ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF COMMON HUMAN TRAGEDY IN THE WORKS OF HAN KANG AND NAZAR ESHONQUL

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Annotation: This article provides a comparative analysis of the artistic methods of portraying human tragedy in the works of the Korean writer Han Kang and the Uzbek writer Nazar Eshonqul. Research shows that although the two writers belong to different cultural contexts, they use similar novelistic content based on the principle of “the internal through the external”: Han Kang demonstrates rejection and transformation through the body, revealing the pressure of the patriarchal symbolic order on subjectivity, while Eshonqul manifests the spiritual difficulties of the lonely individual through dream, inner monologue, and symbolic images. The article analyzes psychological depiction methods, the system of symbols, and the dimension of the body in three dimensions, highlighting the contribution of the two writers to expanding the boundaries of psychological realism in modern Asian literature.

Keywords: Han Kang; Nazar Eshonqul; inner world; psychologism; symbol; comparative literary studies.

Introduction

In modern Asian literature, the deep exploration of the human inner world has become an important aesthetic direction. South Korean writer Han Kang (한강) was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2024, and her works were recognized for their artistic achievements in “confronting historical traumas and exposing the fragility of human life”. Uzbek writer Nazar Eshonqul is known as a continuer and renewer of the tradition of psychological depiction in modern Uzbek prose.

The cultural foundations and creative environments of the two writers differ fundamentally: Han Kang creates at the intersection of individual and collective trauma during Korea’s modernization, while Eshonqul was formed in the historical junctures of post-Soviet Central Asia when social values were being reconstructed. However, they demonstrate a remarkable dialogic relationship in the artistic expression of the human inner world. Both reject turning the protagonist into a passive receiver of external phenomena and instead turn the inner world itself into the main battlefield of the narrative.

Han Kang's most striking feature in expressing the inner world is the “embodiment” of psychological states. In “The Vegetarian” (“채식주의자”),

the inner transformation of the protagonist Yeong-hye (영혜) takes external form not directly through psychological depiction, but through a series of bodily actions: refusing to eat meat, not wearing a bra, and ultimately renouncing food altogether.

Yeong-hye’s recurring dreams constitute another important dimension of her inner world. The reason for her refusal to eat meat is not any ideology or moral position, but a “dream”. These dreams turn the experience of violence, the traumatic memory of her father force-feeding her meat, and the imagination of animal slaughter into an unconscious aggressive force that moves her body. It is emphasized that Yeong-hye expresses “escape from convenient, everyday violence”, and this violence manifests in the patriarchal family order in the form of “forced feeding”.

As Korean researchers Lee Hyun-Kwon and Yoon Hye-Ri (2020) noted, the work consists of five external achievements and, in response to them, Yeong-hye’s dreams or monologues. The first achievement: the husband’s verbal violence about “not being quick to prepare food”, which reveals the violence of the husband's patriarchal attitude toward his wife as a "mother-like, servant-like being." In response, Yeong-hye has her first dream: “a warehouse resembling a slaughterhouse with countless pieces of meat hanging, chewing blood-soaked meat, her face reflected in a pool of blood like her own”. In this dream, Yeong-hye’s words– But I was afraid. There was still blood on my clothes. When no one was looking, I hid behind a tree. There was blood on my hands” –show her astonishment at her own violence and aggression, her fear and anxiety, and her sense of guilt. In this dream, “familiar yet unfamiliar... that vivid and strange, dreamlike strange feeling” indicates that in the Freudian psychoanalytic context, Yeong-hye inadvertently perceived the strangeness of the unconscious level of aggression or the death instinct, or the strangeness at the real level.

In terms of narrative form, Han Kang deliberately limits direct access to Yeong-hye’s inner world. The narrative perspectives of the three parts are respectively adopted by the husband, the brother-in-law, and the sister, and Yeong-hye's inner world is always observed “from the outside”. This narrative distance itself serves as a means of expressing the inner world. The different perspectives in the three parts maximally reveal Yeong-hye’s state as a “divided subject” or a “subject in process”.

Eshonqul’s protagonists are described as “living more in the inner life than in external activity”. Unlike Han Kang’s protagonists, who express the inner world through bodily movement, Eshonqul’s protagonists manifest their spiritual world through inner contemplation, dream, and “conversation with oneself”. In “The man led by a monkey” the image of the monkey performs a multifaceted symbolic function. It expresses “man’s dependence on his own

desires and lust”, while the human image appears as “a symbol of spiritual weakness and purposelessness in life”. Research emphasizes that the monkey “deeply reflects the protagonist’s split personality and decline in activity”. The roles of controlling and being controlled become ambiguous, showing the individual’s “inability to control his own destiny”. The image of the old man in the work is an artistic expression of the psychology of a generation that served a certain idea and system all its life, but at the end of life felt the meaninglessness of its belief. The artist's works from different years “form not a connected artistic biography, but a history of consciousness that changed in color and meaning along with the era”. While brightness and firmness predominated in his early works, in later works there is an increase in black color, abstraction of landscapes, and the transformation of fear into image. This color evolution shows that “the idea once considered salvation ultimately led life into darkness”.

Eshonqul’s novel “Giryon” is a vivid example of psychological depiction. Research shows that the novel is “built not on external action, but on the protagonist’s psychological experiences and the dynamics of inner thought.” Inner monologue is used “not only as a means of expressing thoughts, but also as a weapon of artistic dramatism”. In certain passages, “the protagonist’s thought disturbances, fragmented memories, and psychological disintegration are depicted in fragmented form”. This feature is one of the important signs of modernist poetics.

The commonality in the two writers’ artistic expression of the inner world is manifested primarily in the “internalization of the external novel”. Han Kang turns traumatic memory into the repetitive aggression of dream, while Eshonqul turns the crisis of social values into the protagonist’s “conversation” with himself and with existence. Both reject turning psychological depiction into an appendage of plot and make the inner world the central field of meaning-making.

The differences are also significant. Han Kang’s path is “toward the inner world through the body”: the body is both a site of oppression and a means of resistance. Yeong-hye’s refusal to eat, her undressing, and her desire to become a tree express psychological demands entirely through bodily actions. Research interprets Yeong-hye’s identification with the tree as “a complete exit from the patriarchal-symbolic sphere”. Eshonqul’s path is manifesting the inner world through contemplation, “and the protagonists’ bodies are often passive, with the real “action” taking place in the inner space of consciousness. There is also a difference in the treatment of time. Han Kang’s protagonists are besieged by traumatic memory, and dreams are “the deferred return of the unconscious, repressed memory”. Eshonqul’s protagonists, however, expand inner contemplation in the tension between “memory and the present”.

Conclusion

Han Kang and Eshonqul demonstrate two ways of artistically expressing the inner world in modern Asian literature: one uses the body as a battlefield and turns psychological conflict into a perceptible material phenomenon; the other uses contemplation as a method and seeks the meaning of existence in the inner space of consciousness. Their common contribution is that both free the inner world from the framework of “character formation” of the traditional psychological novel and turn it into the central field for examining violence, power, and individual freedom. At a time when modern literature is increasingly focusing on the problems of trauma, memory, and subjectivity, the practice of these two writers provides a rich example for understanding how the “inner world” can become a form of literary resistance.

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