

## A Study on the Tragedy in Kim Sung-han's Short Stories : *Extreme, Return*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is intended to study the tragedy of Kim Sung-han's short stories 'Extreme' and 'Return'. The author describes the postwar chaotic reality as a tragic reality in the novel as the pain of the times people experience. In the novels "Extreme" and "Return," war is violence, and all human beings who participate in it are victims of the violence of war. However, in "Extreme," Tatsuko expresses her will to fight against the tragic reality in "Return."*

*Kim Sung-han never wants them to stay in the tragic world, although the tragic reality of the main characters in his novel ends in a tragic ending. He wants them to fight against the tragic reality.*

**Keywords:** *Tragedy, Ritual Sacrifice, Extreme, Violence, War, Will*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to study the tragedies that appear in Kim Sung-han's short stories *Extreme, Return* in the 1950s. The main emotion that emerges in his novel is tragedy. His novels related to the postwar social situation are divided into two categories: the protagonist gives in to the tragic situation in reality or confronts the tragic reality. It is meaningful to understand the true meaning of the novel that the writer wants to say by examining the tragic situation of the main character in the novel and the process of confronting such reality.

Kim Sung-han was one of the writers who had a strong sense of subject matter about society. He recognized the postwar national reality as a literary barren land and tried to find a new way to create novels in literary attitudes [1]. The authors of this period focused on the meaning of death and human existence, and insisted on restoring humanity to overcome the extreme crisis of reality that threatens human survival. The novel shows intensity with the development of the darkness of postwar reality and corresponding literary spirit, with field literature or reporting literary character, accusatory literary character, didacticism, extreme situation setting, character setting of perpetrator-victim, and satirical tendency [2].

Kim Sung-han tried to create new ethical and social values different from previous generations of writers.

In the situation of the times at that time, it was intended to accuse and criticize absurd reality and negative humans, and to correct and improve them. In order to establish this new literary foundation, various narrative techniques such as satirical techniques, allegorical techniques, and montage techniques were selected as

creative principles.

Looking at the existing discussion on Kim Sung-han's novel, the first is the evaluation of writers included in literary history and literary theory technology. The second is the theory of a particular work. The third is the theory of writers of academic research that reveals the overall characteristics of novels by categorizing various works of Kim Sung-han. The fourth is papers on various narrative techniques [3][4]. In Kim Sung-han's novel, Park Soo-hyun defined the limitations inherently possessed by humans as the term "human limitation," and analyzed the immateriality of human intelligence, the nature of human power-seeking attributes, and the reality of good and evil [5]. Choi Ae-soon analyzed Kim Sung-han's novel according to Camus' absurdity theory. By setting its own standards for "open consciousness," it was analyzed by dividing them into degenerate humans without "open consciousness" who could not face absurdity, helpless people who had "consciousness" but did not rebel, and sincere people who kept their conscience in absurd reality [6].

Kim Sung-han's novel has been depreciated because it failed to present an appropriate alternative to the dark postwar era despite various narrative methods and creative content composition. The researcher attempts to analyze the main character's tragic situation in the tragic reality depicted in the novel and the resulting tragic world perception of the main character to analyze the process of overcoming it. Through this, I would like to contribute to enhancing the value of Kim Sung-han's novel.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The overall sentiment of Kim Sung-han's short story is tragic. Northrop Frye says that tragedy is one of the representative styles in literature, and this stylistic prototype, tragic drama, is also related to a certain social and historical foundation. It was in Athens in the 5th century BC and in Europe in the 17th century, from Shakespeare to Racine, that tragic drama developed indigenous developments. This era belongs to an era in which aristocratic politics still maintained ideological authority even though it was rapidly losing its real power in social history. The social class downfall is the beginning of a tragic worldview. Fry classifies the main character's actions in tragedy into upper imitation style, lower imitation style, and irony style. The tragedy of the upper imitation style is centered on the feelings of fear and compassion, and in daily life, fear and compassion are accepted in the form of pleasure. In the tragedy of the lower imitation style, the feelings of fear and compassion are conveyed as sensational emotions outside the work. Tragedy can be characterized by the word pathos. Sorrow indicates that the main character is isolated due to certain weaknesses, and we ourselves have the same weaknesses as the main character, which is appealing enough to arouse sympathy. Sadness is concentrated on a person's character. It is the fundamental concept of sorrow to exclude individuals at the same level as us from the social group they want to belong to. The study of this isolated spirit forms the center of sad literature. The story centers on the process of human beings similar to ourselves falling due to the confrontation between the inner and outer worlds, the confrontation between the imaginary reality and the reality built by the common will of society. This type of tragic figure is called "alazon," and refers to a person who pretends to be more than real or tries to become a self-deceiving person.

In the irony style, a self-deprecating character named Eiron appears as opposed to Alazon. The word irony refers to a technique that makes oneself look lower than it really is, and in literature, means as much as possible while saying as little as possible. The irony of tragic forms is the depiction of tragic isolation itself. The main character is simply a person who is alienated from society. The central principle of tragic irony is that there should be no causal relationship to the main character. The core of the tragedy is that the main character's catastrophe is properly related to the tragic situation. From the tragic situation of irony, the main character becomes a victim of misfortune and must be responsible for the incident that came to him. Even if there is a reason why the main character is chosen to lead to a catastrophe, it further promotes counterargument because

the reason is not sufficient. This typical victim begins to have a specific appearance within the tragedy as the degree of irony in the family tragedy deepens. This typical victim is called a pharmakos, an acid offering. Pharmakos is neither guilty nor innocent. The inevitability and absurdity combined in tragedy are divided from irony to bipolar. Irony starts with sub-mimic forms of realism and harsh observation. At the same time, he steadily heads toward the myth, and the image of the sacrifice or god is vaguely reproduced in irony [7].

Through the tragic world perception revealed in Kim Sung-han's novel and the main character's appearance against this tragic reality, I would like to reveal the true meaning of the writer through the novel.

### **3. EXPRESSING ONE'S WILLINGNESS TO OVERCOME THE TRAGIC REALITY**

#### **3.1 Intended Sacrifice – *Extreme***

*Extreme* is a work published in *Literature and Art* in May 1956. It depicts the tragic life of the main character, Yamamoto Tatsuko. She and her pastor husband, who worshiped Schweitzer, went to Manchuria to be forgiven for the atrocities committed by their country, Japan, and ran an orphanage in a place called Bongcheon. In "The Prayer of a Faithful Man", his belief took care of orphanage children with love and mission despite his wife's complaints[8]. However, when Japan was defeated, her husband was beaten to death by the children of the orphanage, and Tatsuko runs away in fear.

Tatsuko runs away in fear, leaving her husband who was beaten and killed by children she cared for with love and devotion, and is raped by a Russian soldier on a train descending south on a refugee train. Despite being raped by a Russian soldier, she has lived to this day only with distrust of humans and curses of the world, rather than any shame.

N. Fry says that tragedy is one of the representative styles in literature, and this stylistic prototype, tragedy drama, is also related to a certain social and historical foundation. Fry says in the upper imitation style, tragedy is a mixture of heroic and ironic, and the death of the main character is a social and ethical fact. The collapse of the social class becomes the beginning of a tragic worldview, and in tragedy, the main character's behavior is divided into a higher imitation style, a lower imitation style, and an ironical style. The tragedy of the upper imitation style is centered on the feelings of fear and compassion, and in daily life, fear and compassion are accepted in the form of pleasure [9].

The collapse of Japan leads to the collapse of the Japanese social class, which is the beginning of the tragic worldview of their lives. Despite the dedication of Tatsuko and her husband, the atrocities and destruction of their homeland Japan lead to tragic lives. Tatsuko, who has lived under a curse on the world and distrust of humans after her husband's death, is named as a udon business in Hakkobang in Seoul. He is living a meaningless life without the will or hope to live well. He didn't put meaning on his existence. Pity for her dead husband and fear of humans dominate her entire life. Tatsuko is a character type called Airon, which is the opposite of Alazon, lowering and demeaning himself below reality. In the irony style, a self-deprecating character named Eiron appears as opposed to Alazon. Irony refers to a technique that makes oneself look lower than it really is, and in literature, means as much as possible while saying as little as possible. It is to arrange words to avoid direct statements or the superficial meaning of the statements [10]. Irony writers demean themselves and pretend to be ignorant like Socrates. He pretends he doesn't even know he's using irony. Complete objectivity and suppression of all self-evident moral judgments are important.

Tatsuko has denied her existence, thinking that she is as dead. The life she has lived so far has been a tragic life that has nothing to do with her will. So I think I don't exist. Then something happens to her that makes her realize her existence. When a Chinese man who visits Tatsuko's udon shop late every night does not show his face for 10 days after being scolded by Tatsuko, Tatsuko misses him. She thinks it's strange to miss a Chinese

man even though his ironic words and actions were very unpleasant. Tatsuko denies her existence, but it is true that she exists, and she begins to recognize her existence from the feeling of longing. The fear of humans and the curse on the world she feels grow into compassion for herself and humans. The longing for the Chinese is not a feeling of affection for him, but rather a feeling of pity for his existence.

Tatsuko, who denied her existence, becomes sympathetic to the feelings she feels and recognizes her existence. When Tatsuko met a Chinese man who came after 10 days, his longing went nowhere, and his existence became meaningless floating in the empty field again. The Chinese do not return and lie down in Tatsuko's Hakkobang and eventually attack Tatsuko. Tatsuko leaves her as she was on the refugee train. Put your existence in the air and put it as meaningless with nothing more to lose. However, unlike when he was hit by a train of refugees, Tatsuko feels fiery anger at the appearance of the Chinese at dawn and kills him with an ax. Tatsuko poured out all kinds of curses and anger at the world and distrust of humans he had received. After killing him, she feels the infinite joy of being freed from all accidents. She did not escape from the tragic reality she suffered, but fought against it by killing him. This is her own will that arose when she recognized her existence.

Tatsuko has a weakness that she is a Japanese who invaded the continent, looted and destroyed, and has lived with the life of her husband, who lived with service and devotion, but died dog. Her multiple rapes have rendered her existence meaningless, and her life is bound to be tragic. Tatsuko's tragic life was to explode at once the anger she had been suppressing while she realized and recognized her existence. Her tragic life is not to give in to the tragic reality and lead her life as a meaningless being, but to awaken her willingness to overcome reality as a meaningful being. The death she chose was not a submission to the tragic reality, but a demonstration of her willingness to recognize her existence and confront reality. This is a way of overcoming Kim Sung-han's intended tragic worldview.

### 3.2 Intended Sacrifice – Return

*Return* is a work published in September 1957 in *Literature and Art*. The life of the main character Kim Kyung-seok and his wife Hye-ran is described in a dual structure. Kim Kyung-seok, a university professor, is an acting intellectual who volunteered among intellectuals who avoided military enlistment in the 1950s. Kim Kyung-seok describes the situation of the front where he participated in the war, and his wife Hye-ran shows him moving around for his life (Table 1).

**Table 1. Preparing for the Situation of Kim Kyung-seok and his Wife Hye-ran**

Kim Kyung-seok's wartime situation	the life of Hye-ran
Kyung-seok fell on the ground, covering his ears with his fingers. The choux followed by a bang. My body shrank. He raised his head. Scream rose from the next squad. He blew his nose and spit out the dirt in his mouth.	The managing director smiled. "Miss, no Misses Huang, I need to talk to you quietly, but at 5:30, no, it's Saturday. Will you come to Eden at 12:30?" Hye-ran replied. "Yes."

It shows Kim Kyung-seok's emergency wartime situation and his wife Hye-ran's life. There is no point in safety in a battlefield full of bullets. War is a tragic reality that everyone faces. We don't know who the war that guarantees everyone's life is for. It is war that both allies and enemies die. The 1950 Korean War is the pain and tragic reality of everyone who lived in that era. The situations to be experienced during the war and

the social reality after the war is over make us doubt the existence of humans for whom the war is for. Kim Kyung-seok volunteers for the battlefield that most intellectuals avoid. Regardless of his wife's dissuasion, he did not enlist under any patriotism, heroism, or anti-communism. He criticized the escape of intellectuals from the reality of the time and encouraged intellectuals to participate in the reality (Table 1).

Kim Kyung-seok's wife, Hye-ran, lives alone, selling cigarettes in the rear. Then with the help of my husband's friend, I get a job at a trading company Life is easier than when you do a cigarette business, but Hye-ran's work life is not easy due to the executive director's flirting. As a result, resentment and longing for the husband become even greater.

In the chaotic days of war, poor and helpless Hye-ran is in conflict with the temptation of the executive director for a while, but she firmly refuses and leaves the restaurant. She is determined to live until the day her husband returns, and vows to resolve her resentment amid the hunger and contempt she has experienced. She did not give in to her tragic reality, but decided to fight it. Then, after receiving her husband's letter, Hye-ran dreams of reuniting with her husband and goes to see her husband. Hye-ran's reality is no longer tragic. The hope of meeting her husband has become the strength and courage for Hye-ran to live again. Man is a mere victim in war. Renee Girard calls ritual sacrifice the archetype of all religious and cultural activities. This is an offer to relieve God's anger and expect God's good will by offering sacrifices such as humans and animals that are prevalent all over the world. It replaces all possible victims with a single sacrifice, and performs religious functions up to the function of preventing bad violence with good violence. Propositional sacrifice serves as a cathartic function. It is a way to purify the violence of disaster by showing all violent reactions to victims whose paths of revenge are blocked. Therefore, the victim is not consecrated to an imaginary god, but to great violence [11].

War is a disaster beyond violence. In the face of the violence of war, countless human beings are sacrificed and supported as sacrifices. The sacrifice of mankind due to war is a ritual sacrifice to the interests and desires of the great powers. At the expense of mankind, great powers take numerous interests, and they become stronger powers. The people of weak and weak countries are only victims of cathartic functioning for them. The people of a weak nation are dedicated to violence by a powerful nation.

Kim Kyung-seok is a victim proposed under the violence of war. Every man in the war is a victim. Those who participated in the war with patriotism for their country are victims of the violence of war. The war will only end when they die. Also, they will only escape the battlefield if they die. Who is the war for? Kim Sung-han is asking this. Many of our young people who were sacrificed as a stepping stone to Japan's invasion of the continent, and the warriors who were killed in the Korean War, which took place separately between the South and the North, are criticized for what and for whom. In "Extreme," Tatsuko's husband is a victim of violence caused by Japan's invasion of the continent. Many who are victims of violence are good people. What about the reality that came back to them after the war? They cannot live in reality with their whole bodies and their whole minds. Kim Kyung-seok and Tazuko's husband are victims of the violence of this war. Writer Kim Sung-han calls for recognizing the violence of war through the sacrifices of the characters in the novel. Kim Kyung-seok endured a fatal wound that should have already died in the hope of meeting his wife Hye-ran. But eventually he dies before he meets his wife. Hye-ran takes the train with new courage and hope in the hope of meeting her husband soon. The core of the tragedy is that the main character's catastrophe is properly related to the tragic situation. From the tragic situation of irony, the main character becomes a victim of misfortune.

Eventually, Kim Kyung-seok dies, and Hye-ran cannot meet her husband. The main characters end up in a tragic situation due to a tragic reality. However, they do not hesitate or give in to the tragic reality. They express their willingness to overcome tragic situations in their own way. Kim Kyung-seok volunteers to join the war

with his own beliefs, and Hye-ran armed her life with the hope that she could be together rather than resenting her husband. At least she will pledge her will until she meets her husband, and one can guess that even if her husband dies after that, she will not be the weak she was before.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Kim Sung-han's main emotion in the short story is non-polarity. The author describes the chaotic reality after the war as a tragic reality in the novel due to the pain of the times people experience. However, the chaotic situation after the war does not stop at tragic world perception, but it criticizes such reality and expresses the artist's willingness to overcome it.

In literature, tragedy is related to the foundation of social history, and the death of the main character is a social and ethical fact. The downfall of the social class becomes the beginning of a tragic worldview, and fear and compassion are the main emotions of the main character in the tragedy. The catastrophe in which the main character is hit is the core of the tragedy, and the main character becomes a typical victim of misfortune.

In *Extreme* and *Return*, war is violence and all humans who participate in the war are victims of the violence of war. Until the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War, the Korean people lived in a tragic reality in which the same people pointed guns at each other in a colonial nation that lost their country. This is an indelible wound and the pain of the times for those who lived in those times. We, who have passed that era a little, feel numb when we think about that time. However, our people have been living firmly so far. That's because we have lived so far in the face of tragic reality without hesitation by staying in the tragic reality.

Kim Sung-han describes a tragic reality in a number of novels and ends in a tragic situation. However, in this process, the main character does not hesitate to give in to the tragic reality and shows his willingness to overcome and confront his tragic situation. Tatsuko in *Extreme* and Hye-ran in *Return* are such characters. Kim Sung-han ends the tragic reality that the main characters face in his novel with a tragic ending, but he never wants them to stay in a tragic world. I hope that they will fight against the tragic reality. In addition, the death chosen by the main characters is an expression of true will to confront the tragic world.

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