Secondary Pleasures, Spatial Occupations and Postcolonial Departures: Park Chan-wook's *Agassi/The Handmaiden* and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*

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Abstract:
This essay explores neo-Victorian fiction in an Asian context via the case-study example of Park Chan-wook's 2016 South Korean film *Agassi/The Handmaiden*. An ostensible adaptation of British author Sarah Waters's novel *Fingersmith* (2002), *Agassi/The Handmaiden* is a complex multi-lingual engagement with cultural, political, and sexual histories that are entirely Asian in provenance and that in turn require new attention be paid to the narrative and generic repertoires deployed by Waters's novel. The article asks how the impact occasioned by adaptational tactics such as neo-Victorianism deepens when the shift is not only one of medium (novel to film) but a recalibration of perspective away from the Anglophone. Park Chan-wook's film repurposes a British neo-Victorian novel into an early twentieth-century Japanese occupational context and makes new Korean meanings that actively decentre Western concerns.

Keywords: adaptation, Wilkie Collins, Japanese imperialism, Korean film, lesbian identities, postcolonial neo-Victorianism, Park Chan-wook, space, Sarah Waters.

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Discussions of the literariness of literature, the "singularity" of the form as Derek Attridge has compellingly articulated it (Attridge 2010: 1-5), are frequently about the second time around: the long recognised secondary pleasures of re-reading a novel or re-watching a film and seeing the things you did not notice at first. In the self-aware, knowing response of reader or spectator to adaptations of those same literary texts, these experiences are further enhanced by the pleasures of recognising what has or has not been adapted and the particular and localised meanings this produces.[1] For neo-Victorian studies, the principle of familiarity operates in a slightly different vein. The pleasure of neo-Victorianism is more about recognising aspects, moments or leitmotifs in the process of adapting the past. The respondent

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takes pleasure in identifying aspects of the nineteenth-century period in general, as well as the specifics of registering elements of particular Victorian novels, their plots, characters, events, that are being reworked in this more hybrid context (Sanders 2016: 151-175). Certainly the pleasure often equally lies in the recognition of what is *not* being closely adapted, in interpreting the interpolation or shift in position. An adapted version, a supposedly belated version (something that comes 'after', that is 'based on', loosely or otherwise) remakes the encounter with the source text, revising, repurposing, recycling, and remediating that 'original'. The critical response is located in acts of attention, of noticing – often in repeated readings or viewings – the clues left scattered in these texts.

Neo-Victorianism is a field which operates more often than not through sustained analogy rather than direct adaptation. How then might the series of impacts and effects occasioned by neo-Victorianism and its particular version of return deepen when the transfer or shift that we are registering is not only one of medium (novel to film, for example, in the specific cases addressed here) but an entire recalibration of perspective, away from an Anglophone or Anglocentric reading to something wholly rooted in other culture(s) and languages(s)? And if this shifts away from the neo-Victorian moment itself, where does this effort rest on the adaptational spectrum and how does it move the centre of gravity away from the norms and assumptions of Western scholarship? These questions underpin this article's analysis of South Korean film director Park Chan-wook's award-winning film *Agassi/The Handmaiden*, which premiered in 2016. The film repurposes a British neo-Victorian fiction, Sarah Waters's 2002 novel *Fingersmith*, itself a complex engagement with nineteenth-century culture, into a 1930s Japanese-Korean colonial context.

The analogous reading of Park's *Agassi/The Handmaiden* advanced in the analysis that follows places the film *alongside* rather than in subordination to Waters's *Fingersmith* and, by extension, in relation to, rather than as defined by, neo-Victorianism. This essay intervenes in an emerging dialogue that is part of the increasingly globalised and non-Anglophone context of adaptation studies. The collaborative project from which this body of research derives is a conversation between Korean and European scholars that seeks to embrace – and be challenged by – the differences of the post-adaptation, postcolonial encounter with a so-called source text when it crosses an East-West binary, and explores how this in

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turn can inflect previously assumed positions on formerly Western dominated fields such as neo-Victorianism. We share Antonija Primorac's wish to "unsettle received notions about the production of neo-Victorianism as a phenomenon linguistically, geographically, and ideologically delimited by the maps of the British Empire" (Primorac 2015: 48). Elizabeth Ho's work is seminal; exploring concepts of recovery and recuperation made possible by new geopolitical mobilisations of understandings of the nineteenth century, she notes that "'the Victorian' […] has become a powerful shorthand for empire in the contemporary global imagination" (Ho 2013: 5). In turn, she identifies the possibilities for neo-Victorian re-stagings of the same "as a means to rethink post-colonial politics and experience" (Ho 2013:7).

An informing work in our own thinking about the theoretical framework for considering Park's film as a work of self-conscious neo-Victorianism in an Asian context has been Frances Dolan's *True Relations* (2013), a study of what might be assumed to be the very different historical context of seventeenth-century relational reading practices. Dolan writes about what she terms "active, appropriative reading" (Dolan 2013: 10). She considers how seventeenth-century readers were frequently "creating networks or maps of meaning", in which they themselves were placed at the centre: "Pursuing his or her own interests rather than cracking an authorial code, the [early modern] reader was a rover as well as a collector or relator" (Dolan 2013: 12). Code cracking can be an immensely satisfying – and indeed important – aspect of literary study. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn have drawn a direct link between the attraction of nineteenth-century novels to a contemporary readership and the fact that the Victorian period was the foundational era for the detective story (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 16).[2] But Dolan's notion of the active reader remains particularly significant for our context, suggesting that Park's film, like its British fictional source-text, generates complex meanings, experiences and indeed (secondary) pleasures for the reader or spectator, who is an active participant in the twists and turns of its narrative, and who embraces in this way the political as well as aesthetic possibilities of what John Bryant has termed the "fluid text" (Bryant 2013: 47 and *passim*).

We make a case for the importance of capturing the layered and rhizomatic impact of adaptational writing and film-making, not simply by interrogating the differences between versions (though that work has

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validity and purpose), but by extending the questions to audience experience (and pleasure) and how different kinds of audiences, intergenerational as well as intercultural, enable differentiated active readings and responses.[3] This approach shares with Ho a desire to conceptualise neo-Victorianism "as a global Anglophone project" and as a strategy to "recuperate the suppressed voices and histories of the past" (Ho 2013: 7, 8). It also extends the discussion to work that deploys neo-Victorianism as a jumping-off point to explore postcolonial identities in their own geopolitical and linguistic contexts. Cultural complexity exists even in the titling of Park Chan-wook's 2016 film. In its Korean original it focuses on its elite female (Japanese) protagonist (the Lady Hideko or "Agassi"), but its English translation centres on Sook-hee, the handmaiden, who comes from the Korean servant under-class. An ostensible adaptation of *Fingersmith* (2002), itself a complex interweaving and rethinking of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) and the genre of Victorian sensation fiction through a contemporary and assertively LGBTQ+ lens, *Agassi/The Handmaiden* engages forcefully with cultural, political and sexual histories that are entirely Asian in provenance and that, in turn, beg for new attention to be paid to the narrative and generic repertoires deployed by Waters's novel.[4] Park's film emerges as a cogent example of neo-Victorianism in Asia in the sense that the analogue he finds for the constrained female agency and sexuality, which Waters depicted in her novel through the aesthetics and social politics of 1870s Britain, is 1930s occupied Korea. By unpacking these analogous relationships, we can demonstrate in action a significant example of what Ho describes as the "viable floating signifier" of neo-Victorianism (Ho 2013: 202), providing as it does for Park's film a contact zone that enables him less to explore the impacts of British imperialism and trade in the colonies *per se* than a parallel moment of colonial occupation in his own culture. This Korean repurposing of Waters's neo-Victorian experimentation is achieved via the Japanese-Korean dialectic of Park's film and is performed through *mise-en-scène*, casting, and linguistic code-switching and subtitling for international audiences.

1. Korean Repurposing

As one of South Korea's best-known film directors *de jour*, Park Chan-wook is no stranger to adaptation as a cinematic and televisual practice. The

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second film in his so-called 'Vengeance Trilogy', *Oldboy* (2003), remediated a Japanese manga comic that was itself remade by the US director Spike Lee into an English language version in 2013 (Sanders 2016: 210-11). In other films he has engaged with the vampire genre, both in *Thirst* (2009), loosely based on Emile Zola's nineteenth-century novel *Thérese Raquin*, and in *Stoker* (2013), the director's first English language film. In late 2018 Park directed the UK BBC television adaptation of John Le Carré's 1983 novel, *The Little Drummer Girl*, having previously flirted with the idea of adapting Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) for the big screen. This series, despite its very different cultural referents and setting, plays with related themes of authenticity and performance to *Agassi/The Handmaiden*. Park's unapologetically Korean repurposing of subject matter and setting in the latter film in turn enables an astonishing dialogue with Waters's novel and its lesbian and feminist perspective on its own Victorian source material.[5] Because both film and novel adopt a highly knowing tripartite structure that re-reads even their own internal plots at various turns and false turns in the narrative, each work alerts us to aesthetic secondary pleasures. Even within a single text and prior to any adaptational cross-reading or enrichment, we find ourselves deceived by protagonists, narrators, or points of view – the essence of these works and their effect is all about the layering of narratives, the palimpsestuous, and the revised (see Hutcheon 2006: 21-22). This provides a helpful set of metafictive tropes around doubling, performance, and occupation for exploring neo-Victorianism in Asian contexts and the relationalities of Park's film in particular.

Park has spoken in interviews about the Korean audience being the primary audience for his filmmaking to this point, which suggests a confident resistance to simplistic facilitation for international audiences (Park 2016). As we shall see, the opening shots of *Agassi/The Handmaiden* assume the viewer has knowledge of the complex contexts of the Japanese occupation of Korea. Similarly, while many adaptational films in the modern era have consciously global production teams and casting, *Agassi/The Handmaiden* is assertively South Korean. The main roles of Hideko, the Count, and Uncle Kouzuki are taken by stars of Korean film and television (Kim Min-hee, Ha Jung-woo, and Cho Jin-woong respectively), and the part of Sook-hee is played by newcomer Kim Tae-ri, who auditioned for the role. While clearly successful in global contexts,

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competing for the Palme d'Or in 2016 and winning the British Academy of Film and Television Award for non-Anglophone film in 2017, the choice of an all Korean cast resolutely speaks to Korean audiences about their own complex colonial histories. In what follows, we aim to unpack the significances of this Korean past as realised in the film's treatment of material culture, from costumes to objects to spaces and households. In the process, deep and persistent relationships in the handling of parallel issues in *Fingersmith*, and therefore neo-Victorianism, are identified. The resultant reading recasts the adaptation process as a story of mutual exchange and cross-pollination in which a Korean lexicon and aesthetic is brought to the fore.

It will already be clear that *Agassi/The Handmaiden* is not a straightforward adaptation of *Fingersmith*. The film unfolds in partial dialogue with Waters's novel. However, with its many interpolated Korean-specific angles, it very much speaks to a pan-Asian and postcolonial context. It might even be suggested that for Park the neo-Victorian mobilisations of his adaptation take second place in his conceptual hierarchy. He has spoken in interviews about *Oldboy* and its manga provenance, about needing to "jump over" the original while acknowledging, in relation to *Agassi/The Handmaiden,* that "spatially you expand yourself" (Park 2016a). The use of Waters's much loved Anglophone novel, which had already received a successful two-part BBC television adaptation in the UK in 2005, certainly ensured that reviews of the film extensively invoked ideas of neo-Victorian literature and scholarship, but the revisionist leanings of Park's film merit attention in their own right. A different kind of revisionism occurs at the close of his film, which resists a straightforward adaptation of the novel's return to the Briar House property and its physically and symbolically-charged library. Whereas Waters chose to end with her protagonists, Sue and Maud, producing female-authored pornography in a direct re-appropriation of the patriarchal controls they had been subject to previously, Park relocates his female leads's 'ending' to a cabin on a ferry *en route* to yet another complex Asian geographical signifier – the cosmopolitan 1930s city of Shanghai on the Chinese mainland. This move, and the radical instability of the film's ending (Western and Asian critics jointly disagree over the extent to which the female protagonists are liberated or reconstrained by this ending[6]), would seem to bear out Heilmann and Llewellyn's position that in creative

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neo-Victorian – and in the case of Park's films we would argue *neo-Asian neo-Victorian* – re-imaginings the domestic becomes a "scene of historical trauma and global political contexts" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). The resistance to a simplistic or unambiguous happy ending by the director-adapter is a point we will return to in our conclusion. Ambiguity is certainly a mode that defines Park's approach to his work and perhaps in part explains his attraction to the generative processes of adaptation and appropriation: "I have a preference for ambiguous expressions, and through repetition, another layer of meaning is added to the same statement" (Park qtd. in Kim Sugyeong 2016a).

Ultimately, as a working example of neo-Victorianism in Asia, *Agassi/The Handmaiden* is not set in the nineteenth century at all. Park shifts Waters's story from a Victorian English context to a highly specified twentieth-century Asian *mise-en-scene*: 1910-1945 Korea under Japanese occupation. This geographical (dis)placement raises all sorts of important considerations about appropriation and occupation: spatial, psychological, linguistic, and political. In the process, it redraws our attention to the ideas implicit in contemporary theories of cultural appropriation as a "hostile takeover" (Sanders 2016: 12). By 1910 there were over 170,000 Japanese in occupied Korea and many acquired property, land and estates by dubious means. This strategic cultural imposition, a forced occupation, impacted everything from language to the press and saw the wresting of cultural artefacts from their Korean environment to Japan; the aftermath is still keenly felt today.[7] In the opening moments of Park's film, viewers witness Sook-hee standing in the rain holding a baby. All kinds of easy associations of motherhood may follow, but then many babies appear in the arms of the household of Bok-sun (the equivalent of Mrs Sucksby, the baby farmer, in Waters's novel). A soundtrack of marching soldiers alerts us to the militarised and occupational context, as does the blunt language and the sense of forced movements, relocations, and dislocations in this opening sequence. One of the women in Bok-sun's company declares: "I should be the one going to that Jap's house" (Park 2017: 0:02:57).[8] At a first viewing we might interpret this statement as self-sacrificial; the woman offers to be a substitute for Sook-hee, who is about to be dispatched. Though a direct comparison is never made in the film, for Korean audiences this sequence, along with other unsettling scenes of misogynistic and racist sexual coercion, would certainly have strong associations with the still highly

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politically charged issue of 'comfort women', those many thousands of women and girls who were forced into sexual slavery by the imperial Japanese army in occupied territories during the Second World War (Caprio 2009: 53).[9]

The film's opening sequences consciously play with the spectator's expectations, testing automatic associations and demanding active attention just as Waters's novel sought to do. We learn later in Park's film, in a repeated version of this opening sequence albeit from a different angle (Park 2017: 0.33.14), and from a differently informed standpoint, that all these babies in Bok-sun's household are foundling children being sold in a fairly mercenary fashion as surrogate children to wealthy Japanese families. The "Jap's house" alluded to signifies differently second time around, when we realise this is no selfless offer of substitution for Sook-hee being made by the other women present but rather bald envy at the fine dresses and jewellery she has been promised for her part in the con-trick the Count intends against the wealthy Japanese Lady Hideko. Moreover, the "Jap" is not even Japanese but, in fact, Hideko's uncle by marriage Kouzuki, now a widower, a Korean so enamoured with and subordinate to Japanese culture that he has re-created his household partly in its image, not least his central domain of the library. Kouzuki abandoned his first Korean wife for a Japanese woman, but the film implies that he continues to sleep with that first wife in the guise of his household maid-servant Mrs Sasaki. This complicated sexual and domestic relationship reflects the ambivalent colonial dynamics between Korea and Japan. In one memorable exchange between the Count and Kouzuki, when the Count asks him, "Why this urge to become Japanese?" (Park 2017: 1:34:51), Kouzuki's reply is: "Because Korea is ugly and Japan is beautiful" (Park 2017: 1:34:55). Some South Korean critics were deeply troubled by this portrayal of a pro-Japanese contingent in the Korean populace and found the beauty of the film's Japanese aesthetic unpalatable as a recovered version of recent history (see, e.g., Jeong and Jeong 2017: 33-58).[10] Conversely, DJUNA has argued that while:

> The background of 1930s Korea under Japanese colonization cannot be rubbed out, such a setting constrains the behaviours of characters. While not turning away from the times and space of the 1930s colonized

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> Korea, *Agassi* frees the two protagonists from [their] restraints [but] they are all translated characters and thereby belong to the frame neither of the "Korean female in Korean film" nor the "Japanese female in Korean film". Since they are both Victorian English characters created by a twenty-first century British writer, they do not share the values of the Korean or Japanese people. [… Instead,] their behaviours and motivations continue to go against what's expected, leaving the audience with a problem in finding a familiar model. (DJUNA 2016)

Park, however, has been very clear about the 'local' resonances of his adaptation and how, by relocating Waters's story, he wanted to capture the complex class conditions of the Japanese occupation, and to portray "an active pro-Japanese group", however uncomfortable that admission might be for some spectators (Anon. 2016; see also Kim Sugyeong 2016b). Park adds further to the frame of Japanese colonisation by playing with different camera angles and the proximity or distance between his human subjects to suggest different models of equalisation, assimilation, and the assumption of power.

The complex plotline of *Fingersmith* lends itself surprisingly well to a Japanese-Korean context and thus does different historical work around Asian – rather than British – colonialism for a contemporary Asian audience. We commence *Agassi/The Handmaiden* in the company of Sook-hee who is swiftly 'remade' and renamed as the Korean household servant, Okju. She is sent to the household of someone we initially presume to be a member of the Japanese colonial elite but who turns out to be the Korean collaborator Kouzuki, owner of the household library that is so central to setting and plotline in both Park's film and its novel source. Like the library belonging to Maud's uncle in *Fingersmith,* Kouzuki's library, which also houses pornographic content, is a symbol of wealth, but in addition it is constructed from wealth acquired from collusion with the Japanese occupying forces. As with the hard-won electricity that lights Kouzuki's property which is likewise enabled by his collusion with the Japanese, the library is a physical and symbolic site of collaboration and oppression, personal and political. Park has suggested in interviews that the library is

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metonymic for the man and for this character who "volunteers to become a slave" (Park qtd. in Anon. 2016). Here once again we register the film adaptation introducing a new Asian imperial context entirely missing from its source text. On arrival at Kouzuki's household. Okju is almost immediately renamed by Mrs Sasaki as Tamako and told to speak only in Japanese to her new mistress. Here, the name changes, linguistic switches, and the hybrid architectural fact of Kouzuki's library combine to illustrate for the audience the complex textual, racial, economic and colonial interactions taking place between Korean and Japanese culture in the film. The linguistic code-switching created complicated work for the subtitlers, who utilised colour-coding to indicate the movements between Japanese and Korean, not only for the benefit of disadvantaged Western audiences, but also for the younger generation Korean spectators who, unlike their parents and grandparents, cannot be assumed to have deep knowledge of the former occupational language of Japanese. In these contexts, the library operates once again as a site freighted with meaning, performing as it does a version of the historical past that is accessible in full only to those 'in the know', those who are able to interpret its archive; in this way it operates as a parallel to neo-Victorian literature with its coded references and its mobilisation of acts of familiarity and recognition on the part of its user-audiences. Kouzuki and his library are, just like the Japanese language, both a function of and agents in the spatial, patriarchal and colonial occupation that is the focus of *Agassi/The Handmaiden*'s Asian re-visioning of *Fingersmith*'s narrative.

In the first version of Sook-hee's rainy departure sequence from Bok-sun's baby factory, we find ourselves as spectators entering alongside her the estate of the wealthy employer she has been sent to serve. We make an extended dramatic approach as she is driven into and through the grounds of Kouzuki's household. Park makes active use of intense close-up in-car shots throughout this film sequence, and the cinematic point of view and what Hans-Robert Jauss has termed (in other contexts) the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 1982: 25) are consciously shared by Sook-hee and the viewer at these moments. Here the cinematic landscape is one of twisting and circuitous roads, obfuscating darkness and woodland, with the director making astute use of the long tracking shot. In this way the film's spectators actively receive the text of Kouzuki's household for reading and interpretation at the same time as Sook-hee but are able to mobilise this

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according to their own cultural referents and prior knowledge. For a spectator familiar with British nineteenth-century novels, who is approaching the film through the partial frame of prior knowledge of Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian novel, what might seem most apparent in this sequence are its Gothic elements: a dark forest, owls hooting, and the proverbial ivy clad house. These same clichéd Gothic elements were frequently adapted and parodied in nineteenth-century literature (see Smith and Hughes 2015: 2). But for Korean audiences, specifically Asian political references to the period of the Japanese occupation and the early twentieth-century Asian aesthetic, as well as playful self-referentiality to Park's own association with cinematic genres, such as the horror film and erotic thriller, are mobilised.[11] As the online reviewer Amy Nicholson has observed, this is a "mash-up […] set in turn-of-the-century Korea with thorny roots that stretch through the Earth's core to the Victorian moors" (Nicholson 2016). There is a recognised sub-genre of neo-Victorian mash-ups, initiated by Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), which is actively invested in ironic acts of appropriation (see de Bruin-Molé 2017), but we would suggest that the specific reach to Victorian literary landscapes may only be mobilised for certain active readers of Park's film. For many Korean film-goers the association of the mash-up mode with Asian deployment of monsters and the monstrous in the post-modern ironic horror film, not least those directed by Park, may be far more to the fore in their experience of *Agassi/The Handmaiden*. Park's repeated recourse to the complex sexual and monstrous iconicity of the octopus in his films, including this one, where a cephalopod dwells in Kouzuki's secretly-accessed library basement and plays a gruesome bit-part in the denouement torture scenes involving the Count, is undoubtedly related to the mash-up's use of monsters to mobilise the historical past and to "literalise related physical, sexual or emotional attributes" (de Bruin-Molé 2017: 22). The specifically Japanese cultural signification of the octopus will be discussed later in the essay, but a relationship to the landscape and environment of Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction is perhaps most evident in Park's film in its textual, and specifically *textile*, engagements with material culture. This goes way beyond what Kate Mitchell has questioned elsewhere as a tendency of playing nineteenth-century dress up as a proxy for deep historical engagement (Mitchell 2010: 3). The remainder of this essay will therefore focus on examples of this engagement with material culture in

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Agassi/The Handmaiden as a means of examining the operations of secondary pleasure, spatial occupation, and postcolonial revision in this film.

2. Combined Materialities

One of the first statements in Park Chan-wook's film about the complex hybrid household that sits at the heart of *Agassi/The Handmaiden* could have been fashioned for the purpose of this broader analysis of neo-Victorianism in Asia. We are instructed, as is Sook-hee (note again our shared perspective with the protagonist), that: "This property has three buildings. A Western-style wing designed by an English architect and a Japanese wing forms the main house" (Park 2017: 0:04.42). A conventional Korean house at the architectural centre of this hybrid arrangement is hereby effectively hedged round, winged, by both Western and Japanese references. We are further told by the housekeeper Mrs Sasaki (who also has a concealed identity) that this melded architecture reflects the master Kouzuki's admiration for (and, in Park's previously-cited terms, enslavement to) both Japan and England and therefore manifests a blended East-West aesthetic. We have in view all kinds of tensions and references that help to determine the visual and spatial practice both of the film and this specific household: this brings to bear ideas of combination and fusion, of adaptation but also appropriation, and of course spatial occupation.

Other important sequences in the film will take place in the annex to the central space of Kouzuki's library. There are several early threatening references to the as-yet unseen basement, and there is also the overt differentiation of the Korean servants' quarters from those of the wealthy Japanese (or pseudo-Japanese) elite. This class distinction and its material manifestations are made most explicit, perhaps, in the direct juxtaposition of Sook-hee's servant's box-bed, where she hits her head in the cramped confined space, and where she will dine on the leftovers of her appointed mistress, the Lady Hideko, and Hideko's own opulent quarters (though these will later come to seem in themselves a figure for spatial constraint). Hideko is herself a complex amalgam of Korean and Japanese influences, adopted into and brutalised by the Kouzuki household at an early age. She has been trained up, under physical and mental duress, to read aloud and perform the pornographic contents of Kouzuki's library for invited Korean and Japanese male audiences. The sheer excess of Hideko's extensive

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personal rooms, defined as they are by drawers full of expensive leather gloves, wardrobes full of silk kimonos, and hundreds of pairs of shoes, suggests opulence but also dissonance. Park himself has spoken of the resonance of both the design (a disjunctive signifier of both femininity and obscenity, capturing Hideko's dilemma) and the colour of the wallpaper, which in its cold blues suggests the stifled and stifling emotional world in which Hideko resides (Park qtd. in Anon. 2016). Park's extensive mobilisation of the grammar of costume, colour and material culture is again something that is specifically Asian in its referents. A careful differentiation of Japanese and Korean traditions within that frame, like the aforementioned linguistic code-switches in the film, act as an emotional and intellectual trigger for knowing audiences. Yet these signifiers are undoubtedly also intimately linked to the material fascinations of Waters's own neo-Victorian fiction and British cultural contexts. The author has observed in interview:

> I was very interested in the texture of Victorian life, and the power dynamics were played out in a material way, and I think [Park] brought a similar interest in artefacts and fabrics. It is such a crowdedly lush film with all those shoes and gloves and corsets. (Waters 2017)

The material texture of Waters's densely detailed novel is subject in this way in Park's film to both an act of homage and a complete cultural translocation as the shoes, gloves and corsets of her neo-Victorian *mise-en-scène* manifest themselves onscreen to tell a very different story about Japanese and Korean cultural history.

As Primorac has observed, "the image of a tightly laced, corseted female figure has become the accepted visual shorthand for the notion of the literally and metaphorically repressed Victorian woman" (Primorac 2018: loc. 435). In the camera's concentration on various scenes of lacing and unlacing that take place between Hideko and Sook-hee in *Agassi/The Handmaiden*, Park clearly draws on this shorthand for the purposes of meaning-making in his adaptation. The numerous dressing and undressing scenes between the women, in which close ups and the particular use of mirror reflections draw attention to their similarity if not identicality, lay the groundwork for the plot of confused identity that sees Sook-hee placed in an

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asylum instead of Hideko. (This itself is a palimpsestuous location with origins not only in *Fingersmith* but also Collins's *The Woman in White*.) These motifs in the film in turn appropriate the significance of doubling in Waters's novel. Sarah Gamble has written astutely on this topic, suggesting that while reflections, mirrors, and exchanges populate the text of *Fingersmith*, perfect symmetry is never achieved: Maud and Sue, she notes, are "still far from being straightforward copies of each other; an asymmetry revealed in their separate narratives" (Gamble 2013: loc. 1268). Park achieves similar reflective blending between his lady and her handmaiden, not least in their conspiratorial use of the Korean language, but, like Waters, he resists a complete fusion. The asymmetries of power writ large in the relationship between occupied Korea and imperial Japan find their own doubled presence in this methodology.

Attention to material culture, then, is no mere window dressing or even solely citation of a source in *Agassi/The Handmaiden*, but is essential to the complex issues the film raises of intersectional identities (class-driven, gendered, geopolitical) in twentieth-century Korea. Sook-hee travels to Kouzuki's estate in the traditional Korean *hanbok* dress of the serving classes. Just as she is greeted by a complex architectural juxtaposition of Japanese, Korean and Western referents in terms of the household, so the costumes of this film weave in and out of a series of conflicting and sometimes overlapping identities. Hideko is first seen on-screen attired in Westernised dresses and ballgowns and only appears in Japanese kimono for scenes of a sexualised content or of active subjugation: for her performances before Kouzuki's invited male consumers of pornography, for example, or when she appears to be in a sexual embrace with the Count in the grounds of the estate, and yet later again in their carefully-staged Japanese rural wedding. By Part 2, of course, the sexual embrace, witnessed by a distraught and confused Sook-hee, is itself revealed to be a carefully crafted performance; costume and the kimono thereby become part of the complex layers of theatrical masquerade in this fraught story of mistaken identities and social mobility.[12]

Sook-hee will gradually be gifted various items of attire by her mistress – firstly shoes, and later dresses and jewels. We read these acts as caring or manipulative at different moments in the film, depending on the perspective we are given. For example, Hideko's seeming act of kindness in lending Sook-hee her shoes, when the other servants have cruelly hidden

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one of her own, can seem manipulative from a later vantage point, once we learn in Part 2 that Hideko is counter-plotting with the Count. But the symbolism works beyond mere plot drivers and focuses these objects of clothing as enablers of social, spatial and, by extension, sexual mobility. We see Sook-hee able to walk much more quickly in her new attire; there is liberation as well as manipulation latent in the act of gift-giving: "in new shoes, even paths I always take seem different", says Hideko early on (Park 2017: 0:15:01), suggesting both her physical constraint in Kouzuki's household and the small freedoms she fashions through her wardrobe. She offers a version of liberation to Sook-hee in turn: "You can walk with me in new shoes" (Park 2017: 0:58:21).[13] These textile signifiers are, then, complex carriers of the questions of female agency that this film explores but leaves deliberately unsettled by the close.

As already noted, we witness intimate sequences of dressing and undressing in *Agassi/The Handmaiden*, as the camera dwells at length on the various buckles and fasteners and strings and ribbons of corsetry; this effects its own visual link to the sartorial intimacies of Waters's lesbian neo-Victorian fiction. The intricate wrapping of the formal kimono and its *obi* (belt) – there is a comic sequence early in Part 1 when Sook-hee is being trained how to wear one for the purposes of the con-trick – introduces a degree of restraint and restricted movement for its female wearers, and in this respect it performs a shorthand for the film's complex notions of national and gendered identities. There are symmetries effected: Sook-hee and Hideko, despite their differences of status, wealth and ethnic identification, prove impossible to tell apart in certain sequences, especially when filmed from behind. But these are also dangerous twinnings and substitutions that are taking place; when Sook-hee is dressed in her lady's *yukata* or household kimono, following her accompaniment of Hideko on the elopement with the Count, Hideko immediately 'plays' at being a sewing servant, and the Japanese medical professionals hired by the Count are thus convinced that 'the lady' is trying to hide her real identity when Sook-hee clams to be the real handmaiden.

Simultaneously, the enforced kimono-wearing of Kouzuki's household signifies the spatial and imperial occupation of Korea by the Japanese, who pursued a conscious policy of the erasure of Korean identity, restricting both sumptuary and linguistic expressions during the occupation. In this way, Park finds in Waters's novel's deep interest in female agency a

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parallel story about Korean colonial and postcolonial identities. In one striking moment of the film, we are active observers of the two women's 'escape' from Kouzuki's oppressive household (we deploy the scare quotes here because, in the end, this too proves a limited or constrained liberation). Their escape from the restrictions of the carefully choreographed space of the household is realised through the shared action of carefully pushing aside layers of (Japanese) paper screens to reveal an exterior space in which they can suddenly move at speed and through (seeming) acts of choice (Park 2017: 1:01:31). There is also a symbolic movement from darkness into light taking place, although once again the knowing camerawork limits the liberating effects: filmed at distance from above in an epic landscape, the women will suddenly seem small and vulnerable to wider cultural and environmental forces. This stands in stark contrast to the joyous close-ups of their faces that we receive as they travel together through the countryside. Interestingly, in this (repeated) sequence, their outfits are almost identical; in a move akin to their joint choreography with the paper screens, Sook-hee and Hideko's wardrobe at this moment emphasises their partnership rather than reinforcing their hierarchical differences. In one telling instance, however, in the Part 2 version of this moment, Sook-hee has to help Hideko over a small wall (Park 2017: 2.12.00). A degree of psychological resistance can be read into Hideko's physical reaction, but what we are also witnessing is a significant reassertion of the realities of rank: the pampered elite woman is not confident in the physical landscape by comparison with her capable handmaiden.

At this point in the film and in a dramatic end to the first part (itself riffing on the 'cliffhanger' developed by serialised Victorian novels and their dramatic uncertain chapter endings, designed to bring the reader back to future episodes wanting to know more), the equally neo-Victorian spatiality of the asylum, intrinsic as it is to Waters's indebtedness to Collins's *The Woman in White*, comes into view. Doubling, as already noted, was a dominant narrative textual mode in *Fingersmith*. It is also the phrase that Sue uses for sleeping alongside Maud in bed: "For all I knew it might have been an ordinary thing for a mistress and her maid to double up like girls" (Waters 2002: 89). Once again, we see Park's film functioning in an adaptive and relational mode, since the doubling in his adaptation refers not only to the women's visual and corporeal resemblance but also their complicated kinship across nation and class, which of course enables the

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clothes-swaps and mistaken identities of the plot. Swapping clothing and places may initially appear empowering, but rapidly both become ethically and morally questionable. There is no simple equation of performance with power or agency in this film, though the possibilities shade in and out of what we are observing.

3. Household Occupations and Spaces of Reading

Many scholars have argued that neo-Victorianism has a particular investment in ideas of spatial geography and in enabling a return to, or a spectral haunting of, the present by the sites and spaces of Victorian Britain (Arias 2010: 133). The conflicted space of the domestic household, not least as constructed by the conventions of the Gothic genre as filtered through nineteenth-century rewritings of the same in novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), has had a strong influence on the writings of Sarah Waters. Heilmann has noted how Waters's neo-Victorian fictions (not least her 1999 novel *Affinity*) engage with ideas of family, sexuality, and identity via the social and spatial architecture of the household (Heilmann 2010: 129). These Gothic traces of neo-Victorianism persist in the lavishly realised *mise-en-scène* of Park's film, but they are subsumed into a much larger frame of Asian historico-political resonance. This essay will, therefore, now focus in on the role of domestic household space.

In thinking about the specific Korean and Japanese resonances of the built environment depicted, it is not our intention to downplay the significant influence of Waters's fictional household contexts on Park's adaptive response; as early as 2013 the director notes his interest in her neo-Victorian novels. Heilmann and Llewellyn argue that Waters has made a specialism of using domestic household spaces which are "regularly configured as spaces of reading" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 28), and Briar House in *Fingersmith* is certainly one such 'literary' household. The site of the library, in which Maud is encased by her uncle to work on and read aloud from his pornographic book collection, is a space that will be reclaimed and re-purposed by the end of the novel, when she and Sue become book producers in their own right. In Waters's recuperative ending, Sue returns to Briar House to find her erstwhile lover writing the same pornographic volumes her uncle had specialised in – something we might view as an act of cultural appropriation and re-vision in itself (see Kaplan 2008: 42-55). While Park certainly adapts this chilling library space into the

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dark heart of his film, in many respects he also makes it anew for his Japanese-Korean *mise-en-scène*. Perhaps for this reason, the female protagonists *of Agassi/The Handmaiden* do not return there at the close having enacted a spectacularly final destruction of the library and its contents prior to their escape from Kouzuki's household which both mirrors the action of *Fingersmith* and somehow extends it. It is important to note that Kouzuki's library (which, of course, also serves as historical archive and as pornographic studio – often simultaneously) is specifically Japanese in its semiotics. It is Japanese culture and imperialism that provide the dark heart of this hybrid occupied household, and in that sense the women's shared act of blatant destruction also makes a deep historical point about trauma and forgetting.

Asia-specific resonances dominate the pornographic imagery of the texts housed in Kouzuki's library. Hideko is forced to engage with these from a young age, both as a reader and performer. At one point, she shows Sook-hee the famous *ukiyo-e* or Japanese woodblock image created in 1814 by Hokusai Katsushika, known as 'The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife', which depicts a woman shell-diver being sexually pleasured by two octopi. This brings Japanese nineteenth-century erotica directly into the film's diegetic and aesthetic world (as we have earlier witnessed the Count making a direct visual copy of this image; see Park 2017: 1:33:31).[14] The woodblock image in Sook-hee's hands embodies the ambiguities at the heart of Park's film. It can (and has) been read in purely negative and threatening terms as presenting sexuality as something monstrous in the form of the octopi: and, certainly, as already noted, Hideko's uncle keeps an octopus in a tank in the basement beneath the library. That 'off-stage' space is consistently invoked as part of the threat of violence, sexual and physical, to the young Hideko and her aunt while still living (recalled via flashback scenes) and is also where the Count will meet his own unedifying demise, so we can read the 'fishy' contents of Kouzuki's basement as embodying something rotten at the heart of his collaborational enterprise as well as potentially deepening the symbolism of Waters's neo-Victorian original. However, the Hokusai painting has also been understood as a depiction of female choice and sexual agency (not least when we think of the image's protagonist as a shell-diver rather than solely as a wife) and in that sense can be interpreted positively. In this respect the woodblock might be felt to reference a very different aspect of Park's film, which is to say its

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celebration and bringing to light of what is in Korean society still taboo, that is lesbian romance.[15] In this highly deliberate way, Park keeps his referents open and floating; they function as ambiguous signifiers to the end.

Aspects of the interior décor and material culture of Kouzuki's household operate in similarly blended ways: the Japanese architectural paper screens are self-consciously deployed in in the film as dividers and spatial blockers, but also as a means of enabling the male and female gaze as well as overhearing (by turns an empowering and a misleading experience). In the film, these screens represent both restriction and possibility and therefore serve as ambiguous signifiers in a mode that fits with the overall radical instability of this work. The screens function as equivalents to *Fingersmith*'s own knowing and somewhat anachronistic use of keyholes as spatial clichés for surveillance and the operations of the gaze, but once again in many ways they are highly specific to the Asian contexts and referents of *Agassi/The Handmaiden*.

The Japanese paper screens can reveal, but they also obscure; they therefore embody something of the ambiguities of the 'paper' novel source of the film but also of Park's directorial method. We witness this most obviously in operation in the wedding night scene(s), when accepting our own supposedly privileged knowledge as spectators as to why Hideko's bedsheets are bloodstained. This understanding is subsequently completely rewritten, or rather overwritten, as fake knowledge. We have through those partially obscuring screens, as so often in this film, received only a limited understanding of what is going on. In these juxtaposed sequences, Park also rewrites Waters's version to accord more agency to Hideko. Here she performs the act of cutting her own skin to mimic the blood from a broken hymen, and therefore her own loss of virginity on her wedding night, for the benefit of the ever present, ever watchful hired maidservants. In the novel, this scene is all part of Gentleman's plotting and therefore very much a performance of patriarchal control. For all that reviewers were troubled by Park's fetishistic gaze as a male director on his female protagonists, these are undoubtedly examples of interesting shifts of agency towards his female characters. In the context of Korean culture where, as already noted, lesbian and homosexual relationships are still regarded as a social taboo, the impact of such narratological choices should not be underestimated. The paper screens in the Kouzuki household, and in the rural lodgings where the staged wedding takes place, tell a story about Japanese cultural occupation

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and about boundaries, but they also signify cultural translation and assimilation. They carry a positive as well as negative charge, and retain to the end the ambiguity of purpose embraced by Park's direction.

4. Adaptation, Interpretation and Uncertain Endings

As in *Fingersmith*, there are underlying themes of forgery, counterfeit and performance in *Agassi/The Handmaiden*, and the anxiety of the adaptation over its own textual dependencies might appear to be made manifest in this respect. When we first meet Count Fujiwara, he tells a story for the benefit of the audiences both inside and outwith the film's diegetic world. The story self-consciously casts light on adaptive processes and cultural translation since it speaks of an interpreter who bribed his way into translating for Japanese high officials as part of the imperial occupation but is, in turn, assimilated into the very culture he is in the act of translating: he 'becomes' Japanese and turns collaborator just as Kouzuki's assimilative tendencies are described back to him by the Count (Park 2017: 1:34:51). Throughout the film, there is a complex interplay and, in many respects. a distinction between Korean characters wanting to 'get one over' on the Japanese – the making of intricate forgeries to sell to them by Bok-sun's criminal household, the wider Lady Hideko plot-line involving the Count, and even the baby factory are versions of this impulse, as are the aforementioned scenes in which we witness Sook-hee being trained in Japanese gait and the wearing of a kimono – and the collaborative and assimilatory leanings of a figure such as Kouzuki. If the bookish and academic behaviours of Kouzuki are cast in a negative light as capitulation and enslavement, the daily acts of subversion by criminal subcultures are depicted with a kind of everyday life-force as coping strategies. By Part 3, however, there is a further twist, when the audience is invited to see everything which has gone before in the film as a shared double-bluff plot hatched between the female protagonists (which, of course, it never is in *Fingersmith*) and drawing Bok-sun into their own version of the con-trick. There is an intriguing sense of these women having 'got one over' on the audience too, which tests in turn our own sense of cultural competence as interpreters.

The final meaningful costume exchange in the film is the one adopted for the women's ferry crossing to Shanghai. Hideko performs a crossing of another kind, when she dons a pinstripe suit and moustache and carries a fake passport, which identifies her as a Korean man. This is yet

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another moment in Park's film when he actively adapts the queer sartorial politics of Sarah Waters's fiction, but it can also be understood as a further example of the quotidian resilience practised by occupied communities. By dressing in this way, the couple are able to navigate and eventually traverse Japanese border regulations in order to pass to a new geographical space and existence. Objects as well as people are remade and reinterpreted in the course of *Agassi/The Handmaiden*. Hideko's hands have, we learn, been damaged by the metal bells used by her sado-masochistic uncle to beat her into submission. Later, these bells reappear in the story of Jinlian, one of the pornographic books read aloud for the household's paying male audience's gratification. (Once again, Park is not afraid to draw issues of a troubling male gaze to our notice.) There they are the bells of passion that ring in the euphemistic "jade gate" (Park 2017: 1:21:35; 1:22:04). They seem to function as straightforward negative emblems of oppression and objectification in this regard, but by the close of the film these bells are (potentially) reclaimed as a positive signifier of lesbian sexual freedom and encounter, ringing joyfully across the closing credits and sounding the women's conjoined bodies. Elsewhere the use of scissor sexual positions and nudity enables a play on the symmetries as well as asymmetries of the relationship between these two partially doubled women and perhaps, by extension, makes a point about colonial and postcolonial Korean-Japanese politics.

The bells may not, though, be entirely liberated from their earlier associations by this closing sequence, and it would be wrong of us to conclude this analysis without raising once more the vexed issue of Park's identity as a male director associated with a certain voyeuristic form of erotica. The politics of his subjection of female stars to a male gaze in this film received extensive discussion in the British and Korean press (see, e.g., Kim Donggyu 2016; Waters 2017). What is particularly interesting, however, is that the ending of *Agassi/The Handmaiden* is only ever partially liberating. There is no escaping the point that, at the close of the film, the two women are in semi-permanent exile, or at least travelling towards it. We last observe them in a ferry cabin *en route* to Shanghai. Once again, for Asian audiences, there are some very powerful semiotics in action. In the 1930s, the triad of Korea-Japan-China was a powerful political signifier, and we can still see these complex histories of Asian imperialism being played out in contemporary geopolitics. The liminal cabin space, in which

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we witness the joyous coupling of Sook-hee and Hideko, is and can only ever be a temporary ending (see also DJUNA 2016). The women have not yet arrived in China, where the Korean government was itself in exile during the period of Japanese occupation, and this leaves a considerable trace of doubt in the spectator exiting the cinema or closing the laptop screen about the extent to which their movement is to freedom or to alternative modes of occupation. Things remain ambiguous, then, open to interpretation and to subjective fantasies and wish-fulfilment to the very end. The film seems to suggest this in its closing moments when Kouzuki observes that "even listening to the same stories people imagine different things" (Park 2017: 2:30:58). Neo-Victorianism's textual and cinematic manifestations in Asia might also be cast in this form: as people imagining different things from the same stories, making new, repurposed and recombinant materialities from the same raw materials, but for very different audiences and contexts and ultimately for a distinctly Asian geopolitics and aesthetic.

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Clarification: Please note that all Korean names, including the authors', have been presented here in the conventional Korean order of last name, first name.

Notes

1. In their 'Introduction' to *The Politics of Adaptation* (2015), Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas are keen to resist the categorisation of the "secondary text" in any adaptation sequence as being a "polluted or otherwise inferior copy of the primary text" (Hassler-Forest and Nicklas 2015: 1). They talk about the "repurposing of ideas" (Hassler-Forest and Nicklas 2015: 1) and the important influence of globalization, media convergence and ubiquitous computing in the development of participatory culture in which

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adaptation as form and process has found a foothold (see also Nicklas and Voigts 2013).

2. Wilkie Collins is often viewed as a pioneer in this regard, with both *The Woman in White* (1859-60) and *The Moonstone* (1868) bearing traces of what we would today categorise as detective fiction. *The Woman in White* is a key source text for *Fingersmith*, and residual traces of its influence can be seen in Park's film in the figure of Count Fujiwara and his affinities with the characterisation not only of Waters's 'Gentleman' but also Count Fosco in Collins's novel and the shared art tutor ruse to gain access to the female victim's household, as well as in the asylum and mistaken identity plotlines.
3. On the rhizomatic tendency in adaptation studies, see Lanier 2016: 21-40. Imelda Whelehan invokes the concept of pleasure when discussing the potential impact of neo-Victorian fiction on its fan-base, but in a more negative tone: "Neo-Victorian novels engage the reader primarily through the promise of pleasure, and that pleasure derives mainly from a recognition of shadows of past classic novels, half-remembered ideas about Victorian culture, and the contemporary habit of bringing sex and bodily functions into just about everything" (Whelehan 2012: 289). This account could be applied to the adaptive tendencies visible in *Agassi/The Handmaiden* but our analysis will stress the importance of the half-remembered and shadowy as both tactic and source of pleasure.
4. The 1860s was the key decade for sensation fiction, disseminated as it was via circulating libraries and railway bookstalls. According to Lynn Pykett, sensation fiction was a hybrid form, mixing the exotic and the everyday (Pykett 2000: 50-64).
5. On Waters's *oeuvre* and its investment in queering the past, see O'Callaghan 2016.
6. Marieke Bruins suggests that despite widespread negative socio-legal attitudes to lesbian and homosexual relationships in South Korea, the film achieves a greater agency for its female lovers than either Waters's novel or the British television adaptation, which were both tied to 1870s historical contexts (Bruins 2017). Bruins's reading assumes an unambiguous status for the closing moments of Park's film, which our reading challenges. For a counterpoint reading, see DJUNA 2016.
7. A number of Korean films in recent years have been set at this moment in the country's history, suggesting a parallel drive to explore memory and trauma to that previously identified in neo-Victorian literature (see Mitchell 2010).

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8. The screenplay has thus far only been published in Korean (see Park and Chung 2016). The script provided in the main texts here is a direct transcription of the subtitles for the UK/US DVD extended edition release (Park 2017).
9. A statue commemorating these women today pointedly faces the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul, and the issue remains a vexed focus of international diplomacy.
10. Underscoring this sense of 'beauty' as an aspiration of the film, and in effect re-creating the film for posterity as a library artefact, Park has published a lavish 'archive' book containing high-quality resolution stills of the film, including extensive details of the costumes, fabrics and material culture of the *mise-en-scène* (Park 2016).
11. Park is renowned for the extremities of his so-called revenge trilogy: *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Lady Vengeance* (2005). On New Korean Cinema, see Shin and Stringer 2003 and Choi 2010.
12. Sheila Cliffe explores the "cultural psychology" of wrapping in Japanese culture and its intrinsic link to presentations of the self through the traditions of kimono-wearing (Cliffe 2017: loc. 111).
13. Park has spoken of the lacing and unlacing of these shoes as a means of exploring asymmetries of power both personal and political: "Symmetrical structure abounds. It includes the first love scene, the high angle shot, and the body position. It was during the colonialization, Japan and Korea, such class differences, such gaps [existed]; I wanted to incapacitate them. Therefore, [for] the idea of progressing in an equal state, such a motif was the most important. At the end, Hideko kneels down and reties Sook-Hee's shoe lace" (Park qtd. in Anon 2016). The director has been accused of a form of fetishism by Korean critics (see Kim Donggyu 2016), but an equally fetishistic approach to materials is visible in the 2005 BBC television adaptation of *Fingersmith* directed by Aisling Walsh: this is performed by the camera focus on and fascination with corsets and their unlacing, with leather gloves and their proximity to skin, shoes, and that silver thimble and the amazing physical intimacy it enables between the female protagonists – a sequence in the Waters novel that Park has singled out as inspirational (Barnes 2016). Caterina Grasi queries this emphasis on corsetry and bedroom objects as a dubious outcome of the remediation of neo-Victorian fiction to the televisual or cinematic mode, suggesting that while "neo-Victorian fiction is a highly politicised genre, tending to view the Victorian era through the lens of Marxist, feminist, and post-colonial criticism", Waters's work becomes

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diluted when adapted for British television (Grasi 2015: 22). Her point is that screen-based adaptations can render simplistic and explicit what a novel offers as coded critique, though she acknowledges having a relatively small sample to interrogate.

14. This is also a playful self-reference to Park's own filmic *oeuvre*, in particular to *Oldboy*, where an octopus features in one particularly grisly sequence.
15. The image featured as a recurring reference in the US television series *Mad Men* (2007-15), initially hanging in CEO Bert Cooper's office but eventually finding a place in female protagonist Peggy Olsen's office, when she breaks free of various subordinate roles to become an advertising executive in her own right. It served in this context as both symbolic of Japanese imperial depravity – the series made several extended references to the suffering and post-traumatic stress disorder of US prisoners of war at the hands of the Japanese army and to the Pearl Harbour incident and this was explicitly linked to the personal history of one of the main business partners in the creative ad agency, Roger Sterling – and of female liberation in Peggy's story. Hence this Hokusai image is both consistently used to highlight the depravity of Japanese sexuality and by extension culture, and to highlight the otherness of Japan for the west, and yet this resonance is itself based on a partial misreading: the image is ostensibly about women's (or the fantasy) of women's desire, titled as it is 'The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife'. Peggy's reclamation of the image suggests an awareness of this dichotomy on the part of *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner, and we would suggest that a similar knowing polyvalence is at play in Park's invocation.

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