

Death Writes Back: Reading Autobiography of Death through Gothic Aesthetics

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Abstract

A long period of public mourning followed the 2014 Sewol Ferry incident, one of South Korea's horrific disasters, which resulted in the death of hundreds of passengers. This paper explores how contemporary South Korean poet Kim Hyesoon employs Gothic poetics to narrate collective trauma in the aftermath of the Ferry disaster. The paper also argues that Kim mobilizes the Gothic impulse to amplify the force of her elegy, turning poetic mourning into a site of communal witnessing and resistance. The research is backed by the theoretical grid of the transgenerational haunting forwarded by Abraham and Torok. Hyesoon's poetry constructs a Gothic of haunting and horror, where spectral voices expose historical trauma and bodily horror, through grotesque and horror imagery. This study further argues that a Western literary mode such as the Gothic—typically associated with European trauma and haunting—finds a compelling and culturally resonant expression in the South Korean context. The Gothic aesthetic, I contend, offers Kim a unique medium to articulate the impulses of haunting and historical trauma that shape Korean collective memory. To date, her poetry has not been examined in depth through this lens, making this an original contribution to both Korean literary studies and comparative Gothic criticism.

Keywords: *Gothic impulse, trauma, transgenerational haunting, Kim Hyesoon, Abraham and Torok, Sewol Ferry disaster, spectrality, poetic mourning, Korean Gothic, Gothic poetics*

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Female poets occupy a significant place in the history of Korean literature, offering a powerful lens into the struggles of Korean women—those who farmed, raised children, and fought for a better future while grappling with the devastation of the Korean War. Their poetry, which emerged in the 1980s during one of the most politically repressive periods in contemporary Korean history, holds a distinct literary and cultural significance. Among these voices, Kim Hyesoon stands out as a critically acclaimed poet known for her nontraditional style, using her work to amplify the experiences of the marginalized and mistreated.

Kim Hyesoon was born in 1955 and studied Korean Language and Literature at Kangwon National University, Konkuk University and Donghak Graduate School. Her first piece of literary criticism was published in the *Dong-a Ilbo* in 1978 and later she made her poetic debut through “Literature and Intellect,” published in *The Smoking Poet*. The year was 1979, and Park Chung Hee’s nearly two decades of authoritarian rule had come to an end with his assassination. She is a member of Another Culture (Ttohana tii munhwa), an organization that emerged in the 1980s and has played a critical role in feminist literary research and publication, including the development of women’s studies in South Korea. Her poem *Poor Love Machine* (Pulssanghan sarang kigye) was awarded the Kim Su- yong Contemporary Poetry Award in 1997, making her the first woman to receive this coveted award. She believes that the recognition of her work was due to the emergence of women’s poetry over the past few decades. Kim’s poetry, among Korean contemporary women poets, is the most experimental. Kim is often seen as responsible for revolutionizing what is considered poetic language, as her poetry goes beyond the expectations of “female poetry”, which traditionally celebrates passive, refined language, as well as the corresponding aesthetics.

Kim Hyesoon maintains that: “What I wrote about was cooking and my ingredient was death ... I tried to turn the heaviness of oppression into something playful and light, so that what I ended up with was a type of poetry that did not appear to be political.”(Hyesoon, 2018, 100) This experimentation is rooted in her attempt to resist conventional literary forms and language long defined by men in Korea, including the literary expectations of “female poets.” Her language, in the context of Korea’s highly structured society, is defiant and revolutionary. She is known as a writer who challenges the preconceived notions of so-called women’s poetry. Out of a bulk of famous poems she produced, this article deals with her elegy titled *Autobiography of Death*. I approach the poem from the gothic concept of phantom and the related theory of Transgenerational Haunting put forward by

Abraham and Torok. *Autobiography of Death*, the first Korean recipient of the Griffin International Poetry Prize in 2019, is an extended elegy of negligence and violence meted out to the students' sea travel. The book consists of 49 poems, each of which corresponds to a day when the spirit of the deceased roams around the living before entering the cycle of reincarnation. The book talks about the deaths of Koreans who "lost their lives under the violent force of government," including dissidents during the military dictatorships of Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏng-hŭi, 1961–1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (Chŏn Tuhwan, 1979–1988), many of whom were students. (Hyesoon, 2018, 106)

To analyze the elegy through the lens of Gothic fiction, I must first define key Gothic parameters that will frame this interpretation while acknowledging that the term is elusive and slippery for a varied and complex phenomenon. Out of many modalities of the gothic impulse, I will particularly focus on the gothic's preoccupations with the concept of death and transgenerational haunting. One of the key Gothic criteria that will guide this analysis is the violation of the human body and the resultant destruction of the self, and the psychological toll of physical abuse writ clear on the faces of the dead who have been given voice, as they could not plead their case in their life. Hyesoon lends a voice to the dead who could not fight for their rights as Korean citizens. In her attempt to document the emotional registers of such a disaster, the literary techniques of realism seem insufficient. For this purpose, I argue the poet seems to have resorted to the gothic mode to articulate the structural violence and social inequalities of South Korea's postwar era. The sole purpose of writing down the stories and their return after death is to pen down the trauma, as she actually wants the dead to live for ages in the memories of the living through her elegy. Through the Gothic rhetoric, she not only wants to appease the dead but unsettle the living beings as well. It has been aptly noted by Margaret Davison: "Death was notably and frequently represented in the early, classic Gothic as a destabilizing, disruptive force involving inter-generational, historical crimes/sins requiring exposure, recognition, and appeasement by way of mourning rituals and memorialisation processes." (2017, 6)

Her work is filled with the themes of death, decay, and bodily horror—all of which align with Gothic impulses. Her representations of fragmented, suffering, or spectral bodies connect her work to the concept of the gothic body. She could not deny the trauma by turning it into a mere fantasy; she had to resort to the darkest of themes to put across the pain she felt in her heart. She forcefully states in one of her interviews: "So whenever such unbearable events occurred, I wrote these poems. I also wrote them whenever death was near me, or we led up within me. Why does our country make us ashamed for being alive, for surviving those tragic events?" (Hyesoon, 2018, 98). As it has been noticed by acclaimed gothic critics that "Gothic works traditionally function to give visibility to the otherwise unseen

and impalpable” (Smith, 2004, 25), and that the Gothic is “more obsessed with bodies than in any of its previous phases” (Spooner, 2006, 63).

Through her book, she is reconceptualizing Korean history and the acts of consciousness, metaphor of death, and processes of psychological recovery. The death builds the link between the individual experience of the psychological recovery and the historical unconscious. In gothic terms, the poem becomes the ghostly reincarnation of the drowned bodies. A flesh-and-blood version of the dead people. The manner in which it directs attention to the treatment of the body after death and even before it. Kim does not concede to the inescapable decay, deterioration and demise of the body. She skillfully connects their uncanny social reappearance to transgenerational haunting. Moreover, the poem is an embodied experience of trauma as Kim keeps it fresh in the memories of the dead by maintaining the connection of the dead to the living bodies. In each of the 49 poems, her speakers enter the physical bodies of the dead and invoke their spirits. The dead people do not find the strength to narrate their own gross stories of violence and injustice, which include the trauma of the past. What other medium can prove to be more befitting than the gothic mode to put silence's voice to the forefront, to speak for the unspeakable, and to move beyond victimhood into the possibility of a future where these dead people will write their own stories. This article attempts to argue that Kim uses Gothic structures and tropes to illustrate the destructive forces of the past and becomes the voice of the dead who were not given a clean burial. The gothic concept that those who die badly come back to haunt looms large in all the poems. This spectrality speaks to both personal and collective trauma, recalling the historical Gothic (i.e., political violence, war, and dictatorship in South Korea).

The aim of this research paper is to connect her work with the Gothic preoccupation, ghosts, and liminal beings that appear frequently in *Autobiography of Death*, which imagines the voices of 49 dead spirits navigating the afterlife. Reading the poems through Transgenerational haunting is deeply engaging, as this is the motive with which the poems were written- to speak of trauma across generations, particularly in the context of South Korea's violent history. Hyesoon's poetry doesn't just remember the dead; it allows the dead to continue speaking, which is the essence of transgenerational haunting. It Gothic structure of haunting, where past traumas (war, dictatorship, state violence) refuse to be buried. The fragmented, ghostly voices of the dead in her poems suggest that trauma is inherited and continues to haunt the living. The 49 ghosts in *Autobiography of Death* are not just individual deaths, but historical echoes—representing victims of war, oppression, and patriarchal violence. The spectral voices collapse temporal boundaries, reinforcing the Gothic idea that the past is never truly past. The poems can be read as ‘Gothic testaments’ where the dead demand remembrance. The 49 ghosts in *Autobiography of Death* are not just individual deaths, but historical

echoes—representing victims of war, oppression, and patriarchal violence. They further represent both personal and collective traumas that refuse to be forgotten. Many of the deaths in the collection are tied to historical violence, political oppression, and patriarchal suffering, suggesting that these traumas are cryptically embedded in Korean collective memory. The poems do not just mourn individual deaths but engage in a broader Gothic reckoning with spectral traces of unresolved grief.

The “49th ghost” is both a specific entity and a representation of many lost voices, much like Abraham & Torok’s phantom, which returns to unsettle descendants. There is a sense that language itself is haunted, mirroring Abraham & Torok’s idea that the unspeakable trauma lodges itself into the unconscious, re-emerging in fragmented, cryptic forms. *Autobiography of Death* performs a Gothic exhumation of buried traumas, where poetry serves as a medium for speaking the unspeakable. The fragmented, polyphonic structure of the collection mirrors the psychic fractures of inherited trauma, much like the phantom’s disruptive presence. Hyesoon’s poetry doesn’t just remember the dead; it allows the dead to continue speaking, which is the essence of transgenerational haunting.

Coming back to the theoretical grid of this presentation, Abraham and Torok maintain that “The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s.” (1994, 173) Moreover, “The phantom represents the interpersonal and trans- generational consequences of silence.” (1994, 168). The students were silenced, their suffering ignored by those in power. With no acknowledgment from high officials, they were compelled to return to assert their presence and demand to be remembered.

Abraham and Torok further comment on the return of the repressed:

The belief that the spirits of the dead can return to haunt the living exists either as an accepted tenet or as a marginal conviction in all civilizations, ancient or modern. . . . To be sure, all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt: the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeak- able secrets to the grave. . . . having suffered repression by their family or society, cannot enjoy, even in death, a state of authenticity—appears to be omnipresent (whether overtly expressed or disguised) on the fringes of religions and, failing that, in rational systems. (1994, 170)

And it is here that the role and the effort of the poet becomes evident, the poems are an attempt “to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm.”(Abraham and Torok, 1994) Abraham and Torok further maintain that “but because, unsuspected, the dead continue to lead a devastating psychic half-

life in us.”(1994) and “their lives’ unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants.”(1994, 167)

The Editor maintains in his note from the book *The Shell and the Kernel* “Abraham and Torok’s work enables us to understand how “the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past—whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state (as in former East Germany) or practiced by parents and grandparents—is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations.”(1994, 169) moreover it has been aptly noted by critics that “Kim’s poetry often takes place in this vertiginous zone of the body” (McSweeney and Göransson, 2016, 6). Similarly, its preoccupation with the body and return of the repressed aligns it with gothic themes. The close textual analysis of the subject matter shows that the subject matter is stressful, confrontational, and painful. The form combines historical realism with a gothic theme as it moves on, it gets subversively abject and haunting. Bruce Fulton, in an attempt to review some of Hyesoon’s works, maintains that “her primary role is to mediate between the inhabitants of this world and those of the next world or, most important, those suspended in the ether because of a premature or unnatural death and/ or an aggrieved” (2015,456). These characters must find the strength to narrate their own stories. This story must include the trauma of the past, must speak the unspeakable, and then must move beyond victimhood into the possibility of a future where the heroine is free to make her own choices, to write her own story. Hyesoon is vulnerable to bodily violation and without protection in a society that is fraught with the “real” monsters of an inherited trauma that has damaged both the heroine and her culture.

The very first poem *Commute: Day One* opens with the following lines:

“On the subway your eyes roll up once. That’s eternity.

The rolled-up eyes eternally magnified.”(2018, 11)

The opening lines immediately signal death, establishing a somber and spectral tone. The use of the word “magnified” suggests that vision, rather than fading after death, becomes sharper and more profound. The dead eyes, now eternally magnified, transcend physical limitations, allowing them not only to perceive with heightened clarity but also to compel the living to see more clearly. This suggests a paradox—death, rather than diminishing awareness, intensifies perception, making the unseen visible and inescapable. This aligns seamlessly with the Gothic theme of the dead returning, often not merely as specters but as bearers of unresolved truths. In Gothic narratives, the dead frequently reemerge to expose past injustices, reveal buried secrets, or force the living to confront the failures of society. Their return serves as a haunting reminder of where things went wrong—

whether in their own lives or in the world around them—demanding acknowledgment and, in some cases, retribution. Gareth Schott, in an article aptly argues that “Consistent with Gothic literature, death is horrific precisely because it is often not quite the end.”(2018, 16)

At another instance she says in the poem titled *Midnight Sun: Day Five*

“Like the brain that sees all too clearly after death” (2018, 17) and

“You’re visible even when you hide

You know everything even without a brain” (2018, 19). Similar idea is conveyed in *Naked Body: Day Sixteen*.

“You can see the clearness even with your eyes closed,

even clearer with your eyes open, you cannot embrace it, you cannot hit it” (2018, 32)

And yet again, she says, “You go without your body.”(2018, 12). a familiar pattern that appears frequently throughout. Marine imagery. This is an indication that perhaps the soul or the ghost of the body comes back without the body, as the corporeal body is dead. Throughout the poem, the “you” seems to embody a fragmented self in a period of death. The ‘open’ and ‘closed eyes’ of the bodies and beings, if not one, are at least inextricably linked.

In *Calendar: Day Two*. She writes:

“It bleeds even after it’s dead. (2018, 13)

“Your doll comes back to life” (2018, 14)

The image of a doll coming to life is a classic Gothic trope, often employed to evoke a sense of horror and unease in readers or audiences. This motif plays on the uncanny—the disturbing space between the familiar and the unfamiliar—where an inanimate object gains a sinister semblance of life. Dolls, meant to be lifeless replicas of human figures, become unsettling when animated, blurring the boundaries between the living and the non-living. This transformation not only fuels fear but also symbolizes deeper anxieties about agency, control, and the fragility of identity.

In *After You are Gone: Day Six*, Kim writes about the unwelcome attitude of the living toward the ghosts of the dead. “When you depart, they close your eyes, put your hands together and cry don’t go, don’t go But when you say open the door, open the door, they say don’t come, don’t come” (18). It is but obvious that everything coming back to life after death scares the living. And the souls of the

dead who met an unfortunate end at the hands of the Government will certainly come back to haunt.

In the poem titled *Everyday Everyday Everyday: Day Nine*, Kim subtly suggests the mother's neglectful treatment of her daughter, implying that she may not have provided adequate care.

“The dead girl talks into a toy phone

Can I speak to my mommy?

I want to sing a song for her

You’re eating, but you’re not at the table” (2018, 22). This suggests that the girl has returned to her home, either to haunt its inhabitants or to assert her lingering presence. Her return blurs the boundary between the living and the dead, embodying a spectral force that refuses to be forgotten. Whether as a ghostly figure or a symbolic reminder of past wrongs, her presence unsettles those who remain, compelling them to confront what has been lost or repressed.

“The tomorrow that escaped from your body turns around to look at you” (2018, 22).

The phrase “body turning around to look at you” evokes the Gothic gaze—a concept in which the dead fix their unrelenting stare upon the living, forcing an unsettling confrontation. This gaze, often depicted as eerie and intrusive, reverses the traditional power dynamic, making the living the object of scrutiny. It embodies the uncanny, where the familiar becomes terrifying, and suggests that the dead do not merely observe but demand recognition, compelling the living to acknowledge unresolved traumas or lingering guilt.

“Now are you liberated from yourself?

Your feet have no prints

Your happiness has no breaths

Your letter has no name” (2018, 25)

“Now you’ve become so light that you won’t be able to plunge at all” (2018, 25). These lines from the poem *Butterfly: Day Eleven* refer to the ghosts of the dead bodies.

You opened the window, but there was no one. You only saw something trying to stand up, like a shadow fluttering in the wind, something that had lived stuck to the ground its entire life. As you opened the door and stepped into the convenience store, something tugged at your ankle. A hand came

up swiftly like a burp from a dark pit. You heard a familiar voice: Let's go, let's go to the unknown place, deepest place, bottom of the bottom. You were afraid that an unknown face might appear in the toilet water, in the mirror. You wondered whether terror comes before sorrow. (2018, 26)

The above poem is mostly prosaic, almost entirely written in long paragraphs of unbroken text; however, certain sections still employ other poetic qualities such as metaphor, repetition, heightened imagery, fragmentation, or rhyme. By writing in mostly prose poem format, Kim's poem takes on an unfiltered, stream-of-consciousness quality, even though its language is carefully constructed. This poem carries a deeply unsettling, almost dreamlike quality, blending the ordinary with the uncanny. The imagery of something struggling to stand—"like a shadow flittering in the wind", "something tugged at your ankle," and "hand came up swiftly"—evokes both fragility and an eerie, ghostly presence. The reference to something "stuck to the ground its entire life" suggests entrapment, perhaps a lingering spirit or a past trauma attempting to rise. The moment in the convenience store introduces an abrupt shift from passive observation to physical entanglement: the mysterious hand pulling at the speaker's ankle transforms the space from mundane to nightmarish. The voice calling to the speaker—"Let's go, let's go to the unknown place, deepest place, bottom of the bottom"—adds an existential dread, as if the speaker is being lured into an abyss, a liminal space where identity and reality dissolve.

The fear of encountering an "unknown face" in reflective surfaces—water, the mirror—reinforces the Gothic trope of the self as other, where horror and recognition blur. The final question, "You wondered whether terror comes before sorrow," is especially haunting, as it implies a sequence of emotional unraveling. Is fear the precursor to grief? Or does the poem suggest that sorrow is the true horror, lurking beneath our immediate terrors? This poem is deeply atmospheric, evoking themes of haunting, existential dread, and the fluid boundary between life and death, self and other. It feels like it belongs in the lineage of uncanny Gothic writing, reminiscent of Kim Hyesoon's work with its surreal, disjointed imagery and its meditation on the abyss. In another instance, Kim writes: "Do you want to be a friendly corpse? Do you want to be a scary corpse? Do you want to become silk that ghosts kiss? Do you want to become a sack that ghosts kick? Every, every day is the eve of death" (2018, 26). The lines reveal her deep awareness of the dual role played by both benevolent and terrifying corpses. In this context, these ghostly souls return to disturb the living, serving as a haunting reminder of their negligence—of the overloaded ferry and the indifference that sealed their fate.

In *Winter's Smile: Day Nineteen*, there is another such reference.

“It’s cold, for you’ve come out from a warm body
It’s bright, for you’ve come out from a dark body
It’s lonely, for you’ve lost your shadow” (2018, 36)

Similar thoughts have been conveyed in *Lack of Air: Day Twenty-Three*

“The spectacle of living far from home without a body!

The spectacle of roaming after death as a faint adverb” (2018, 42)

The above excerpt presents a strikingly Gothic image of disembodiment, alienation, and spectral existence. The lines evoke key Gothic themes such as unhomeliness, haunting, and the dissolution of identity. The idea of “roaming after death as a faint adverb” transforms the speaker into a ghostly grammatical entity, emphasizing a loss of materiality and linguistic fragmentation. The intentional breaking, disjoining, or disruption of language to create meaning, evoke emotion, or challenge conventional syntax and structure is used to evoke the unsettling feeling in the reader. This can manifest in several ways, including sentences or phrases that are incomplete, fractured, or arranged in unconventional ways. For example, “the spectacle of roaming after death” entails an uncanny feeling, as no one expects anyone to walk after death. Gothic literature reflects themes of loss, exile, trauma, or fractured identity. Kim uses fragmentation to mirror psychological, political, or existential dislocation. This recalls Gothic concerns with the unspeakable and the uncanny, where language itself can become an unstable, haunted medium. Gothic literature often explores the liminality between life and death. Here, death is not a definitive end but a continuation in an altered, insubstantial form—a mere “faint adverb,” suggesting a being that exists only in modifiers, on the margins of meaning.

In *A Lullaby: Day Thirty-Seven*, Kim writes

The mother of the child cuddled her dead child in her arms

She sang a lullaby. This is the contents of her lullaby:

Sleep, sleep my baby, die soon so you’ll be at ease,
so you won’t have to cry

The mother of the child dug a hole in the middle of her room and buried her child

She also buried her child in the ceiling.

Buried her in the wall. Buried her in her pupils

Nobody knew the name of the child's mother, but they knew the child's name (2018, 63).

This cycle acts as the foundation for the trauma-based relationships between mothers and daughters. Kim uses the unique dynamics of mother-daughter relationships to portray cyclical violence as a part of broader psychological traumatization. This suggests that the child who was buried alive will persist beyond death, his ghost lingering to haunt the living. The dead will not be forgotten, as they will continue to return, forcing the living to confront their presence.

From *Underworld: Day Forty-Five*

"The dead, gone forever, departed before you, pull amniotic sacs over their heads and get in line to be born again and say that they need to learn their mother tongue all over again

You're not there when they awake or even when they eat breakfast

When the dead swarm down the mountain like children who pour out of the door of the first-grade room carrying their notebooks and shoe bags" (2018, 75)

The image of "pull amniotic sacs over their heads and get in line to be born again" is both liberating and eerie—the speaker experiences the joy of rebirth, yet the image of the amniotic sac remains unsettling in its grotesqueness. This passage creates a striking and eerie image of the dead as cyclical beings, not resting but returning, wrapped in amniotic sacs like newborns awaiting rebirth. The idea that they must "learn their mother tongue all over again" suggests a loss of identity in the transition between life and death, as if language itself—our primary means of connection—is something fragile, forgotten in the passage through oblivion. The second line, "You're not there when they awake or even when they eat breakfast," introduces a sense of absence and detachment. It implies a disconnection between the living and the dead, as if the speaker is both witness and outsider to this strange rebirth. Everyday rituals like waking up and eating breakfast become haunting when applied to the dead, emphasizing their liminality—caught between existence and nonexistence. The final image of the dead "swarming down the mountain," likened to children leaving a first-grade classroom, is particularly powerful. It evokes both innocence and inevitability, as if death is merely another lesson to be learned, another cycle to pass through. The juxtaposition of children—symbolizing new beginnings—with the dead creates an unsettling contrast, reinforcing the poem's meditation on rebirth, repetition, and the unbroken continuity between life and death.

This passage feels deeply Gothic, exploring themes of spectral return, loss, and the porous boundary between past and present, the living and the dead. There's also a surreal quality to it, reminiscent of writers like Kim Hyesoon, whose poetry often blurs the lines between bodily horror and existential reflection. Ruth Williams aptly comments, "If those who are marginalized by society seize the power to defile the normal order of things will be reversed and 'dead things' will rise up...In Kim's poem, exposing one's monstrous nature is a gesture of revolution" (Williams, 2025, 408)

She is enacting the idea of transgenerational haunting through a gothic lens, constantly enmeshed in transgenerational transmissions. A gothic critic Christine Berthin commenting on the return of the dead to life argues that "The voices of the dead surreptitiously permeate the text. They refuse to die in the signs that would signify their absence." (2010, 17) A ghost, or Abraham and Torok's phantom, turns out to be a mere metaphor for an unspeakable death. Kim powerfully reconstructs the life – death narrative by bringing back the dead in her poem *Autobiography of Death*. They, moreover, provide irrefutable and irreducible reasons, both as structural interstices within the text and unassailable cultural realities outside the text. The poems call forth participation of a "shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Angela DiPace maintains that, noting that there exists "no native informant here," this "shared experience" will entail "rememory," reclaiming, loving, and accounting for the "disremembered and unaccounted for" (1994, 336)

This paper explores the return of the dead in *Autobiography of Death* as embodiments of the traumatized selves of those who suffered injustice in life. It argues that the collection's portrayal of multifaceted trauma—manifested through temporal and linguistic disorientation, generational violence, and oral fixation—is intricately woven into Kim Hyesoon's use of Gothic rhetoric and aesthetics. The text presents a transgenerational haunting in which trauma binds the dead across all ages, from children to adults to the elderly. While existing scholarship has examined individual trauma in the collection, little attention has been paid to the role of the Gothic's transgenerational haunting as a psychological manifestation of this trauma. Even in death, the spectral figures retain a profound presence in the lives of their surviving family members.

Through a Gothic lens, the poem gains heightened literary significance. Its narrative trajectory—from darkness to revelation, from loss to healing—mirrors the Gothic's preoccupation with the lingering presence of the past. The act of paying homage functions as a ritual of reparation, and understanding becomes a transformative force, allowing the text to navigate the liminal space between

mourning and renewal. Although the violence of the Korean War is never explicitly referenced, its lasting impact—along with the broader history of imperialism and violence in Korea—haunts the poem’s every scene, operating as an unspoken yet omnipresent specter. “What if we allow ourselves to truly see and revel in the world’s ugliness and our own monstrosity? What if we, the marginalized and oppressed, bellowed our rage into the air so loudly and discordantly that none of the ruling class could ever sleep soundly again?” (Allyson 29) This is precisely what the poems evoke in readers- whether through aesthetic of choice or matter of interpretation—an unsettling effect that lingers long after reading. The transgenerational haunting not only disrupts the present but also extends its influence across future generations, ensuring that the specters of the past continue to disturb and unsettle. “Each poem in *Autobiography* also journeys, one by one, to its own absence, then returns,” says Kim in one of her interviews (2018, 101).

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