might give to his psyche. I'd forgotten that my grandfather was one of the most consequential literary critics of his place and time, and that this essay of his wasn't some diary entry that might be combed for involuntary emotional disclosures. It was his work.

It was also work he had done exceptionally well, to the point that the broader intentions behind it, and the long-lasting consequences of it, are still being argued. *Was* he a fascist collaborator? Or was he a nuanced thinker, at a time when zealotry would turn out to be more socially acceptable? I still don't know, and still find myself filling the void with fantasy and imagination. Seeing the discrepancies in these quotations from Joyce as cracks in some armor behind which my grandfather awaits my discovery of him is a fantasy. Imagining that I might, through the close reading of someone else's translation of his translation, get the better of him is a fantasy. But fantasy and imagination are the best tools I have for this work, and perhaps my monolingual nature is a useful tool as well. Despite his enduring villainy among Koreans and Koreanists, my grandfather seems never to have been villainized, but only admired, for his attachment above all other things to the English language and its literature. I never run across scholars deriding him for Eurocentrism, or parsing the balance in his earlier, apolitical career between his championing of new Korean writing and his championing of new writing in English. After the collapse of the Japanese empire, his only source of income was the ad hoc English-language instruction, and in the 1950s and early 1960s, when he was able to return to an extremely diminished professional life, he taught and wrote exclusively about Shakespeare. English was safety, into which he initiated my father, inside which my father raised me. Even when I whine about not being multilingual, I'm aware of the singular privileges of my home within English.

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I'll end with a last image from the limited trove of his childhood that my father has shared with me over the years. When he was a young boy, my father has told me, his father used to bathe him, just the two of them, outside in the tub. One summer evening his father told him Japanese and Chinese troops had fought, near the Marco Polo bridge. "The world will be different from now on," my father has told me that his father told him. "We have a difficult time ahead of us." The Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July of 1937 marked the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, and, more broadly, the beginning of the Pacific Theater of World War II. In other versions of this story, my father quotes his father as having said, "They started a world war today, and the whole world will be changed when you grow up." Memory—whether our own or that of someone we love—is imperfect, as is translation. Perhaps the monolingual condition, for me, is mostly about the painful condition of being divided from the past—but we're always divided from the past, whether we speak one language or all of them. The imperfections of translation, fantasy, and memory will have to suffice.

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