

Research Article

Jean Owen*

Immigration, Incest and Post-Nationality in Krys Lee's "The Believer"

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Abstract: This article explores the idea of a drifting house, a house with no fixed coordinates, a concept that is central to an understanding of immigration. It can also describe what Anaïs Nin referred to as a house of incest, which means that under such a roof, all traditional familial boundaries are mobilised, either being crossed or absent to begin with. This is the situation for Jenny and her father in Krys Lee's short story, "The Believer," from her debut book *Drifting House* (2012). After her mother murders a delivery boy and is incarcerated in a high-security psychiatric facility, Jenny and her father become dislocated from their life as immigrants to the United States. Eventually, daughter and father take a road trip to visit Jenny's mother and then drive on to Las Vegas, where their life as immigrants began and where they will now cross the ultimate boundary. Very few women writers have addressed the emotive theme of incest from the position of a daughter's willingness to participate or even initiate the sexual encounter. Krys Lee twins immigration with incest to draw significant parallels between the two situations. In doing so, she demonstrates how the European and Korean past remains relevant to post-national literature.

Keywords: Krys Lee, incest, daughter, father, heterotopia

In "The Believer," a short story from her debut collection *Drifting House* (2012), Krys Lee implicates the sociopolitical conditions through which an immigrant family operates within America in an act of incest perpetrated by the daughter. While writing the story, however, Lee "didn't think about" how she had juxtaposed two seemingly disparate topics: "The way a plot unfurls is nearly always intuitive for me . . . which is why it can be a dangerous form of revelation" (Owen-Lee).

Krys Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, raised in California and Washington, and studied in the United States and England, where, she comments, "I feel equally at home (and not)" (Owen-Lee). It is not surprising then that Lee identifies herself with the title of her book. She reflects: "I consider myself between cultures, a kind of drifting house that becomes a home wherever I happen to live" (Owen-Lee). Lee is currently a professor of Creative Writing and Literature at Yonsei University in Seoul. She is also, in her words, an "accidental activist" (Laity, "Krys Lee Interview") in helping refugees escape from North Korea. She might consider her efforts to be "part-time," but after single-handedly assisting a refugee to escape from a Christian missionary who had wanted to keep him prisoner in China in order to solicit donations, Lee received death threats. She had believed that "human rights and Christianity were on the same side in the border area, but it's often not the case" (Laity, "Krys Lee Interview"). She draws on this experience and accounts of refugee suffering and survival in her first novel *How I Became a North Korean* (2016). Paul Laity writes, "Lee is keen to convey that behind the Orwellian grotesqueries of the North Korean dictatorship there are 'ordinary' people, with family and community ties, aspirations and memories." The same could be said of the characters in *Drifting House*. In our interview, she commented: "I am always going to be on the side of people who have survived and who have experienced things that most of us are lucky not to have faced" (Owen-Lee). In his brief discussion on the transnational turn in

*Corresponding author: Jean Owen, Independent Writer & Researcher, London, UK, E-mail: ojean27@yahoo.com

Korean Literature, Jongyon Hwang observes that

women writers have taken the lead in producing politically progressive and artistically subversive literary text[s] since . . . the collapse of communism in the late 1980s. Korean women writers, who were brought up experiencing the industrialisation and democratisation that has allowed Korean culture to gradually move away from its patriarchal structure, and who were also under the influence of various kinds of Western feminisms, have tried to speak their truths . . . which resulted in uncomfortable and disconcerting realities of desire and power. (51)

While Lee writes in English, she considers herself and her writing to be post-national since she is “very interested in the space of being a Korean/American writer” or what she calls “the world in-between” (Owen-Lee). *Drifting House* contains both perspectives. Reviewers have praised it as “an unflinching portrayal of the Korean immigrant experience” that “propels Korean literature further into an era of postnational themes” (Blair, “Editor’s Pick: *Drifting House*”). Through nine interconnected stories, Lee confronts extreme familial, social and emotional dislocation through the lives of Koreans negotiating seventy years of turbulent history in their homeland, following the Second World War, and the communities of Korean immigrants grappling with assimilation in the United States. Lee has commented on her enduring interest “in the way countries and citizenships define who we are . . . where we’re allowed to go—or not—is more relevant than ever” (Lang, “Interview with Krys Lee”). In our interview, she states:

my fictional characters are individuals who happen to be South Korean, or North Korean, or American. What I mean by that is, individuals are people who get caught up, shaped, and sometimes trapped by the social system and values they are raised in, but they are first and foremost people who have had legal and cultural boundaries imposed upon them.

In “The Believer” all legal, cultural and geographic boundaries collapse as Lee twins immigration with the difficult terrain of incest to present interesting parallels between the two situations, not least because of the link between a sociopolitical organisation (e.g. the family) and what it prohibits.

If the idea of a drifting house, a house with no fixed coordinates, is central to an understanding of immigration, it is also descriptive of what Anaïs Nin referred to as a “house of incest” in her novella of the same name, which was first published in 1936. What she describes is a situation in which all traditional familial boundaries have been crossed, or are absent, to begin with.

The action of “The Believer” takes place over the course of one year (1985-86) and is a brutal story of migration, violence, insanity, incest and isolation. It begins with Helen Nam’s vicious murder of a Chinese-American delivery boy whom she mistakes for the devil and her subsequent incarceration in a high-security psychiatric facility. Her daughter Jenny, an eighteen-year-old theology student, comes home from the seminary to find fragments of the boy’s body scattered about the kitchen—“an arm in the sink . . . the torso . . . protruding from an industrial-sized waste bin . . . the boy’s pinkish-blue eyelids pinched shut” (148). Jenny recognises him, “a fifth grader in the neighbourhood,” which means he is only ten or eleven years old. She notices her mother crouched in a corner, “looking [...] frightened, bewildered” and “still holding the bloody saw she must have found in the toolbox.” In one appalling moment, what has been home for a decade becomes an uncanny site of violence and trauma, “the creation of her mother’s mad rabble.” Jenny “felt a sudden hate for this woman, who was her mother.” Simultaneously, she loses her faith in God, which until this moment had been profound: “God was everywhere,” now “God was nowhere” (147). Indeed, for Jenny, “G was always for God.” As I shall go on to show, this space of “nowhere”—which is a constant preoccupation for many of Lee’s characters in *Drifting House*—becomes the organising principle in “The Believer.”

Following Helen’s institutionalisation, grief-stricken Jenny and her father Insu Nam move away from Flushing, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Queens, New York—where they have endured “media uproar about ‘the Korean killer’” and “hate mail from the local community” (149)—to Flatbush in Brooklyn, some fifteen miles away from the site of trauma, where Insu reopens a clothing store. A year goes by, passing “like a silent movie . . . a long sleep” (151), during which Jenny and her father are as “distant” from each other as “Flatbush and Seoul” (150)—Jenny drops out of the seminary but does not tell her father. She spends her days drifting around the city and forgetting to eat. For his part, Insu “tries to act normally, jogging every

morning, remembering his customers' birthdays, even the ones that steal from him" (149): "But there are small betrayals: his tidy professorial look gave way to hair like tangled grapevines that Bacchus would have envied; his teeth browned from forgetting to brush." Here, and at other moments in the story, Lee juxtaposes a bricolage of references from European and Korean cultures as a means of positing post-nationality as both strategy and identity. In his yearning for the language and culture he is cut off from, Insu spends his free time watching Korean soap operas and playing screeching music he called *pansori* whose words Jenny cannot understand. In fact, Jenny is not presented as having any recall of her place of origin even though she would have been about eight years old when the family first moved to its adopted country. On the other hand, she does not fit easily into the American way of life—there is no mention of any friendships and the only place she had belonged to before the murder is the church, but even this former place of refuge is denied her (or she denies it to herself). From their respective places of non-belonging (or, perhaps no-longer belonging), Insu highlights the failure of immigration when he tells his daughter that they should never have left Korea: "Everyone back home would be satisfied, in secret. That's the way it is, you know, when you leave the country and fail" (159).

One August morning, Insu instructs his daughter to prepare for a "surprise," a road trip to visit Jenny's mother. But Jenny "did not want to see her mother, changed as she was" (152). The visit proves to be a disaster: "the ward for the criminally insane is as sad as plastic Jesus souvenirs" (152), and staff and inmates seem equally afflicted by the muted atmosphere. Helen is "there but not . . . as if murder had changed her and made it impossible for her to return" (153).

Insu "beg[s]" (155) Jenny to travel on to Las Vegas, which is where their lives as immigrants first began a decade earlier. En route, they stop at a bar, somewhere in Colorado, themed as "a gloomy Victorian drawing room" (156). On one of the walls is a collage of postcards depicting "other places that were always better than here." Jenny reminds her father that she is too young to drink. He answers cynically: "They won't care. This is nowhere" (156). He gets drunk and has an altercation with a Latino who does not appreciate his rendering of the Korean national anthem. Finally, father and daughter spend a night in a seedy motel where the ultimate in boundaries is crossed.

Beyond the psychoanalytical confines of the Oedipus complex, most narratives of vertical incest—that is, incest concerning parents and their offspring—position the father as perpetrator and the daughter as victim. In my doctoral thesis, *Narratives of daughter-father incest: Ovid's Myrrha, Anaïs Nin and Kathryn Harrison* (unpublished, 2013), I theorised what I refer to as daughter-led incest as an adult daughter's sexual interest in her father. This model of incest is adult-centered, meaning that the daughters are of marriageable age, however that is defined historically. In Lee's story, it is the daughter who is the perpetrator of incest, while Insu could be regarded as her victim, except that, in this story, there is more parity than these rather loaded terms suggest, not least because both are drunk when the incest takes place.

The trope of daughter-led incest is often accompanied by violence and exile. In the Graeco-Roman myth of Myrrha and her father Cinyras, for instance, which has been most fully rendered by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, the daughter's incest-act results in pregnancy, exile and the painful transformation of a princess into a tree from which she gives birth to a son she will never be mother to. In another early example, the incestuous fate of migrant Lot and his daughters follows the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the change of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt (see Genesis 19 for a full account of the story of Lot and his daughters). Lee's story has strong affinities with this ancient Hebraic narrative, though she admits that she had not intended "The Believer" to be a modern retelling, "but I'm sure it was there on a subconscious level. Love, sex, giving, are all tied up for me. I grew up in the church [her father was a pastor] and so much of what I thought I left behind continues to creep out through my fiction, which at first shocked me" (Owen-Lee).

It would be difficult not to make such a connection when writing daughter-led incest narratives: I have already mentioned Nin's *House of Incest*, but in an unexpurgated diary titled *Incest* (published posthumously in 1992), in which she records an actual nine-month sexual relationship with her father, Nin notes a visit to the Louvre with poet Antonin Artaud to see Lucas van Leiden's 1533 painting titled "Lot and his daughters." In Harrison's controversial memoir *The Kiss* (1997), the incestuous father is cast as a pastor and the protagonist Kathryn is aligned with Lot's daughters and other martyred female figures, and in her

depiction of the failures of national identity, religion and the crime of slavery, Carolivia Herron weaves the ancient story into the lives of a middle-class, African-American, incestuous family in her 1993 novel *Thereafter Johnnie*.

Famously, in spite of being warned not to, Lot's wife looks back at the destroyed cities and is turned into a pillar of salt for her disobedience. Yet, I would argue, Lot's wife has made an impossible choice that turns nostalgia—a sickness for home—into an indelible feature of the landscape. For some, she is a potent symbol of the migrant position in that she is fixed permanently in a void between the home she has lost and the present time and place.

In her immobile aspect, Helen Nam is a modern version of the pillar of salt as she sits fixed by insanity and the law inside her tiny cell. Yet if Lot's wife is unnamed in Genesis 19, in "The Believer" Jenny's mother is given multiple appellations, which are often determined by location and thus situate her in accordance with how other people see her: in English (i.e. in her adopted country) she is Helen Nam; in Korean, Heeyoung; in the media she is "The Korean Killer" (the focus here is on nationality and not sex, which might have been the case had she been a white American woman); for Jenny she is "Omma"; when Insu talks to her through the bars of her cell, he uses Korean terms of endearment to highlight the tragic intimacy between an estranged husband and wife—she is "Dangshin" [dear] and "my gonju" [princess]; and finally, in the psychiatric facility, she is case number 6479274.

Given the incarceration and the effects of medication, the many-labelled Helen is (e)motionless. Her husband is static too, especially as he sees the world through what he has left behind and what he has lost—the American dream, his former country, his wife, and his own dignity. In short, he is utterly defeated. Thus, it is left to Jenny (she believes so) to move the family forward, but her drastic solution cuts them off further from human society. And so, as A. E. Housman wrote in his untitled poem on Lot and his family (see *More Poems*, poem XXXV 55), Insu and Jenny pursue the road of their own undoing.

Significantly, there are other incest narratives that play out "on the road," most notably Nabokov's novel *Lolita*, Nin's *Incest* and Harrison's aforementioned *The Kiss*.¹ Harrison writes that the daughter-father relationship takes place with "the road always stretching endlessly ahead and behind us, so that we are out of time as well as out of place" (3), an image that is echoed in Lee's story when Insu stares out of the car window "to the stretch of blue desert road" (166), a stretch to a place called "nowhere" (156). They take turns "driving past tract homes as ugly as soggy toast, stretches of strip malls with parking lots big enough for a dozen cemeteries, then empty northern roads. They drove as though they were being chased by the story of their lives" (155). For Jenny and her father, to be on the road is to be displaced, always in motion in an unsettled and hyper-emotional state. The road itself is a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces, yet it connects with other sites—cities, diners and motels. It is a space of transition, otherness, *heterotopic*, as Foucault might suggest (25); what stretches out in front and behind is, in fact, homelessness, which is the migrant's condition. It is also the incestuous position. Jenny states: "What if they had been the all-American family who fit into the order of things? Would her mother become as sick as she had? Immigrants. Not here not there, not this or that. Indeterminate and silenced" (Lee 156). But Insu has also been silent about Helen's mental illness, denying its seriousness even to himself.

In "The Believer," the string of "nowheres" comes to symbolise the void one feels upon losing everything. In the rhetoric of nostalgia, Insu recalls a location of happiness and hope when they first arrived as immigrants in Las Vegas, "a city where a decade ago, they had believed" (164), but which he now recognises as just another nowhere. Even the physical landscape around them, nature itself, is a magnificent "nowhere" they drive through, "a thirsty land fissured with cracks" (164), an apocalyptic vision that reverberates with the vast and empty plains after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lee comments:

Immigration for me, rooted back to my own family's experience and the general community in my father's church, is often a form of the greatest trauma. For almost no one without the language and financial means is equipped for the near-heroic demands that "successful" immigration demands. Immigration, in the case of first-generation Asians in America, and I

¹ *Lolita* is not strictly an incest narrative since Humbert is a self-professed paedophile and stepfather of the eponymous child.

would argue, also in Europe, leads to a silencing of the individual on a daily as well as on the social and political level. This kind of trauma is what [Jenny] is responding to: a desire to give all that has been taken away. (Owen-Lee)

With the family broken up, the daughter and father separated from Helen, home, and community, the car itself becomes a "drifting house," the road an in-between space in which an immigrant father and his daughter come adrift, become—again—migrant, in "a world without hope... nowhere" (167) until they reach the seedy motel that stands in for Lot's cave.

In Dinah Brooke's 1976 novel *Death Games*, Elspeth tracks her indifferent father all over war-torn Vietnam. When he is incapacitated in a hospital following a heart attack, she takes the opportunity to perform fellatio on him. The shock results in his death. In this nasty novel, Elspeth acts out of revenge in a space where the rules of warfare suspend all other rules, including what the narrator of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) calls "the love laws, that determine who we can love, and how" (33). This is the situation for Jenny and her father. In this story, failed immigration leads to the crossing of familial boundaries as daughter and father drift towards a space where the old rules no longer apply. While the story does not directly address the legal system concerning incest—though Insu does comment that he belongs in jail (166)—what Lee seems to recognise is that the outlaw nature of incest requires a daughter and her father to become migrant, drifters on the road precisely because there is no place for such a relationship within society. In his discussion on heterotopias, Foucault reminds us of the ancestral tradition undertaken by brides and grooms known as the honeymoon trip: "The young woman's deflowering could take place 'nowhere' . . . the honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers" (24-25). This is precisely the space in which the (it can be assumed) virginal Jenny and her father find themselves, except that, in breaking the love-laws—their incest-act being illegal—theirs is an appalling parody of the honeymoon trip that further leads to nowhere. In fact, Foucault considers American motel rooms "where a man goes with his car and his mistress and where illicit sex is both absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden" (27) as heterotopic.

When aligned with who one is permitted to marry, adult incestuous sexuality can be regarded as a means of not moving beyond the family, a refusal of exogamy—and perhaps even endogamy which, in this context, might mean Jenny marrying within the Korean community. "The Believer" is a love story on two counts: firstly, between a husband and his incarcerated wife; secondly, between a bereft daughter and her grieving father. Yet Jenny's incest-act has nothing to do with marriage, and perhaps not even the "love laws" in the way described in *The God of Small Things*. Jenny believes in the incest-act as Lot's daughters do, as a means of restoring something in her father: It is "[a desire] to give him back the man who swallowed a fistful of American soil on his arrival to the strange land, to show where he now belonged, to restore the woman he loved to him..." (161).

In the Lot saga, with the wife absent, it is up to the daughters—so they believe—to take her place in their father's bed. Jenny's situation is also a moment of replacement. In my essay "Replacement mothers, bedtricks and daughters out of place," I explore the ways in which daughters become bound up in incestuous ties with their fathers following the absence of their mothers. In the tradition of European incest tales, where the father instigates the incest-act, it is the daughter's resemblance to her absent (often because dead) mother, that is sometimes used as justification for his incestuous demands. In "The Believer" also Jenny's father comments several times on his daughter's resemblance to her mother. On the day of his twentieth wedding anniversary, for example, while "lying in a mountain of her mother's lingerie" (149), he says to Jenny, "You look so much like your mother" (150)—a resemblance he comes to regret after the incest-act. From her prison cell, Helen becomes distraught by the mother-daughter likeness: "How can you wear my face" she accuses Jenny, "You stole my face!" (154). Her words can be read as a mad premonition for when the daughter does appropriate her mother's body because, for Jenny, this resemblance is all she has to offer her father, the "wife" inside her. Lee states that Jenny "symbolically adopts a kind of madness, becomes her mother in a way, in order to show mercy for her father" (Owen-Lee).

The motel room, with its twin beds covered in bedspreads patterned in a "mottled brown Civil War battle," becomes a site of incest. In her drunken state (she has consumed a quarter of a bottle of gin), Jenny conjures her mother into the room. The ceiling is the same colour as her mother's face and other

images resurrect “the way her mother’s ways of seeing had always haunted her” (160). When she closes her eyes, she sees Janus, “two faces looking to the past and the present” and “a strip of rainbow” like “God’s covenant to his chosen people, a gliding Boeing 747, a landscape of miracles” and behind it all, “there was her mother.” As God had been at the beginning of the narrative, her mother is now everywhere.

In the other bed, in an image of active and desperate male sexuality, a drunken Insu masturbates in his sleep while Jenny looks on, feeling “horror” and “shame.” But she also feels something else, a “desire to touch him.” Ambivalence or the oscillation between revulsion and desire is a typical trope in daughter-led incest narratives. In their depictions of the incest-act, for instance—albeit in different ways and to varying degrees—Nin and Harrison show the incestuous oscillations between which their protagonists are pulled. As I suggested above, Jenny’s “desire” does not seem to be motivated by the pursuit of sexual pleasure, which is the situation for Anaïs, for example, or the pursuit of revenge, which is the case with Kathryn (and, in fact, Elspeth in Brooke’s novel). Jenny is more aligned with Lot’s daughters. Indeed, as Lee points out, “it is an act of mercy” (Owen-Lee) or, from Jenny’s point of view, a “desire to give back his stolen happiness” (161). In letting her father “find her mother in the folds of her flesh” (161), Jenny is also offering her body as a homecoming in which Insu can return to his wife through his daughter.

The interchangeability of women within the same family suggests complicity with patriarchy. For Jenny herself, the blurring of identities and of boundaries results in a thwarted rite-of-passage: at the very moment she should be separating from her father, Jenny is drawn ever closer towards him and through him, to her God. If Lee has a close but troubling relationship with religion, a similar ambivalence can be discerned in Jenny. Her Christian beliefs are a legacy from her mother and not her father, who is presented as a non-believer, though he does not demean Jenny for her faith. He notes: “You were a strange child . . . [f]asting, praying. You used to draw little crosses into your rice. Every Sunday you had to go [to church]” (166). Yet Jenny’s obsession stretches beyond the decision to attend a theological seminary (147). Indeed, “The Believer” can be read as a short meditation on Jenny’s ambivalent God, who is a “monster gliding along the sea’s black floor” and “the face of all time.” Jenny imagines a world without God, “a vast and empty future,” which is the plight of Insu, who touches the icon of Ronald McDonald as he enters the fast food restaurant, as religious devotees might touch their favourite saints as they pass into church or other sacred spaces. In more resistant terms, it is also Jenny’s plight, though her belief in Christianity predisposes her towards hope. It also inclines her towards the F/father since, as I have pointed out, her God is male and monotheistic.

Lee positions the incest-act in the interstices of the sacred and the secular. As Jenny touches her father’s penis, “In the conviction of alcohol . . . All the time the prayers that had been lodged in her throat deluged out. She prayed for her youth, her dreams, for her faith to be transferred to him. She prayed for Lot and his incestuous daughters, for their sins” (161). When the martyred daughter straddles her father so that “there was nothing between them but their body’s salt and sin and endless longing,” the God who had left “the orifices of her body” (151) returns in an image that merges an earthly father with a heavenly one. “She finally saw Him. She was so relieved to be back in God’s presence . . .” (162). And, in fact, throughout the story, the image of an ancient disappearing God is juxtaposed with a broken father, though never more so than in the incest scene. Such propinquity renders Lee’s portrayal of daughter-led incest as both physical and spiritual.

When I first wrote the story, it was intended to be a comic story about a runaway bride meeting a father-son duo who can’t get their finances together, and going to Las Vegas to seek their fortunes. As you can see, my stories don’t listen to me. As the story grew and changed, and I came closer to what I felt was true to the story, it became a story about love and mercy . . . But when I first realized that it was becoming a sex scene, I was dismayed because I didn’t want to realize this about myself: that I had once wanted so badly to “save” the people around me, that when it came to Jenny, I could imagine consensual sex between a father and daughter to be a desperate possibility. That love, in all its forms, was an act of trying to reach and help another. (Owen-Lee)

Lee told me that she had received mixed responses to this story: for some, it was their favourite, while others—especially those with children—could not bear to finish it. Such a reception is not uncommon when it comes to daughter-led incest narratives, not least because of what is highlighted about female sexuality

and, more pertinently, about the tabooed subject of a daughter's sexual desire for her father—whatever motivates it and whether or not it is reciprocated. One reviewer of "The Believer" complains of "being told certain things so graphically and with such unbridled candour" that he felt he was "watching art-house porn" (Pak 194). Lee comments, "I can understand wanting to avoid difficult subjects . . . but I tend to be a person who wants to understand those hard experiences. Fiction allows us to see both what we want—and don't" (Owen-Lee).

Writers such as Dinah Brooke and Carolivia Herron have used the metaphor of daughter-led incest to explore ways of confronting or overcoming paternal authority and the wider patriarchy. As I have demonstrated, Lee uses the trope differently in her refusal to position Jenny as though she had no choice—though it must be noted that Jenny's "choice" is compromised by the fact that she and her father are intoxicated (as Lot is when his daughters approach him). Yet, as with other characters in *Drifting House*, Lee explores the complexities of the choice this desperate daughter makes, even if it is a damaging one (though initially it seems to upset Insu more than his daughter). Jenny admits her own culpability; indeed, she is not prepared to blame her father and tries to reassure him: "I wanted it . . . I wanted to be with you . . . I made it happen" (166). She reminds him that the women of the Joseon dynasty married at thirteen, as though their situation and hers is comparable. Interestingly, there is mention of a Joseon wedding chest in the Nam living room. The Joseon dynasty or kingdom was founded near the end of the fourteenth century. As one of the longest ruling monarchies, it continued until the first decade of the twentieth century and was entirely patriarchal. Under such a regime, men determined the age at which a girl married, which is why it is misleading to equate marriageable age with adulthood in any given historical context; rather, it has been (and in some situations still is) generally related to menarche.

In *Drifting House* Lee presents Korea—and the Korean family—as intensely patriarchal and "The Believer" itself draws fully on patriarchal motifs, most notably, as I have pointed out, through Jenny's preoccupation with the God of Christianity. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine how this story could unfold without such a framework, which is to say without drawing upon an ancient patriarchal model, in which daughters are (expected to be) dutiful to the F/father. Jenny believes her mother murders the boy because God is punishing the entire family for some unspecified sin. Unable to stay on the ward where her mother is being held prisoner, Jenny recalls "First Corinthians 13:13. *And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love*" (155). Jenny believes herself to be "incapable of mercy or love" until the night in the motel room. In this context, mercy becomes the ultimate sacrifice—and Insu does refer to his daughter as a "sacrificing fool" (164)—after Jenny enacts what Shakespeare's Cordelia knows no daughter should ever do, which is to "love [her] father, all" (*King Lear*, Act 1, sc i). By extending its ideology beyond the duties usually expected of a daughter, Jenny is being more than compliant with patriarchy if, in Lee's rendering "one associates religion with a kind of patriarchy," though, she continues, this is not the case if "acts of mercy and charity for someone who you consider with great pity and sympathy is a form of being empowered . . . Jenny's act, for me, was always an act of grace—of mercy—of love. It was so clear to me when I wrote the story, but perhaps it's been hard to accept as an idea for some" (Owen-Lee).

At eighteen Jenny is barely out of adolescence, yet she deals more effectively with the carnage her mother has left behind than her father, and she takes responsibility for the incest-act; indeed, in spite of her reproach to Insu to "find [his] own way" (158), she feels accountable for her father more generally. There are times that he treats her like a child, as when he makes "two pigtales with her hair and tickle[s] her cheeks with their bushy ends" (151), or when he tells her, in faux-strict terms, that children should listen to their parents. And though it is implied that she has the same slender body shape as her mother, with her "waifish figure," Jenny appears as something of a gamine—albeit more aligned to Chaplin's orphan-girl in *Modern Times* than Audrey Hepburn. She wears "dresses resembling togas" and keeps her "straight black hair under a sun hat as wide as an extravagant sombrero" (150). A man makes a crude suggestion to her and she gives "him the finger, giving herself a small thrill." And later in the narrative, when they are in the bar, she enjoys shocking her father with her bad language, "to feel him press his hand hard on her mouth until she promised not to speak that way again" (157).

Yet it is precisely because Jenny does not conform to peer pressure (she does not dress fashionably) or paternal pressure (she goes against her father's wishes to become a lawyer or a doctor) that indicates she is

a girl who makes up her own mind. In this sense, the incest-act, as Lee states, is “not a duty. It’s a gift to her father, and it’s in her power to give it. It’s a kind of twisted logic, perhaps the only kind of logic available to the damaged” (Owen-Lee). Sadly, whether duty or mercy, Jenny’s incest-act becomes another failure, and one that wears her down: “Eighteen, and she felt older than time itself” (167). The story ends with the image of an awful trinity: a sexually satiated father, an incestuous daughter and an insane mother far away in her cell.

In “The Believer” Lee creates a family that loses sight of all boundaries. Daughter and father are adrift in a car that represents a heterotopic site of deviance on a road to nowhere, with choices the narrative does not fully answer, except that as an incestuous pair—coupled together as they are by an extreme outlawed act—they become “undone,” and stranded like Helen, or like Lot’s wife.

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