

Article

# Traumatized Masculinity in Jung Jiwoo's *Happy End*

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## Introduction

For many years, the Constitutional Court of Korea had maintained the country's adultery law<sup>1</sup> in order to punish married people's infidelity, with Korea being one of a very few non-Muslim countries keeping the law. Adultery law, which has been used as a "scarlet letter" that stigmatized many Koreans since the practice was first outlawed in 1905, and finally abolished on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2015. For 110 years, this law had punished cheating husbands and wives with prison terms, reflecting changes in a culture that now emphasizes the significance of individuals' rights over the government's intervention. The Constitutional Court judges ruled seven to two that the criminalization of adultery by Article 241 of the criminal code which made the act punishable by up to two years in prison was unconstitutional (Lee, February 27, 2015). Interestingly, this was the fifth time in 25 years that a petition to abolish the controversial law was brought before the Constitutional Court. All four previous rulings maintained the law reflecting very conservative Korean culture (Kang, February 27, 2015).

The reason why I mention adultery law before dealing with major issues in this study is that adultery is a key theme in my analysis of my main text, *Happy End* (1999). If though this film was released over 15 years ago, *Happy End* is a very useful filmic text depicting men in danger in Korean society.

There were two different arguments between the judges: privacy vs morality. According to Lee Kyung-mi, the justices also determined the statute excessively restricts basic rights, such as the public's right to sexual self-determination, without achieving the public interest of protecting the system of marriage. The other is for society. Two justices stated that abolishment of the adultery crime could destroy one of our basic pillars of sexual morality resulting in degraded sexual morality throughout society and causing disorder in that morality (Lee, February 27, 2015). Even though there was adultery law to punish his wife, a male protagonist in *Happy End* punishes his cheating wife

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1. According to Lee Kyung-mi (*The Hankyoreh*, February 27, 2015), "an estimated 100,000 people have been criminally punished for adultery since the Korean criminal code was enacted in 1953. A total of 52,982 were prosecuted in the thirty years between 1985 and January, with 35,356 of them subjected to arrest. Of these, the 5,466 (including 22 arrestees) who were prosecuted after the last constitutionality ruling on Oct. 30, 2008, are eligible to request retrial. All ongoing adultery cases in courts are to be withdrawn."

by himself in the name of bad mother, not in the name of bad wife. Indeed, it is very significant aspect to view this film in the perspective of weak husband in the family.

First of all, I will discuss the femme and the homme fatale images in *Happy End* in relation to film noir. The film shows repeatedly a victim and a maltreater, and effectively explores the relevance between masculinity and trauma, the topics of this study. Amongst the patriarchal Korean society, a man experienced trauma due to his loss of economical competence and the extramarital affair of his wife. This trauma even causes the violence of murder. Jung Jiwoo made his debut as a director through *Happy End*, a story where an unemployed husband commits murder of his wife due to her affair. In addition, *Happy End* is a film that successfully expressed the social phenomenon of Korea after the economic crisis in 1997. It is a film where the position of males, who are represented as husbands and fathers in the Korean society amongst the realistic issue of economic crisis, can be identified.

In the second section, I will explore the loss of masculinity by means of the representation of disguised masculine images suffering from trauma. In *Happy End*, I also shall map out shifting gender hierarchies. The husband's role as a conventional male is changed by his unemployment. A lost sense of masculinity causes him to be traumatized so that he unavoidably becomes a typical housewife. In the third part of this study, I will explore the theme of castration anxiety. In *Happy End*, the male protagonist is endlessly threatened with the loss of masculinity. The expression of hysteric and excessive masculinity in this paper eventually applied as a measure to escape from the fear of castration. This trauma of castration eventually originates from weakened masculinity. The husband in *Happy End* represents the image of a castrated male owing to his wife's adultery.

In the fourth section, I will discuss the phenomenon of male aggression against women. In *Happy End*, a male protagonist inflicts severe violence on his wife, and he kills her after he discovers her infidelity. Especially interesting from my point of view is that a passive-aggressive personality transforms into an active-aggressive one. However, he does not display such cruel violence before he suffered from the trauma caused by his wife's betrayal. In this film, by dwelling upon the husband's murder, I will explore femicide which is the killing of women with intent as gendercide. In other words, the brutal femicide has an equivalent of the man's mental illness which is paralyzed and

traumatized. In the final part of the study, I will suggest an alternative analysis of *Happy End*. In this sense, I will argue that the narrative of this film is based on the husband's implementing of his fantasy experiences in relation to romance and mystery novels which he reads with great intensity. I suggest that he reflects the fiction from novels into his reality. In other words, he is writing a fiction which is based on historical or actual events

## Changing Gender Hierarchies

At the end of 1990s, a number of newspapers drew attention to the masculinity crisis in families. When the Korean economy stood at the brink of a recession in 1997, many businesses collapsed. In addition, the nation's unemployment rate went up enormously (up to about 7% in 1999) as I mentioned before. In relation to dismissal in the family, if the head of a family, being the breadwinner, loses his or her job, the family will suffer financial hardship. In general, a husband has a responsibility for the family in Korea. Similarly, a woman does housekeeping chores. As Seung-Kyung Kim and John Finch point out, in *Happy End*, Minki lost his job as a banker, but his wife still runs a small business so that his family does not face any economic trouble unlike other middle class households. At this point, we can see the shift of gender roles in the family, otherwise it is not easy to find this change. In particular, the gender hierarchy in the household is quite in a state of flux among middle class families. In other word, the upper and the lower classes stick to the hierarchy regardless of the social changes, especially the economic crisis.

If men lose a job, they feel social alienation more than women, because most men's identity is formed through their job. Consequently, long-term unemployment leads them to avoid their social contacts. The unemployment can be caused to deconstruct most families with economic hardships and conflicts. Therefore, if men are viewed as economically incompetent, they would experience the alienation in society as well as in the family. Even though the government has announced the economic recovery in 2000, there are still a lot of financial hardships for Korean people. Namely, the Korean government recovered from the crisis, but Korean people continue to face the difficulties.

Meanwhile, *Happy End* covers a very controversial issue of the patriarchal system in the post-modern Korean society. In the modern Korean society, it

was very important for men to have a strong patriarchal power in the family.

In *Happy End*, the situation of Minki who has been deprived of authority as a man and patriarch can be said to represent the wider mass unemployment of men which occurred after the foreign exchange crisis. If the worry about the man who drops his head from a social point of view is embraced into the individual family, it mostly overlaps with the shape of a man who cannot perform his economic role. To have lost economic power means that the person has been ousted from the public sphere and this means that the separation of the symbolic space occupied by man and woman has become obscure. Thus, if the man is a type of person who is only accustomed to his traditional public role and cannot contemplate other possibilities, his existence reaches an extreme point and may crack (Hwang 2004, 558).

For example, he finds the highway pass ticket for Sokcho discovered in the car when he is cleaning. Actually this used ticket is meaningless for us, but it explains the proof of the physical and emotional absence of his wife. It is not weird that the man who drops his head could be considered the man who lost his masculinity. This shot sows his divided identity through the mirror reflecting in the lift after he becomes aware of her adultery. Interestingly, the lift is going up, but his head is looking down in the lift. The shot depicts his desperate mind painfully.

As I mentioned before, *Happy End* describes contemporary Korean society, in particular, focusing on a middle class family suffering from the economic crisis in 1997, gender role changes, and three characters' deviation from long-standing customs and status. When compared with films featuring male adultery, there are only a few films displaying female adultery in Korean cinema. In particular, *Madame Freedom* (1956) and *The Ae-ma Woman* (1982) involved highly controversial issues in relation to housewives' infidelity. For cultural reasons, Confucianism influences Korean society to treat male infidelity generously, while being very harsh towards adultery by women. The films emphasized women in crisis who had an "excessive" sexual desire and dissatisfaction with their spouse. However, the majority of Korean films in the period of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s portrayed not female adultery, but male adultery. *Madame Freedom* pioneers the theme of adultery in the history of Korean cinema. However, in these films, female adultery is always sutured by means of punishing the adulterous spouse and subsequently returning her to the home. The hegemonic power of family completely belonged to the father

or husband, in the result of that the films focus on male audiences not female. Thus, even though *Happy End* follows a similar narrative, it illustrates the deconstruction of patriarchal ideology by the appearance of a traumatic male protagonist, Minki.

It can be considered that Minki had been a conventional man before he would be an invisible cross-dresser who wears male clothes, but his behavior, which has entirely changed, is unusual. When he worked as a banker, he hardly ever did housework. Since losing his job, he starts arranging items for recycling, cooking, cleaning, feeding the baby, and picking up the baby from nursery. Sometimes Korean husbands do these chores but they are more special for Minki who had previously conformed to the norms of patriarchal masculinity. Nevertheless, it has been observed that he does not have any choice to avoid housework because he is a jobseeker. Moreover, his wife forces him to do the work. It is important to emphasize that Minki's gender role consists of a few elements as a housewife through behavior, housework, and his relationship with his neighbor. Meanwhile, he wants to hide the loss of his masculinity. That is why he pretends to be a housewife, by means of doing housework and looking after his baby. In a sense, he does this in order to disguise his true identity. Illustrating the disguise, his changed gender role emphasizes a social taboo in this behavior in the respect of the traditionally patriarchal system in Korea. Even supposing he wears suit outside, he shows his feminine behavior and traits through doing housework.

After losing his job, Minki begins to wear an invisible apron on behalf of his successful wife. Actually we cannot find any scene he is putting on an apron in *Happy End*. Instead, we can see Bora wearing an apron when she decides to stop cheating. However, generally an apron is an outer garment to cover mainly the body. Unlike this, an apron especially for men symbolizes the loss of masculinity in Korean society. We often use an apron to explain the gender hierarchy in the family. Like other Korean men, Minki may not want wear it in front of others including his wife. Even though she complains about his behavior, ironically she considers him as a housewife.

Bora destroys his masculine hegemonic position in the family as she says that she is working. Therefore, she confines him to the status of housewife. Furthermore, he is compelled to degrade his hegemonic structure and obey her order. It can be said that she drives him to such a cruel situation in order to comfort herself by turning her thoughts away from her infidelity.

In this shot, the camera focuses on Minki and a boiling kettle behind him. Bora's face is getting upset because Minki is staying silent. In the beginning of this scene, the boiling kettle is framed behind her. She glances at it. It means that the power in the family moves to Bora. Minki totally lost his status in the family as a father and husband in the respect of patriarchy order. Notably, we can discover that his gender role is changed regardless of his intention.

## Eros and Thanatos

Frank Krutnik's *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, in particular explores film noir as a representation of masculinity in the 1940s in Hollywood. Especially, he examines the representation of masculinity in terms of "tough thriller" focusing on hard-boiled Hollywood films. Krutnik has pointed out the loss of masculine power:

The transgressive adventure tends to be pitted directly against either the family or some other systematised figuration of the patriarchal order, or both. For example, in *Double Indemnity* and *They Won't Believe Me*, the hero specifically transgresses against a closed regime of masculine economic power—an insurance company, headed in each case by a powerful figure of male authority (the deceased "Symbolic Father" Old Man Norton in the former, and Trenton/Tom Powers in the latter). (2006, 137-38)

In *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis Dietrichson represents the femme fatale who conspires against Walter Neff and Mr. Dietrichson. The femme fatale makes Walter murder her husband in order to get money from an insurance company. Finally, Walter realizes she has betrayed him, which leads to him killing her. This is a very classic film noir femme fatale. Like this film, Bora in *Happy End* is killed by her husband due to her betrayal.

In *Happy End*, Minki, Bora, and Ilbeom *per se* are sufferers and abusers. For instance, Minki is fatally wounded due to his wife's adultery. It may, however, be noted that Minki is a murderer who kills his wife. Even though there was an adultery law to punish infidelity legally at that time, he chose an alternative way to react. In addition, he sets a snare for Ilbeom. Indeed, Ilbeom

is both *homme fatale* and victim of the *femme fatale*. Despite the fact that Bora is not a typical film noir's *femme fatale*, she leads the two men into risky circumstances. Also she is punished by her husband like the *femme fatale* in a classic film noir.

In the first half of *Happy End*, the film describes Minki's weak and fragile masculinity threatened by his wife. For example, she treats him as a loser, and when he watches a TV drama, he cries. However, he tries to punish his wife's adultery not depending on the law. William Jankowiak and Angela Ramsey explain the *femme fatale* and the male beauty *fatale* (which is similar to the *homme fatale*). According to them, the *femme fatale* and the *homme fatale* leave someone suffered. In *Happy End*, Bora could be the *femme fatale*, and Ilbeom, the *homme fatale*. Continually a status *fatale* means a woman or a man leads someone to suffer in a narrative.

The *femme fatale* or dangerous woman motif was coded as present if the tale implicitly or explicitly noted that someone suffered in some way due to involvement with a physically attractive female. A male beauty *fatale* was coded as present if suffering resulted from contact with a physically attractive male. The tale was considered to have a status *fatale* motif if it noted that someone suffered as a result of his or her involvement with a person of social distinction. (Jankowiak and Ramsey 2000, 61-62)

Although Bora knows that her precious husband and baby are important, she enjoys a passionate love with a former lover, Ilbeom in order to fill what she is lacking. Sometimes she feels guilty and tries to abandon the relationship; but no matter when she does this, she still seeks to see Ilbeom. Therefore, her physical attraction involves him into her private boundary which means her pseudo family.

Ilbeom is a physically attractive and fascinating "*homme fatale*" "whose enchanting beauty and sexual power lead their partners to tragic ends" (Nagaike 2012, 41). According to Kazumi Nagaike (2012, 42), who explains that "a *homme fatal* is similar to that of the *femme fatale* prototype, which is basically signified in terms of the body rather than by any spiritual characteristics." Ilbeom is Bora's former sweetheart and wants to have her, her baby and all of her possessions. His obsession with her leads him to the brink of ruin. His heart is set on her. Thus his deep attachment to her causes



her to be murdered by her husband. In the film, Bora considers only him as a physical or sexual partner.

Bora is, as often the fate of a femme fatale, killed as a punishment. Meanwhile, Ilbeom transgresses the border separating his private and intimate sphere from Minki's boundary. In other words, it can be argued that Minki's home is invaded by Ilbeom. By the same token, his appearance in Minki's apartment destroys Minki and Bora's intimacy.

Fundamentally Minki's traumatic masculinity is caused by Bora and Ilbeom. Some male protagonists use this excess of masculinity in order to cover their weak masculine hegemony. As a result, his sex role is changed in private or domestic boundary. Then his traumatic and fragmented memories are activated in the process of a posttraumatic period. By the same token, I shall explore castration and femicide in relation to the traumatic theme in *Happy End*. By exploring this assumption, I aim to illustrate an account of trauma theory in terms of the analytic approach to the filmic text focusing on a hysterical excess of masculinity. For instance, the main protagonist in *Happy End*, Minki lets us see his hysterical reaction to trauma through the use of female victimization. In short, my discussion of this subject will deploy the psychoanalytic terms one by one in relation to masculinity and trauma.

## **A Castrated Man Who Is Castrating the Phallic Mother**

Before discussing castration anxiety, it is first necessary to describe its relationship to the phallic mother. The phallic mother is a mother phantasmatically identifying with a phallus, as Diane Jonte-Pace (1992, 12) has pointedly stated, "Lacan constructs a multilayered negation of material presence through the notion of the 'phallic mother,' the phantasmatic image of wholeness through the symbiotic relation with the mother." In *Happy End*, Bora is the femme fatale who is endowed her with the maternal phallus, as Margaret Cohen (1992-1993, 111) further elaborates, "The femme fatale, the phallic mother, and the new woman: we know this trinity from a now-classic body of feminist analysis on classic film noir." Here the phallic mother and the new woman are similar to the femme fatale. By the same token, they are the illegal holder of the phallus like the femme fatale in film noir.

Meanwhile, Minki's economic disempowerment by means of losing a

job makes him remote from institutions around him. In this case, it does not matter that Bora has an intention to isolate him or not.

...masculinity as personal practice cannot be isolated from its institutional context. Most human activity is intuitively bound. Three institutions—the state, the workplace/labor market, and the family—are of particular importance in the contemporary organization of gender. (Connell 1993, 602)

In this account, Minki has lost or has been taken from at least two institutions such as the workplace and the family mentioned above. Indeed, it is not easy for him to keep or get his (new) workplace by himself. It is needless to say that we never see him in the workplace throughout the film. By contrast, there are a number of scenes depicting him in the family. It suffices to say that he is placed at his apartment, a second-hand bookstore, and a supermarket as a private sector. In contrast to Minki, Bora and Ilbeom are positioned at her English language school as a workplace. Additionally, they are often located at Ilbeom's home so they can involve in the absent family.

However, he seeks to protect a fundamental boundary, his family including his daughter, Yeonseo and Bora forever. As is well known, the workplace and the family are important for individuals. By the same token, he has nothing to confirm his presence and realizes his absence in two institutions. In other words, he is being castrated through his isolation from the institutions.

Generally speaking, the phallus is a signifier for man in order to show his genital difference from woman. In *Happy End*, the knife which Minki uses when he murders his wife is a penis-symbol as well as a gun. Minki has castration anxiety that his phallus will be removed, perhaps as punishment for his misbehavior—his loss of job and masculinity. To some extent the theme of *Happy End* might be interpreted as a story about the hegemony of masculinity. For one thing, Minki is seeking his masculine hegemony which he lost for a while in the film. As R. W. Connell (2002, 38-39) has aptly observed, "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." He cannot change his subordinated position without murdering his wife under the

authority of patriarchy. At last, the failure of hegemonic masculine images drives him to be castrated.

At this point, I will explore how *Happy End* might be understood to symbolically investigate male anxieties in relation to Oedipal complex and castration. Minki follows a typical Oedipal trajectory, but he is facing the castration complex from Bora who plays role in a castrating mother figure. It is necessary for me to explain here that Ilbeom and Bora make threats for Minki to be castrated symbolically. In other words, they try to get rid of him in the family. For example, Ilbeom, Bora, and Bora's daughter, Yeon, have a nice holiday in an area near a beach. They look like a real family. In the hotel, Ilbeom shows a pram with a name tag on which is written "Kim Seoyeon." In fact, he has inserted his surname, Kim, in front of Seo Yeon. Seo is her actual surname, given to her by her father, Minki. The concept of Kim Seoyeon being her daughter deepens the obsession toward her.



Picture 1. Two last names, Seo and Kim in *Happy End*

Due to the existence of this baby who is called two names (Seo Yeon and Kim Seoyeon), the audiences rethink and think who the baby's real father is. The baby is not merely a burden to solve the marital relationship, neither a being which lives miserable life being born in a wrong rhythm, but possesses a more powerful symbolism. However, it is not very clear to know the baby's father.

The audiences want to know that Bora is just cheating, not any more. Otherwise, Minki could be such a miserable man, if Yeon is not his daughter.

The audiences may believe Yeon is a witness of their cheating, because she sometimes accompanies Bora when she meets Ilbeom. The scene of the baby staring as if it witnesses the adultery before they talk over the phone and move to a pub gives even the feeling that the attention of the baby and the audience are synchronized. If the baby might remember while growing about the complexly tangled adultery situation, it must be too awful indeed, but such thing will not happen. It is because he is in the state when he starts to learn something and express emotions. The result of the adultery results in the miserable killing and death of the wife, collapse of the family and imprisonment, all tragedies for the family. If Minki does not reveal all these facts, the baby will live a life without knowing the tragedy that these people experienced. While the tragic conclusion of having lost his own mother itself can be negative conclusion too to the baby, since the baby is not a character who experiences the adultery directly or indirectly, he is superficially in possession of the happiest ending among all the characters.

However, Bora and Ilbeom have a good time, probably her daughter too. There is no room for Minki, and his presence is meaningless. Therefore, his absence means that he has been already castrated by Ilbeom and Bora. In addition, when Bora has sexual intercourse with Minki, she has no feeling. Then she thinks about Ilbeom. The shot suddenly cuts to Bora and Ilbeom both naked on the bed at his home. It implies that Minki is castrated due to the loss of masculine power and strength. In other words, it seems that he reveals the loss of phallic power to Bora and Ilbeom.

The change of Minki after he finds out about the adultery of Bora supports the above interpretation. Romantic love, marriage, and family are the sacred things that system provides. Especially, the absolute maternal love toward the baby is the core demand for the wife of Minki. The maternal love becomes the device which calls again the self-respect of the husband who could not but to stay away and watch secretly while assuming the adultery of his wife. The man who has lost the economic power is an ousted being in the social sense. This social ousting leads to sex without manhood, the sexual relationship with no pleasure in the physical sense. However, acknowledging the loss of symbolic and practical manhood as it is nothing but sentence of death. Thus, Minki's attitude to try to ignore the adultery of his wife and pass is his only defense against the loss of authority. The existence of the blood which shares the genetic character of himself and his wife is the only excuse to justify this

type of defense and final battle (Hwang 2004, 560). So Minki tries to forgive her adultery to protect his daughter, even though he lost his dignity as a husband. In other words, he wants to keep the status of the father. Therefore, this film continuously emphasizes on Bora's maternal love. Whenever she loses the love, Minki begins to punish her in the name of the father, not in the name of the husband.

*Happy End* moves from melodrama to thriller as soon as Minki discovers his wife's infidelity. He usually goes to a used book store in order to read love stories. He starts to read thrillers instead of romance novels. In this scene, the bookstore owner says to him, "Are you OK? There are no romantic novels here. As you know, you can find the books over there. You can read only thrillers in this section." Through a few thrillers, he learns to commit a crime to murder his desperate wife. But this scene never zooms in to show the title of thrillers. For the meantime, Bora decides to stop her infidelity and to be a good mother and wife as anticipated. At the same time, Minki discovers her adultery with her ex-boyfriend, Ilbeom. One day, she receives a call from Ilbeom, and she tries to get her child to sleep. But her baby does not sleep very well, so she gives a sleeping drug to her baby. The desperate wife leaves her young daughter alone at home in order to meet Ilbeom near her home. When Minki comes back, he discovers his baby is ill. On the way home from hospital, he miserably observes his wife and Ilbeom's sex at home. After this event, Minki confirms his plan to kill his wife. Finally, her murder is his hysterical defense in order to rebuild his loss of masculinity.

Just before this scene, Minki finds evidence in Ilbeom's home showing Bora is cheating. This two-minute-long take displays the barrier between Bora and Minki. There are many vertical lines to emphasize that their relationship is dividing. In addition, they have no conversation and no eye contact each other. The light of in this room depicts the two protagonist's condition. There are two different moods in the same space in this shot. Bora in a relatively high-key lighting is eating dinner and still enjoying her cheating. But on the other side, Minki sitting on the sofa hides his anger in a low key lighting with dark image.

Even though Bora is still enjoying her infidelity with Ilbeom, she later feels guilty as a mother and wife for her family. This distracted wife tries to finish her relationship with Ilbeom.

Suddenly she realizes she is committing bad actions against her family. Then she starts to do housework and talks to herself, as indicated by the

exchange below. In *Happy End*, Bora wears an apron first time and it means that she wants to stop her cheating. Another long take tries to separate them in one frame, and then the camera zooms in Minki without any cut. Minki says “You...you’re a good mother...for your baby.” It means it is fine for him not to be a good wife any more.

This long take has never shown two people in one frame, just captured them one by one. At the end of this long take finally shows them in a same frame like the picture above. They try to reconcile with each other, but, unexpectedly, Ilbeom calls a stop to their conversation. It means that the ending of this film is rapidly becoming unhappy. At this moment, he gives up Bora as his wife. On the other hand, he just wants Bora to be a good mother for their daughter.

## Female Victimization, Hysterical Reaction to Trauma

*Happy End* starts with a scene depicting an illicit romance between Bora and Ilbeom. In the scene, Bora is walking along the corridor heading to the Ilbeom’s home. Then, a camera movement takes us into his room. In the scene, there are long takes and handheld shots. Indeed, the long take shots represent their vigorous and energetic lovemaking. These continuous shots make audiences involved in this film as witnesses of the love triangle. The fierce intercourse scene between Bora and Ilbeom for the first 5 minutes at the beginning of the film elicits a strong sense of voyeuristic attention in the audience while it could not eradicate the sticky and sensual energy completely regardless of whether a handheld or a long take camera is used. By the same token, images in the scene are perceptibly shakier by means of the use of handheld shots. These tremulous shots mean that their love is dynamic but questionable and unstable. Then, a camera zooms in on Bora’s finger wearing the wedding ring on his body. Even though she has furious sex with him, the camera movement portrays their instability.

The sex between Bora and Ilbeom presented by *Happy End* is a description of passion which is emancipated by exhausting all the energy. For Bora, to pursue sex for pleasure is shown as an expressive behavior of her desire not to be shown in front of her husband who lost dominant masculinity. This surely is related to the changed identity of the man and woman and their

relationship. What has changed is not only the hegemonic issue between man and woman which is formed by way of the medium called sex. She has the conviction that while she enjoys everything that she can enjoy, she does not indulge in it and can get out of it any time she wants. Only if they deal with things properly, they can live their lives without any further trouble. Other people think that the results of such acts are wrong, but they themselves believe that they can end their behaviors as a *happy ending*. That is the most fatal attack of desire and the most fatal shortcoming of the people. In the scene, Ilbeom considers a future for both of them, but Bora wants that the relationship will just be one time only in purpose (Hwang 2004, 554).

It is Ilbeom who makes people realize the illusion that they can get out of the indulgence only if they want. Audiences gradually realize that even though they let go of the counterpart, if that counterpart does not let go of them, they cannot get out of it, but they eventually face a miserable result. It is not that Bora does not strive to abandon such desire. She detects danger several times and tries to get out of it, but she pursues her desire only just for some more time and finally she fails in getting out of it. When she buys a checked shirt at a store and go to meet Ilbeom and sees that he is wearing the same shirt, Bora suddenly realizes that she is in a very dangerous state of desire. Bora begins to know when she hears a warning from Minki. Nevertheless, she cannot get out of her desire and finally makes her husband feel castrated psychologically. Meanwhile, Minki's memories of trauma are potentially located in unconscious memories not still activated. By the same token, his fragmented memories of traumatic events such as his loss of hegemonic masculinity and Bora's extramarital love affair lie beneath his consciousness. However, these memories of traumatic events have already transformed into hysterical symptoms.

I have argued there is a passive-aggressive and active-aggressive man in *Happy End*. Generally speaking, the man who has passive-aggressive behavior shows his aggressive desire in passive ways, and the man who has active-aggressive behavior displays his violence directly. For example, Minki was not an aggressive man when we see the first part of this film. However, he is gradually changing his temper towards being an aggressive man, in detail from a passive-aggressive man to an active-aggressive man because of his wife's behavior towards him. Therefore, a set of these processes explains his traumatized memory by means of femicide.

In that regard *Happy End* neither belongs to the genres of the action, the

film noir, nor the Western, which all show the power of masculinity through male heroes.<sup>2</sup> We are not able to find such strong masculinity in this film because there are only two male protagonists who are defending a wife or an ex-lover. Indeed, Minki, Bora's husband has an unusually weak masculinity. By contrast, Ilbeom, Bora's ex-boyfriend who possesses a masculine image and professional job is always reminding her of love, in spite of her marriage. Even though Minki is not strong enough to show his masculine body or image, finally he tries to overcome his weakness by means of killing his wife. In *Happy End*, we can find Bora who is a successful career woman and becomes involved with her ex-first love, Ilbeom. On the other hand, there is Minki, her husband who looks after an infant child since he lost his job. Nevertheless, this film shows how cruel Minki is by killing his wife in order to punish her infidelity. The violence in this film is more severe than any other action film or western film. Though *Happy End* is not such a masculine genre, it represents effectively the images of aggressive and traumatized masculinity.

It is not easy to see this kind of film in Korean cinema in relation to gender politics. *Happy End* overthrows the typical gender roles dichotomized as male and female. As I said before, traditionally, a man does not attend to household duties in Korea, even if he does not have a job. Bora is a successful executive in her field, but Minki is dismissed for a while. In relation to this, Lynne Segal (1990, 255) points out the gender politics between husband and wife. "Along with their emphasis on the disastrous effects of male unemployment and poverty on family violence, they attribute this to men responding violently to threatened loss of dominance, status and privileges." In *Happy End*, Minki has an inferiority complex from not having job, and this condition leads him to the extreme violence of killing his wife. According to Caroline Bainbridge and Candida Yates, male suffering occasionally leads to a hysterical defense against the weakened masculinity.

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2. The action film and the western film represent usually the stronger masculinity than any other filmic genres, for example, Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) in *First Blood* (1982) and Joe (Clint Eastwood) in *For a Few Dollars More* (1965). Mark Gallagher (2006, 45) writes that "The action film has historically been a 'male' genre, dealing with stories of male heroism, produced by male filmmakers for principally male audiences. The genre's most intriguing development in the 1990s was the incorporation of formal elements associated with the 'female' genre of melodrama." Generally speaking, the action film shows a heroic masculinity, meanwhile, melodrama focuses on female characters.



The proliferation of discourses about male suffering and its representation in film is analogous to a hysterical defence against the losses of masculinity.... However, one can argue that the slippage from trauma to hysteria also has a usefully disturbing effect, as it provides the spectator with a glimpse of something else and the unspeakable losses of masculinity that lie beneath the excesses of the text. (2005, 303-04)

In the respect of gender hegemony in family, there is a very similar film to *Happy End*. In *How To Kill My Wife* (1994), Bongsoo is the owner of a film studio whose wife, Soyoung, works with him. She is very good in her field as producer. Her success causes him to be jealous. In the end, Bongsoo hires a professional killer to kill his wife. But the difference between *Happy End* and *How To Kill My Wife* is that the former is a thriller and the latter is a comedy. Even though *How To Kill My Wife* has a similar narrative, it describes the progress of a man trying to kill his wife using a comic approach. Therefore, from this it might be deduced that we cannot find the man with trauma in this film.

As Jill Radford has discussed, “Femicide has many different forms: for example, racist femicide (when black women are killed by white men); homophobic femicide, or lesbicide (when women are killed by their husbands); femicide committed outside the home by a stranger; serial femicide; and mass femicide” (Radford and Russell 1992, 7). She has categorized different forms of femicide and presented here a comprehensive perspective of femicide, an action committed by men.

Andrea Dworkin (1976, 17) has defined the term of gynocide as “the systematic crippling, raping, and/or killing of women by men...the relentless violence perpetrated by the gender class men on the gender class women.” Also in “The Sexual Politics of Murder” Jane Caputi (1989, 439) follows Dworkin’s definition to explain gynocide. They argued that “honor systems are in integral part of the process of killing woman by their families or intimates, regardless of where the woman lives.” In addition, they have pointed out that “an understanding of such honor systems can help us better explain the occurrence of intimate-perpetrated female homicides and why the incidence of these murders, and the violence that surrounds them, might be resistant to change in the face of increasing social disapproval” (Baker et al. 1999, 164-65).<sup>3</sup> In this

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3. Also see Polk 1997, 141-68.

sense, Minki's murder of his wife looks like a fulfilment of honor systems in modern Korean society under Confucianism.

A wife's adultery and a daughter's premarital sexual activity are the most extreme violations of patriarchal community norms in certain societies, and therefore the ones that merit the most severe penalties sometimes even death. (Nancy et al. 1999, 169)

But it can be argued that Korean society does not allow such an honor system. It is my argument that a traumatized person exposes himself compulsively to situations reminiscent of the traumatic events. As re-remembering traumatic experiences belonging to the past, the memories make him recall his trauma at present. This trauma is generally expressed by patriarchal violence included murdering. Michael P. Johnson has called patriarchal terrorism which focuses on the women's movement and the feminist perspective.

The term *patriarchal terrorism* has the advantage of keeping the focus on the perpetrator and of keeping our attention on the systematic, intentional nature of this form of violence. Of course, the term also forces us to attend routinely to the historical and cultural roots of this form of family violence. (1995, 284)

In the perspective of feminist approach to this film, in particular Minki's murdering his wife, I would suggest that his violence is absolutely patriarchal terrorism. In other words, his patriarchal construction of female victimization inevitably entails and compels Bora's punishment. When he stabs her with a knife on the bed, he allows her to recognize him as if this victimization is an inescapable process against her adultery. Therefore, his patriarchal terrorism is a hysterical reaction to trauma and there is no celebration of her victimization in the film. In addition, he does not try to rebuild his loss of hegemonic masculinity from Bora who is brutally victimized.

In this case, the female victim is Bora. Some films try to kill a male protagonist by their wives. Clearly, most prominent of gendercide is not vermicide but femicide. Put otherwise, there are a number of female victims by means of male violence. In relation to this, in Margo Willson and Martin Daly (1992, 83)'s discussion of "Despite the contemporary scourges of serial killers, rape-murders, and homicides in the course of robbery, most murdered

women are killed by their mates,” one detail turns out to be particular interest, they tries to point out that even though murdering women can be happened in different ways, most femicides are committed by partners.

...the study of aggression and violence is moving away from assumptions of single motivational system—because aggression and violence are not goal but strategy. Instead, it aims to understand the contextual, person-environment interactions or, more specifically, an analysis of why physical aggression, as a strategy, is chosen by this particular person in this particular context to achieve this (or these) particular goal(s). (Gilbert 1994, 355)

In *Happy End*, Minki has already set up an alibi before he is examined. On the surface, his extreme aggression looks like his goal. Most obviously, his murdering his wife is not his goal, but it is process or strategy to obtain and confirm his masculine power. Minki shows his violence towards his wife, Bora, and the other man, Ilbeom.

To some extent the theme of *Happy End* might be interpreted as a story about the hegemony of masculinity. For one thing, Minki is seeking his masculine hegemony which he lost for a while in the film. Minki cannot change his subordinated position without killing his wife under the authority of patriarchy. As Neil Frude has noted, economical power in the family is very important for Minki to have a confidence as a breadwinner. But his loss of earnings made his masculinity.

Unemployment not only brings loss of income and status but also increases the partner's isolation from outside social contract and brings them into close contact for prolonged periods. This can produce chronic irritation, particularly if living conditions are cramped. There may be disputes over who is to “blame” for the lack of employment, and a partner who has lost self-esteem by virtue of his or her unemployment may feel under attack by the other. With few resources available to break up the day, and with little to look forward to, both partners may become bored and irritable, and in such circumstances a husband's anger may be vented on his unfortunate wife. (Frude 1994, 157)

According to Freud (1971, 52), “Hysteria in males gives the appearance of a severe illness; the symptoms it produces are as a rule obstinate; the illness in

men, since it has the greater significance of being an occupational interruption, is of greater practical importance.” In this film, Minki is in no pain after killing his wife. Due to this case, his hysteria appears, and causes him to murder against Bora. As often happens with *Happy End*, Minki is inevitably linked to the traumatic and hysterical memory inevitably.

## Implementing Fantasy Experiences

In this part, I seek to challenge the audiences’ widespread assumption that Bora is murdered by Minki with patriarchal violence. This alternative analysis can change the whole narrative structure. As we have seen, the final scene is very ambiguous making it very difficult to comprehend this film. The director Jung leaves us wondering whether the whole story of this film really happened, in particular, whether the murder took place or not. In my opinion, it is possible that Minki’s product of his imagination or a daydream. There are a few clues for this interpretation in the final scene of the film.

The last scene of the film also finishes with the sight of the baby. Minki has just woken up after taking a nap with his young baby. In details, when the baby and Minki were sleeping together, he wakes up and reveals how uncomfortable his sleep has been, but the baby sleeps alone calmly. There is a milk bottle in the floor. The baby who falls asleep while sucking the milk bottle can be a happy ending. Regarding this, I assume that all narratives happened before waking up could be a daydream, in particular, a nightmare exposed Minki’s uncomfortable sleep. Following the scene, the ending title “Happy End” comes to us, then, the word “Happy” gradually disappears. It seems that this film ends with happy ending. In other words, the director infers vaguely that the story can end happily.

Secondly, a lamp of condolence is flying up from the bottom of apartment to Bora’s balcony. In this shot, we do not know exactly if it is her image, smoking a cigarette in the balcony, is a ghost or not. However, there is a possibility that she is not a ghost. In Korea, when a family member dies, others attach the lamp of condolence in order to let people know of the death. In this case, Bora lets the lamp go in order to let audiences discover that she is not murdered.

There is another possibility to analyse this film with different perspective.

There three scenes depicting Minki at a second-hand bookstore. I presume that Minki is implementing his romance novel throughout the film so we can watch what he reads. He endows Bora with the heroine committing adultery. In other words, it is probably easy for him to empathize with the character in his books. In addition, he is putting his mystery book into practice. Therefore, it is said that her adultery and his murder are a set of implementation agreements reflected his fantasy experiences reconstructed from the novels.

The first scene of second-hand bookstore is followed by the opening scene describing Bora and Ilbeom's frenzied lovemaking. When they are lovemaking on the bed, this scene unexpectedly changes into the bookstore focused on the door written "Books." Then the following shot shows Minki who is crouching and unstably reading a book there. In the scene he is completely captivated in a romance novel, as he does not care whatever the bookshop owner says. Minki says to the bookstore owner that "Well, it's closer to a mystery story than a love story. But a real love story, it's so sad. It breaks your heart. Now that stuff is really good." In a second-hand bookstore, he usually reads romance novels. Especially, he loves to read the sad and painful romance novels. After that, he goes to a park to read the book which he bought. He is so impressed this book enough to make him cry during the reading.

The second scene of second-hand bookstore is next to the scene which illustrates his failure to get a job and his disappointment in a heavy shower in the street. The camera zooms out the bookstore to find him with very cheerful old music. Finally, the camera movement captures Minki who is reading a book enthusiastically. Still, Minki does not realize his wife's infidelity. So it is said that he is reading the romance story. The third scene of second-hand bookstore is followed by the scene in which he knows finally Bora's adultery with her ex-boyfriend. The bookstore owner says to him that "Are you feeling OK? There are no romance novels here. They're over there. That's the mystery section now." In this scene, he is reading a mystery book with great intensity.

On the other hand, some feminists approach to *Happy End* with other perspective. According to Hwang Youngju, the appraisal that this film eventually lies in the male-centered way of thought comes from the dramatic solving method in the conclusion of this film. In other words, this film has the development which can be possible since there is a premise that extramarital affair of a husband is a one-time betrayal that can be forgiven, but extramarital affair of the wife is an infidelity that cannot be forgiven and is an illegal act that

should be punished. However, it should be pointed out that in the assessment of this patriarchy, as one type of an ideal male, violence has been used to solve the extramarital affair. The way of solving incidents using most dramatic violence not even considering other alternatives to solve the extramarital affairs of the wife is interpreted as an example of showing every aspect of our current society which has been gendered although this is a film which pursues dramatic fun (Hwang 2002, 179-200). In an interview, Jung mentioned this film was based on a real story, so he could not avoid the same conclusion inevitably, even though it is not necessary for Minki to kill his wife (Kim 2008, 119).

## Conclusion

In analysing *Happy End* this study has explored four aspects: the femme fatale, cross-dressing, castration, femicide, and implementation of fantasy related to the theme of trauma. I argued Ilbeom as the homme fatale like typical film noir in the 1940s and Bora as the femme fatale in classic film noir make Minki a victim and wrongdoer simultaneously. I discussed invisible cross-dressing in Minki's masculine body dissembled.

Firstly, I argued the femme and the homme fatale images in *Happy End* in relation to film noir. *Happy End* displayed frequently a victim and a maltreater, and efficiently explored the relevance between masculinity and trauma. Secondly, I explored the loss of masculinity by means of the representation of disguised masculine images suffering from trauma. In *Happy End*, Minki's role as a conventional male is changed by his unemployment. A lost sense of masculinity caused him to be traumatized. Thirdly, this study explored the theme of castration anxiety. In particular, Minki was endlessly threatened with the loss of masculinity so that this trauma of castration eventually originated from his weakened masculinity. Fourthly, I discussed the phenomenon of male aggression against women in relation to femicide in *Happy End*. Finally, I could suggest an alternative analysis of *Happy End*. I suggested that he reflects the fiction from novels into his reality.

In addition, I explored the theme of castration anxiety. In *Happy End*, Minki's castration complex drove him traumatized due to the loss of masculinity power. Finally, his trauma caused his wife's murder with unbidden memories of trauma. It is very controversial to comprehend the director's

final scene in the film. Is she a ghost or an illusion? I answered he implements his experiences as if they are in reality. Five major findings from the above discussion should be highlighted. Proceeding from what has been said above, it should be concluded that Minki's hysterical excess of masculinity in *Happy End* came from his trauma.

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## Abstract

In analysing Jung Jiwoo's *Happy End* this study explores the femme fatale, castration, femicide, and implementation of fantasy related to the theme of trauma. I argue Ilbeom as the homme fatale like typical film noir in the 1940s and Bora as the femme fatale in classic film noir make Minki a victim and wrongdoer simultaneously. I discuss invisible cross-dressing in Minki's masculine body dissembled. This transformation as a drag queen made him change his gender role in the family. In addition, I explore the theme of castration anxiety. In *Happy End*, Minki's castration complex drives him traumatized due to the loss of masculinity power. Finally, his trauma causes his wife's murder with unbidden memories of trauma. It is very controversial to comprehend the director's final scene in the film. I answer he implements his experiences as if they are in reality. Proceeding from what has been said above, it should be concluded that Minki's hysterical excess of masculinity in *Happy End* came from his trauma.

**Keywords:** masculinity, cross-dressing, femme fatale, castration, femicide