

STUDY OF SATIRICAL FEATURES IN THE PROSE OF KIM YUJEONG

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Abstract: *This paper examines the satirical features of Kim Yujeong's prose, analyzing his aesthetic system and socially critical consciousness. Set against the backdrop of rural colonial Korea in the 1930s, his works reveal, through the language of laughter and satire, poverty and inequality, and the contradictions between human desire and morality. For Kim Yujeong, satire is not mere humor but an aesthetic of resistance that exposes structural injustice and social hypocrisy. The analysis focuses on *Spring* (봄봄), *Camellia* (동백꽃), and *Manmuban* (만무방), examining the typology of satire, expressive techniques, and the embedded models of humanistic understanding. Furthermore, the pedagogical and contemporary significance of his satirical prose is discussed.*

Keywords: *Kim Yujeong, satire, haehak, humor, social criticism, humanity, immorality, rural realism, colonial era, literary education*

Introduction

The 1930s marked a period of intensified Japanese colonial control and economic decline, which led to the devastation of rural society. In this context, literature functioned not as an object of aesthetic contemplation but as a social instrument exposing the contradictions of reality⁴⁶. Depicting village life of that era, Kim Yujeong uses satire to represent the lives and desires of the lower classes, as well as moral hypocrisy, thereby revealing the contradictions of the time. Laughter in his texts is not simple amusement but a means of criticizing social reality, and satire serves as the language of resistance against institutional injustice⁴⁷. Satire in Kim Yujeong's prose does not mock individual vices but exposes the structural limits of human existence, metaphorically denouncing the absurdity of the world. Previous studies have often classified his works as "local realism" or "village humor," yet at the core of his satire lie ethical issues and ontological

⁴⁶ Yun, Chonghui. *Rural Society and Human Consciousness in the Colonial Era*. Studies in Modern Korean Literature, 2002, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Kim, Yunsik. *A Study of Kim Yujeong*. Seoul: Ilchogak, 1994, p. 75.

reflection. This study analyzes the structure and meanings of satire in Kim Yujeong's prose, clarifying its aesthetic and pedagogical implications.

Satire in Kim Yujeong's works is not mere buffoonery or ethnographic sketching; it is a central aesthetic mechanism that reveals the irrationality of rural society and the contradictions of human nature. Through laughter, his prose illuminates the oppressive structures of reality and demonstrates a narrative strategy that transforms tragedy into the register of haehak. In other words, satire for Kim Yujeong is the "language of social resistance," a mode of survival and an expression of human wisdom⁴⁸. His laughter begins as play but never remains superficial; it serves to uncover social absurdities and operates as an inner defense mechanism that enables people to endure suffering. Through the foolishness, greed, and immoral acts of his characters, Kim Yujeong interweaves structural injustice with human instincts and desires. His satire therefore does not condemn individual characters but functions as an ethical device revealing social contradictions through them. In *Spring, Spring*, the protagonist Bongphil – a poor youth under his father-in-law's control – symbolizes class exploitation. Though he works tirelessly, postponing marriage, he does not fully perceive the absurdity of his situation and responds with laughter; readers, however, recognize in that laughter a satirical exposure. By emphasizing the hero's naïve language and behavior, Kim Yujeong reveals both the structural oppression of the colonial village and human helplessness⁴⁹. Bongphil becomes the object of laughter, yet it is this laughter that exposes social cruelty. In *Camellia*, satire takes on a subtler form: gender conflict and everyday emotional friction undermine patriarchal norms. Chomsuni expresses her emotions freely, sometimes provoking through words and actions, and takes the initiative in her relationship. Although the narrator fails to understand her and grows jealous, the author leads the reader to recognize patriarchal limitations. Thus, the "lovers' quarrel" becomes a satire on male normativity. In *Manmuban*, satirical aesthetics reach their culmination: the protagonist, who lives by deceit, is portrayed not as a fallen figure but as one "struggling to live"⁵⁰. The author does not morally punish him; rather, he perceives vitality in his amorality and presents him as both victim of the social system and satirical subject mocking false morality. Through his speech, "the heartlessness of reality behind moral masks" is revealed, and laughter restores the reader's sense of compassion. Hence, Kim Yujeong's satire is not "village humor" but a narrative mechanism that critiques double

⁴⁸ Lee, Chonghui. *The Aesthetics of Haehak and Satire*. Seoul: Munhakgwa Jiseongsa, 2010, p. 51.

⁴⁹ Kim, Byungik. *Realism and Satire in Kim Yujeong's Works*. *Modern Literary Studies*, No. 15, 2003, p. 83.

⁵⁰ Jeon, Hokhwan. *Morality and Satire in the Prose of Kim Yujeong*. *Korean Literary Studies*, Vol. 19, 2013, p. 92.

morality and institutional contradictions; laughter becomes a form of social critique, transforming the language of tragedy into that of liberation.

Kim Yujeong's satire often centers around "foolish yet humane" characters who fail to overcome social contradictions but embody vitality and dignity. These figures evoke not condemnation but "empathetic laughter"; the author's goal is not to judge but to understand and console. Bongphil, Chomsuni, and the protagonist of Manmuban exist outside "normative morality," following their desires and instinct for survival. Their outward awkwardness coexists with the genuine truth of peasant life. Through their immoral actions, Kim Yujeong exposes social hypocrisy and reveals the power structures concealed by moral pretense. These characters are both the objects and subjects of satire.⁵¹ Rather than attacking the elite directly, Kim Yujeong prefers to reveal structural contradictions through the lives of "ordinary people." He defines "truth in laughter" as a form of critique that replaces violence with haehak. For him, humans are imperfect beings, but within imperfection lies the beauty of humanity – thus his figures are not "victims of laughter" but "redeemed through satire." The target of satire is not the individual but the value system of society itself: through depictions of desire, greed, and ignorance, he demonstrates the decay of social order and captures it in laughter – the most human language of truth.

Satire in Kim Yujeong's prose evolves into the aesthetics of haehak – a force transforming despair into humor and revealing the fundamental positivity of human existence through laughter.⁵² Colloquial speech, dialect, and rhythmic phrasing create a vivid sense of presence. The writer portrays human desires and foolishness without embellishment, finding in them warmth and will to live. The rustic dialogues of Spring, Spring, the witty exchanges of Camellia, and the trickster banter of Manmuban all serve as instruments of haehak that envelop tragic reality. Laughter becomes not escape but wisdom of survival and a sign of solidarity in shared suffering. In Kim Yujeong's works, laughter is an "ethic of humor": not a tool of humiliation but an attitude of understanding and acceptance of human weakness. It is communal and therapeutic, preserving human dignity. Thus, his satire not only criticizes social dysfunctions but also nurtures the human within. Furthermore, Kim Yujeong's satirical prose possesses significant pedagogical value. Through his works, students can critically explore the relationship between morality and desire, between the individual and society; by using laughter as a teaching tool, one can dismantle the illusion of absolute morality and comprehend the

⁵¹ Park, Migyeong. Character Typology and the Structure of Satire in Kim Yujeong's Literature. Korean Literary

Collection, Vol. 24, 2014, p. 109.

⁵² Choi, Eunmi. The Aesthetics of Haehak and the Restoration of Humanity. Literature and Interpretation, No. 30, 2015, p. 97.

complexity of human nature.⁵³ Kim Yujeong's literature shows how art can serve as a "mirror of society," combining a warm view of humanity with critical insight. In this sense, haehak is not a stylistic device but a philosophical stance and ethical practice: laughter in his prose is not a mask for pain but a minimal form of dignity that allows one to face pain directly and remain human.

Conclusion

Satire in Kim Yujeong's prose is not a mere literary device but the result of deep reflection on humanity and society. His satire affirms life amid absurdity and serves as an aesthetic of endurance. His characters transcend social norms and appear "immoral," yet through this they reclaim human truth. Therefore, Kim Yujeong's satirical prose surpasses moral instruction and becomes a philosophical inquiry into the boundaries of desire and morality. By revealing the social-critical and anthropological dimensions of his satire, we can see that this literature remains a relevant text for understanding humanity. Future research could compare his satirical poetics with the rural prose of his contemporaries to reevaluate the horizons of colonial realism.

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⁵³ Choi, Mijong. Humor and Pedagogical Value in the Literature of Kim Yujeong. *Studies in Korean Literary Education*, 2020, p. 88.