

Kim Yǒngnang Reading Keats: An Intertextual Study of “Tugyǒn” (The cuckoo) and “Ode to a Nightingale”

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This study adopts a comparative literary approach to two well-known poems composed in Korean and English, respectively: “Tugyǒn” (The cuckoo) by Kim Yǒngnang (金永郎) and “Ode to a Nightingale” by the English Romantic poet John Keats. In both poems the solitary speaker is responding to the bird’s song, but an intertextual reading of the two works reveals far more than this obvious similarity in the ways that deepen our understanding of their texts. Densely intertextual in itself, the text of each poem is a mixture of earlier texts which include the works of literature, historical sources, and literary or cultural conventions. Moreover, the relationship of “The Cuckoo” to the Nightingale ode proves explicitly intertextual. The third stanza of “The Cuckoo,” in particular, seems to have been produced in reaction to the seventh stanza of “Nightingale.” The imagistic structure of the former parallels that of the latter in that three successive scenes in each stanza feature different auditors (some of them being historical and literary figures) hearing the music of the bird. As illustrated by the depictions of Ruth and Ch’unhyang, a creative side do both of Keats’s and Yǒngnang’s dependence on other texts in the composition process have. In addition, the relationship between aspirations to death and the experience of beauty turns out to be paradoxical in both poems, which is an effect of intertextuality. While engaging creatively and intertextually in Keats’s ode, Yǒngnang evolved a ‘pure’ lyric style that laid the foundation for modern Korean poetry.

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The Intertextuality of Korean Romanticism

The Korean literature of the Japanese colonial era (1910-45) was inherently comparative, since it blended past and present, the East and the West, and Korean literary conventions and Western literary influence. The very in-between state of Korean writers urged upon them the need for reevaluating the literary traditions of their past and also for modernizing their literature by transposing Western literary discourses into their own. One of the Western traditions upon which they drew to enact literary reform was Romanticism, which exerted a pervasive influence on Korean poetry in the 1920's and 1930's. Indeed, the presence of Romanticism in early modern Korean poetry has attracted a lot of critical controversy among scholars, especially since the turn of the twenty-first century. An overview of earlier studies on the issues concerning Korean Romanticism shows that there was no unified, continuous literary movement aimed at modernizing the forms and prosody of Korean poetry under the heading of Romanticism. Nevertheless, researchers have identified a group of writers who self-consciously incorporated Romantic themes, moods and imagery into their poetic work: Kim Sowŏl (金素月), Kim Yǒngnang (金永郎), Chǒng Chiyong (鄭芝溶), Paek Sŏk (白石), Kim Kwangsŏp (金琰燮), and other writers. Many of these had their first encounters with English Romantic poetry in Korean translation or at Japanese universities where they studied English literature. This experience afterwards proved to be a formative influence on their mature poetry.¹

¹ Here it might be appropriate to provide a comprehensive review of the previous studies on the Romantic movement in early modern Korean poetry. Note that this review is confined to book-length studies. The first significant contribution to the subject was made by O Seyŏng, whose *Han'guk nangmanjuŭisi yŏn'gu*, published in 1980, considers the writers of balladic poetry in the 1920's to have first formed the Romantic school in Korea. O Seyŏng claims that although it is unreasonable to unqualifiedly adopt Western literary standards for explaining trends and movements in Korean literary history, 'the school of balladic poetry' (*minyoshi'p'a*, a term invented by the author) in the 1920's cannot be described in terms other than those of Romanticism (154). According to O Seyŏng, the ballad works of Chu Yohan, Kim Ōk and Kim Sowŏl, though they never proclaimed themselves to be Romantics, represent Koreanized Romanticism (153). These poets' close association (rather than precise identification) with Western Romanticism is, to repeat one of the author's arguments, shown in their firm belief that they are embodying the Korean spirit (what they called *chosŏnbon*) in their ballads; these nationalist sentiments about the composition of literary ballads were also expressed by some late-eighteenth-century writers in Britain and Germany who attempted to capture 'the spirit of a nation's people' (*Volks Geist* in German) in the folk ballads and other forms of orally transmitted literature (155). See O Seyŏng, *Han'guk nangmanjuŭisi yŏn'gu* (Sŏul: Ilchisa, 1980).

Though providing an excellent springboard for all succeeding studies on Korean Romanticism, O Seyŏng's work reveals limitations in confining its attention exclusively to the ballads of the 1920's: in his study, the Romantic spirit is presumed extinct in the poetry of the 1930's. Yang Aekyŏng's 1999 book titled *Han'guk t'oe'p'yejŏk nangmanjuŭisi yŏn'gu* explores a different Romantic dimension of the poetry of the 1920's from O Seyŏng's study. Yang identifies a decadent attitude pervading many poems from the period—most notably, Yi Sanghwa (李相和)'s poems including “Naŭi ch'imshillo” [To my bedroom]—as Romantic in its wider sense. Largely confined to surveying the literature of the 1920's, Yang's study too is limited in scope, yet it enables the reader to build up a broad picture of Korean Romanticism in the 1920's. See Yang Aekyŏng, *Han'guk t'oe'p'yejŏk*

The present study suggests that the idea of intertextuality, a term coined by the Bulgarian-French critic Julia Kristeva in 1966, is key to understanding the relationship between Korean poetry in the early twentieth century and the works of English Romanticism. Having gained in huge popularity among humanities researchers, intertextuality in the usual sense of the word denotes interconnectedness among literary texts, the notion that any text is made up of an intersection of earlier texts. No text from history, to put it simply, can be deemed to be self-sufficient. In the words of Kristeva herself,

Around the poetic signified [meaning] is ... created a multiple textual space whose elements are susceptible of being applied to the concrete poetic text. We will call this space intertextual. Within intertextuality, the poetic enunciation itself is a sub-group of a larger group which is the space of applied texts. ... [T]he poetic signified is the crossing point of many codes (at least two) which are found in a relation of negation, one in connection to the other.²

An element in the poem's meaning is, to paraphrase Kristeva, overlaid with meanings from

nangmanjuŭisi yŏn'gu (Sŏul: Kugak Charyowŏn, 1999).

Sin Myŏngkyŏng's 2003 book *Han'guk nangmanjuŭi munbangnon* broadens the discussion to the 1930's, concerning literary theories of Kim Ōk (金億), Kim Sowŏl (金素月), Pak Yongch'ŏl (朴龍喆) and Im Hwa (林和) which display deep affinities with Romantic conceptions of poetry. Sin Myŏngkyŏng stresses that the historical peculiarity of the colonial rule prompted an affirmative response to Romantic poetics from Korean writers. To put it another way, Romantic aspirations towards unattainable dreams proved to be the strong attraction they felt for the ideas of Romanticism. See Sin Myŏngkyŏng, *Han'guk nangmanjuŭi munbangnon* (Sŏul: Saemunsa, 2003).

Yi Mikyŏng, in her 2009 work *Han'guk nangmanjuŭi munhak yŏn'gu*, makes an important point that an encounter with Romanticism led to the emergence of aesthetic modernity in Korean literature (243). According to Yi Mikyŏng, the factor that distinguished Korean literary discourses on Romanticism (those as presented by Kim Sowŏl, Pak Yongch'ŏl, and Kim Yŏngnang) from their Western counterparts was their direct association with literary modernity. The modernist project being conceived under the influence of Romanticism, Yi argues, involved embracing eagerly the concept of artistic autonomy, hence an isolated, autonomous individual becoming the ideal type of artist. Indeed, Yi's book is the lengthiest examination of Korean Romanticism to date. See Yi Mikyŏng, *Han'guk nangmanjuŭi munhak yŏn'gu* (Sŏul: Yŏngnak, 2009).

Published in 2010, Pak Hoyŏng's *Han'guk kŏndaegi nangmanjuŭi chŏn'gae yŏn'gu* examines the Romantic characteristics of the poetical works of Kim Sowŏl, Kim Yŏngnang, Kim Kwangsŏp (金琬燮) and others. In particular, Pak traces the considerable influence that John Keats (English Romantic poet, 1795-1821) exerted on Kim Yŏngnang and that Percy Bysshe Shelley (English Romantic poet, 1792-1822) exerted on Kim Kwangsŏp. The influence study of this kind had been rarely conducted before Pak did. It is also interesting that Pak identifies three major trends in the reception of Romanticism in the 1920's: 1) Romantic decadence embraced by the poets of *Paekcho* (literary journals published in the early 1920's) under the influence of French symbolism; 2) Romantic idealism among writers such as Chu Yohan (朱耀翰) and Kim Ōk; and 3) Romantic revolutionarism rooted in national consciousness. These trends continued in the 1930's, pronounced in the writings of Kim Yŏngnang, Kim Kwangsŏp, Im Haksu (林學洙) (who composed poetry) as well as of Pak Yongch'ŏl, Ch'oe Chaesŏ (崔載瑞), Im Hwa (who put forward theoretical propositions). See Pak Hoyŏng, *Han'guk kŏndaegi nangmanjuŭi chŏn'gae yŏn'gu* (Sŏul: Pangmunsa, 2010).

² *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 255, quoted in Herman Rapaport, *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 84. The quoted passage is from Kristeva's essay "Poésie et négativité," included in *Séméiôtiké*. I have been unable to find an English translation of this essay. As such, I have quoted from Rapaport's English translation of the passage.

other kinds of discourses. Thus the poem's text is likely to create a multiple textual space whose elements can be interconnected in terms of the poetic meaning. This multiple space is called the intertextual. Kristeva continues to argue that the poetic text should be viewed as the site for a complex interaction of codes. The term code here refers, to borrow the wording of Herman Rapaport, to "the system of signs into which a message is translated and conveyed" or, simply, the text per se.³ Out of the interaction between these codes, which negate each other to some degree, does meaning emerge.

Many of the poems composed by Korean writers involved in the Romantic movement of the 1920's and 30's appear to have an intertextual relationship with English Romantic poems. Romanticism, it seems, inspired the most sterling examples of intertextuality in colonial-era Korean poetry. One such example is "Tugyŏn" (The cuckoo), a poem of Kim Yŏngnang (金永郎, 1903-50). Yŏngnang is one of the foremost poets of the colonial period, who has been acclaimed for the lyrical beauties and musicality of his poetry. Born in Chŏllanamdo (a southern region of Korea), he crossed to Japan at the age of 18 and enrolled in the English department of Aoyama Gakuin in Tokyo. While many other poets in Korea read English poems only in translation, he was privileged to appreciate them in the original. He is said to have enjoyed reading Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, as well as W. B. Yeats, finding Keats most fascinating. It is noteworthy that Yŏngnang used as the epigraph to Yŏngnang sijip (Yŏngnang's poems), the first volume of his poetry that came out in 1935, a quotation from Keats's *Endymion*: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever."⁴ This raises the possibility that his absorption of Keats's aesthetic poetics played an important role in the development of his lyricism.

A Comparative Intertextual Approach to the Image of the Bird

This article is specifically concerned with the image of the cuckoo that appears in "The Cuckoo" contained in the 1935 collection, one of Yŏngnang's lengthiest lyric poems. This cuckoo is, I would argue, a reimagining of the nightingale that is the subject of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (henceforth also referred to as the Nightingale ode or "Nightingale"), one of the most anthologized poems written in English. This essay gives a special focus on ways in which he conflates the nightingale of Keats's great ode with a cuckoo in the Korean lyric tradition. The cuckoo has traditionally been used in Korean literature as a medium for releasing pent-up emotions of *han* (한恨), a Korean concept whose rough equivalent in English is sorrow or resentment. The present study sets out to investigate intertextually how Yŏngnang recreates this traditional image of the cuckoo under the inspiration of Keats's

³ Rapaport, *The Literary Theory Toolkit*, 85.

⁴ Published in 1818, *Endymion* elaborates the story of the shepherd named Endymion, who is beloved by the moon goddess Cynthia. The first line of the poem is "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." It is interesting that this line is printed horizontally, not accompanied by Korean translation, on the first page of *Yŏngnang sijip*, whereas the following poems are printed vertically.

“Ode to a Nightingale.”⁵

“Ode to a Nightingale” has been seen as a high point of Keats’s poetic achievement. Keats’s odes of 1819 including this one represent the pinnacle of British Romantic poetry. Widely shared among the critics is Helen Vendler’s opinion that “the English language finds an ultimate embodiment” in these odes.⁶ The great critical acclaim that the ode dedicated to a nightingale has won, in particular, derives from a combination of musical, evocative language, vivid imagery, and the skillful use of a new stanzaic form.⁷ In addition, the themes the ode explores—those of human mortality, the transcendent beauty of art, and the power of the natural world—have the continuing relevance to our lives today. Yŏngnang would have read the Nightingale ode when studying at Aoyama Gakuin. There is a passing mention of the ode in his 1939 prose piece “Tugyŏnkwa chongdalsae” [The cuckoo and a skylark]: “Was I intoxicated by the nightingale of Keats, though I am yet to be delighted at the solitary humming of a young girl in the plowed rows, who once inspired Wordsworth greatly?” (Wordsworth’s poem “The Solitary Reaper,” too, gets a mention here.)⁸ Given that Yŏngnang here demonstrates some knowledge of Keats’s ode, it seems reasonable to assume he composed “The Cuckoo” with the ode in the back of his mind. In other words, he could not have avoided comparing the poem he was writing to Keats’s. As Ben Hutchinson has noted, comparing literatures occurs “already during the process of composition, in the mind of the writer.”⁹

The two poems invite meaningful comparison in that they both are recording the speaker’s emotional response to the singing bird. The image of the singing bird, to which many differing responses have been written across languages, acts as a leitmotif providing, to quote from Hutchinson, “a readymade structure for comparison” and “helpful hooks for broader reflections on cultural memory and tradition.”¹⁰ Aside from this shared image, what makes Yŏngnang’s and Keats’s pieces more attractive objects of comparative study is the canonical status each has achieved in national literary history (i.e. they are renowned poems) as well as the existence of analogies and parallels in them—which seems the intentional effect of intertextuality. Yŏngnang consciously wrote himself into a situation that should be understood in intertextual terms. In the comparative argument to be constructed in this article, the two works are perceived to be mutually enlightening poems, whose relationship is intertextuality. This implies that “Nightingale,” the precursor text, is a requirement for an

⁵ An ode is a poem or song composed in order to glorify or praise a thing or person. It originated in ancient Greece. For a detailed account of the ode, see Ross C. Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 352.

⁶ Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1983), 3.

⁷ Each stanza of “Nightingale” has the rhyme scheme *ababdecde*, a combination of the Shakespearean sonnet (its opening quatrain with *abab*) and the Petrarchan sonnet (its sestet with *cdecde*).

⁸ “워즈워드의 크게 느낀바 밭이랑 가의 어린 소녀의 외로운 콧노래에는 내 아직 흥겨워 보지 못하였느니 키츠의 나이팅게일에 취한 까닭인가.” Kim Haktong, “Tugyŏnkwa chongdalsae,” in *Toltame sosaeginŭn haetpalgach’i: Kim Yŏngnang chŏnjip p’yŏngjŏn* (Sŏul: Saemunsa, 2012), 146. The English translation is mine.

⁹ Ben Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13.

¹⁰ Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature*, 17.

adequate understanding of “The Cuckoo,” the belated text, and, at the same time, that once we read “The Cuckoo,” we can never interpret “Nightingale” the same way again.

In much the same vein, Hutchinson’s following description of the agenda of comparative literature fits in with the present study: “To look at literature comparatively is to realize just how much can be learned by looking over the horizon of one’s own tradition; it is to discover more not only about other literatures, but also about one’s own.”¹¹ The cross-linguistic connections that we make when reading the two poems, Korean and English each, enable us to properly interpret “The Cuckoo,” and further, to bring a fresh perspective to “Nightingale.” Each poem’s text is an intertext—a kind of mixture of other texts, whose existence depends largely upon its relations to these texts. We will see what textual meaning emerges from the intertextual relationship between the two poetic texts. This essay will carefully comb through each poem for echoes of earlier texts, such as allusions, style, imagery and structure. The close reading this study will conduct seeks to analyze not merely textual detail on a micro-level (this is the traditional notion of close reading) but also, more importantly, “the broader tradition and values of which [given] texts form a part” on a macro-level.¹² This comparative close reading is aimed at grasping the significance of the contexts surrounding each poem.

In actual fact, a number of Korean literary commentators on Yōngnang have cited Keats’s ode as an important influence on “The Cuckoo,” which is hardly surprising given several obvious similarities between the two poems. (One glaringly obvious similarity is the inclusion of the bird’s name in the poem’s title.) However, they have tended to mention Keats only in passing; none of them offers a comparative close reading of the poems.¹³ In my view, the resemblances between “The Cuckoo” and the Nightingale ode which they noticed have remained at a superficial level—though I do not wish to disparage their work. My comparison

¹¹ Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature*, 5.

¹² Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature*, 31.

¹³ In his 2008 article, Kim Chonggil states that Yōngnang would have composed “The Cuckoo” with full consciousness of its close relationship to Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale.” A professor of English poetry himself, Kim notes that a cuckoo and a nightingale have established a high reputation in Eastern and Western literature, respectively, as a bird whose beautiful song is tinged with deep sadness. From Kim’s perspective, however, Yōngnang’s poem is judged vastly different from Keats’s, for the former is based purely on the traditional Eastern view of the cuckoo. As will be demonstrated later, I disagree with him on this point. Kim makes no textual analysis of the poems. See Kim Chonggil, “Amhūgūi shidaee issōsōūi shiinūi kil”, in *Namdoūi hwanghorhan talbit: Kim Yōngnangūi siva sasang*, ed. Han’guk Sūn Hyōphoe (Sōul: Uri Kūl, 2008), 15–26.

Yun Hobyōng’s 2008 volume *Munbakgwa munbagūi pigyo* is a collection of essays doing comparative literary studies, one of them being a comparison between “The Cuckoo” and the Nightingale Ode. It is noticeable that Yun provides his own Korean translation of the ode, which means that he has a high level of understanding of the original text of the ode. However, his discussion of the two poems is not as comparative as it purports to be; it reads like a mere combination of two separate accounts of the works, literary influence of the one over the other not being really explored. See Yun Hobyōng, *Munbakgwa munbagūi pigyo: Han’guk byōndaesie panyōngtoen oeguksūi yōnghyangkwā suyong* (Sōul: P’urūn Sasangsa, 2008), 338–50.

Pak Hoyōng, too, makes a brief mention of Keats when examining the Romantic characteristics of Yōngnang’s poetry in his *Han’guk kūndaegi nangmanjuūi chōn’gae yōn’gu*. Keats was indeed Yōngnang’s special favorite, and according to Pak, Yōngnang’s passion for the English poet led to the composition of “The Cuckoo,” which recalls “Ode to a Nightingale” (79). Pak seems to have nothing more to say beyond that Keats significantly influenced Yōngnang’s poetic vision. See Pak Hoyōng, *Han’guk kūndaegi nangmanjuūi chōn’gae yōn’gu*, 76–79.

is differentiated from theirs in that it does not only trace the influence Keats's ode had on the structure and imagery of "The Cuckoo." But in broad terms, my intertextual view of these pieces also allows for an examination of the ways in which the relationship between them is understood within existing frameworks of references. As Hutchinson clarifies, "intertextuality offers a significantly broader canvas than influence."¹⁴ I believe that my own in-betweenness, which arises from the fact that I am a native Korean scholar who has long studied English Romantic poetry, creates favorable conditions for this comparative project.

The Bird's Song and the Pursuit of Pure Poetry

Now let us examine Yŏngnang's poem "The Cuckoo" in relation to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." My explication of this poem in its entirety seeks to reveal traces of Yŏngnang's infatuation with Keatsian imagery and themes, and furthermore, highlight the creative dimension of his reception of Keats. The following is the first stanza of "The Cuckoo":

Little bird, weary of a lifetime in rancor and sorrow,
 you cough blood after singing, then swallow it again;
 you came to this world to delve deep into sorrow by blood,
 your tears have endlessly clouded a myriad ages.
 This southern region is secluded, you can hide in exile;
 The moonlight is so dazzling, this desolate dawn,
 your anguish startles fish a thousand leagues under the sea,
 makes infant stars at the sky's edge shudder.¹⁵

울어 피를뺏고 뺏은피는 도루삼켜
 평생을 원한과 슬픔에 지친 적은새
 너는 너룬 세상에 서름을 피로 색이려오고
 네 눈물은 數千세월을 끈임업시 흐려노았다
 여기는 먼 南쪽땅 너쪼껴 숨음직한 외딴곳
 달빛 너무도 황홀하야 후젓한 이 새벽을
 송긱한 네 우름 千길바다밑 고기를 놀내고
 하날 스가 어린별들 버르르 떨니겟고나¹⁶ (ll. 1-8)

By invoking the cuckoo, Yŏngnang keeps to a long-standing convention in Korean lyric poetry.

¹⁴ Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature*, 82.

¹⁵ As for English versions of Yŏngnang's poems quoted in this article, I used the following book: *Until Peonies Bloom: The Complete Poems of Kim Yŏngnang*, trans. Brother Anthony of Taizé (Haworth, NJ: MerwinAsia, 2010). For "The Cuckoo," see 44-47.

¹⁶ All the Korean texts of Yŏngnang's poems as they were first printed are quoted from Kim Haktong, *Toltame sosaeginŭn haetpalgach'i*. For the text of "Tugyŏn," see 64-65.

As was indicated earlier, the cuckoo has traditionally formed a close association with *han*.¹⁷ And by dedicating an odal hymn to the nightingale, Keats conforms to an old convention in Western lyric poetry, too: that is, referencing to the nightingale and its song, depicted as both lamentable and beautiful. Yǒngnang and Keats each participate in the common stock of past conventions which forms the fabric of literary discourse in which each was writing; their works are part of a continuum of their national literary histories.

However, Keats refuses concession to the customary practice of associating the nightingale with Philomela, an Athenian princess who metamorphosed into a nightingale in Greek mythology. The story of Philomela has been frequently represented in Western literary and artistic works since the Roman poet Ovid, who gave a detailed (and graphic) account of the princess' misfortunes in his *Metamorphoses*.¹⁸ Paul D. Sheats indicates that "the nightingale [in Keats's ode] is notable for what it is not: the Philomela of poetic tradition."¹⁹ In a similar vein, Vendler writes, "Keats's rejection of the legend of Philomela so conclusive, that we feel the bird to be sexless."²⁰ Keats indeed makes it clear that his nightingale has nothing to do with the mythological Philomela. Being called a "light-winged Dryad" (l. 7), i.e. a tree nymph or spirit, the nightingale is felt to be, to borrow Vendler's words, only "faintly female."²¹ Keats introduces a bird of "happiness" who, as described in stanza 3, "among the leaves hast never known / the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of mortal life (ll. 22-23). In contrast to Philomela, who was subjected to acts of brutal violence, his happy nightingale is presumed to have no experience of suffering and pain. Keats's erasure of the Philomela myth in fitting into a pre-existing framework of references to the nightingale illustrates the ways in which he engages with literary tradition. While following in mainstream tradition, Keats has no hesitation in deviating from the classical source. His reception of tradition should be regarded as a creative process. It is noteworthy that the omission of Philomela from his representation of the nightingale makes room for enriching the intertextuality of the ode, especially its seventh stanza. (This stanza will be thoroughly examined.) Without having to allude to Philomela, the poet is free to explore the possibilities of forging new connections with other texts in regard to the bird. Yǒngnang's cuckoo is somewhat similar to Philomela. He calls the bird an "anguished spirit" and describes its voice as filled with regret or *han*. Weary of rancor and sorrow, the cuckoo is not an entity removed from mortal reality.

¹⁷ The cuckoo was also a recurrent motif in the works of poets contemporary with Yǒngnang: Kim Sowŏl, Sŏ Chŏngchu, Han Yongun, and Cho Chihun. According to Kim Chusu, Yǒngnang's treatment of the cuckoo motif in "The Cuckoo" was different from those of the four poets in that he presented the cuckoo's cry as an outpouring of intense grief over the loss of his country. As for the other four, Sowŏl's poem "Chŏptongsae" (The cuckoo) depicts the bird as a reincarnation of the speaker's dead sister. Similarly, the cuckoo in Chŏngchu's "Kwich'okto" is a bird containing the soul of the speaker's beloved. Yongun is comparable to Yǒngnang in that he also identified in the bird's voice a touch of deep sadness about the lost country. Chihun, in his poems titled "Nak'wa" (Fallen blossoms), utilized the cuckoo motif as a device for evoking a sad mood. See Kim Chusu, "Hyŏndaesie nat'an an tugyŏn mot'ibŭ yŏn'gu," *Minjongmunhwa*, no. 36 (2010): 308-22.

¹⁸ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 134-42.

¹⁹ Paul D. Sheats, "Keats and the Ode," in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90.

²⁰ Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, 82.

²¹ Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, 82.

One important commonality of the cuckoo and the nightingale, however, is that the bird serves as a vehicle for the poetic imagination, a symbol of the eternal power of song or poetry. In “The Cuckoo,” the sorrowful song of the bird heard at dawn triggers the poet’s active imaginative engagement with his country’s past and present. The stanza quoted above, for a start, describes the cuckoo as engaging in artistic activity, which is in actual fact the poet’s own; the bird is said to have “delve[d] deep into sorrow by blood.” Given that the Korean word rendered as “delve deep into” (saegiryŏogo) can also translate as “engrave,” the cuckoo as natural artist is engraving, in the poet’s imagination, his people’s heartache and sorrow with its own blood. In “Ode to a Nightingale,” too, the bird retains a powerful hold on the poet’s imagination. It even seems to represent the imagination itself. As Vendler has observed in her highly sophisticated reading of the ode, the nightingale is a “natural poet” which the human poet aspires to become²²; this is a valid point that can be also made about the cuckoo, which is portrayed as a natural engraver of sorrow. The nightingale, Vendler notes again, represents “a voice of pure self-expression.”²³ This remark by Vendler helps to understand why the cuckoo held such allure for Yŏngnang who was actively involved in the founding of a literary journal *Simunhak* (Poetic literature), which promoted *sunsusi* (pure poetry), in the early 1930’s.²⁴ (Here it is worth noting that “The Cuckoo” was published in 1935.) *Simunhak* was a reaction against nationalist or leftist writers of the time: the former saw literature as a tool for championing the nationalist cause, and the latter believed that literature should serve sociopolitical purposes, ultimately fomenting a proletarian revolution. Opposed to ideological agenda advanced in leftist or nationalist literature, the *Simunhak* group embraced literary purity with enthusiasm. To quote from Peter H. Lee, what the group meant by purity was “a liberation from ideological content and moral didacticism.”²⁵ To them, leftist or nationalist literature was impure in the sense of being exaggeratedly purposeful. The *sunsushi* that Yŏngnang and his fellow poets upheld excluded ideology from their poetry and sought to be aesthetically receptive to the world. Preoccupied with capturing the essence of beauty, many of their poems related an experience of intense aesthetic pleasure.

What fascinated Yŏngnang about the cuckoo, apart from its traditional association with Korean *han*, may have been the impossibility of assuming an ideological stance on its song. As a wild creature of the forest, the cuckoo resists any urge to add to its spontaneous song social and political dimensions. To repeat Vendler’s phrase, the music of the cuckoo is “pure self-expression.” The singing bird as natural artist remains utterly (and blissfully) unaware of its audience and hence foils any of their attempts to build ideological content out of its carefree and beautiful song. The solitary cuckoo retaining its aesthetic autonomy would have appealed to Yŏngnang who strove for his aesthetic ideals in a state of self-imposed isolation.²⁶ His stress on pure self-expression, whose quintessential example is the

²² Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, 81.

²³ Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, 81.

²⁴ A brief biography of Yŏngnang is included in Kim Haktong, *Toltame sosaeginŭn haetpalgach’i*. See 234-86.

²⁵ Peter H. Lee, *A History of Korean Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 360.

²⁶ After returning to Korea from Japan, Yŏngnang spent a life of seclusion in his home town—Gangjin,

spontaneous natural song of the cuckoo, in the pursuit of pure poetry explains the reason that, as Lee had noticed, the most frequently occurring words in his entire oeuvre are “heart/mind” and “I/mine.”²⁷ Such emphasis he lays on the importance of subjective experience and emotions in poetry is linked closely to Keats’s aestheticism—whose motto is, as quoted above, “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,” the first line of *Endymion* that is printed as the epigraph on the first page of Yŏngnang’s 1935 collection. The critic Yi Mikyŏng contends that Yŏngnang eagerly embraced the concept of artistic autonomy with the aim of achieving “aesthetic modernity” in his work.²⁸ From his viewpoint, the ideal type of artist is an isolated, autonomous individual, finely attuned to the beauty of the natural surroundings. He or she somewhat resembles the cuckoo that is singing alone. Yŏngnang’s aestheticism, which entails for him the modernization of Korean poetry, can be attributed in large part to the influence of Keats. Keats’s aesthetic philosophy is rooted in a commitment to poetry that, as the *Endymion* line implies, provides the source of beauty and pleasure—to put it another way, a commitment to pure poetry freed of literary didacticism or political propaganda. His focus on the aesthetically satisfying experience that poetry brings is central to the *sunsushi* Yŏngnang vigorously pursued. Moreover, what one reader finds beautiful may not be the same for another reader. This idea of aesthetic subjectivism is reflected in his frequent use of first-person pronouns in his poetry.

Three Figures Hearing the Immortal Song of the Bird

To return to the discussion of the cuckoo’s self-expression, time and space in which the birdsong is heard is enormously expanded in the poem’s text. This is a Keastian setting, a repetition of the substantive features of “Ode to a Nightingale,” the precedent text. In the opening stanza quoted earlier, the “rancor and sorrow” of the cuckoo is described as resounding through “a thousand leagues under the sea” and to “the sky’s edge.” The agonized cry of the little bird has even supernatural powers, surprising fish lurking in the depths and making distant stars tremble. This spatial expansion of the bird’s song is coupled with an expansion of time, which actually is more elaborately imagined in the poem than the spatial expansion. In the first stanza of “The Cuckoo,” the speaker tells the bird, “your tears have endlessly clouded a *myriad ages*” (emphasis added), and in the third stanza, he refers to two well-known figures in Korean literature and history as the bird’s audience: Ch’unhyang and a child king. This kind of expansion of temporal dimensions occurs in “Ode to a Nightingale,” too, and it is interesting that both of the poetic speakers track the song of the bird backward in time. In a manner similar to “The Cuckoo,” Keats’s ode conceives of the nightingale as a time-transcending bird that has sung to everyone across time, such as “emperor and clown”

Chŏllanamdo. It was not until the liberation of Korea in 1945 that Yŏngnang became heavily involved in political activities and moved to Sŏul, where he died. See Kim Haktong’s biography of Yŏngnang.

²⁷ Lee, *A History of Korean Literature*, 362.

²⁸ Yi Mikyŏng, *Han’guk nangmanjuŭi munhak yŏn’gu*, 246.

and the biblical Ruth in stanza 7. Imagining the bird singing to historical or literary figures in different times—this is the most remarkable similarity, or, I would say, intertextual dialogue, between “The Cuckoo” and “Ode to a Nightingale.”

In order to clarify how this dialogue is practiced, let us look at the third stanza of Yǒngnang’s poem that contains references to Ch’unhyang and a child king:

Since your anguish makes every red heart wither then bloom,
could Ch’unhyang avoid death in prison in highest spring?
In ancient times a child king set out from the palace,
wept all alone in a mountain valley, then followed you
and on the south coast opposite Gogeu Island, on a bitter homeward path
the sound of a galloping pony came to a halt, wearied
and a scholar’s haggard face floated in blue waters
as your regret-filled voice conjured even death.

비탄의 녀시 붉은 마음만 낮낮 시들피느니
지튼봄 옥속 春香이 아니 죽였슬나디아
옛날 王宮을 나신 나히어린 임금이
산스골에 홀히 우시다 너를 따라가셨드라니
古今島 마조보히는 南쪽바다사 一가 한만흔 귀향길
千里 망아지 얼녕소리 쉼듯 멈추고
선비 여윈얼골 푸른 물에 띄웠슬제
네 恨된 우름 죽음을 호려 불렀스리라 (ll. 17-24)

Envisioned as a form of permanence, the cuckoo exists beyond the limits of our own mortality. Here Yǒngnang describes three different figures hearing the immortal song of the cuckoo in the distance, a plaintive song that arouses a fervent desire for death in their minds: first, Ch’unhyang, the romantic heroine of an old Korean folk tale; next, a child king who was forced into exile after being deposed; and last, a scholar who has forcibly been exiled to a remote island and is now seeing his own “haggard face” reflected in sea water. To all of them, the bird turns out to be an emissary of death. The cuckoo’s “regret-filled voice,” Yǒngnang writes, conjures up thoughts of death. As the Korean literary critic O Hagŭn puts it, the voice of the cuckoo crying is “an invitation to death.”²⁹ Now, the following is the penultimate stanza of “Ode to a Nightingale,” a stanza that shows close textual relations with the third stanza of “The Cuckoo”:

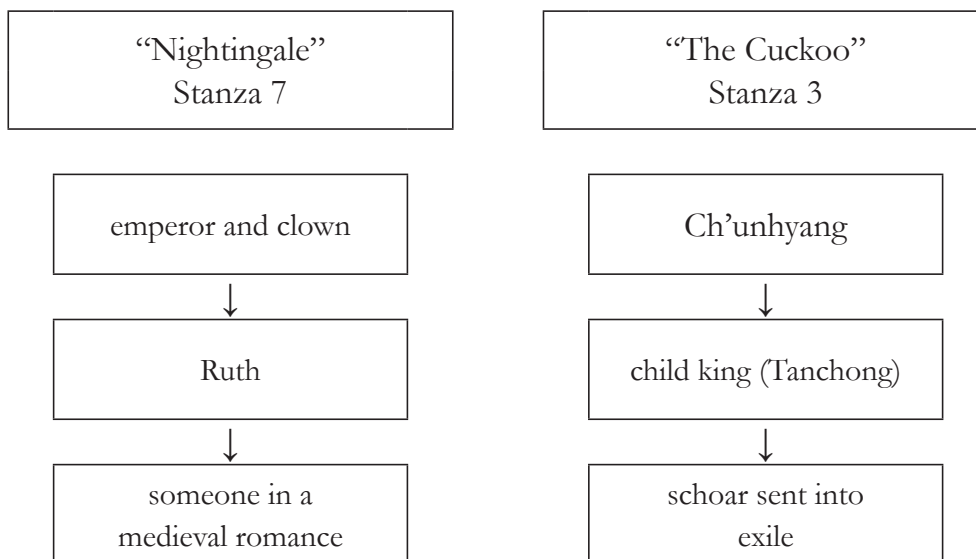
Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard

²⁹ O Hagŭn, *Kasŭmen dŭt nunen dŭt tto p’itchuren dŭt: Yǒngnang si chŏnp’yŏn haesŏk* (Sŏul: Chakka, 2012), 244.

In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (ll. 61-70)³⁰

Keats's nightingale is also imagined singing, as he puts it, to the countless "hungry generations"—to the emperor and clown of an ancient kingdom; and to Ruth, a woman in the Old Testament of the Bible; and thirdly, to someone in a medieval romance who looks out of an open window, "magic casements," at "the foam / Of perilous seas." As has the cuckoo of Yǒngnang, the nightingale has achieved transhistorical permanence, addressed as "immortal Bird." And as with Yǒngnang's poem, we have here three different scenes in which the same bird sings. But whereas Yǒngnang's bird lures the audience into death, Keats's bird remains as friend to those who hear its voice. The nightingale, to borrow the words of John Strachan, "embodies the possibility of aesthetic consolation in the face of grief, suffering and oppression."³¹

This difference between the two birds will be further explored later. For now, it is worthwhile to stress that the way that Yǒngnang conceives of the cuckoo as an immortal bird closely parallels the structure of stanza 7 in the Nightingale ode. The two poems capture a series of dramatic moments in which each someone is overcome with powerful emotions while hearing the music of the bird. The diagram below illustrates this point graphically.



³⁰ The text of "Ode to a Nightingale" comes from John Barnard, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1988), 346-48.

³¹ John Strachan, ed., *The Poems of John Keats*, Routledge Guides to Literature (New York: Routledge, 2003), 146.

What is particularly interesting here is parallels between Ruth and Ch'unhyang, both of whom are female. Keats and Yǒngnang both feature a solitary female listener whose troubled spirit is deeply moved by the birdsong, but in far different ways. Ch'unhyang is the main character of one of the most popular love stories in Korea. In this story, Yi Mongnyong, the son of a chief magistrate, falls in love with her at first sight and is instantly engaged to her. Soon afterwards, however, his father takes him to Sōul against his wishes. Ch'unhyang vows to remain faithful to him, yet a new magistrate, a corrupt and lecherous man, throws her into prison when she keeps refusing his demand that she sleep with him. On the day she is to be executed, Mongnyong, who has become a royal secret inspector (a high-ranking official), arrests the magistrate and rescues Ch'unhyang. The couple lives happily ever after. Yet Yǒngnang departs from this happy ending by imagining the imprisoned Ch'unhyang being led to death by the anguished wail of the cuckoo. The bird's song full of sorrow and anguish dries up the girl's "red heart," which refers to her integrity and devotion to her lover. In the original tale, Ch'unhyang is happily reunited with her betrothed after enduring ordeal at the hands of a corrupt official. Yǒngnang rewrites the happy ending of this familiar story; his revision has a tragic ending. Ch'unhyang's single-hearted love for the man she was engaged to, in his version of the story, fades as she takes the crying of the cuckoo as an invitation to death. Through death, she achieves an imaginative union with the bird.

Yǒngnang's retelling of Ch'unhyang's story was elaborated at length in his later poem entitled "Ch'unhyang," which was published in 1940:

Wretched Ch'unhyang collapsed again early the next day
and never woke again. The cuckoo called in vain.
She had seen her love, so no bitterness remained
but she believed there was no hope that she could be saved, so her body lost all its vital
powers.
After revealing his identity, the secret inspector weeps, holding Ch'unhyang's body.
"Crueler even than wicked Pyeon, I have killed Ch'unhyang."
Ah, such singleness of heart!³²

모진 춘향이 그 밤 새벽에 또 까무리쳐서는
영 다시 깨어나진 못했었다 두견은 울었건만
도련님 다시 봐서 恨을 풀었으나 살아날 가망은 아조 끈끼고
원몸 푸른 脈도 풀려 버렸을법
出道 끝에 御史는 춘향의 몸을 거두며 울다
「내 卞苛보다 殘忍無智하여 춘향을 죽였구나」
오! 一片丹心 (ll. 43-49)³³

³² Brother Anthony of Taizé, *Until Peonies Bloom*, 101, 103.

³³ Kim Haktong, *Toltame sosaejinūn haetpalgach'i*, 89.

This is the final stanza of the poem in which Ch'unhyang dies tragically in prison after seeing Mongnyong, who was appointed as secret inspector and so disguised himself as a beggar. Ch'unhyang's death results from the conviction that her hopes of being rescued by him have been shattered. The cuckoo appears here, too. It still sings to Ch'unhyang, but "in vain" because she is already dead. This scene evokes the image of the nightingale in Keats's ode singing rapturously to the dead narrator, who is said "to have ears in vain" (l. 59). In the above-quoted poem, it is Ch'unhyang who has ears in vain. The bird is unaware that one of her receptive listeners has just died—so receptive as to be, in Keats's words, "half in love with easeful Death" (l. 52) which its mournful song evokes. As we have seen, the description of Ch'unhyang in the above poem contains echoes of "Ode to a Nightingale."³⁴

Turning back to the discussion of "The Cuckoo," Yŏngnang revises the folk tale of Ch'unhyang by introducing into it the cuckoo, a time-transcending bird that has filled all of its listening audiences with a burning desire for death. The same kind of rewriting a well-known story is witnessed in Keats's poem, too. The scene featuring the biblical Ruth, according to Leon Waldoff, exemplifies the poet's "reinterpretation of inherited material to make it fit to his purposes"³⁵—this claim is also true for Yŏngnang's revision of Ch'unhyang's tale. As Waldoff observes, the Ruth of the Bible left her homeland of her own free will to accompany her mother-in-law to Judea. It thus seems unlikely, in his view, that she felt homesick and wept tears, as described in the ode, when gleaning "amid the alien corn" (l. 67).³⁶ Still, Keats pictures Ruth as shedding tears of homesickness when she listens to the nightingale's song, which, as he beautifully puts it, "found a path / Through [her] sad heart" (ll. 65-66). Touching her heart, the bird consoles her. Both Ch'unhyang and Ruth are presented as the audience of the bird, an imaginary scene not found in the original tale. The figure of Ch'unhyang in Yŏngnang's work is, in a sense, a poetic descendant of Keats's Ruth. Yŏngnang's presentation of Ch'unhyang is the result of his intertextual engagement with Keats's depiction of Ruth. Besides radical revisions to the original version of the story (i.e. "inherited material" in Waldoff's wording), Ch'unhyang resembles Ruth in that they both are doubly excluded from the mainstream of society. They are women, and moreover, they have outsider status. Ruth is a gentile living among Jews, and Ch'unhyang is a daughter of a courtesan. Their underprivileged status as outsiders might have attracted Keats and Yŏngnang: the former being a son of a livery-stable keeper, and the latter a learned man in Colonial Korea. They felt like outsiders in their societies, so it seems not far-fetched to argue that they had a deep empathy with the two women.

In addition, the scene involving emperor and clown in the Nightingale ode—"The

³⁴ In his commentary on "Ch'unhyang," Yi Sungwŏn regards the poem as belonging to Yŏngnang's highly ambitious works, together with "The Cuckoo." As with "The Cuckoo," indicates Yi, "Ch'unhyang" is a product of the poet's imaginative treatment of history. See Yi Sungwŏn, *Yŏngnangŭl mannada: Kim Yŏngnang si chŏnp'yŏn baesŏl* (Sŏul: T'aehaksa, 2009), 302.

³⁵ Leon Waldoff, "Imagination and Growth in the Great Odes," in *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 313.

³⁶ For details of Ruth's story, see The Book of Ruth in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 326-30.

voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown” (ll. 63-64, stanza 7)— might have been a contributing factor in the appearance of Ch’unhyang in Yŏngnang’s poem. Vendler remarks that there is a “democratic diffusion” in this scene from the seventh stanza.³⁷ The bird sings joyfully to an emperor and a clown alike; it is completely indifferent to whoever hears its voice. This democratic diffusion is a significant aspect of the story of Ch’unhyang since there are big class differences between the female character and her lover, whose father is a senior government official. The original Ch’unhyang marries into a family of higher social standing—a happy ending that vicariously fulfills the common people’s aspirations toward overcoming class divisions in the Chosŏn society. The cuckoo’s music possesses the quality of democratic diffusion, too, in that the music is equally audible to Ch’unhyang, a woman of low social standing, and a child king, who historically refers to Tanchong (1441-57), the sixth king of Chosŏn dynasty. Tanchong succeeded to the throne at the age of 11, but after a few years, he was deposed by his ambitious uncle, who became a new king. He was exiled to Yŏngwŏl, a mountain area far away from Sŏul, and afterwards murdered by his uncle’s order. In the third stanza of “The Cuckoo,” Yŏngnang describes Tanchong, a child king, as weeping at his place of exile and then following the cuckoo to the world beyond. The child succumbs to the temptation of the bird, which is represented as an envoy from the world of the dead. Do these lines imply that Tanchong committed suicide hearing the wail of the bird, although in actual history he was put to death by his successor? Yŏngnang is not explicit about this, but we might say that as with Ch’unhyang, he here makes an imaginative intervention in inherited material.

To sum up discussions about stanza 3 of “The Cuckoo” and stanza 7 of “Ode to a Nightingale” so far, not only is each stanza richly intertextual in itself, but the relationship of the one to the other is also intertextual. Beth Lau alleges that Keats’s ode as a whole “is saturated with echoes of other literary works.”³⁸ In its seventh stanza, particularly, the latter two scenes are made up of existing literary sources: The Bible and medieval romance. The third stanza of “The Cuckoo,” too, is constructed almost out of preexistent texts: stories about Ch’unhyang and Tanchong. The reference to the scholar in forced exile on Gogeu Island is probably based on old tales of scholars and officials exiled to that island. Consequently, each stanza is a crossing point where different texts come into relation. And further, it appears that the third stanza of “The Cuckoo” was composed in response to the seventh stanza of “Nightingale,” Yŏngnang imitating and diverging from Keats. In other words, the composition process of the Cuckoo stanza depended on the intertextual dialogue the stanza engages in with the Nightingale stanza. The textual elements in the Cuckoo stanza guaranteeing comparability with the Nightingale stanza are, as shown above, the structure and imagery of the stanza (three successive scenes in which someone is hearing the birdsong), the imagining of historical/literary figures as the bird’s listeners, as well as the closeness of Ruth and Ch’unhyang in relation to their respective contexts.

³⁷ Vendler, *The Odes of Keats*, 94.

³⁸ Beth Lau, “Intertextual Dialogue,” *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 414.

Additionally, the two poets creatively rewrite elements from earlier texts, as demonstrated by the images of Ruth, Ch'unhyang and Tanchong they produce—images that are not derived from original sources. Nevertheless, Yŏngnang departs from his literary predecessor in terms of the effect of the bird's song. Whereas his figures hearing the cuckoo's song find death too great a temptation to resist, the forlorn figures in the Nightingale stanza (i.e. Ruth standing in tears and a lone figure on the windowpane) find consolation in the nightingale's happy song. To put it differently, the cuckoo of stanza 3 and the nightingale of stanza 7 perform different roles by means of the song: the cuckoo as guide to Hades (the land of the dead) and the nightingale as comforting presence to the despondent audience. It is therefore not that Yŏngnang was influenced by Keats in a passive way. While seeking guidance and inspiration from the English poet, Yŏngnang succeeded in constructing his own voice within Korean poetic tradition. The reception of Keats in his poetic practice occurred in an active and creative manner. In sum, the third stanza of "The Cuckoo" can be seen, to borrow Kristeva's phrase, as "the absorption and transformation of" the penultimate stanza of "Nightingale."³⁹ Deep interconnections between stanza 3 of "The Cuckoo" and stanza 7 of "Ode to a Nightingale"—each is the intertextually densest stanza in the poem—encourage us to read the former poem through the latter and vice versa. In other words, we see how "The Cuckoo," a supposedly pure Korean poem, draws upon "Nightingale," as well as the endless possibilities the latter opens up for establishing new textual relations across a range of regions and languages. Yŏngnang recognized these possibilities in "Nightingale" and tapped into them for composition.

The Paradox between Death Wish and Beauty

Another common, important thread for linking the two poems is the paradoxical nature of the relationship between death wish and aesthetic experience in them. This section traces this thread of intertextuality. From my perspective, to begin with, a deeply pessimistic mood of "The Cuckoo" is due largely to the poet's own despair and frustration over the situation of Korea, which was then a colony of imperial Japan. To Yŏngnang, the cuckoo is not simply a private symbol of poetry and the imagination in the same way the nightingale was to Keats; the bird is also presented as speaking to all Korean people groaning under colonial oppression. The cuckoo of Yŏngnang releases the painful collective feelings of Koreans that have long been pent up in their minds—to put it in one word, their *han*.⁴⁰ Accordingly, it is no wonder that Yŏngnang portrays himself as one overwhelmed by the sentiment of *han*. As an auditor of the cuckoo, he is no different from the figures depicted in the poem's third stanza: all of them submit to the death wish when they are in the midst of listening to the bird's music.

³⁹ Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

⁴⁰ In a similar vein, Yi Sungwŏn contends that the cuckoo weary of sadness in the poem is a portrait of the poet himself and moreover, represents the miserable lives of Korean people (215).

So the poet laments, associating the birdsong with the idea of death, in the second stanza:

Tears pooling and pooling late at night for so many years
 that I could never wash away, they simply pooled and flowed,
 and I—sorrowful, lonesome, grieving—
 finally grew weary of the wine-glass you kept filling,
 songs from the beyond that echo near in this dawn full of fear,
 death’s boastful voice circling the foot of the city walls.
 The moonlight, that pale lantern sobbing to win hearts, is going.
 The long-since emaciated, gaunt heart likewise goes.

몇해라 이三更에 빙빙 도는 눈물을
 씻지는 못하고 고힌 그대로 흘니웠느니
 서럽고 외롭고 여윈 이몸은
 퍼붓는 네술 사잔에 그만 지눌것느니
 무섭 사정 드는 이 새벽 가지올니는 저승의 노래
 저기 城 밑을 도라나가는 죽엄의 자랑찬 소리여
 달빛 오히려 마음어둠 저 힌등 흐릿겨가신다
 오래 시들어 팔리한 마음 마조 가고지워라 (ll. 9-16)

Here the poet (or the poetic speaker) hears “songs from the beyond,” a dirge sung by the funeral procession, at the crack of dawn. To him, the dirge sounds as if it is an eerie echo of the cuckoo’s song, and with the former merging with the latter, the cuckoo emerges as a messenger from the Underworld. Its song strikes the primal fear of death into the heart of the speaker, who is already so “sorrowful, lonesome, grieving.” Interestingly, “full of fear,” the translation of *musǒmchǒng*, contains the letter *chǒng* (情), which usually translates as affection or love. As O Hagŭn suggests in his analysis of the poem, it is worth noting that Yǒngnang here uses a dialect word for *musǒmchǒng*, whose last letter is *chǒng*, not *chǒng*.⁴¹ Thus, the speaker’s adopting of the local dialect (which ends with *chǒng*) seems intentional. The phrase “full of fear” refers to intense fears about death, but its dialect form ending with *chǒng* connotes affection for death. The song of the cuckoo apparently lures the speaker into wistful yearning for death as the sole means to escape from dreadful realities—one of them is without doubt Japan’s occupation of his country—which have brought tears to his eyes “late at night for so many years.” Furthermore, the funeral dirge, which is already indistinguishable from the bird’s song, sounds to the speaker like “death’s boastful voice,” i.e. death’s proud boast of having prevailed over life in the end. The birdsong, or the dirge, announces death’s victory so resoundingly that the “long-since emaciated, gaunt heart” of the speaker has no wish but to be soon released from painful reality. He aspires to enter the realm of death in the

⁴¹ O Hagŭn, *Kasŭmen dŭt nunen dŭt tto p’itchuren dŭt*, 242.

company of the moon, which has turned pale as it hears the cuckoo's sad song. The Korean word *kagojimōra* (l. 16) harbors a burning desire to leave the human world which its English equivalent in the above translation "likewise goes" fails to communicate.

This coupling of death wish with the birdsong can be traced to Keats's ode. In its sixth stanza, the speaker desires to become one with the nightingale through the means of death—a desire to be fused with an object that exists beyond the boundaries of mortal life.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod. (ll. 51-60)

In Leon Waldoff's analysis, death here serves as "a metaphor for a state of mind in which all anxieties, all tensions, would be dissolved in a moment of luxurious sensation."⁴² This comment is equally valuable in interpreting "The Cuckoo." In its second stanza cited above, Yōngnang laments, "I ... finally grew weary of the wine-glass you kept filling" (ll. 11-12). Just as Keats thirsts for wine, "a draught of vintage" (l. 11), that would taste like "Flora and the country green" (l. 13) and allow him to "leave the world unseen" (l. 19), so Yōngnang gulps wine to forget all the unpleasant realities he confronts. Yet he knows well that the luxurious sensation caused by being surrounded by the cuckoo's music—he compares this music to an intoxicating drink—is only temporary. The music soon brings the poet back to a higher consciousness of all the anguish and pain inside him, and for this reason, he writes that he grew weary from drinking the wine served by the cuckoo. For the poet, death is the ultimate escape from the world of reality. William Flesch has indicated in his reading of "Ode to the Nightingale" that death for Keats means an eternal forgetfulness.⁴³ Yōngnang, having become intoxicated by the *han*-ful song of the cuckoo, also wants to remove himself permanently from the world—to put it in Keats's words, to "[f]ade far away, dissolve, and quite *forget* . . . [t]he weariness, the fever, and the fret" of human life (ll. 21-23, emphasis added). Both poems draw this analogy between the bird's song and alcohol based on their effect being relegating the listener/drinker to oblivion.

Yōngnang's longing for death under the influence of the intoxicating song of the cuckoo comes to be faced with a paradox in the fourth, final stanza of "The Cuckoo." The presence

⁴² Waldoff, "Imagination and Growth in the Great Odes," 311.

⁴³ William Flesch, *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry: 19th Century* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 276.

of this paradox is another important characteristic of the poem's interdependence with its precursor text, "Ode to Nightingale." Its closing stanza is as follows:

Without your song, this world is so sorrowful, so wracked;
 early in spring as the groves become green, the grass is fragrant;
 seeing the pitiful bright darkness as the crescent moon hangs from slender bamboo
 leaves
 you tremble, on the verge of tears, feeling pity;
 if you did not sing, you would surely die, oh, anguished spirit.
 You call late at night when thick-clustered azalea flowers fall
 and gently vague mountain ranges draw back,
 little villages suddenly wake.

너 아니 울어도 이세상 서럽고 쓰린 것을
 이름 봄 수풀이 초록빛드리 물내음새 그윽하고
 가는 대낮에 초생달 매달려 애뜻한 밝은 어둠을
 너 몹시 안타가워 포실거리며 훗훗 목메었느니
 아니울고는 하마 죽어업스리 오! 不幸의 녀시여
 우지진 진달내 와직지우는 이三更의 네 우름
 희미한 줄산이 샅뽏 물러서고
 조고만 시골이 흥청 깨여진다. (ll. 25-32)

As the speaker's awareness of pain and suffering in the mortal world increases, hence his desire for death getting more fervent, he injects—paradoxically—greater vitality into his description of the world. In this stanza, the speaker is made more acutely aware than in previous ones that human existence is filled with heartache and sorrow. Even without reminders from the cuckoo, it looks obvious to him that “this world is so sorrowful, so wracked.” At the same time, however, the speaker is demonstrating a great capacity to capture the beauty and freshness of the physical world surrounding the cuckoo: the greenness of the grove, the watery fragrance of the grass, a crescent moon on the tip of bamboo, the fall of tangled azaleas, a panorama of distant mountains by moonlight, and the night sky that is both bright and dark (an oxymoronic perception). Here Yŏngnang is seen aspiring to an extensive range of aesthetic experience while embracing the idea of dying as release from pain and anguish—a yearning that acts as a bridge to link “The Cuckoo” to Keats's poem. Moreover, the beauty of the surrounding countryside that Yŏngnang is conveying is even more enhanced by the beauty of his poetic language. This beauty is generally acknowledged to come from the poet's skillful use of the local dialect and the natural rhythm of his language. According to Hong Sŏnghŭi, the naturalness of Yŏngnang's poetic rhythm resists being reduced to any metrical pattern or rule. He generates rhythm as the natural flow itself of Korean language;

it is not that he uses language rhythmically.⁴⁴

Let us return to the sixth stanza of Keats's ode cited above. Here the poet's intense absorption in the nightingale's song—his imaginative union with the bird as described in the fifth stanza—leads into the invocation of death as a way of being granted release from human agony and woe. It is not that the nightingale, like Yŏngnang's cuckoo, tempts the speaker into forsaking the world of reality. In lines 2-3 of the stanza, he confesses that he already "[has] been half in love with easeful Death / Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme," the implication being that thoughts of death have long preoccupied him. Keats's beloved younger brother Tom died of tuberculosis in December 1818 (five months before he composed "Nightingale"), the very disease that would soon strike him and eventually claim his life in February 1820. Having witnessed the untimely deaths of his parents as well as Tom's, Keats himself had a premonition that he would die at an early age—which proved true as he died four months after his twenty-fifth birthday. Therefore, the nightingale's song actually fuels, rather than generates, the desire to die—to escape painlessly his mortal condition. Hearing the ecstatic song of the bird, Keats falls into a trance, and now, he says, it seems "rich to die" (l. 5). As Bloom has pointed out, he is now "more than half in love with death" (emphasis in the original).⁴⁵ However, just as he sees himself dead, Keats becomes keenly aware that with his death wish being fulfilled, he is nothing more than a "sod" (l. 60) that is completely unresponsive to the beauty of the birdsong—and to any other kind of aesthetic pleasure as well. The song the nightingale is pouring forth in ecstasy would reach his ears in vain; the dead poet is deaf, of course, to the song—which is now a memorial requiem for the poet. This is one of the deepest paradoxes of life that Keats is confronted with. As Flesch puts it, "death is the cessation of the beauty that leads toward death."⁴⁶

To explain this paradox in detail, the exquisite beauty of the nightingale's song instills an even stronger desire for death in him than before, who has long mused upon death as the only means of escaping the real world of suffering; for him, death now looks "easeful" (his own term) and beautiful. Yet he painfully comes to realize that death would leave him unable to listen with rapture to the bird's song, which initially strengthened his wish to gain freedom from the pain of human existence through death. Indeed, death would render beauty and pleasure—which made the idea of dying look especially inviting—inaccessible. To quote the words of Flesch again, "the worst thing about death is the loss of contact with beauty it will bring."⁴⁷ John Blades makes the same point in the following remark: "No matter what release or escape death may hold out to [the poet's] troubled spirit it would also preclude the experience of beauty (in art as well as in nature)."⁴⁸ To die is to be deprived of all chances

⁴⁴ Hong Sŏnghŭi, "Ridŭm kaenyŏme taehan chaesayuwa Kim Yŏngnang shŭi Ridŭm," *Pigyo Han'guk'ak* 24, no. 2 (2016): 90.

⁴⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, A Revised and Enlarged Edition (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 411.

⁴⁶ Flesch, *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry*, 277.

⁴⁷ Flesch, *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry*, 276.

⁴⁸ John Blades, *John Keats: The Poems*, Analysing Texts Series (New York: Red Globe Press, 2002), 108.

of aesthetic experience. With the realization that “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!” at the beginning of the seventh stanza, Keats returns to reality. The immortality of the nightingale’s song, as represented for the rest of stanza 7, separates the bird clearly from the mortal poet. As Stuart Sperry rightly claims, “Rather than uniting the earthly and the eternal, the bird now serves to emphasize the gap between them.”⁴⁹ The poet’s self-identification with the nightingale is doomed to failure. Trapped in the physical world, with all its disappointment and despair, he is distanced from the bird’s melody, which “moves via a loftier horizon than that of the physical senses” in Blades’s terms.⁵⁰ There is indeed the unbridgeable gap between the poet’s world and the nightingale’s.

To reiterate the main points, the narrator of “The Cuckoo” is shown to have a deeper aesthetic appreciation of the world while desiring death as a means of leaving its bitter realities; his heightened perception of natural beauty in the closing stanza is related paradoxically to his death wish, which has grown stronger as he becomes conscious of the harshness of reality. And in the case of the Nightingale ode, its narrative “I” finds himself in a paradoxical situation where death he has yearned for turns out to be the loss of all access to aesthetic delight as exemplified by the song of the nightingale—the very thing that made death appealing to him. This paradoxical relationship between desire for death and the experience of beauty observed in both poems can be perceived as the effect of intertextuality. Keats’s discourse on the association between death and beauty in “Nightingale” is, to borrow Kristeva’s term, transposed into “The Cuckoo.” According to her own definition, transposition denotes “the signifying process’ ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permute them.”⁵¹ Kristeva is known to have favored the term transposition over intertextuality, Graham Allen explains, because of the possibility that intertextuality may be misunderstood in the sense of “the traditional notions of influence, source-study and simple ‘context.’”⁵² Yöngnang’s transpositional practice, in Allen’s terms, does not merely “utilize” Keats’s text but also attempts to “transform” it⁵³, thereby devising a new way to explore the paradox about beauty and death within the historical context of Japanese occupation. The passage of this paradox from a nineteenth-century English poem to a twentieth-century Korean poem attests to its universal appeal—in brief, this paradox is inherent in human life. The text of “The Cuckoo” successfully re-contextualizes the paradoxical nature of the relation between a craving for death and aesthetic consciousness.

To add one more thing, Yöngnang’s affiliation to Keatsian aestheticism is made evident once again in the final stanza of “The Cuckoo.” The stanza’s last three lines, in particular, can be interpreted as an illustration of the concept of “negative capability,” one of Keats’s key aesthetic ideas. He coined the phrase to describe the capacity to tolerate “uncertainties,

⁴⁹ Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 265.

⁵⁰ Blades, *John Keats: The Poems*, 107.

⁵¹ Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, 112.

⁵² Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 3rd ed., The New Critical Idiom Series (New York: Routledge, 2021), 52.

⁵³ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 52.

Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.”⁵⁴ Here Keats insists upon embracing uncertainty and the unknown in the pursuit of aesthetic values, without resort to the language of logical reasoning. This mental ability is an essential attribute for artistic creation. With its rejection of “the notion of predetermined constraints,” to put it in the terms of Frederick Burwick, this capacity enables its possessor to “experience phenomena free from ideological bounds.”⁵⁵ The three lines concluding “The Cuckoo” exemplify the characteristics of negative capability. For convenience, the lines are quoted again here: “You call late at night when thick-clustered azalea flowers fall / and gently vague mountain ranges draw back, / little villages suddenly wake.” Concerning the first line, in my view, it can be also translated as follows: “Your crying late at night lets fall thick-clustered azalea flowers,” the bird’s cry causing the flowers to fall. Ambiguously worded, the original line can be understood in either way. The alternative reading describes something of a mystery that defies reason—how can the flowers fall due to the crying of the cuckoo? Interestingly, this kind of a mysterious phenomenon is repeated in the two lines that follow: a range of distant mountains moves backwards, lightly, as if surprised by the crying cuckoo, and villages (rather than a few people) wakes to that sound. With its supernatural powers over the surroundings, the cuckoo remains shrouded in mystery, something beyond the reach of human reasoning. Yōngnang’s willingness to embrace syntactic ambiguity and the mystery surrounding the cuckoo leads to the composition of extraordinarily beautiful lines in which the poem culminates. The dreamlike scenes unfolding here violate every physical principle, but they contain what the poet perceives as aesthetic truths. The state of negative capability allows him to have a heightened perception of beauty. Though having addressed to the cuckoo for nearly 30 lines, the poet feels as though the bird was still beyond his intellectual grasp. Instead of becoming irritated, however, he accepts his human limitations and explores the unknown with active imagination. Yōngnang embraces the possibilities of the unknown as a springboard for a new vision of poetic beauty, to repeat Burwick’s words quoted earlier, “free from ideological [or any other] bounds.”

Conclusion

The present study has been detecting the traces of the English Romantic poet John Keats in Yōngnang’s “The Cuckoo,” one of his lengthiest and most ambitious works. In particular, it traced the textual relations of “The Cuckoo” to Keats’s famous “Ode to a Nightingale,” which Yōngnang obviously knew. Both poets did a self-consciously intertextual writing. Their poems each consist of a wide variety of sources (or texts) that it depends on—sources including works of literature, historical events, and literary or cultural conventions. Having interwoven references to these sources in its text, each poem is, to quote Kristeva’s phrase, “a mosaic

⁵⁴ Robert Gittings, ed., *Letters of John Keats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 43.

⁵⁵ Frederick Burwick, *Romanticism: Keywords* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 195.

of quotations,” that is, a web of textual relations that assign the poetic text its meaning.⁵⁶ So viewed, each poem in itself is extraordinarily rich in intertextuality. Not only this, but the two pieces also form intertextual connections between them. The relationship of “The Cuckoo,” the later work, to “Ode to a Nightingale,” the earlier work, is explicitly intertextual. Aside from the presence of the solitary speaker addressing the singing bird, which is a repeatedly recurring image in the literatures of both East Asia and the West, an intertextual account of the two poems offered in this study argued two major points. First, there is the noteworthy interconnectedness between the third stanza of “The Cuckoo” and the seventh stanza of the Nightingale ode. The two stanzas share a complex set of affinities: each stanza made up of three scenes in which figures from history or literature are successively imagined as the audience of the birdsong; the remarkable resemblance between Keats’s Ruth and Yǒngnang’s Ch’unhyang, both of them being women from an underprivileged background; and the poet’s creative appropriation of historical and literary figures such as Ruth, Ch’unhyang, and Tanchong—whose representations in the poem are far from mechanical reproduction of the original source. Another point raised in the earlier account of intertextuality was the identification of a common paradox between the two things: the poet’s heightened sensitivity to beauty and the death wish he falls prey to. Yǒngnang’s transposition of this paradox into his poetic discourse involves re-contextualizing the paradoxical situation, since he is facing the awful truth that his country no longer exists. The transmission of this paradox from Keats to Yǒngnang points to its universality—we can all relate to a paradox of this sort.

The intertextual study of the Nightingale ode and “The Cuckoo” advances our understanding of both poems. It brings a refreshing perspective to both the earlier and the later works. By reading the former through the latter, we come to comprehend more fully the intertextual nature of Keats’s work—i.e. how this poem builds up a network of relations to other works that have contributed to its creation as well as to those that succeed it. With its huge potential for expanding this network across time periods and languages, “Ode to a Nightingale” seems to have attained the status of *Weltliteratur* [world literature].⁵⁷ And reading “The Cuckoo” through “Nightingale” sheds new light on the sources from which Yǒngnang’s poem was composed. They are all, apparently, unique to Korean history and literature. When compared to the Nightingale ode, these sources, however, reveal their intertextual debt to the ode, thereby producing new meaning that is valid only in relation to the English ode. Viewed from the standpoint of intertextuality, moreover, aestheticism for which Yǒngnang is well known in modern Korean poetry reveals a new aspect. His advocacy of pure poetry is informed by Keats’s focus on poetry as the expression of aesthetic truths. “[W]ith a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration,” Keats claimed

⁵⁶ Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, 37.

⁵⁷ The German poet Goethe invented the concept of *Weltliteratur*. For detailed discussions of world literature, see Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature*, 56-64; and Darío Villanueva, “Comparative Literature and the Future of Literary Studies,” in *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*, César Domínguez, Haun Saussy, and Darío Villanueva (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-19.

in the very letter in which he introduced the concept of negative capability.⁵⁸ Examined in terms of negative capability, the otherworldly realm at the end of “The Cuckoo” in which the bird is responsible for mysterious incidents acquires a distinct aesthetic dimension.

Careful examination of the intertextual nature of “The Cuckoo” and “Ode to a Nightingale” makes us realize that, as Allen points out, meaning is always created “at one and the same time ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the text.”⁵⁹ There is no literary text, Darío Villanueva rightly asserts, that “exists in a self-sufficient vacuum.”⁶⁰ The task of comparing literary artifacts from different times and cultures being undertaken in this essay makes it evident that “[t]he past influences the present of literature, but the present also influences the past”—in short, past and present being compressed into an intertextual body.⁶¹ To argue beyond the scope of the current study, intertextuality was inherent in early modern Korean poetry. The birth and development of modern poetry in Colonial Korea was bound up with active and creative engagement with Western literature, as was represented by Yŏngnang’s absorption and transformation of Keats.

⁵⁸ Gittings, *Letters of John Keats*, 43.

⁵⁹ Allen, *Intertextuality*, 37.

⁶⁰ Villanueva, “Comparative Literature and the Future of Literary Studies,” 3.

⁶¹ Villanueva, “Comparative Literature and the Future of Literary Studies,” 3.

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