

Omission Strategy in the Crime Fiction Translation: Survival of Cruelty in *The Good Son*

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*The raison d'être of literary translation cannot be separated from its obligation to faithfulness. In contexts where public funding supports translation, omissions are rigorously scrutinized for potentially undermining fidelity. Yet omissions often reflect more than error or negligence, requiring attention to their productive effects rather than to what has been removed. In the acclaimed English translation of the Korean crime novel *The Good Son* (2018, Penguin), notable omissions in the protagonist's paranoid monologues about murdering his mother heighten the emphasis on the crime's physical brutality. These omissions operate in two contexts: first, the genre of crime fiction privileges rapid pacing and narrative immersion, making repetition or embellishment susceptible to omission; second, crime fiction's lower status within literary hierarchy allows for greater tolerance of deletion or alteration. Thus, omission functions as a strategic device to accelerate plot, intensify fear, and heighten engagement, reflecting genre conventions rather than strict fidelity to the source.*

Keywords: Korean literature, English translation, crime fiction, cruelty, omission, translation strategy

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the burgeoning acclaim and widespread reception of English translations of Korean literature within the international publishing market underscore a remarkable progression in the historical trajectory of the English translation of Korean literature, a tradition that has endured for more than a century. In the context of the novel genre, several Korean works have garnered significant international attention since 2010, either by winning prestigious international literary awards or being long or shortlisted for such honors.

Noteworthy examples include Kyung-sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom* ('2011 Man Asian Literary Prize'), Kang Han's *The Vegetarian* ('2016 Man Booker International Prize' & '2024 Nobel Prize in Literature'), You-jeong Jeong's *The Good Son* ('2018 Candidate for NBC TV Tonight Show Summer Reads Program'), Hye-young Pyun's *The Hole* ('2018 Shirley Jackson Award'), Suah Bae's *Untold Night and Day* ('2019 The Guardian's Top 10 New Books in Translation'), Ko-eun Yun's *The Disaster Tourist* ('2021 CWA Dagger for Crime Fiction in Translation Award'), Nam-joo Cho's *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (longlisted for '2020 National Book Awards for Translated Literature'), Bora Chung's *Cursed Bunny* (shortlisted for '2022 International Booker Prize'), and the actual list is much longer and more diverse than this selection (Lee 2023: 380-381).

Despite the remarkable success of the English translation of Korean literature in the international publishing market in recent years, these acclaimed English translations often face rigorous and harsh translation criticism within the domestic academic sphere. Particularly, omissions in translation are often subject to close scrutiny and harsh criticism as a nationalist perspective tends to regard each original Korean text as a complete embodiment of the value of Korean literature with a strong sense of the ownership of Korean literature, claiming that "only Koreans own Korean culture and literature, and that Koreans are guardians, high priests, gate keepers, monitors, and quality control supervisors of anything that gets transmitted (or translated) to the outside world" (King 2020: 24). Thus, any form of alteration in translation, including omissions, is likely to be perceived as a threat which is

to undermine the integrity of the original text and distort the profound tradition of Korean literature. Furthermore, the background against which the issue of faithfulness in English translations of Korean literature can become even more contentious lies in the context that traditionally most translations of Korean literature into English used to be carried out through the translation support programs of government agencies or private foundations.

The English translations of Korean literature from the mid-20th century onwards cannot be discussed without highlighting the translation grant programs of government agencies and private foundations. Institutions such as the Daesan Foundation, which has supported English translations of Korean literature since 1993, and the Korean Literature Translation Fund, established by the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1996, and subsequently succeeded by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTIK), a government agency established in 2001, have played pivotal roles in the sponsorship and dissemination of English translations of Korean literature abroad for nearly three decades. Under the circumstances, the evaluation process of translation manuscripts by the translation grant agencies has primarily relied on comparing the original Korean text with its English rendition as a primary means to gauge faithfulness to the original.

Moreover, the rarity of successful Korean literature translation undertaken without such translation grant, being chosen directly by overseas publishers, underscores faithfulness as an indispensable prerequisite for the practice of literary translation in Korea. Furthermore, before the 1990s, English translations of Korean literature as well as the evaluation of the translations were predominantly undertaken by Korean native professors specializing in foreign literature, with faithfulness as a predominant criterion. Publication, likewise, was largely domestic, as overseas publishing opportunities were scarce, with most works being distributed through domestic publishers to domestic readers or utilized for the government's cultural promotion purposes (Medina 2018: 396).

In this context, it is necessary to examine the value and significance of attempts to move beyond the heavy grip of faithfulness, given the considerable impact faithfulness has had on English translations of Korean literature. I intend to examine

how the strategy of omission contributes to the successful reception of English translations of You-jeong Jeong's Korean crime fiction *The Origin of Species*, translated by Chi-young Kim with the English title *The Good Son*, superseding the established conventions of faithfulness which dominates the practice of literary translation.

2. Translation of *The Good Son*: Success and Controversy

2.1. Faithfulness and Equivalence in the Translation of *The Good Son*

In the field of literary translation, the faithful transposition of the original text can prove challenging, owing primarily to the extensive disparities in cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic facets inherent in different languages. Not only do the translation efforts struggle to attain essential translational equivalence, but it often encounters substantial limitations in conveying the author's intent and message. M. J. Costa (2009: 138), a renowned British translator of Spanish and Portuguese literature, particularly noted for her translations of works by José Saramago and Paulo Coelho, emphasizes the formidable task of achieving faithfulness in literary translation: "a translator cannot be a neutral conduit through which language passes as the best translations have the stamp of individuality on them, but a dual individuality: that of author and translator."

An interesting challenge with translating 'mother' is found in the English translation of the bestselling Korean crime fiction *Jongui Giwon* [The Origin of Species], written by You-jeong Jeong¹⁾ in 2016, with the English translation, *The Good Son*, published by Penguin Books in the US, and in the UK by Little, Brown in 2018 respectively. Jeong's crime fiction presents a significant test to literary

¹ You-jeong Jeong (1966-), a former registered nurse, won the grand prize in the first 'Korean World Youth Literature Contest' in 2007 and has embarked on a path to becoming a full-time writer, continuing to win a series of prestigious literary awards in Korea.

translators as it delves into the taboo subject of matricide. It challenges translators by plunging readers into the protagonist's meticulous and graphic depiction of the brutal murder of his own mother. Additionally, the novel exposes translators to the protagonist's recurring paranoid flashback monologues which revolve around the vicious matricide and his struggle in episodic amnesia to put all the pieces of a horrific puzzle together. This complex narrative field underscores the demanding task of translating Jeong's novel, requiring a nuanced and strategic approach to transfer into another language the intricate details of matricide and bizarre character developments while effectively preserving the defining features of crime fiction.

S. An, also known as Brother Anthony of Taize, a distinguished English translator of modern Korean literature, highlights the extensive discrepancy in the selection process of Korean literary works for translation. The discrepancy stems from the disparities between what is significant and popular among Korean readers and what would be equivalent among English translation readers. These disparities are deeply rooted in the distinct cultural contexts and aesthetic expectations as An (2002: 73) claims that "the selection of works to be translated for publication abroad is often influenced by their popularity with readers or regimes at home but their appeal may not be translatable." As a significant portion of such translations is supported through government subsidy or private foundations' sponsorship, the recipients of such support or grants are also selected based on the representativeness of Korean literature. This has led to a nationalistic responsibility to introduce to international readers Korean works that not only represent the essence of Korean literature but also reflect the preference of Korean readers, expecting these works to appeal to the international readers as well. However, in the reality of literary translation, such aspirations are often not realized.

Jeong's thriller novel appears to be a rare case of success with both Korean and international readers because of its overwhelming and powerful force of suffocating thrill and suspense in the context of crime fiction genre. Despite its record-breaking popularity and success outside Korea, however, Jeong's novel, just like Shin's *Please Look After Mom*, one of the most popular English translations of Korean novels abroad, which faced heavy controversy and harsh criticism in Korea due to

its controversial cultural mistranslation (Lee 2012: 219-236), seems to be more susceptible to rigorous critique owing to the larger extent of reduction and omission evident in the English translation.

However, an intriguing dilemma in the English translations of Korean literature arises here: to what extent can the translation strategies of Korean literary works that have received acclaim abroad be recognized as valid strategy for successful translation? To what extent faithfulness to the original text should be prioritized, how much change or deviation from the original can be tolerated, and how much ‘descriptive’ aspects should be considered in ‘prescriptive’ translation evaluation criteria are always at the core of ongoing debates and dilemmas in literary translation. While the end does not justify the means, it can be argued if it is proper to strictly assess translations that have been successfully embraced overseas, solely based on conventional faithfulness-oriented evaluation criteria.

While it cannot be asserted that successful translations in the publication markets abroad do not necessarily prove quality translations, it remains a fact that they serve as practically valid and meaningful criteria in translation evaluation. Particularly in the case of English translations of literature from lesser-known languages, it is undeniable reality that not only overcoming linguistic barriers inherent in translation but also negotiating the cultural hegemony of the English-speaking world pose formidable challenges. Thus, the act of omission in literary translation may constitute a translator’s or publisher’s deliberate and conscientious decision, aimed at optimizing the literary equivalence of the translated work, contingent upon the unique attributes of the particular literary genre.

In the history of literary translation, faithfulness-based literal translation has occupied a dominant position as the essence of literary translation because of the expectation that only the literal translation can capture and deliver the author’s original spirit and unique style entirely without being distorted or contaminated by the translator’s subjective interpretation or intervention. As the mid-20th century approached, however, significant changes began to take place in the theoretical discourse surrounding the traditionally strict concept of faithfulness in literary translation. S. Bassnett proposes a non-traditional concept of equivalence in

translation: “equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two translations of the same text, let alone between the original text and the translation” (Bassnett 2014: 9). The possibility of moving away from the emphasis on formal equivalence in literary translation opens the door to a potential for implementing faithfulness to the source text in a variety of ways including selective modification, and strategical addition and even omission in the case of the English translation of the Korean novel *The Good Son*.

One of You-jeong Jeong (1966~)’s major novels is *7 Nyeonui Bam* [Seven Years of Night], which sold more than a million copies in Korea alone. Written in 2011, with the English translation published by Penguin in 2020 under the title of *Seven Years of Darkness*, the novel is considered a milestone in the Korean-style thriller novel genre, while the two other novels, *28* (in 2013) and *Jongui Giwon* [The Origin of Species] (in 2016) complete her evil trilogy, meticulously examining the nature of evil in the human psyche. The last novel in her evil trilogy, *Jongui Giwon* [The Origin of Species] begins with 26-year-old son Yu-jin, who suffers from epileptic seizure, waking up to find his mother brutally slashed to death in the house. While he traces back a dim memory of the crime scene with all the bloody evidence around him, he makes the shocking discovery that it is Yu-jin himself who killed his mother. In the remaining chapters, Yu-jin continues his serial killing spree, including killing his aunt, who is his own psychiatrist. The final revelation is that a long time ago Yu-jin was diagnosed by his psychiatrist aunt as the most dangerous level of predator psychopath and has been responsible for several unsolved murder cases of women in the neighborhood. In fact, it was Yu-jin who pushed his elder brother off the cliff to death 16 years ago, which was witnessed by his mother. The novel ends with the serial killer Yu-jin, declared a missing person by the police, surviving to live as a fisherman in a remote fishing village, thus completing the ultimate survival of cruelty.

The favorable reviews of the English translation of the novel outside Korea²⁾

2) Following its fervent reception in Korea, with the author Jeong being nicknamed ‘Korea’s Stephen King’ in *The Korea Times* on June 8, 2018, the English translation by Chi-young Kim has been quite successful with both critics and readers abroad. On March 23, 2018, *Publishers Weekly* listed Jeong’s

appear to be primarily based on the thrilled suspense and meticulously crafted flow of the translation itself, without considering its translation equivalence to the original Korean text. This suggests that the mechanical criteria of faithfulness to the original text may have been excluded from the scope of assessment in the English-speaking media review. Consequently, the successful reception of the English translation abroad not only stresses the independent aesthetic value and completeness of the translation text itself but also, to some extent, is assumed to prove the substantial level of literary and aesthetic equivalence between the original Korean text and the English translation, with securing the book's status as one of the most remarkable thriller novels of the year both in and outside of Korea. C. Post, chief-editor of a renowned translated literature magazine, 'Three Percent', stresses the organic completion of literary translation with an example of the review process of the 'National Translation Awards': "the jury is encouraged to consider the [translation] book as a whole—both on its own terms and as a work in translation. A book that is very well translated but with a deeply flawed plot won't end up winning; neither will a book that's really good but filled with issues on a line-by-line basis that could've been addressed in the translation" (Kellman 2019: 4).

Nonetheless, when it comes to the popular English translations of Korean literature that have received high acclaim abroad, domestic translation critics tend to apply a more rigorous and strict evaluation criteria, focusing extensively on scrutinizing faithfulness issues such as alteration and omission under the pretext of securing the organic completeness of Korean literary works in translation. Particularly, when domestic critics who are native speakers of Korean evaluate the quality of English translations of Korean literature, they tend to focus heavily on faithfulness to the original text. Under such constrained conditions, it is highly unrealistic to expect domestic critics to read and evaluate English translations of

novel in the category of 'Crime Fiction in Translation: Mysteries & Thrillers in 2018,' highlighting the "twisted relationship between a mother and son, a dynamic explored often less in this thriller genre." *Financial Times* described the novel on July 20, 2018 as "dark, harrowing, horribly claustrophobic, but hard to put down." *The Guardian* introduced the novel on May 19, 2018 as a new leading wave of Korean thriller novel, adding that "Jeong expertly inches up the tension in this crafty, creepy story of a psychopath's coming-of-age."

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Korean literature from the perspective of native English-speaking readers. As a result, they often become especially sensitive to omissions in translation and may respond to them with more concern than is actually warranted.

For instance, it was likely that a translation with such a considerable amount of omission would have been disqualified in the screening process of conventional translation grant programs by government agencies or private foundation in which the first round screening process used to exclusively involve Korean reviewers, focusing on the faithfulness to the original Korean text while only those translations that cleared this initial stage could proceed to undergo assessment by native English-speaking reviewers for the naturalness and readability of the translation. Under the circumstances, the English translation of Jeong's novel *The Good Son*, with a conspicuously large degree of omission among recently published English translations of Korean literature, warrants a more detailed and closer analysis.

2.2. Omission Controversy in the Translation of *The Good Son*

In the evaluation of literary translation, omissions are never without controversy. Nevertheless, given the magnitude of success Jeong's novel has achieved in the international publishing market, omissions in the translation of the novel need to be regarded as a deliberate and strategic choice, which can provide an intriguing insight into the background and motivation of the controversial transformation and omission, focusing on what the translation intends to generate through what is 'lost in translation.' R. Dimitriu particularly stresses that, although most omissions in translation are inevitably subject to controversy from the standpoint of source-text faithfulness, they should be understood in actual translation practice as strategies that are carefully shaped by the expectations of the target readership: "An examination of what has been written about omissions ... shows that there are several reasons for which translators may decide to resort to omission. ... It should be noticed that omission is a target-related strategy and needs to be defined in terms of the target readers' expectations" (2004: 165).

The first noticeable transformation in the translation of Jeong's crime fiction is

the book title. The Korean title ‘Jongui Giwon’ [The Origin of Species] appears to have originated from Charles Darwin’s 1859 seminal scientific work *The Origin of Species*. Jeong once commented at a writer’s conference on the origin of the Korean title that she had initially considered ‘Agui Giwon’ [The Origin of Evil] for the title,³⁾ intending to trace the origin of human evil, but the final choice of ‘The Origin of Species’ for the Korean title poses the ultimate question regarding not only where human beings come from, but also how human beings’ evil nature originates. However, the drastic replacement of the philosophical Korean title, ‘The Origin of Species’ in the translation appears intended to accommodate the translation readers’ contextual accessibility to the translation title, while attempting to shield the readers from the potential reminiscence of the original Darwinian title.

At the same time, the English title *The Good Son* intends to implicate the novel’s context of ‘goodness’ and ‘son’ in a paradoxical contrast by reflecting the family’s unfulfilled wish for the protagonist Yu-jin to become a good son, a wish that is to be crushed at the end of the first chapter with the revelation of his matricide killer identity and brutal serial slaughter of the remaining family. The effort to prioritize translation readers’ prompt understanding of the English title is reflected in the attempt of Barbara Zitwer, Jeong’s literary agent in the US, to consider ‘Beautiful Demon’ as a strong candidate for the translation title during the final publication stage (Barbara Zitwer agency homepage).⁴⁾

The more substantial transformation is the repeated pattern of omission in the English translation. The omissions mostly focus on phrases of repetition and elaboration whose function is to emphasize and supplement the main clause in the protagonist’s long inner flashback narrative. In light of the significant role played by the first paragraph which is crafted to establish the overarching ambiance of the entire narrative, translations of opening passages frequently serve as a substantial

3) You-jeong Jeong mentioned at a writer’s conference, provided by a major online bookstore ‘Yes24’ on 26 August 2016, that she had originally considered ‘Origin of the Evil’ as the book title, in an attempt to integrate every piece of evil embedded in each human being.

4) In this context, the French translation title ‘Généalogie du mal’ [Genealogy of Evil], published by Babelio in April 2018 (Babelio Homepage), which reflects a return to the original context of the Korean title within the philosophical tradition of French literature, is noteworthy.

barometer revealing the overall translation strategy of the novel, and the translation of the opening paragraph of Jeong's novel serves as a prime example.

[Example 1]

Korean text: 피냄새가 잠을 깨웠다. 코가 아니라⁵⁾ 온 몸이 빨아들이는 듯한 냄새였다. 공명관을 통과하는 소리처럼 내 안에서 되돌리고 증폭되는 냄새였다. (Jeong 2016: 15)

Literal translation for comparison purpose: The smell of blood woke me up. It was a smell as if the whole body, not the nose, was sucking it up. The smell reverberated and amplified inside me, like the sound going through a resonance tube.

English translation: The smell of blood woke me up. It was intense, as though my whole body were inhaling it. It reverberated and expanded within me. (Jeong 2018: 53)

In comparison to a literal English rendition of the Korean opening paragraph above where the protagonist wakes up to find his house drenched with the sickening smell of blood, two changes are noteworthy. First, the English translation shows a substantial reduction from the Korean text with most parts of reduction deriving from the intentional omission of Korean modifying phrase which starts with “like~” in the translation. The Korean second line “as if the whole body, not the nose, was sucking it up” is reduced into “as though my whole body were inhaling” while omitting the emphasizing phrase of “not the nose.” In the third line, the Korean phrase “like the sound going through a resonance tube” is entirely omitted from the translation.

The omission of modifiers can be attributed to three main factors: first, the translation may be difficult or result in much lengthy expressions; second, similar expressions may be repeated; and third, their inclusion may disrupt or hinder the flow of the text. As a modifier is a supplementary part of the sentence for the effect of emphasis and elaboration, omission of modifying parts in translation is not likely to distort the context or damage the narrative flow of the text but mostly intends

5) The underlined passages indicate portions that, according to the author of the article, were omitted in the published English translation.

to affect the degree of detail and intensity. In light of the inherent rewriting tendencies within the practice of literary translation, faithfully rendering repetitive and elaborative modifying phrases often yields translations that are either more redundant or loose than the original text. Consequently, selective omissions could emerge as a viable strategy to facilitate clear and speedy flow of the narrative.

As even “altering the way characters or narrators express themselves (in translation) can bring out a change in the feel of the texts” (Bosseaux 2018: 130), omissions in literary translation are particularly susceptible to rigorous scrutiny and criticism from both critics and readers. Nevertheless, deliberate omissions in literary translation deserve due recognition as well as thorough scrutiny, as such omissions often arise from a careful decision made by the translator and editor. As C. E. Landers (2011: 95) emphasizes in reference to the strategic dimension of omissions within the context of literary translation, “omission does not refer to cutting out a portion of the work that presents difficulties ... rather, what is omitted is the explanation, leaving the reader to his own devices.”

Furthermore, the omission in literary translation is closely related to the characteristics of the literary text genre. The omission of repetitive metaphoric and elaborative phrases from the protagonist’s monologue is likely intended to enhance the narrative’s pacing—an element regarded as a crucial and distinctive storytelling device in crime fiction. M. Baker (2002: 49) supports the translator’s decision to omit certain parts of the text for the reason that “if the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanation, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question.”

In the English translation of Jeong’s novel, it is clear that the translator has intended to elucidate the perplexing and convoluted circumstances encompassing the protagonist’s matricide for the sake of better empathy with translation readers. This is achieved by deliberately reducing the excessive redundancy found within the protagonist’s recurrent retrospective monologues and the intricate flow of his consciousness. D. Osborne’s review (2018: 72) of the English translation of Jeong’s novel highlights the valid controversy between the redundancy and meticulousness

of the protagonist's monologues: "Throughout the book, this technique (monologue) can at times become tedious, but it's worth noting that the line between tedium and tension can be extremely thin."

Instead, the English translation of Jeong's novel tends to place greater emphasis on the corporeal portrayal of the act of matricide, while providing a more controlled and restrained description of the protagonist's descent and withdrawal into psychological regression. This strategic approach in translation seems intended to engage translation readers by directing their attention toward the painfully graphic progression of the matricide narrative. Such an intervention is anticipated to accentuate the unique and speedy narrative structure and serves to heighten the readers' fear to its maximum effect, prevailing within the genre of psychological crime fiction. As one of the translator's strategic priorities in the translation of Jeong's crime fiction is to keep the suspense alive by holding readers back from discovering the protagonist's killer identity too early due to his obsessive and paranoid monologue, the omission in the translation could function as a crafted strategy to tighten suspense and enhance speedy development of the narrative in the hunt for the killer without distorting the flow of the novel. Under the circumstances, omission strategy in Jung's novel needs to be examined from the perspective of the genre-specific attributes of crime fiction, as it pertains to the endeavor of engaging and accommodating translation readers in accordance with established conventions within the crime fiction genre.

3. Omission Strategy in the Translation of Crime Fiction, *The Good Son*

In literary translation, it is important to accord due significance to genre-specific attributes, as the choice of a particular translation strategy is likely to be influenced by the distinctive characteristics inherent to a given literary genre. Just as poetry translation needs to prioritize the unique aesthetic structure and poetic images, the translation of crime fiction is similarly obliged to adhere to the genre's conventions, which are designed to evoke suspense and fear through the explicit use of an

archetypal narrative structure and expeditious plot progression. The crime fiction genre “makes it easy for readers to name and order events into narrative sequences such as ‘murder’, ‘interrogation’, ‘chase’, and ‘cover-up’ ... Thanks to this exceptional clarity (...) it has been treated as a paradigm of effortless readability. The enlisted characteristics enable fast reading ...” (Pyrhönen 2010: 54). Thus, highlighting the speedy development and flow in crime fiction translation becomes more than a matter of the translator’s individual choice but a significant convention because crime fiction translation is strongly encouraged to accommodate the unique expectation and needs of translation readership of the genre.

Furthermore, omissions in crime fiction translation are intricately linked to the marginalized position of crime fiction within the literary hierarchy as E. Davies (2007: 62) argues, “The extent to which omission is considered a valid solution may depend on the status of the source text.” Regardless of the prolific output of best-selling novels by crime fiction writers, the attainment of a Nobel Prize in Literature or a more elevated standing within the literary hierarchy remains improbable due to marginal status of crime fiction genre. The reason Stephen King, the world’s unprecedented best-selling author with over 400 million copies sold worldwide, is unlikely to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature or the Pulitzer Prize is that, as a writer of suspense/crime fiction, his work is often regarded as having limited literary prestige due to the genre’s inherent characteristics and perceived constraints. Under the circumstances, the marginal status of the genre likely triggers or tolerates less faithfulness to the original text in translation for the sake of accommodating particular conventions prevalent in crime fiction genre. Its priority always goes to broader and more popular readership rather than the prestige of the text, as “translators of crime fiction into English might face pressure to reduce metaphors in order to meet the perceived expectations of their readers” (Schäffner 2017: 254).

If a particular type of transformation in the practice of literary translation demonstrates recurring patterns, this transformation could evolve into an established convention and a deliberate strategy. While this premise does not necessarily justify every omission in crime fiction translation, one of the core and realistic purposes

of crime fiction translation is to actively bring readers into the narrative dynamics and track down the killer by means of the readers' collective intelligence and emotional identification because "a central feature of crime fiction is reader involvement: emotional engagement when the investigator is threatened, and cognitive participation in working out the puzzle alongside the investigative process" (Seago 2018: 923). If it is difficult to demonstrate how omissions in literary translations compromise or damage textual integrity, it may be more productive to examine how such omissions function to enhance communication with the translation readers.

Cruelty is generally defined as any type of vicious human behavior that causes physical or mental harm and pain to another. Although there exists a prevailing inclination to confine the conceptual category of cruelty to the malevolent actions perpetrated by dangerous individuals, mostly deemed criminal or afflicted with mental instability, it is important to conceive of cruelty as an intrinsic component of the human condition. K. Taylor (2009: 6) discloses a critical nature of 'cruelty': "Cruelty is not the domain of madmen or natural-born evildoers. Rather, much of cruel behavior is rational (...) Cruelty implies deliberation, free choice, and moral responsibility." Cruelty itself cannot become the criterion for the binary division between good and evil because cruelty is regarded as a universally inherent human trait, something not found in other animals. Even on the safest side, "the gap between solid citizen and evil perpetrator may be reassuringly wide for most of us, but it is by no means unbridgeable" (ibid., 8).

Conveying to readers the clandestine nature of cruelty inherent in every human being is also a precise purpose of the author, as elucidated by Jeong herself in an interview: "I see humans as having both these extremes, the bonobo-like pacifism and the chimpanzee-like aggression. In some regards, humans are unbelievably noble, and in other regards, unbelievably shameful and nasty and wicked" (Jung 2017). Likewise, it becomes the duty of literary translators to transfer the existential complexities of human cruelty into another language. As for cruelty effect, the translation of Jeong's novel attempts to reduce or temporarily diminish the gap between the protagonist's evil nature and ordinariness. The author claims that the

simple division between good and evil, normal and abnormal in human nature is not only artificial and biased but can also overlook the complexities of evil and its inherent nature in human beings.

With this aesthetic orientation, the first chapter of the novel penetrates into the protagonist's psychology and witnesses his own perspective on the mother's deceased body through heavily charged deep and dense inner monologues. To achieve this aesthetic objective, the de-personalization of the crime scene in the translation serves to highlight the distressingly vivid and emotionally detached visual imagery. Furthermore, the deliberate revelation of the murderer's identity near the end of the first chapter is intended to intensify the sense of moral perversion and the cruel impact on the translation readers, who are unprepared to confront the truth yet.

[Example 2]

Korean text: 손이 저절로 움직이기 시작했다. 머뭇대지도 더듬대지도 않았다. 자를 대고 종이를 자르듯, 벌어진 상처 안쪽을 오차 없이 따라갔다. 느낌 하나하나가 완벽하게 익숙했다. 내 목덜미에 끼쳐오는 숨결의 비명 같은 떨림, 손아귀로 밀려드는 속살의 부드러운 저항, 근육을 가르고 혈관을 끊으며 전진하는 칼날의 거침없고 매끈한 움직임, 면도칼은 턱을 거쳐 오른쪽 귀 밑까지 한 손질에 도달했다. (Jeong 2016: 73)

Literal translation for comparison purpose: The hand began to move automatically, without hesitating, or fumbling. As if cutting paper with a ruler, the hand precisely followed inside the gaping wound. Each move felt completely familiar, even with her trembling breath like a shriek that stretched over the back of my neck, the soft resistance of the inner flesh that was felt on my grasp, and the smooth and unhindered movement of the knife blade that went forward while splitting muscles and severing blood vessels. The razor slid past the chin and reached under the right ear in a single stroke.

English translation: My hand moved automatically, without hesitation, following the gaping wound fluidly. Each motion felt perfectly familiar—the soft resistance of the inner flesh, the smooth passage of the blade. The razor slid past the chin and arrived under the right ear in one easy swoop. (Jeong 2018: 53)

Example 2 above is the most disturbing and brutal scene in the novel. The protagonist is recreating the matricide process by inserting a knife into the open wound on her neck of the deceased body in order to confirm if the knife in his possession matches the wound's width and depth. This scene compels the protagonist to confront and acknowledge his true identity as the killer of his own mother. The author confessed in a 'behind the story' interview with a Korean newspaper that she had hesitated a great deal before finally deciding to include this most gruesome scene in the novel (Kim 2016). The meticulously detailed and gruesome depiction of the protagonist slitting his mother's throat with his late father's cherished knife is executed with unsettling precision and meticulous attention to detail. Nevertheless, the disconcertingly calm, detached and unemotional narrative tone employed by the author evokes a profound sense of shock and fear in the reader. H. Worthington stresses the function of 'fear-fostering' narrative in crime fiction through the detailed 'otherizing' description: "Crime fiction responded to this fear of the serial killer, and in some ways fostered that fear in representing it to the reading public ... whose motives are incomprehensible" (xxiii).

The most immediately noticeable difference in the quote aforementioned is the reduced length of the English translation, almost half the literal translation sample, with a significant volume of omission, including expressions of "as if cutting paper with a ruler," "even with her trembling breath like a shriek that stretched over the back of my neck," and "(movement of the knife blade) that went forward while splitting muscles and severing blood vessels," etc. Again, the translator's decision centers on omitting lengthy and reiterated metaphoric and descriptive phrases from the Korean text starting with "as if ~", "like~", "which~", designed to mirror the protagonist's inner confusion and emotional anxiety.

Through the deliberate reduction of the protagonist's introspective monologues, the English translation seeks to accentuate the gruesome depiction of the deceased mother's body. Consequently, the translation strategy in this scene functions to temper the protagonist's overly self-satisfied and verbose inner reflections and emphasize the detached and dehumanized depiction of the deceased mother's corpse, enhancing the narrative pace and implicitness, characteristic of crime fiction,

which are essential to evoking suspense and fear in the reader, closely aligning with the conventions of crime fiction. While the Korean text places greater emphasis on the narration of the crime and the psychological portrayal of the perpetrator, the English translation shifts its focus from detailed psychological depiction to the transmission of the crime's brutal imagery, thereby accentuating its visual violence.

Matricide is far from a commonplace theme in literature, not to mention in Korean society where the Confucian tradition of filial piety to parents has been traditionally indoctrinated 'as an organized and resilient political/cultural orthodoxy' (Robinson 1991: 204). In Jeong's novel the protagonist's bizarre and graphic descriptions of his own inner feelings in front of the slain mother's body forces translation readers to confront physical and psychological fear, chill, and abhorrence, which is the first chapter's intended function: "we have a visceral revulsion from extremely evil acts. The revulsion is most vivid when the acts involve physical violence" (Morton 2004: 13). The chilling vividness of the cruelty becomes markedly graphic enough to be reminiscent of famous movie scenes, and several book reviews of the translation of Jeong's novel share a similar perspective: "To an extent, felt like reading a film" (Osborne 2018: 72), and "if this were a movie, Yu-jin might be played by (a younger) Anthony Hopkins" (Gordon 2018), who starred as the psychiatrist and cannibal serial killer Dr. Hannibal in the 1991 movie *The Silence of the Lambs*. The connection with the particular film imagery ultimately emphasizes the necessity for a swift and graphic progression in the translation of the novel.

[Example 3]

Korean text: 뼈마디들이 불거진 발가락과 높고 좁은 발등, 피 웅덩이에 반쯤 잠긴 발꿈치, 왼쪽 발목에 걸린 발찌, 발찌에 달린 손바닥 장식. 딸꾹질이 튀어나왔다. 위장이 훌쩍 뒤집히는 느낌이었다. 이제라도 몸을 돌려 내 방을 올라가버리고 싶었다. 후회할 뭔가를 보게 되기 전에, 본 것을 후회하기 전에. (Jeong 2016: 32)

Literal translation for comparison: Toes with every bone joint bulging out, and high and narrow top of the foot, heels half-immersed in blood puddle, anklet hanging from the left ankle, palm-shaped decoration on the anklet. Hiccups came

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out. I felt like my stomach flipped upside down. I wanted to turn around and go up to my room if not too late, before seeing something I would regret, before regretting seeing something.

English translation: bumpy toes, high arches, an anklet with a dangling charm hanging from the left ankle. My stomach flipped and I began hiccupping. I wanted to go back to my room. (Jeong 2018: 17)

In Example 3, the protagonist provides a detailed description of his mother's slain body lying on the floor, noting an ankle bracelet on her left ankle—an item later revealed to belong to a neighborhood woman he had murdered in a prior crime. Again, a significant difference between the Korean text and English translation is the text length with a substantial degree of omission and reduction. Not only are modifying and elaborating expressions, such as “every bone joint”, “and narrow”, “heels half-immersed in blood puddle”, “palm-shaped decoration on the anklet” omitted in a consistent pattern, but also omitted is the entire sentence of the protagonist’s inner monologue reflecting his fear and confusion, “if not too late, before seeing something I would regret, before regretting seeing something.”

[Example 4]

Korean text: 치켜든 여자의 목이 턱 밑을 따라 날렵하게 잘려나가 있었다. 왼쪽 귀밑에서 오른쪽 귀밑까지, 어느, 힘센 손아귀가 예리한 칼로 한 동작에 그어버린 것처럼 보였다. 언월도 형상으로 벌어진 목의 속살은 아가미처럼 붉었다. 숨쉬듯 펄떡거리는 착각마저 들었다. 흐트러진 머리카발 밑에선 새카만 눈동자가 시선을 맞대었다. 내 눈을 쏘살같이 찢러오는 발톱 같은 눈이었다. 가까이 와, 라고 명령하는 눈이었다. (Jeong 2016: 32)

Literal translation for comparison: The woman’s neck, which was tilted back, was swiftly cut off along the chin line, from below the left ear up to the right ear. It appears that some powerful hand had slashed it in a single stroke with a sharp knife. The crescent-shaped open wound looked as red as a gill in its inner flesh. For a moment I felt as though it was still fluttering for breathing. Under her disheveled hair, the coal-black irises came out to meet my eyes. They were claw-like eyes that flew like an arrow to pierce my eyes. They were commanding eyes as if ordering me to come closer.

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English translation: Her head had been jerked back and her neck was severed. Someone strong must have done this in one swift motion, with a sharp knife. The flesh around the wound was red, like a fish's gills. For a moment I thought I saw it throb. Dark irises met my eyes from under the tangled hair, ensnaring me, ordering me to come closer. (Jeong 2018: 17)

In Example 4, a comparison of the Korean text with its English translation reveals that the elements consistently omitted are metaphors, symbols, and various modifying or elaborating expressions. Notably, these modifiers largely represent the internal monologue of the perpetrator narrator and articulate the psychological sensations involved in confronting the matricide he has committed. The removal of such psychological descriptions thus accelerates the pacing of the crime narrative and eliminates what may be perceived as superfluous detail. Although nuanced depictions of a perpetrator's psychology are undoubtedly an important narrative technique in crime fiction, there is no guarantee that such delicate nuance can be effectively reproduced in translation. The omissions therefore appear to reflect the translator's consideration that these elements might lose clarity or become ambiguous in the translated text. This intervention results in a translated version that is more than roughly 30 percent shorter than a literal, line-by-line rendering of the Korean original, indicating that substantial omissions recur throughout the work. What is also notable, even in the portions that are not omitted, is a recurring pattern in which rhetorically intensified expressions are simplified. For instance, "was swiftly cut off" becomes "was severed," "some powerful hand" becomes "someone strong", and "coal-black irises" is rendered simply as "dark irises."

The protagonist's monologue in the fiction could afford readers a unique opportunity to gain insight into their mental state, a perspective intentionally concealed from other characters within the narrative. Consequently, the repeated omission of the protagonist's anxious monologue in translation may potentially hinder translation readers from gaining insight into the protagonist's psychological depths. On the other hand, the omission strategy, which compresses some of the protagonist's repetitive, anxious, and psychopathic monologues on the slaughter of his mother, reflecting his inner fear and confusion, could also tighten up redundancy

and vagueness in the protagonist's stream of consciousness. This approach accelerates the narrative flow and enhances the narrative tension, ultimately conforming to the conventions of crime fiction. The pattern of omission in translation could compromise the frequency of repeated references to the cruelty of matricide and consequently tone down the intensity of the cruelty on the part of translation readers, but at the same time, excessive repetition may create a sense of redundancy and ultimately diminish the intensity of cruelty, as the impact of repetitive expressions in Korean and English can differ significantly.

Deborah Smith, translator of *The Vegetarian*, the 2016 Man Booker International Prize and 2024 Nobel Prize-winning novel by Kang Han, confesses the burden inherent in the English translation of Korean literature, specifically addressing the inherent ambiguity and repetitiveness of Korean prose, which necessitates transformation into precision and concision during the translation process (Smith 2018). This may be subject to the translator's interpretation regarding the tension between the traditionally appealing strategy of repetition and the unpleasant sense of boredom in the context of crime fiction conventions because "a veteran reader is quite comfortable with the reappearance of the familiar formula [repetition], while a neophyte may be bored by the apparent borrowing" (Dove 1997: 36).

In literary translation where omissions occur repeatedly, what deserves particular attention is not the amount of omitted material but the characteristics of the sentences or paragraphs that are consistently omitted. One possible reason for the frequent omission of psychological descriptions of the protagonist may lie in the difficulty of rendering detailed and complex psychological nuances effectively in translation. However, the more significant factors are likely to stem from the generic conventions of crime fiction. First, the genre's emphasis on rapid plot progression necessitates the maximization of suspense, minimizing verbosity and redundancy. Second, given the relatively low literary status and value of crime fiction within the literary system, the publishing market tends to prioritize readability and popular appeal in the translated text over strict faithfulness to the original.

Despite a substantial volume of omissions, the essential themes, suspense, and

thrill of Jeong's Korean crime fiction have survived in the translation, as evidenced by its significant global popularity. This is due to the fact that the translator has strategically taken care to preserve the contextual integrity and aesthetic coherence of the Korean crime fiction, resulting in a translation that remains faithful to the essential attributes of the crime fiction. By doing so, the translation of Jeong's novel strives to enhance its popular accessibility for a different readership. Critiquing omissions in literary translation is different from proving that such omissions have resulted in substantial hindrance to a literary work or its aesthetic appreciation by translation readers. Eventually, while an author writes in his or her own language for readers whom the author knows better, a literary translator is obliged to recreate it into another language for a different group of readers whom the translator knows better than the author. As authors do not craft their text with translation readers in mind, translators do not translate with the original text's readers as their primary concern.

4. Conclusion

In literary translation, the act of omission has generated substantial controversy, primarily due to its potential to threaten translation equivalence or damage the aesthetic integrity of the original text, particularly under the circumstances where literary translation heavily relies on government support. Nevertheless, when such omissions occur in a repeated pattern throughout the entire translation text, they reflect the translator's deliberate choices and responsibilities, guided by specific intentions and objectives that are integral to the overall translation strategy. Thus, it would be meaningful to examine how the distinctive attributes inherent to a particular literary genre may, at times, supersede the established conventions governing the practice of literary translation, especially in the case of the English translation of Jeong's Korean crime fiction.

The Good Son is the first English translation among Jeong's Korean novels, and it would be overly optimistic to expect that a nearly 400-page Korean novel by an

unknown, non-English speaking author could survive in its original length and form within the highly competitive and demanding field of the English publication market abroad. Nonetheless, the English translation of Jeong's novel has made a remarkable entrance into the global literary arena despite a significant volume of omission from the original text, by securing copyright sales in more than 20 countries, thus affirming the substantial degree of dynamic equivalence effect between the Korean novel and its translation.

In the English translation of Jeong's novel, the omission strategy has been deliberately employed to expedite the progression of the narrative, intensify its suspense and fear, and boost translation readers' engagement with the chilling portrayal of human malevolence. This approach accentuates the distinctive features of crime fiction, such as suspense, fear, brutality, and the pursuit of the criminal. Particularly, within the crime fiction genre, the paramount objective is to optimize its resonance with readers through the amplification of genre-specific attributes, rather than its conventional faithfulness to the original text. Consequently, there is a pressing demand for these genre-specific traits to take precedence in the translation of crime fiction. Moreover, crime fiction, which occupies a relatively lower position within the literary hierarchy compared to poetry or literary fiction, tends to prioritize popular appeal among translation readers and within the publishing market over the aesthetic value of the original text. Consequently, its translations often exhibit a discernible pattern that favors readability and accessibility over stronger faithfulness to the source text.

If the omission strategy in crime fiction translation effectively evokes emotions such as fear, horror, frustration, suffocation, and relief, while providing equivalent aesthetic satisfaction and motivation to translation readers to seek more of the author's other works, such a translation strategy should be acknowledged for its validity. While the omission strategy in the English translation of Jeong's novel has substantially condensed the text, it has also strengthened the author's aesthetic connection with a broader readership, a significant achievement for the English translation of Korean literature. Ultimately, the omission strategy in the translation of Jeong's novel offers valuable insights into what it intended to generate through

what is lost in crime fiction translation, reminding us that a successful literary translation never betrays its readers.

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