

The Significance of Pak Kyong Ni's Literary Heritage in Korean Literature

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Abstract. *The article provides information about the artistic world of the Korean writer Park Kyong Ni. In the work of Park Kyong Ni, the image of the female psyche and its realization is expressed. Prose works of the artist are analyzed and reactions are expressed. In the works, special emphasis is placed on the characteristics, qualities, and role of a woman in social life.*

Key words: *poetic world, imagery, social life, storytelling, novel writing, artistic style, mentality*

Introduction

Pak Kyong Ni is one of the writers who created in a unique style in Korean literature. The works created by her are significant not only because they cover current issues, but also because they show the place of women in society, life, and family. The artist focuses on the image of a woman in her works, emphasizing her unique characteristics, qualities, and her role in social life. Park Kyong Ni's early stories not only lovingly depict the female character, but also divide them into three types of women. The woman in the first image is interpreted as a character who is impeccable, has excellent qualities, and is searching for herself, her identity, and who has not yet taken over family relations. In the second image, a mother who takes responsibility for the well-being of the family on her shoulders, and in the third image, a passionate woman who strives to build her life on the basis of love. The main goal of presenting the image of a female writer through these three images is to create an impression of

women as individuals who do not forget their identity, whether it is a time of peace or a time of war. This is significant because in the space of society after the Korean Civil War and the Korean Japanese War, it is inevitably recognized as a person fighting for life and survival. As discussed above, the figure of a woman surviving against adversity serves as both the essence and recurring motif across all three depictions. With the help of such an image, the artist opens the way to understanding the inner contradictions of the female image. As a result, in her stories, she presents characters such as La Yeon, Choi So Hee, La Bel, Bong Sun, Vol Song, and Im to the readers.

Pak Kyong Ni entered literature in the middle of the 20th century. In 1955, she created a short story titled *Kom Dong*. She entered the world of literature in 1955 with the story “Gyesan”. In 1962, she gained attention with the novel “The Pharmacist Kim’s Daughters”. In her works, she described the life of widowed women during the Korean War, which was based on her personal experiences. Although author started her work early, she did not start writing prose works at once. By the middle of the 20th century, she started writing prose works. That's why you can find 5 poetry collections in the beginning of her work. She presents her 48 short stories and 10 prose collections to her readers. Today, her works are included in 20 volumes. Since her works are recognized as bright pages of Korean literature, more than 125 research works have been carried out. In order to perpetuate the bright memory of the artist, a research information service named “Pak Kyong Ni” has been formed.

Author’s literary work has served as material for numerous research studies. In the 2010 study by 김진숙 titled “박경리 중기 장편소설의 갈등 구조 연구: “표류도”, “김약국의 딸들”, “시장과 전장” 을 중심으로”, attention is given to the early stages of the author’s literary activity. According to Kim Jin Sook, the writer’s creative journey can be divided into two main stages. The first stage encompasses the period before the novel “Earth” was written, while the second stage covers the period after the creation of “Earth”. The study primarily presents research on works such as “Everything is White, Everything is Black”, “Distrust”, “The Feudal Lord and the Cat”, and “The Age of Darkness”. It is stated that these works played an invaluable role in shaping Park Kyong Ni’s novels, and they can be evaluated as initial experimental

explorations that incorporated innovative elements into her literary development. However, there is a common feature found in these works, which includes the following: *first*, a characteristic shared by all of them is the presence of widowed women who have lost their husbands during the Korean War; *second*, the author shapes her characters based on the realities she personally experienced, which allows these characters to easily embody the creator's inner world; *third*, the events unfolding in society are vividly reflected in her writing. For this reason, the features that emerged in her early works successfully conveyed social realities. It is also worth emphasizing that the writer instills her own personality traits into her characters—essentially presenting herself as a character within her works. This aspect served as a form of rehearsal for the creation of her later novels. A significant portion of her works depicts tragic destinies. The novel “The Daughters of Pharmacist Kim” supports this point. In “The Daughters of Pharmacist Kim”, the tragedy of one individual is equated with the tragedy of an entire Korean family. As a result, the Korean people began to recognize this work as one that represents the fate of the nation. The ideas presented by Kim Yung Kung in her work “『박경리 장편소설에 나타난 인물의 '가치'에 대한 태도와 정체성의 관련 양상: <김 약국의 딸들>, <파시>, <시장과 전장>을 중심으로】” are also of great importance regarding the author's works. In her analysis of novels such as “The Daughters of Pharmacist Kim”, “The Seasonal Fish Market”, and “Market and the Theater of War”, she draws conclusions about the value and dignity of human beings. From her earliest novel up to “Earth”, the author emphasizes the concept of human worth throughout all her works. In Park Kyong Ni's novels, the notion of human dignity is unified around three focal points: the absolutization of human value, indifference toward human value, and the diversification of human value. These values encompass moral, social, and cultural considerations. Based on these principles, the writer develops a critical attitude toward reality. That is why her works consistently feature characters who are in search of their identity and self-worth. In these individuals who are searching for their identity, an identifier emerges. In our view, while expressing the social system in her works, the author's characters serve to reveal the nature of that environment. The desire for truth found in their character traits does not

stand above the system or life itself. Therefore, in many of Park Kyong Ni's novels, we frequently encounter depictions of individuals who become victims.

In Park Kyong Ni's prose, the portrayal of women and their inner world is not limited to the concept of familial happiness. At the center of her attention are the images of the "Sinful Woman" and the "Saint-like Woman." Our view is supported by research conducted by the Korean Society for the Study of Literary Criticism, which highlights that Park Kyong Ni's works have become a relevant topic for many studies due to the way they reveal romantic characteristics. Alongside her perspective on creating female characters, her portrayal and expression of love become a method for understanding women. Through this, one can learn to reflect her thoughts. In the aforementioned research, her novels are identified as following a melodramatic formula. This is because in her stories, concepts like love within the family, happiness, or wedding relationships do not typically lead to happy endings. Based on this, the research concludes that in Park Kyong Ni's prose, women do not seek forgiveness after experiencing romantic failure, nor are they entirely consumed by regret. For this reason, romanticism is not placed at the forefront of female psychology in her works. Instead, she pays special attention to the balance between emotion and reason. This creates a foundation for understanding the notion that a woman's happiness is not necessarily defined by marriage and that love does not belong exclusively to the institution of marriage. The female protagonists in her prose act as a link between family and society. The concept of a standardized role for women within the family is entirely absent in Park Kyong Ni's writing. Rather, the women she creates are portrayed as individuals in search of their place within society. In the author's perspective, the image of the woman in the family as a "housewife" and the image of the woman in society as a "public figure" stand in contrast to each other. She does not view women merely as individuals whose sole function is reproduction. Through the depiction of two contrasting female traits in her works, the writer succeeds in criticizing the double standards society holds toward women. In our view, Park Kyong Ni's prose seeks to explore and define what constitutes a moral and free union in the context of love. Park Kyong Ni aims to portray society in a comprehensive and multidimensional

way in her writings. This perspective is especially evident in her novel “The Daughters of Pharmacist Kim”.

Park Kyong Ni’s “The Daughters of Pharmacist Kim” is significant for the way it pays special attention to every layer of society. The novel was written in 1962 and has been studied by Korean researcher and professor Bang Min Ho, who focuses on the portrayal of women in Park Kyong Ni’s works. In her analysis, she notes:

“2절에서는 『표류도』(1959)의 광희와 『김약국의 딸들』(1962)의 용란을 중심으로 사랑의 실패를 경험한 여성인물들이 이에 대응하는 양상을 살펴보았다. 『표류도』의 광희는 시인 민우를 사랑하지만 자신의 사랑이 일방향이 될 뿐만 아니라 자신의 육체가 강현희의 대체품임을 깨닫자 스스로 몸을 훼손하며 일탈의 길을 걷는다. 『노을 진 들녘』의 주실을 참고향으로 삼아 분석한 『김약국의 딸들』의 용란은 계급의 차이로 인해 사랑에 실패하지만 스스로 죽음을 택함으로써 자신에게 요구된 희생 양 되기를 거부하는 『성녀와 마녀』의 형숙과 달리, 사랑이 실패하자 발광 하는 히스테리의 방식으로 이에 대응한다. 광희와 용란이 보이는 이러한 모습은 구체적인 양태는 다르지만 사랑의 실패를 맞아 방종과 일탈, 히스테리의 방식으로 이를 거부한다는 점에서 특징적이다.”

As highlighted in this study, the novel brings to life the portraits of two women whose hopes in love are shattered. In both cases, their feminine charm is not fully explored. However, as one reads the novel, it becomes evident that the author vividly portrays the condition of a woman who, due to domestic violence, ultimately takes her own life. This depiction is rendered in full by the writer, providing a powerful insight into the tragic realities faced by women.

Although the novel presents two brothers as the central figures, attention is also given to the role of women through the depiction of their family relationships. As observed

in the passage above, Bonnen does not value women. As a result, the woman in his household is subjected to constant physical abuse. Through this very scene, the author conveys her reflections on the place of women within the family. In this work, Park Kyong Ni masterfully portrays Korean traditions, the conflicts between social classes, and the contrasts between rural and urban cultures. Consequently, her realist style of writing had a significant impact on South Korean literature. Traces of the Korean War are also felt in her other works. Park Kyong Ni explored the psychological effects of war and its impact on family relationships in a profound and meaningful way.

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