

## Society and Human Conflict in The Stories of Lee Mun-Yeol's

Nodir Karimov

Researcher, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

**Abstract:** The issue of the conflict between society and the individual is one of the pressing topics in Lee Mun-yeol's works, and this article is dedicated to exploring this theme in his stories. Through examples from his works such as "The Pillar and the Pig", "Do You Remember Nazareth?", "The Portrait of a Young Man", and "The Apple and the Five Soldiers", the conflict between society and the individual is depicted from the author's perspective. The use of settings such as trains and orphanages, as well as the thoughtful utilization of details, effectively brings this theme to life.

**Keywords:** The Pillar and the Pig, Literature, artistic ideas, philosophical reflection, Nazareth, author criticizes.

### INTRODUCTION

Literature, as a means of expressing thoughts and emotions, is also a form of visual art. Lee Mun-yeol, a master of this art, depicted the era of military rule and the chaotic years following the civil war through symbols and details in many of his stories. The combination of philosophical reflection and fragmented memories used to convey the atmosphere of that period is reflected even in the titles of his stories. While some events in his works represent historical realities and social issues, the author criticizes the impoverished state of his nation, the moral crisis, and the reprehensible behavior of the youth. His artistic ideas, expressed through various details beyond time and space, have drawn the attention of critics to the hidden critical perspectives embedded in his story titles. For instance, in "The Pillar and the Pig", the pig symbolizes an entire class of indifferent individuals, while in "Do You Remember Nazareth?", the true image of the interior of an orphanage is vividly portrayed.

In the story "The Pillar and the Pig," the enclosed space is a wagon, and in the story "Do You Remember Nazareth?" it is a compartment. The author was able to fully embody his thoughts on the violence of the time in a confined space like a wagon and a compartment. The author first places Kim, a stranger with his family, the main character, who witnesses all the events, in a compartment. The author introduces an episode of men drinking alcohol in a compartment in order to bring everyone back to the past and recall memories before the events that are expected to happen. The tragedy that ensues is the man's suicide.

The story recalls the memories of a teacher Kim and a stranger who, at first glance, were calm but then violently stormed. Referring to the memories, the writer draws attention to the essence of the

problems of the post-chaos military rule, the increase in the number of orphanages, the growing anti-government sentiment, the weakening of faith among people, and the shallowness of spirituality. The orphanages, who become the heroes of the story, are people of a historical era, struggling to survive:

*"We pretended to be studying during the holidays, but in reality we were just hiding from the cold. The room was only slightly heated during the day, but on those winter days we would sit together, wrapped in blankets, leaning against each other - trying to keep our body temperature together"* [1. 19].

Lee Mun-yeol takes a new approach to the portrayal of characters in his story. The portrait of the first disciple of Nazareth, who is presented at the beginning of the story as a strange man, has this image:

*"He was a pupil of our house of mercy, a smart man who was called just, and entered the seminary of the city synagogue under the auspices of the city synagogue. However, before the synagogue recognized his talent, he graduated from the local school with high marks. He lived in Nazareth for two years, not knowing where to go"* [1. 31].

The portrait that Lee Mun-yeol is drawing is presented in the form of a future priest, U. His portrait is supplemented with descriptions given by the children of the orphanage: *"Even the priest of the house of mercy was afraid of him"* [1. 31], *"...in front of the warm stove in winter and in the shade in summer, the students enjoyed his various stories"* [1. 31], *"...at that time, in winter, the fire in the ondal (Ondal is a warm floor in Korean houses) did not go out; meat soup was served once a week"* [1. 31], *"...no one, not even the school*

teachers, would touch the honor and dignity of the students of "Nazareth"[1. 33], etc.

In the definition given to Uga, the image of the perfect human being found in classical Korean prose is observed: "He was a model of perfection, a legendary hero who rose to fame over the years" [1. 33]. The main issue in Lee Munyol's attention revolves around Him. His life and destiny was an *exemplary history* (exemplary history - this refers to the image of a perfect human being presented in Korean prose of the classical period.) for students. But the perfect man in everyone's eyes one day bowed down to love, his life was ruined. He knows that he can no longer live like this, he cannot change the life he aspired to live. This image created by the author appeared as a product of certain conditions, a system, but the fire of love that entered the heart of the young priest affected qualities that were not characteristic of his character. In fact, the writer shows that almost the majority of young people who lost their parents early in this period wanted to find a cure for their "heartache" by studying in religious schools, and some young people were forced to take this path in order to hide the fact that their family members were left behind in North Korea. The author skillfully places this situation in the following words of the head priest of the orphanage: " – Forgive me. This sinner is my pink belt and blood, I have no one else here in the south" [1. 46].

The excerpt from the dialogue reveals the unique spiritual world of the high priest and plays a key role in illuminating the essence of the story. The inner feelings, pains and suffering of this man, who has spent his whole life in vain, and who knows nothing but curses and insults, are perfectly placed in this sentence. The high priest and the strange man (the high priest's son) are heroes who cannot adapt to the environment of the time, and their fate ends tragically.

As a participant in the conflicting era, the writer reveals in the story "Portrait of a Young Man" the reasons for the youth's path of asceticism, and illuminates the suffering of a wandering person in the image of the author. The image of the author (created by Lee Mun-yol), unlike other images, did not fall into such a trap (emphasis ours - K. N.). The following lines are found in the story about this: "If objective, absolute values cannot guide us, our lives depend on ourselves. ...our lives are given to us, not to external influences, but to ourselves." [2]. The author endured mental shocks, hard times, hunger, loneliness, had a positive

attitude towards the environment, lived with despair, depression.

The next hero portrait drawn by Lee Mun yeol is scientist M. Sultanova's: "It is important to express the character's state, his mood at a certain moment, not with words, but with his appearance and expression" [Sultonova, M, 1973] agrees with his opinion. Children of the orphanage have always remembered this person through his negative features. The priest, with his squinting eyes and his unbendable left arm burnt by the grass, as if he was possessed by an evil spirit, always caused an unpleasant mood:

"The high priest, who had constant control over not only the weak, but also hundreds of heartless students, would insult them without thinking... Even this bachelor, abandoned by his wife, would bow down and recite his own confession for a very long time, as if repenting for the sins of all mankind" [Saidazimova, U. T, 2018. 36].

Instead of meaningfully helping and sympathizing with the foster children of the orphanage, the author points to conflicting relationships between people, not only as a religious leader, but also in the image of a chief priest who has lost the image of humanity and humanity.

The House of Mercy is also one of the closed places chosen by the writer. The main character, who accidentally witnessed a conversation between the high priest, who gives the impression that they were trying to cover up their dirty deeds during the reign of a tyrannical regime, and He (a strange man) whose true appearance is unknown, has not been able to understand the essence of this complicated matter for years.

A girl who was bedridden for life due to her disability in the orphanage committed suicide, and all the children, especially the plum tree that was considered sacred to her, died. After that, she destroyed the plum tree by the roots. The tree, uprooted and thrown away, also carried the crime that had occurred in its bosom. In Sija's poetry, the images of fruit-bearing and picturesque trees have always been the interpreters of the poets' hearts. For instance, Lee Won-ik depicts the act of defending his homeland from enemies with the lines:

"Can the green willow branches  
Bind the blowing wind?"

Meanwhile, Yun Seon-do portrays the true image of a patriot through the symbol of a tree with the

lines:

*“Just a single steadfast pine,  
Unafraid of frost or lightning.”*

A tree is often compared to human life, character, and nature. In poetic works, the spirits of individuals with different fates are also depicted through the image of a tree. For instance, the pine symbolizes steadfastness, the bamboo represents simplicity yet unity among people, and so on. Plum trees were often adopted by classical poets as their pen names. The image of the plum tree also appears in Lee Mun-yeol's novella *“The Phoenix”*. Additionally, the plum tree is included in the story *“Do You Remember Nazareth?”* where it is considered sacred. The girl finds her death beneath this sacred tree, freeing herself from the world of evil, corruption, and a dangerous era. The plum tree then becomes a witness to the tragic event. However, not only does it destroy the sacred (or ominous) tree entirely, root and all, but it also highlights the character's realization of the inadequacy of the religious knowledge they acquired when confronted with the harsh truths of life:

*“Forgive, look at the inappropriate actions of man, do not doubt the Creator!”* [1. 46].

The author, who introduced this lifestyle of young people like Kim Sin Ok into his character, gives his full name at the end of the story:

*“We are looking for the family or companions of Mr. Yun Suwon, Mr. Yun Suwon is 39 years old - we ask you to come to the train conductor's office immediately. Yun Suwon had an accident”* [1. 48].

While the hero, who is presented as a strange man at the beginning of the story, is a mythical figure from the era of political violence, in the memories of the orphanage's inmates, he is remembered as a hero whose real name is Yun Suwon, who, when he encounters people who know him, commits suicide, and whose actions reflect the tragedy of the country's military rule.

The main characteristics of Korean prose are clearly manifested in the process of identifying the strong influence and significant role of three leading religious-philosophical teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—in literature. In particular, Lee Mun-yeol's novella *“The Phoenix”* refers to Confucianism's principle, rooted in the moral categories and values of the Korean people, which states that *“A teacher plays an important role in any person's life”* [Saidazimova, U. T., 2018]. The novella uniquely

portrays the disciple's process of growth, depicting the pure spiritual essence of a person through the portrait of the Teacher.

In the story *“The Apple and the Five Soldiers”*, the Buddhist spirit is strongly manifested. After completing his military service, the main character was supposed to serve for the rest of his life in the monastery where he was raised and educated. However, the curiosity about who his parents were prompted the main character to return to his birthplace - to material life. In the story, the dream motif, which has long occupied a central place in Buddhist legends, is replaced by a means such as hallucinations:

*“The use of such forms as dreams, hallucinations, and letters is not common in the story. In this genre, there is more opportunity to use psychological detail, psychological detail...”* [Qabilova, N. S., 2020].

The protagonist, who is in a whirlwind of thoughts about the village where he has lived for only three days, whether his parents are alive, and how they will receive him, sees an interesting situation:

*A helmet without a camouflage cover, a uniform with no visible insignia, torn and patched, mud caked soldier shoes. Oily, long-unwashed faces, tense muscles were more clearly visible. The depth of their cheeks indicated that they were hungry, that they had not had enough for a long time. Two of the soldiers stuffed unripe apples into their coats, the other two stuffed their trouser pockets full of apples, and the fifth chewed a raw apple like an achophat”* [1. 19].

In the excerpt above, the author refers to the hallucination that the main character experiences: when he passes by the soldiers and looks back, they have already hidden somewhere. After Manso visits his mother's house, his mental state deepens: before stepping into a new life, he ponders over the mysterious life of his mother and the words of his uncle. It is in this depressed state and a whirlpool of heavy thoughts that he encounters the soldiers from yesterday in the garden. In the repetition of the excerpt above, the author also deepens the hallucination. On the one hand, the main character is surprised, on the other hand, he is overcome by a feeling of fear. This feeling of fear deepens even more when he talks to his bedridden mother:

*“Listening to his mother's words, Manso's interest in the five soldiers grew even more. He rushed out of the house to chase them. But when he reached*

*the hill through the bushes, he saw that they had disappeared without a trace” [1. 31].*

It is clear that the religious and philosophical teachings in the worldview of the creator have become a leading principle in his works. From this point of view, the stories of the writer can be grouped as follows: first, the placement of philosophical views in the text of the work through symbols. In particular, in the image of the philosopher Pyrrho, it is said about people who are useless to society. This is reminiscent of the views of Park Chi-won, who lived and worked in the 19th century, who criticized Confucian scholars who were only engaged in reading books and practically inactive. Secondly, as a result of the negative impact of ideological and political processes in the country on people's lives, people seeking religious refuge seek refuge in themselves. This is evident in the activities of the children and educators of the orphanage (here the head priest is meant). Thirdly, the author's thinking about the civil war is in harmony with Buddhist views. Hallucination plays a more important role in this than the dream motif. In some cases, the writer criticizes the issues of indifference and inattention that have arisen in society, while in other cases he studies a person, his self-awareness, and his mental state.

Lee Mun-yeol describes the period of stagnation in the history of the Korean people in a closed space - detail of a train, in orphanages. The writer is disturbed by issues such as religion, faith, apathy, which are disappearing at the time of economic growth and technical development. The terrible scenes of the period show that the roots are directly related to the past, history, external and

internal factors that influenced the development of society.

The author's artistic goal and concept is very complex, and to understand it, the reader is required to have a high aesthetic taste, deep knowledge of the history and culture of Korean society. Also, in the images chosen for his stories, he draws the image of a contemporary person, his spiritual world and problems based on the age-old criteria of human life. The author, who captured ordinary things in the center of the image in the artisticization of a life story, was able to convey his observations to the reader.

#### REFERENCES:

1. 이문열. 팔론과 돼지. 알에이차코리아 (2021): 19쪽.
2. 이문열. 젊은 날의 초상. 알에이차코리아 (2020): 350쪽.
3. Sultonova, M. "On the Style of the Writer (Based on the Prose of Oybek, A. Qodiriy, A. Kahhor, and S. Ahmad)." *Tashkent: "Fan" Publishing House* (1973): 26.
4. Saidazimova, U. T. "Spiritual and Aesthetic Concepts of Korean Prose of the XVII-XVIII Centuries." *Philological Sciences, Doctoral Dissertation, Tashkent* (2018): 45.
5. Qabilova, N. S. "Artistic Psychologism in the Work of Jack London and Abdulla Kahhor." *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Dissertation in Philological Sciences, Bukhara* (2020): 11.
6. Saidazimova, U. T. "Spiritual and Aesthetic Concepts of Korean Prose of the XVII-XVIII Centuries." *Philological Sciences, Doctoral Dissertation, Tashkent* (2018).

**Source of support:** Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

#### Cite this article as:

Karimov, N. "Society and Human Conflict in The Stories of Lee Mun-Yeol's." *Sarcouncil Journal of Arts and Literature* 4.1 (2025): pp 1-4.