

ANALYSIS OF IMMORALITY IN THE NOVELS OF KIM YUJEONG

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Abstract: *This study analyzes the meaning of immorality as it appears in the novels of Kim Yujeong, demonstrating that it functions not as a mere line of deviation or corruption, but as a literary device for critical reflection on humanity and society. Kim Yujeong's works, which realistically depict human desire, hypocrisy, and contradictions amid the oppressive reality of colonial rural society, reinterpret these through the language of laughter and satire. Immorality in his literature is not an absence of morality or a fall, but a protest against social hypocrisy and the suppression of human nature – a symbolic expression of instinctive vitality. Using Spring, Spring (봄봄), Camellia (동백꽃), and Manmuban (만무방) as primary examples, the study examines the narrative structures in which immorality is formed, the dynamics of desire, and the functions of satire and humor, thereby revealing the ethical paradox and socially critical nature of Kim Yujeong's prose.*

Keywords: *Kim Yujeong, immorality, satire, desire, humor, morality, human nature, realism, ethics, colonial society*

Introduction

In the 1930s, Korea's rural regions, under colonial rule, struggled to survive amid devastation. Poverty, ignorance, exploitation, and inequality created a historical reality capable of shaking both human nature and moral order. Under such conditions, Kim Yujeong explored-through satire – the relationship between morality and desire, hypocrisy and vitality.³¹ His characters frequently cross moral boundaries, challenging or mocking social norms. They are often cowardly or greedy, yet within their actions lie self-preservation and the genuine emotions of people forced to endure a suppressed reality. Therefore, "immorality" in Kim Yujeong's prose does not signify a collapse of

³¹ Yun, Chonghui. Rural Society of the Colonial Era and Human Consciousness. Studies in Modern Korean Literature, 2002, p. 28.

ethics but rather a literary mechanism that exposes social hypocrisy and restores human nature³².

1. The Structure of Immorality and Its Social Context

Immorality in Kim Yujeong's work is a product of its era and a survival strategy born from social structure. By truthfully portraying the poverty and inequality of colonial rural Korea, the writer shows how human instincts and desires are repressed in the name of morality.³³ His characters often fail to adhere to normative ethics, but within their "deviation" lies a more authentic human truth. In *Spring, Spring*, the father-in-law exploits Pongpil's labor, delays his marriage, and breaks promises. Outwardly hardworking and "moral," he is in fact driven by greed and hypocrisy. Pongpil, though seemingly simple-minded, embodies the strength of common people – the ability to withstand absurdity through laughter. By juxtaposing these two, Kim Yujeong satirically exposes the hypocrisy hidden behind moral authority and questions the true nature of humanity.³⁴ In *Camellia*, immorality appears not as deviation but as emotional truth. From the perspective of social norms, Chomsuni is rude and "unfeminine," yet her honesty and expressiveness reveal vitality beyond moral boundaries. Although she is seen through the eyes of a male narrator, the reader perceives her subjectivity. Thus, Kim Yujeong critiques the illusion of moral borders, showing human desire that transcends them. In *Manmuban*, immorality manifests most openly: the protagonist is a trickster, yet his deceitful acts are desperate attempts to survive. He lives outside the "moral order" of society, and in this lies his courage to face reality directly. Hence, Kim Yujeong asserts that "immorality" is not moral emptiness but an expression of human adaptability and survival³⁵.

2. The Paradox of Desire and Morality

Immorality in Kim Yujeong's prose arises from the collision between desire and morality. His characters follow desire and, in doing so, overturn the moral order. Yet the author does not condemn desire; rather, he treats it as an essential aspect of human existence and uses it to dismantle the hypocrisy of moral constructs.³⁶ In *Spring, Spring*, the father-in-law cloaks his greed in the "language of morality," exploiting Pongpil while maintaining a veneer of virtue before society. This exposes the duplicity of morality. Pongpil's desire, by contrast, is simple and sincere – he seeks love and happiness through

³² Kim, Yunsik. *A Study of Kim Yujeong*. Seoul: Ilchogak, 1994, p. 87.

³³ Lee, Chonghui. *The Aesthetics of Haehak and Satire*. Seoul: Munhakgwa Jiseongsa, 2010, p. 52.

³⁴ Kim, Byonik. *The Satirical Realism of Kim Yujeong*. *Studies in Modern Literature*, No. 16, 2004, p. 66.

³⁵ Park, Migyeong. *The Conflict of Desire and Ethics in Kim Yujeong's Prose*. *Korean Literary Studies Collection*, Vol. 21, 2012, p. 44.

³⁶ Choi, Eunmi. *Analysis of the Structure of Desire in "Camellia."* *Literature and Interpretation*, No. 33, 2015, p. 91.

marriage. True immorality, therefore, lies not in Pongpil but in the father-in-law, who hides selfishness behind moral appearance. In *Camellia*, the narrator condemns Chomsuni's behavior, yet the text itself turns that judgment into satire: her "audacity" reveals how female desire becomes taboo. By breaking this taboo, Kim Yujeong finds vitality in desire – it is not immoral, but profoundly human. By satirically exposing a society where morality suppresses desire, the author shows how genuine emotions become distorted under the weight of norms. The protagonist of *Manmuban*, a "social outcast," demonstrates an ethical paradox: though he lives outside social rules, his instinct for survival retains traces of conscience and dignity. Thus, emerges an "ethics of immorality," where morality is defined not by society but by individual choice and desire.

3. Immorality and the Aesthetics of Humor

Immorality in Kim Yujeong's prose is most powerful when intertwined with humor and *haehak* (해학). This is not laughter at tragedy, but its transformation—aesthetic resistance to despair. Kim Yujeong criticizes human folly, greed, and cowardice, yet simultaneously draws warmth and vitality from them.³⁷ His use of colloquial language, dialect, and rhythmic phrasing brings speech to life; dialogue naturally generates humor. The rustic exchanges of *Spring*, *Spring* reveal not escapism but resilience – laughter here is not evasion but a means to overcome despair. Humor for Kim Yujeong is not a weapon of condemnation but a language of understanding and empathy. He does not judge characters by moral standards; rather, through their desires and "immoral" actions, he explores the essence of humanity. Laughter becomes an ethical language embracing human weakness, a literary strategy revealing social dysfunction. In pedagogy, this aesthetic holds particular value: readers learn to think critically about the links between desire and morality and to understand how norms shape the inner world. Immorality ceases to be mere "deviation" and becomes a means to recognize human complexity.³⁸

Conclusion

Immorality in Kim Yujeong's prose is an aesthetic device that simultaneously exposes social hypocrisy and reveals human nature. His characters violate norms, yet through their actions emerge authenticity and vitality. By tearing away the "mask of morality," Kim Yujeong affirms the power of instinctive desire and emotion and gestures toward a new ethical possibility. Therefore, immorality in his prose is not a story of "fall," but a form of satirical realism that unmasks moral falsehood and reveals human truth. Through

³⁷ Jeon, Hokhwan. *Haehak and Humanity in the Literature of Kim Yujeong*. Korean Literary Studies, Vol. 18, 2013, p. 117.

³⁸ Choi, Mijong. *The Aesthetics of Laughter in Kim Yujeong's Literature and Its Pedagogical Value*. Studies in Korean Literary Education, 2020, p. 88.

laughter, despair is overcome; through humor, humanity is restored. Kim Yujeong's literature remains a relevant text for understanding human nature and a space for ethical reflection on the boundaries between morality and desire.

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