

Characteristics of Feminine Writing in 1990s Korean Women's Novels: Women's Autobiographical and Confessional Writing¹

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Korean women's literature played a central role in modern Korean literature of the 1990s. A large number of women writers and their noteworthy literary works emerged and prevailed in the field of modern Korean literature during that era. In the meantime, Korean feminist literary criticism addressed a variety of issues and questions regarding the value and limitations of Korean women's writing.

Responding to this topic, this paper initially analyzes the characteristics and importance of feminine writing in Korean women's novels of the 1990s. In examining them, I will seek to explore the potential of feminine writing in the context of feminist literary discourse and women's writing practice. This work focuses mainly on the two types of Korean women's writing: autobiographical and confessional. Furthermore, this work goes on to investigate the broader literary implications and social meanings of women's writing. Lastly, I will point out the limitations of 'feminine' writing in Korean women's novels of the 1990s.

In terms of feminist aesthetics, Korean women's autobiographical and confessional writings have striven to involve a wide range of literary discourses and feminist criticisms. With this persistent process, Korean women's writing becomes capable of acquiring the power and possibility to uncover the rou-

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1. Literary works referred to in this paper include the following: Sin Gyeong-suk's *Oettan bang* (The Lonely Room), *Oraejeon jibeul teonalttae* (Leaving Home a Long Time Ago), and *Gichaneun 7sie teonane* (As the Train Departs at 7 a.m.); Park Wan-seo's *Geu manteon singaneun unga da meogeoseulkka* (Whoever had Eaten so Many Singa) and *Geu sani jeongmal geogi iseoseulkka* (Doubting if the Mountain was Really over There); Eun Hui-gyeong's *Bincho* (Wife with Emptiness); and Jeong Mi-gyeong's *Naui pituseongi yeonin* (My Bloody Darling).

tinized problems in relation to women's oppression and subordination in a male-centered society. Feminist literary poetics, within/through women's differences, should be grounded in/upon diverse women's lived experiences and then seek to explore not only an aesthetic but also a social value of their lived experience/reality and the feminine content. Through it, 'feminine' writing of women's literature will be able to thrive within modern Korean literature.

Keywords: feminine writing, femininity, social reality, women's lived experiences, autobiographical text, confession, self-reflection, women's inner-world.

1. Introduction

Not many people would dispute the 1980s being called the 'Era of Poetry' and from the 1990s to the present the 'Era of Novels' in modern Korean literature. Many Korean women writers have participated in the advent of the 'era of novels' (Kim, Lee, Park, and Sim 1999:139; An 1998:361-63).² The appearance of popular themes such as 'The Rise of Feminist Writers and Writings' and 'The Power and Possibility of Korean Women Novelists in Modern Korean Literature' in the major Korean literary journals and magazines tells us how extensively and intensively Korean women writers and their works have drawn the attention of Korean literary societies, including feminist literary critics and scholars. In the 1990s, Korean women writers began to have their own voices and successfully expressed their lives through literature (Jeong 2001:307). The

2. Since the late 1990s, a number of Korean literary criticisms and feminist discourses with respect to Korean women's literature have been made in terms of its significance and accomplishments in modern Korean literature. Works of Korean feminist literary criticism that I refer to are: Kim Mi-hyun's *Yeoseongmunhageul neomeoseo* (Beyond Korean Feminist Literature); Sim Jin-kyung's *Yeoseongmunhageul garojireuda* (Across Korean Women's Literature); Kim Eun-hwa, Lee Jeong-hui, Park Suk-ja, and Sim Jin-kyung's *90nyeondae yeoseongmunhak nonuie daehan bipanjeok gochal* (A Critique of Feminist Discourses of Korean Women's Literature in the 1990s); and An Nam-yeon's *90nyeondae yeoseongmunhak-yeoseongjakgaui jeongcheseong tangureul jungsimeuro* (A Study on Korean Women's Literature from the 1990s- Focusing on the Discovery of Women's Identity).

theme 'The Expanding and Deepening of Korean Women's Literature' makes more sense of Korean women's literature of the 1990s. In short, diverse and different women's stories were written by Korean women writers during that era. They, in turn, made great and significant literary accomplishments (Kwon 2000:13; Yang 2003:382).

The end of the Cold War and the 'Era of Reason' has resulted in the termination or denial of masculine discourses and narratives within modern literary theories and writing practices (Felski 1989:66-7). Since postmodernism, discourses for minority groups such as women, gays, and lesbians have emerged a great deal as distinctive literary counter-public spheres (Y. Kim 2002:387-89). With this move, Korean feminist novelists became more able to write their own stories centered on the specific interests and experiences of women, which had been concealed by male authors or male-dominated ideologies. Such male-centered ideologies and discourses or history of the world began to be criticized and deconstructed by contemporary French feminist thinkers and scholars (Weil 2006:153). Instead, "marginalized and alienated women and their subjectivities," as Young has clearly noted, have drawn much attention to a poststructuralist literary criticism and feminist scholarship (Young 2005:3; Alcoff 1997:340-41).

In the Marxist perspective in relation to feminism, proletarian thoughts and perceptions toward the world and history do not exclude the bourgeois perspective as such. As a proletarian identity is grounded on the negative totality of reality, women's consciousness of the self and their points of view also presuppose men's. Women's standpoints toward the world are based upon this negative totality as is the proletarians'. This concept is very similar with the notion of 'negative function' of a nature of woman in Julia Kristeva's books (Jones 1981:247-63).

In many cases, the vision of Korean feminist literature also takes a stand for this proletarian negative identity. Feminine writing resists the male-centered history and world view by rejecting "everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing stated of society," (Jones 1981:248; Weil 2006:153-55) and thus does not exclude them. Likewise, Korean feminist novels were derived from the resistance to women's fate under patriarchy, the denial of and contradiction to sexist ideology in modern Korean society. Korean feminist novels have not only revealed the problems of a male supremacist culture and addressed the broader implications of patriarchal systems or men's domination over women in a woman's life, but also more positively dealt with such themes

as gender identity, female subjectivity, and a positive content of the feminine and womanhood in the last few decades (An 1998:362; Yang 2003:382-83).

In fact, Korean women writers became able to represent all of their oppressed lives and hidden bodily experiences and emotions within the field of literature. Furthermore, Korean women writers began to explore feminine writing differently from men: they first focused on women's differences from men (Jeong 2001:308; Kim, Lee, Park, and Sim 1999:140-51). Korean women's literature seems to have provided the possibility of a new literary style in terms of feminist literary poetics through narrating/creating women's lived experiences and figuring out female reality and identity in less constricted and more inventive ways (Kwon 2000:14-5).

In this paper, I will analyze the characteristics and limitations of 'feminine' writing in Korean women's novels of the 1990s. In examining its significance and predicament, I will also address the issues of femininity and, more importantly, the aesthetic possibilities of femininity in terms of feminist poetics.

2. Characteristics and Significance of Feminine Writing in Korean Women's Novels

Korean women's literature of the 1990s has a lot to do with the particularity of the individual female. In texts, many diverse women emerge with distinctively different stories: a woman suffering from the boredom of a routine everyday life, a woman with a failed marriage, a female struggling with finding her self-identity and sexual orientation, and so on. Then, with these women's stories can we identify the characteristics and consequences of feminine writing in Korean women's literature? To put it another way, in what form and with what specific tactics do Korean women writers and novelists reflect and represent women's lived experiences and their different voices from men's? How exactly can they envision different modes and styles of feminine writing? Such questions enable this paper to directly address the characteristics and consequences of feminine writing in Korean women's literature of the 1990s.

In the rest of this section, I will provide an overview of feminist literary criticism in relation to feminine and women's writing in terms of Korean women's literature of the 1990s.

It is believed that the term 'féminine writing' originated from French feminism. In fact, the notion of féminine writing seems to have contained an ambigui-

ity and ambivalence. Hence, it would be impossible to define what *féminine* writing is. In French, *féminine* can be translated as either female or the feminine. Therefore, it can refer to sex or to gender at the same time. We can conceive its meaning as something associated with the female body, her erotic body, and bodily vulnerability. Or, we can understand it as just feminine features such as femininity and motherhood. More importantly, this notion is epistemologically founded upon the affirmation of women's sexual differences from men's and their particularities. After the advent of French feminism, much of the feminist literary criticism focused on the production of the feminine in literature (Weil 2006:154). In this sense, the feminine of writing practice should be understood as "productive, giving life to new possibilities" for imagining and inventing women's lived and real experiences (Weil 2006:168).

The return to the authentic or truly feminine in literary writing, as reflected in French feminist theory and writing practice, is regarded first as a challenge as well as a resistance to the masculine writing tradition and male-centered Western thinking (Weil 2006:164). In her recent book *Yeoseongmunhageul neomeoseo* (Beyond Korean Feminist Literature), Kim Mi-hyun, a prominent Korean feminist literary critic, asserts the difference between feminine writing from men's writing by drawing upon French feminism (M. Kim 2002:8). She takes it as the power and possibility of women's writing, which can reveal a male bias, sexist dichotomy, and ultimately subvert the symbolic system and language: it works to deconstruct the masculinity in modern Korean literature. She emphasizes the very different language and writing practice used by women as a potential means for subverting phallogocentric writing traditions and disrupting the patriarchal discourses (M. Kim 1996:29-31). She designates "feminine language as the 'double language,' the language for 'subversion,' 'dissolution,' 'plurality,' and 'ambiguity'" of the signifying (M. Kim 2002:8-10). "Living marginally to the masculine world, she sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view. For her it is no conglomeration of implements and concepts, but a source of sensations and emotions; her interest in the qualities of things is drawn by the gratuitous and hidden elements in them. Taking an attitude of negation and denial, she is not absorbed in the real: she protests against it, with words," claims Simone De Beauvoir in the revolutionary book *The Second Sex* (De Beauvoir 1989:704).

Women's writing attacks or contradicts, in varying degrees, the masculinist culture and phallogocentric thinking of Korean society, which had distorted or objectified the image of women and reduced the significance and value of

women into their terms. Thus feminine writing can be considered a different mode of resisting against or even moving beyond masculine writing within literature (Jeong 2001:307-8).

Additionally, according to Kim Yong-hui, a feminist literary critic, “the main characteristic of Korean women’s novels is ‘popularity’: femininity in Korean women’s literature is deeply related to the value and limitations of popularity” (Y. Kim 2002:388). She points to “the discovery of the individual or the personal narrative,” “focusing on private and secret stories of family and marriage,” “the pursuit for authentic self and interpersonal relations,” “the fascination with intimacy” as the crucial characteristics and importance of Korean women’s literature (Y. Kim 2002:386).

Generally, Korean women novelists in the 1990s began to involve actively the literary discourses with relation to the private sphere, such as women’s private and secret stories and the sensations and emotions of the female, in their writings in various creative ways. By delineating the routinized everyday life, focusing upon greater details of the domestic and personal life of a woman, and disclosing the inner feelings of each female individual, Korean women’s literature achieved the authority of the counter-public spheres. Such a position for women’s literature is very important because it exposed the routinized problems in modern society and also allows us to take a closer look at the social and cultural bias, deeply grounded in real life. Korean women’s literature, in a sense, is concerned with interruptions and instabilities in the self-identification as a woman. Indeed, Korean women’s literature seeks to articulate the consciousness of self, the inner feelings, and a disruption of self-identity. Kwon Yeong-min argues that “Korean feminist novels seek primarily to represent women’s lives and experiences in their own words, not through men’s eyes” (Kwon 1999:13).

Women’s experiences, their standpoints, and the feminine narratives had been long excluded and marginalized in masculinist writing practice. Women used to think of themselves not as subject, but *other* or object. This widely held concept sums up why Korean feminist writers have been more eager not only to represent their lived experiences, but also to create the feminine in modern Korean literature: women writers seem to have more desire and frantic pursuit to find expression of women’s identity and the self-discovery and the self-invention of women. In many cases, Korean women’s novels are quite synonymous with the forms and texts of autobiographical and confessional writing, which are exemplary models of consciousness-raising, self-discovery of women, expression of women’s interior space, and un/conscious desire. Korean women’s nov-

els of the 1990s seem to have employed, to varying degrees, autobiographical and confessional texts (Kim and Lee 2002:193-5, Kim, Lee, Park, and Sim 1999:155-9).

3-1. Women's Autobiographical Writing: Reflection of the Self and Social Reality

Autobiographical and confessional writings comprise a distinctive subgenre of women's or feminist literature (Felski 1989:89). By definition, autobiography is regarded primarily as a genre of self-disclosure. If any text or writing is classified or characterized as autobiography or autobiographical literature, one element is indispensable. Rita Felski, an American feminist scholar, has clearly noted that "it is the factual resemblance of the identity of author and narrator or protagonist" (Felski 1989:89-90). Autobiographical literature, on one hand, contains a retrospective account of the woman author's life centered on a "unifying vision of self-identity:" "a retrospective narrative written by the author concerning her own existence as a female" (Felski 1989:90). On the other hand, as Leigh Gilmore notes, "autobiographical texts allow us to see the discontinuities in identity of female protagonist and the interrupted, fragmented women's subject" (Gilmore 1994:16-9). She goes further to argue that "autobiography is ontologically, epistemologically, and organizationally founded upon principles of identity" (Gilmore 1994:17).

Since the mid-1990s, many women's autobiographical and confessional texts have emerged in Korean contemporary literature. Accordingly, Korean literary criticism has called for more attention to be paid to them with different perspectives. Women's autobiographical novels have played an important role in the pursuit of self-definition by female authors: they have played out an anxious, often uneasy struggle, to discover a female self. Many Korean literary critics regard autobiographical writing as a primary mode for the discovery of women's existence or female identity. Woman's 'autobiographics' can provide a more general means to reflect on the experience of women and the construction of female subjectivity (Gilmore 1994:7). Indeed, Korean women's autobiographical writing has been founded on the matter of female subjectivity or construction of femininity. In terms of autobiographical literature, female novelists seem to adapt much of their own lived experiences and write of the female existence as the individual in great detail. By positing author as a female protagonist or

“paralleling between the life of the author and the female protagonist,” (Felski 1989:89) female writers ultimately become able to mirror their own lives and the social reality of women more objectively. With this regard, autobiographical novels reflect, to some extent, the social and material configuration of a woman’s reality at the time. To take a point of view of the female protagonist allows new insight into the construction of particular conjunctural moments in relation to femaleness or womanhood, resulting in an endless self-scrutiny, a search for a pure female self. Feminist autobiographical and confessional writing may also accommodate the specific needs arising from their social function in the context of women’s contemporary cultural and political struggles (Felski 1989:115). Furthermore, autobiographical writing can serve to articulate some of the specific problems experienced by women and play an important role in the process of self-identity formation and cultural critique (Felski 1989:112).

As a result, the main parts of Korean women’s novels also appear to conform to autobiographical and confessional writing models. Korean feminist novelists of the 1990s have more actively expressed their desire for seeking women’s identity, self-discovery, and self-invention. Accordingly, feminist novelists’ concerns have resulted in more autobiographical and confessional writing: a strong desire and painful quest for the discovery of women’s identity first emerge in their literary writings.

A popular Korean woman novelist, Sin Gyeong-suk’s female protagonists in *The Lonely Room*, *Leaving Home a Long Time Ago*, and *As the Train Departs at 7 a.m.* tend to withdraw into a purely interior world or the self-conscious world. Hence, they more or less seem to renounce social activities. This is why Sin’s heroines often appear to trace an inward voyage rather than an outward adventure. Actually, their journey seeking for true selfhood becomes possible through writing itself or of themselves. Whereas, the feminist literary work of Park Wan-Seo, another prominent woman writer, can be construed not only as narratives of female individual’s voices and feelings, but as a literary process of reformation and transformation of women’s identity, which is deeply influenced by a complex interplay between a female self and outside society. Park’s novels contribute to the concrete reflection of a protagonist’s social environment: reflection of women’s material reality and lived experiences in greater detail. Nevertheless, in both women’s novels, the theme of femininity and self-identity of the female protagonists can be seen as a constructed result and social effect of specific social conditions at the time; these works reveal and mirror the socially material

foundations of specific periods in modern Korean times.³

In Park's novels *Whoever had Eaten so Many Singa*, and *Doubting if the Mountain was Really over There*, female protagonists survive the Korean War and suffer the tragic aftermath of the war: they experience the ordeal for the survival of life as well as conflict with the outside world after the war. Kwon Yeong-min makes similar points that Park's novels seek to explore and affirm the feminine value in heroines (Kwon 2000:12-3). Namely, the heroine's personality as a woman exercises a power or the possibility to substitute for a given patriarchal family system. The female protagonists internalize and reify feminine ethics: Park's texts reconceptualize the ethical consciousness and the sense of female protagonists in an aesthetic way. The ethical personality as a woman becomes equivalent to the feminine value and positive femininity in Park's texts. The stories in Park's novels begin during Korea's colonial time, but mainly focus on the Korean War. Most female characters are born while Japan rules Korea. They undergo the tragic Korean War and confront the confusing situation of Korean society in the 1960s. The core of Park's novels appears to describe and construct the memory of the female protagonists from a new and different perspective during the Korean War; they seek to break the seal of the memory of female protagonists. In fact, the literary works of Sin and Park take a good deal of autobiographical factors and texts; the female protagonist represents the female authors as such. Korean literary critics have contended the factual resemblance of author and protagonist in both novelists' literary works: their novels contain retrospective narratives centered on the female author's life.

In Sin's *The Lonely Room*, the lived experiences of the female protagonist directly and indirectly reflect the social condition of her time in Korea. It not only historically but also contemporarily mirrors a woman's social reality in Korea with great detail; it points out the important issues and problems such as rapid urbanization, people's migration to the big cities, and industrialization in modern Korea. In *The Lonely Room*, the protagonist works at a factory in a big

3. See Kim and Lee. Primarily, I agree with their analysis and its broader implication of women's autobiographical writing for the self-discovery of women. They seek to explore and determine the ways in which women's autobiographical texts deeply relate to the narrative for self-discovery of a female protagonist. I agree that to some degree women's autobiographical texts entail the narratives for self-discovery of women. In this paper, I take on some of their arguments and the valuable, significant interpretations on Korean women's autobiographical novels (Kim and Lee 1997:209).

city and starts a new life in the urban area; she works as a factory girl like numerous women during modern Korean times. Meanwhile, she also wishes to one day be a writer; she writes a novel in her 'lonely room' after returning from the suffering at work. In her own dream, the protagonist identifies herself with a writer, not an ordinary factory girl. For her, writing about her own experiences and feelings can be construed not only as part of a progressive revelation to the self, but also as a real search for the self-identity of a female individual. By writing, she eventually becomes able to explore or acknowledge her own existence as a female individual (unifying self-identity). *The Lonely Room* simultaneously allows us to see the interruption and discontinuities in self-identity of the female protagonist. At a certain point, she seems to resist her reality as a factory girl and attempts to escape the harsh reality standing against her own desire of becoming a writer. The protagonist struggles to find expression to her own words and invents her own world through writing. Nevertheless, in the end, this novel shows a unifying vision of the female protagonist's self-identity. In *The Lonely Room*, the very act of the protagonist's writing serves to fulfill her own dream; it also works to discover a woman's identity while simultaneously redeeming her subjectivity as a woman. While writing her own novel in her lonely room, she accomplishes a kind of internal growth and at the same time attains a greater self-understanding.

Park Wan-seo's novels emphasize the impact of the Korea War followed by mass migration to urban areas, which change the young and innocent female protagonist's life; whereas Sin Gyeong-suk's novels start during the industrial era of the early 1960s to the late 1970s. In relation to a notion of a communal female identity, female protagonists have aspects representative of women's communal experience. In short, Korean women's authors use their own lived experiences as representative of Korean women of their respective times.

The novels of Sin and Park primarily take a mode of autobiographical writing. More importantly, they contain the narrative of the female protagonists' inner development. Besides, the female protagonists mainly struggle to discover their selves. This is why the autobiographical writing of Sin and Park, in a sense, can be identified with the narratives of self-discovery of the female protagonist. In the words of feminist literary researcher Rita Felski, "the narratives of 'female self-discovery' and 'gender identity as women' are initially associated with the contemporary social and cultural conditions" (Felski 1989:121). Korean women's autobiographical and confessional writings can be read as socio-historical texts of modern Korea.

Many Korean feminist literary critics have contended that those narratives of self-reference and self-representation of female authors contributed to fulfilling their frantic pursuit for self-identity and gender identity in a social and political context (Kim, Lee, Park, and Sim 1999:158-9). For women's writing, the narrative conception of the female self renders the idea of a core self and woman's identity intelligible and recognizable without reducing it to masculine terms, suppressing differences, and without insulating the female self from social relations. Women's autobiographical texts base a core ability to describe and reflect their own lived experience; thus, these texts represent the diverse voices 'of/among' many women and many relations that they have experienced.

3-2. Women's Confessional Writing: Elaboration of the Inner-World and Disclosure of Un/conscious Desire

The literary discourse on women's confession or confessional writing in terms of a literary mode or style generally relates to a detailed description of a woman's inner world or self-consciousness: the majority of Korean women novelists of the 1990s sought to elaborate the inner world of the female protagonist, or a search of the self. Such detailed representations and exaggerated expressions in relation to the inner world of the heroine, revelation of the self-consciousness, her episodic and fragmented desires to others, and her delicate mind have been frequently discussed as the core factor of women's confessional writing in Korean women's literature. Moreover, women's confessions in terms of a feminist literary style or mode have been taken as a deeply contested issue within contemporary Korean literary criticism.

This section looks at Eun Hui-gyeong's *Wife with Emptiness* and Jeong Mi-gyeong's *My Bloody Darling*. Initially, both literary works delineate an obscured un/consciousness of the female protagonist and her reality and experience; each story possesses many confessional factors in terms of a literary form and content. In both works, much of the narrative seems to underlie the female protagonist's psyche: the feminist confessional writing generally serves to shape and construct the female psyche. Here we take confessional writing as a stylistic device and literary characteristic, not as any real element or factual content in relation to the author's real life and personal experiences.

In both works, the female or male protagonist writes a diary or personal note and the other of them comes to read it by chance. Ultimately, their writings make the core of the narrative confessional and personal.

Wife with Emptiness is a story about a middle-class married couple in an urban area. In it, the narrator usually takes the husband's point of view, but when the husband reads his wife's diary, the narrator takes her perspective. It takes a first person perspective: one is the husband's and the other is the wife's perspective. Through the husband's reading of the wife's diary, her desires and thoughts that have been repressed in her inner world became visible and real. In other words, one level of her unconsciousness comes to be revealed. The extent to which writing a diary or secret note within a literary work can be construed not only as a confessional, but also as a basic form to expose an authentic core of self: a search for the female self. While reading the diary, the husband becomes able to trace the inner voice, desires, and consciousness of his wife. Then he comes to acknowledge her existence as a woman. As a result, in women's fiction, 'writing and reading a diary' make it possible to elaborate the inner world of the female protagonist and build up a sense of self.

In actuality, she is just an ordinary married woman who has devoted her life to taking good care of her two children and husband. She lives in a big apartment in an urban city. To some degree, she seems to live a satisfactory and happy life as a wife and mother, and yet her diary contradicts, explicitly, such assumptions and reality. In her diary, she is a single and very attractive woman who enjoys her single life very much. She has a professional, well-paid job, and she even tries to have relationships with many men at once. The woman in the diary is completely different from what and who she is in the real world. Her everyday life does not seem that different from any other married woman of her age. Some passages, in which she exposes her sexual pleasures and desires, need some consideration in relation to containing sensual and bodily experiences in terms of marking her own sexuality. Other passages, in which she depicts the details of daily events as they occur, offer a retrospective account of part or all of the female protagonist's life. And yet the detailed depictions of her daily life and the narrations for self-consciousness of the inner world are more likely to seem fragmented, episodic, and repetitive.

Wife with Emptiness appears to contain a great deal of confessional text of the female protagonist: the female protagonist becomes able to articulate her desire and inner feelings with greater details by writing a diary. In short, confes-

sional writing contributes to revealing and articulating her 'real' existence as a woman, not as a wife and mother.

Another confessional work, Jeong Mi-gyeong's *My Bloody Darling* deals with the embodiment of an intense anxiety and obscurity of the female protagonist Yu-Seon after she finds out that her husband had a lover before his sudden death. In this sense, the title has a paradoxically double meaning: 'bloody' can be interpreted as the tension between hatred and affection of the female protagonist toward her husband. She starts her own journey after she finds and begins reading her husband's diary. In other words, *My Bloody Darling* seeks to detail her anxiety and hatred arising from her husband's adultery; such narrations involve women's confessional writing because they write of her psyche profoundly: self-consciousness, inner emotions and feelings. Yu-Seon describes her husband as follows: "He is my valentine and my heart itself. I always wished to pour my blood into his by cutting each other's wrists with sharp blades" (Jeong 2004:84). However, her 'valentine lover' turns out to be a 'bloody' valentine who has never loved her: in this text, 'bloody' acquires the opposite meaning of cold and cruel. Accordingly, the image of 'bloody valentine' in her perception was entirely broken and taken apart: he was no longer her valentine and she lost her lover in the end.

As her identity and undoubted belief of a loved woman from the 'bloody valentine' is starting to be questioned and disrupted, Yu-Seon tries to separate herself from him. After struggling and suffering, she eventually comes to acknowledge her husband as a 'bloody valentine': Yu-Seon's deep hatred and powerful affection toward her bloody valentine are dynamically described in the vivid expressions of her psyche and through revelations of her unsatisfied desire and longing for her husband.

Both *My Bloody Darling* and *Wife with Emptiness* focus on the disrupted and fragmented psyche of the female protagonists and don't pursue a unifying vision of a woman's identity and coherent female subjectivity. Confessional texts are concerned with the heroine's interruptions and eruptions, that is, the complexity in relationships with the discovery of a gender identity. In addition, confessional texts offer different perspectives on the estrangement of the female protagonist from the social norms of gendered positions and sexuality. In effect, women's confessional writing in which the topics of female self, women's identity, and sexuality are recurrently addressed serve to reflect on women's diverse experiences and show the dynamic un/consciousness of the female self.

4. Limitations and Critique of Feminine Writing in Korean Women's Novels

As Western feminist perspectives on the female self or women's subjectivity have long been salient in feminist philosophy, so have Korean feminist writers and literary critics debated the topic of female selfhood or women's subjectivity. As Diana Meyers, clearly notes, "It is pivotal to question about personhood, identity, the body, and agency" that Korean feminist literature addresses (Meyers 2004:1).

Simone De Beauvoir's assertion that "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute" (De Beauvoir 1989:12) whereas she is only *other* and object to man, tells us why the self, the female subjectivity, is such an important issue in Korean feminist literature and the criticism of Korean women's novels. Moreover, since women have been represented as inferior to the masculine individual, the paradigm of the self in a male dominated society is derived from the experience and perspective of men who have dominated the arts, literature, media, and scholarship. "Responding to this matter, a large variety of feminist philosophers and scholars' theoretical approaches and writing practices regarding the issue of the female self have taken three main tacks," as Diana Meyers briefly notes, "(1) critique of established view of the self, (2) reclamation of women's selfhood, and (3) reconceptualization of the self to incorporate women's experience" (Meyers 2004:1-2). Similarly, women's autobiographical and confessional writing/text have a central role in raising or affirming the sense of female self or self-identity in Korean women's literature of the 1990s. Namely, they first are concerned with such topics as exploring an authentic female self, the discovery of women's identity or femininity, and the assertion of female subjectivity. In short, women's writings seek to, at varying degrees, affirm women's selfhood and embody women's lived experiences.

As Korean feminist novels have mainly dealt with such major themes as gender identity, female subjectivity, and women's different lived experiences in relation to femininity and motherhood, so to have women's autobiographical and confessional writings contained the narratives of the female psyche centered on the inner self and the self-consciousness of the other. More importantly, they base the desire for the discovery of the female protagonist's self-identity (consistent pursuit of self-definition) and her reflection on women's social reality. However, as some Korean literary critics have pointed out, Korean women's

autobiographical and confessional writing practices have posed some problems and limitations with relation to a serious focus on the female protagonist's psyche, more precisely, the heroine's overwhelming fascination with the inner space and its self-image which are in most cases excessively forged (Yang 2003:386). In fact, within Korean women's novels of the 1990s, such an infatuated preoccupation with the inner world could be regarded as resulting in the female protagonist's alienation and divorce from the outside world and collective women's reality. Actually, the heroine's personality and character influence the quality of the content and form of women's novels. Accordingly, such female protagonist's character may well engender self-pity and self-justification by female readers. Some feminist confessional writing ascribes to just reinforcing the ideal or given image of women or femininity in favor of a masculine discourse, which helps public readers accept it complacently: it conforms to a sexist binary system or sexist ideology instead of resisting it (Y. Kim 2002:389-93). Felski also argues against confessional writing's "cathartic self-reproach rather than critical self-analysis" (Felski 1989:107). Consequently, these problems and limitations in women's confessional writing can even extend to the denial or disclosure of the possibility and the positive potential of feminine writing or the feminine in Korean women's literature.

Another problem of Korean women's writing is the limitation of subject matter. Korean women's novels often end up having a melodramatic plot, love affairs, and reproduction of gender stereotypes: that is, conforming to a given category and formative gender roles of male and female, and telling sentimental stories: for example, love affairs of men and women, fantasy for romantic love, happy marriage, broken hearts, relations of heterosexuality, sex and adultery, and cheating and revenge. At another level, the problem with women's novels is said to be 'feeling too much.' In particular, the problem of feeling too much emerges in some examples of women's confessional writing; the emotion and self-image of female protagonists are at all times exaggerated in terms of the context of women's confession. Similarly, there are numerous female protagonists who are inclined to be introspective, self-conscious, and isolated or alienated from others and social interactions: throwing themselves into the world of selves or domestic and private spheres. Such self-isolated, alienated heroines tend to withdraw from any interpersonal relations and even emotional relationships, resulting in diminished social activities. Rather, they have a tendency to immerse themselves in their dream world or live in the past, while reminiscing their lost time and space.

In effect, some Korean feminist writers and women novelists seem unable to be free of those problems against the invention of 'new' feminine writing in modern Korean literature; conversely, a heroine's invariable infatuation with her fantasies of memories, longing for romantic love, and immersion with the past and interior space also could be traced in the works of some Korean women's novels. Such a negative inclination and its prevalence in women's novels can entail a refusal or resistance to the positive content and possibility of feminine writing within Korean literary criticism. The focus on female characters and their interior space, sensibility, inner feelings, self-consciousness is negatively construed as the inferiority of women's novels. Accordingly, Korean literary criticism tends to conceive women's novels or feminine writing only as stories of love affairs or sentimental narratives. Then, it identifies feminine writing as a simple expression of femininity, sensibility, and sentimentality of female authors. Likewise, a negative understanding of Korean women's writing mostly originated from its indifference and divorce from women's collective reality and socio-historical context; it seldom takes into account any of the important social issues regarding collective women. Instead, it mainly employs an individualistic paradigm of the female protagonist. These typical problems and crucial limitations with Korean women's writing hold back the positive recognition of feminine writing in Korean women's literature.

5. Conclusion

Sin Gyeong-suk's *The Lonely Room* has long been celebrated for the creation of feminine writing or the feminine in modern Korean literature. In Korean women's literature, Sin Gyeong-suk invented her own feminine literary style which has already achieved recognition and agreement by the critics for its adequacy of depicting women's stories and experiences aesthetically. Her stylistic innovation eventually offered a new kind of feminine writing to articulate a woman's lived experiences. By delineating women's inner world and sensitive, delicate feelings into an aesthetic form, Sin has succeeded in appealing to the public. In the case of Sin's works, the heroine's refined sensibility and delicate mind permeates the literary style of work. The woman's psyche, which is explicitly manifested in the texts, contributes to achieving the aesthetic features of Sin's novels in terms of feminine writing.

The female protagonist in both Sin's and Park's novels plays an important role as representative of Korean women of their age. Throughout the novels of Sin and Park, women's lived experiences and their perspectives are restored in an inventive and aesthetic way; more importantly, the very 'narrativity' in the works makes women's occluded and marginalized lives and voices intelligible as well as recognizable. Likewise, the memory and image of the female protagonist deeply relates to the material social reality of each woman's time: each of them is indeed influenced by the social situation. Their images not only serve as a way of interrogating social reality, but also present the very effect of their lived experiences as women in Korean society.

In terms of modern Korean literature, women's autobiographical and confessional writings involved a wide range of literary discourses and criticisms with relation to the private sphere and individualism: focusing on private and individual narratives of family and marriage, the emotions and bodily desire of females, namely, sex and sexuality. Women's autobiographical and confessional writings base a core ability to describe and reflect their own lived experiences as women: these texts represent the diverse voices of/among women and the many relations that they have experienced.

Feminine writing in terms of feminist literary practice can never be easily theorized and defined. Nevertheless and more importantly, this notion of feminine writing is founded upon the assertion of a woman's difference from a man and its particularities in literature. Thus, much of the feminine writing is concerned with the production of the feminine in literature. That is, the feminine in writing is regarded as productive, giving life to new possibilities for imagining, and inventing women's experiences (Weil 2006:168). Feminine writing is a process in which female experience and voice is creatively, actively restored, and reaffirmed: simultaneously, it can involve transmuting the rage of women into a source of literary creativity. Feminine writing works to open up an alternative space for female imagining and action. Under this ongoing process, feminine writing can be used as a potential means to create experimental feminist poetics.

Feminist literary poetics should be grounded in and upon diverse women's lived experiences and seek to explore the aesthetic value of their lived experiences/reality and the feminine. With this process, feminine writing of women's literature will be able to thrive in modern Korean literature.

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