

STANDARDIZING QUEERNESS IN THE NOVEL "ABOUT MY DAUGHTER" BY KIM HYE JIN

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ABSTRACT

Heterosexuality in the novel *About my daughter* by Kim Hye Jin

Throughout history, heterosexuality created the main flow of society, and the entire social system took it as a standard. But recently a diverse perspective on sexuality has emerged. Thus, the topic of 'queer' and the violence of heteronormativity which are implicit in culture is concerned. This study will analyze the attitude of the mother about her lesbian daughter in the Korean novel "About my daughter" (2017) by Kim Hye Jin to understand if her attitude is deeply rooted in heterosexuality.

1.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, the term "queer," originally used as a derogatory label for individuals within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community, has gained wider acceptance. LGBT individuals have embraced the term "queer" as a form of resistance against those who discriminate against them¹. Reflecting this phenomenon, literary and cinematic works focusing on queer themes have garnered significant attention, to the extent that "queer" can now be considered an artistic genre. Notable examples include the film "Carol" (2015), directed by Todd Haynes and based on Patricia Highsmith's romantic novel "The Price of Salt" from 1952 (later republished in 1990 as "Carol")², which portrays a lesbian love story and received critical acclaim from both reviewers and audiences. Similarly, the film "Moonlight," directed by Barry Jenkins³ explores the coming-of-age journey of a young gay man and was awarded the Best Picture Oscar. Within this evolving landscape, South Korea, a country that values heterosexuality and homophobia, has also begun to witness the emergence of literature and film exploring queer themes. For instance, Korean cinema has presented thought-provoking works such as "The King and the Clown" (2005) and "Antique" (2008), which question homosexual desire within the historical context of Joseon-era Korea. "No Regret" (2006), directed by Lee Song Hee-il, be considered as the first Korean queer film, featuring a gay couple inspired by the director's real-life experiences. The documentary "Troublers" (2015), directed by Lee Young, chronicles the life of Lee Mook, a lesbian woman born in 1945 who faced multiple displacements due to her gender identity. In the realm of literary contributions, noteworthy works include Kim E-whan's short story "Metamorphosis," which vividly portrays

¹ Source: <https://sapphovn.com/queer-la-gi/>.

² Source: [https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_\(film\)](https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_(film)).

³ Source: <https://baomoi.com/moonlight-dung-dau-danh-sach-100-bo-phim-hay-nhat-thap-ky/c/31597923.epi>.

provocative scenes of intimate encounters and the complex emotions experienced by a gay couple in South Korea. Similarly, Kim Hye Jin's short story collection "Neighbors" (2017) and the novel "About My Daughter" (2017) construct narratives that revolve around the love between lesbian couples, effectively reflecting the societal perspectives and attitudes towards queerness in Korean society.

In addition, throughout history, heterosexuality has formed the main current in society, with the entire social system taking it as the norm. Laurent Berlant and Michael Warner have identified the ways in which heterosexuality creates a powerful and privileged form of sexual identity, establishing heteronormativity as the standard. They argue that while *heterosexuality* has an opposing counterpart in homosexuality, there is no corresponding term for the normalization of homosexuality (*homonormativity*) [...] Because homosexuality has never been fully accepted as a societal standard that must be safeguarded by the ideals of correctness or normalcy" ([1]: 548-549), the concept of *heteronormativity* emerged. It was first discussed by Michael Warner in his study "Fear of a Queer Planet" (1991) and refers to the assumption that "Individuals or institutions perceive everyone as heterosexual, and heterosexuality is seen as a superior and privileged sexual orientation compared to others".

In the context of South Korean society, where the mindset prioritizes heterosexual love and marriage to the extent that individuals who identify as queer face legal discrimination, the author of the novel "*About my daughter*" vividly portrays the prejudices originating from the very people close to and colleagues of queer individuals, Green and Lane. It can be said that the character of the mother idealizes heterosexual love and does not accept deviations from the norm in the romantic and sexual inclinations of her daughter and her daughter's "partner." This study aims to analyze the psychological and attitudinal aspects of the mother character when confronted with a lesbian couple in the South Korean novel "*About my daughter*" by Kim Hye Jin, in order to uncover the underlying causes of her attitudes rooted in *heteronormativity*.

1.1 Kim Hye Jin and About my daughter

Kim Hye Jin was born in 1983 in Daegu, South Korea. She received the DongA Literary New Year Award in 2012 for her short story "*Flying Chicken Squadron*" and officially began her literary career. In 2013, she was awarded the 5th Central Literature Novel Prize for her work "*Central Station*." Additionally, she has published a collection of short stories titled "Oe-bi".

Gender and queer issues are intricately interwoven and prominently addressed in the works of Kim Hye Jin. This is evident through characters like Professor Lim in the short story "*Different Memory*," who swiftly faces termination from the university, partly due to her female gender. Similarly, the homosexual couple in the short story "*Neighbors*" encounters prejudice from their neighbors solely based on their lesbian identity. Notably, Kim vividly depicts the societal attitudes and perspectives on LGBTQ+ individuals, specifically highlighting the lesbian identity of the couple, Green and Lane, in "*About My Daughter*." Published for the first time in 2017, "*About My Daughter*" has garnered significant acclaim from Korean critics, resonating with numerous readers who empathize with its portrayal of gender conflicts and family dynamics within Korean society.

"*About My Daughter*" is a narrative that revolves around a mother in her 60s working as a nurse, her daughter in her 30s, and her daughter's homosexual partner. The daughter has moved out and currently works as a guest lecturer at a university. One day, a colleague of hers is unjustifiably fired, allegedly due to their queer gender identity. In response, she uses her rental deposit money⁴ to participate in protests against the unfair termination, leading to her homelessness. Consequently, she and her partner have to move back in with her birth mother. The story unfolds from this point, successfully capturing the mother character's turmoil, confusion, and struggles to comprehend her daughter's homosexual love. Furthermore, the work reflects the contemporary Korean cultural landscape, exploring the challenges and fierce demands for personal affirmation and acceptance of differences among the younger generation.

1.2 The psyche and attitude are heavily influenced by the heteronormativity of the mother character

South Korean society serves as a prominent example of a nation profoundly shaped by *heteronormativity*. Prior to the modern era, Korean history witnessed a deep-rooted and widespread patriarchal ideology during the Joseon Dynasty under the rule of the Lee family (1392-1910). Gender inequality was prevalent, with distinct privileges and roles assigned to males and females. Men were afforded opportunities for education and government positions, while women were confined to domestic duties such as cooking, sewing, embroidery, etc. This gendered social structure was the driving force behind the establishment of exclusive schools for males by the Joseon Dynasty. On the other hand, with the end of the feudal era and the onset of the modern and contemporary periods, women in South Korea began gaining access to education. Numerous girls' schools emerged at all levels, from elementary to university, exemplified by institutions like Ewha Women's University and Sookmyung Women's University, which continue to thrive today. Furthermore, South Korea is currently still in a state of armistice with North Korea, so all young South Korean men are required to perform two years of military service under South Korean law. Thus, within the context of predominantly single-gender environments, whether all-male or all-female, the emergence of homosexual love and sexual relationships quietly takes root in Korean society⁵. However, queer experiences in South Korea remain predominantly clandestine, stifled by the pervasive barriers of prejudice that exist among a majority of the population. During an interview conducted by the Joseon-ilbo newspaper on May 12, 2007, with former Mayor Lee Myung Park (who later became the President of South Korea), he expressed his views on abortion and homosexual love, stating,

⁴ In South Korea, there are two forms of housing rental. One is called "wol-se," which means renting a house and paying monthly rent. The other form is "jeon-se," where the tenant makes a large deposit to rent the house and does not have to pay monthly rent.

⁵ Cha Min Jung (2011) analyzed the strong emergence of lesbianism in South Korea within a specific context. According to the analysis, the phenomenon of "homosexual love" among women cannot be seen as unrelated to the creation of a new "space" where women break free from the confines of the traditional family structure and live collectively with women of the same age. The presence of same-sex love within the context of school environments and shared dormitory living among female students demonstrates the interconnectedness of this new "homosocial" dimension. While it is acknowledged that values such as intimacy, affection, and camaraderie among women existed prior to the modern era, it is through the liberation from traditional spaces that centered on men, and the entrance into contemporary spaces like schools or companies, that women became capable of envisioning new forms of relationships between women. This capacity is a crucial prerequisite for the recognition and acknowledgment of intimate relationships among women, giving rise to new and innovative manifestations such as "dating" or "romantic love".

"Fundamentally, I am against it. Before I became a Christian believer, humans were meant to live as the union of male and female, which is considered normal. Therefore, individuals engaged in homosexual relationships are neither human nor animal, but rather deviants"⁶. As a result, it can be stated that South Korean society exhibits a profound prejudice against queer individuals, to the extent that even a prominent intellectual and mayor of a major city like Lee Myung Bak openly expressed highly derogatory remarks in front of the media. What's more alarming is the prevailing system of heteronormativity in South Korean society, which is enforced through clear-cut penalties defined in the Military Criminal Code. Specifically, Section 6 article 92 of this code explicitly outlines the punishment for sexual harassment, stating: "Individuals falling under Sections 1 to 3, engaging in anal intercourse or committing other acts of sexual harassment, shall face imprisonment for a period not exceeding 2 years." This legislation was enacted on November 2, 2009, during the presidency of Lee Myung Bak (2008-2013). Recently, the statement made by the candidate for Minister of Justice, Cho Kuk, on September 7, 2019, causing Korean public opinion to split into two sides in South Korea. He remarked, "Homosexual relationships should not be treated as criminal offenses, and the legalization of homosexual marriage is on the horizon"⁷. However, the opposition against such progressive attitudes remains robust, particularly within various Christian denominations who vehemently oppose homosexuality in order to safeguard their religious doctrines. Notably, on September 19, 2019, Korean professors collectively signed a petition challenging the proposed legislation aimed at prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals⁸. This ongoing wave of opposition continues to demonstrate its resolute strength within the society.

Based on the real-life context in South Korea, where many queer individuals still hesitate to openly assert their gender identity and where prejudice against queerness remains pervasive across all social strata, from the working class to the intellectual elites such as professors and researchers, *"About My Daughter"* vividly depicts the strong discrimination Koreans have against homosexuals. Specifically, the characters Green, Lane, and Green's colleague exemplify the prevailing prejudice against queerness in Korean society. Green's colleague is not directly present in the story but is only mentioned when describing the contextual situation. In the narrative, Green's colleague is fired from a university due to their queer gender identity. However, *"Regarding My Daughter"* goes beyond depicting workplace discrimination and delves into the manifestation of prejudice within families, specifically between the character of the mother and her daughter.

When analyzing this work, while one could focus on Green and Lane to understand their relationship as a form of love, this study limits its scope to examining the attitudes and thoughts of the mother character who struggles to not understand the love of Green - her daughter with Lane. The article analyzes heterosexuality as a social norm - the factor that creates a conflict between the mother and daughter characters and ultimately causes the mother immense distress as she grapples with what she perceives as deviant love..

⁶ Source: https://blog.naver.com/shine_es/80045962763

⁷ Source: <http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/news/325174>.

⁸ Source:

http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002571691&CMPT_CD=P0010&utm_source=naver&utm_medium=newsearch&utm_campaign=naver_news.

It can be said that South Koreans often fulfill societal expectations through education. From a young age, Korean children are expected by their parents to be admitted to top universities such as Seoul, Yonsei, Korea....., and to pursue careers in prestigious corporations like Samsung, Hyundai, Doosan, and others. The majority of Koreans strive for these goals, and in order for their children to meet parental expectations, Korean parents are willing to sacrifice many things, from their own jobs and financial resources to their time. In "About My Daughter," Green's deceased father went to the Philippines to earn money in order to cover the expensive tuition fees for his daughter's education. In the frequent absence of her husband, the mother character in the story also sacrifices everything possible to care for and raise her daughter in the best way. She had to give up her stable job as a teacher, a profession she had worked hard in, and took on various labor-intensive jobs to support her daughter's education and aspirations of becoming a professor or a civil servant. Here we see a change in the expectations of the Korean family structure. The Korean family structure, which was greatly influenced by Confucianism's belief of "the first-born son writes, the rest of the daughters are illiterate," has now evolved due to intense educational competition. In present-day South Korea, if children aspire to access quality education, their parents must possess considerable financial resources. This reality has led many Korean families to opt for the solution of having only one child⁹. The unique familial structure with a sole daughter has gradually gained prominence and thrived within Korean society, shifting the traditionally placed expectations on sons - who were once considered the heirs, towards daughters within the household. The character of the mother in "Regarding My Daughter" exemplifies such a case. She and her husband sacrificed everything to invest in their daughter, anticipating her success in society and envisioning her as a pillar of support in their old age, akin to a male heir in the family. However, contrary to her mother's expectations, Green - the daughter, made a decisive choice upon entering university to rent her own place, asserting her gender identity. Nonetheless, the conflict between the mother and daughter did not arise solely from that moment but likely had been simmering beneath the surface for a long time.

"I turned a blind eye when I first discovered that my daughter was consistently communicating and corresponding with another girl. After all, such interactions are common among young girls. Even when I felt an odd sensation resurface as my daughter entered university and began renting her own place, I mustered the remaining strength to try and ignore the clear evidence and intuition. At times, it seemed my daughter had ventured so far that I could do nothing more. Like a fool, I let slip the opportunity to uproot whatever it was at its core, at any cost." ([7], page.54)¹⁰ This excerpt tells us that the character of the mother has dimly realized her daughter has a special gender from a very early age, but she has not been able to face it bravely and always has a mentality of deliberately avoiding the truth.

The nervousness, fear of facing the naked truth that her daughter has a lesbian sex of the mother is better described by Kim Hye Jin in the everyday situations where she has to witness intimate gestures and words. between Green and Lane.

⁹ Hàn Quốc is the only country in the world with a birth rate below 1, with just 0.98 births per woman in 2018. Source: <http://www.idomin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=707860>.

¹⁰ All the content quoted from the novel "About My Daughter" (2017) in this study has been translated by Ha, Thu Thi Nguyen.

"Therefore, what concerns me is this. Certain moments or scenes will appear before me without any prior warning, and I have to witness firsthand things that I have imagined and speculated about. It could be something beyond my worst fears, something terrifying and much scarier than what I had mentally prepared for" ([7], p. 63).

"In the darkness of the night, what do they do when lying next to each other? Are they imitating and bringing each other the same joy that my husband brings to me or that I bring to my husband? Like how parents give birth to a daughter. Like how my spouse and I have a daughter of our own. Can the two of them have a child who resembles both of them?" ([7], p. 122)

Despite her daughter affirming multiple times that she is a lesbian, stating, *"Mom, mom, look at this. I'm saying to you, look at this [LGBT protest poster]. These words are me. LGBT, homosexual, lesbian, these words are me. That's who I am"* ([7], p. 107), the mother still refuses to accept the truth and is always afraid that her daughter will do what heterosexual people do when they are in love with her homosexuality 'partner'¹¹. The ingrained belief that only individuals with diverse sexual orientations can love each others, engage in intimacy, have children, and form a family deeply permeates the mother's mindset. It controls and manipulates her, rendering her unable to embrace or understand behaviors that deviate from those customary beliefs, leaving her unable to support or empathize with her daughter.

The deeply ingrained ideology of heteronormativity dominates the behavior and attitude of the mother character in her relationship with Lane,- Green's romantic partner. When Green's father falls ill and is hospitalized, Lane frequently visits the hospital to take care of him, driven by concern for Green's well-being. However, when Green's mother discovers that Lane is *"the exact girl who is her daughter's lover"* at the hospital, instead of expressing gratitude, she attempts to dismiss Lane through words such as, *"I appreciate your help, but you don't need to be here. This is a family matter,"* or *"Please be cautious and spare yourself from such efforts in the future."* ([7], p.42)

Amidst financial difficulties and the inability to pay rent, Green sought out her mother for a loan. However, her mother was also struggling and unable to come up with the money to assist her desperate daughter. As a last resort, she proposed that Green move back in with her. Despite the seemingly hopeless situation, Green replied, *"Let me have a conversation first. This is not a decision I can make on my own."* She needed to discuss it with her 'partner' who was living with her. Unable to contain her emotions, the mother uttered, *"You wretched child!"* ([7], p.36). The utmost helplessness culminated in a terrible curse directed at her own, and only, biological daughter. This action reveals the mother's mixture of anguish and disdain towards her daughter's unique gender, contradicting the societal norms she still adheres to.

On the day Green and Lane moved into their new home, while standing face to face with her daughter's partner, the mother whispered silently to herself: *"I still can't decide on anything. I still can't prepare myself to welcome someone of unknown background, someone I can't and don't want to know, into my home. Oh no, I've already made up my mind long ago. I can't change it. I can't let that person into my home"* ([7], p.40). Green's mother couldn't accept Lane - a homosexual individual. Even Green herself - her biological child that she still cannot

¹¹ Using the English word 'partner' in this novel.

recognize, her disapproval of Lane is understandable. However, living under the same roof made it difficult to avoid facing each other. "Perhaps we shouldn't cross paths if possible. At least not in the morning" ([7], p.46). This was Green's mother's first statement to Lane after the lesbian couple moved in together with her. The mother drew a clear boundary with her daughter's "partner". Once again, this action expressed her refusal to accept homosexual love and the individual involved. She felt uncomfortable and tormented herself every time she saw Lane, but given the circumstances that they had to live together under one roof due to financial issues, the only recourse left for her was to silently wish: "If only I didn't accept their rent money. If only I didn't take the extra money for groceries and taxes. If only I could make a condition for my daughter to break up with this girl by offering her a year's worth of rent. If only I could repay the money my daughter borrowed from this girl and ask her to leave my house" ([7], p.66). when the overwhelming sadness consumed her, Green's mother entertained thoughts and desires of violent acts, even murder: "*In this moment, I want to overturn the chair and use force, brute strength, to throw that girl out of the house. I want to grab her hair and scratch her face, preventing her from ever getting close to my daughter and my home. No, not just that. I want to kill this girl. I want this girl who has brought me such pain, sorrow, and ultimate unhappiness to vanish forever*" ([v], p.66).

she always assumed everyone was heterosexual, so when observing her daughter's 'partner', the mother couldn't help but wonder: "*Where did my daughter meet this girl, after all? While everyone else chooses a strong and capable husband for themselves, how did my daughter and this girl fall into such a misguided situation, and from where?*" ([7], p.41). Or she would mutter to herself: "*She can cook delicious meals and maintain cleanliness, so why doesn't this girl get married? Things like starting a family, bearing children to nurture and fulfill societal responsibilities, why doesn't she consider those meaningful and praiseworthy tasks instead of wasting her time and energy in a senseless manner?*" ([7], p.61). Green's mother believed that women should seek a heterosexual marriage, partnering with someone of the opposite sex. Therefore, she wondered why her daughter's "partner" did not adhere to this normalcy. This very notion left her restless, uneasy, and saddened by the fact that her daughter did not even consider doing such a seemingly ordinary path. Kim Hye Jin skillfully depicted the mother's powerless anguish upon discovering her daughter's lesbian identity. While individuals like Green and Lane were tirelessly fighting for societal recognition of their differences, this mother also found herself grappling with the rights and struggles of a mother's position..

- *I have heard your nonsense words many times. I don't know what else you're going to say to hammer more nails into my heart, but I have my rights too. A mother also has the right to see the child she has worked so hard to raise live a normal and rustic life.*
- *What does it mean to live a normal and rustic life? How can you question the way I live?*
- *Is there any reason to question it? Don't you know, or do you pretend not to know? How can you still ask?*
- *Mother, do you honestly not think you've gone too far? Is this truly how far you're willing to go? That chapter has already ended.*
- *What do you mean it has ended? You truly don't know, do you? Have you ever tried to consider how it makes me feel witnessing this scene every day? Have you ever thought about the emotional state a mother experiences when seeing her own grown child living in such an unconventional manner?" ([7], p.66-68)*

The conflict between the character Green and her mother represents a larger conflict between those who uphold heterosexuality as the societal norm for evaluating individuals, and the LGBTQ+ individuals who are struggling to assert their gender identity and fighting for recognition. Despite the fact that the queer population in South Korea accounts for 5-8% of the total population, many South Koreans claim they have never encountered a gay person¹². The queer community in South Korea still operates largely secret¹³. Due to the prevailing queer stigma in South Korea - a country known for its developed economy in Asia, queer individuals find it difficult to openly express their true gender identity. Simultaneously, non-queer individuals also struggle to accept and embrace them, even when they are their own flesh and blood.

According to Green's mother, "[...] *No one lives the way you do. Even if it's an era of living according to one's own desires, does that justify it? Every time I say this, you accuse me of not understanding and consider me an ignorant old woman stuck in the past. But it's not like that. Do you even know how long you'll remain young? Do you think that if you make mistakes, there will always be enough time to rectify them?*" (source, p. 102). In her perspective, all forms of love are considered deviant, which leads her to believe that no one in the world lives like Green, and no one chooses to love or marry someone of the same gender like Green does. Furthermore, she and others argue that although times have changed to the extent that individuals can live according to their own desires, they still find it difficult to accept homosexual love. In particular, the mother perceives this as a mere mistake, one that can be rectified if Green is determined to change. However, her mother categorically refuses to comprehend that this is her daughter's true identity—a fundamental aspect that has existed since birth. Therefore, she offers her advice: "*It's not too late. Find a suitable partner and get married. Then have children. When we're young, we all make mistakes. The crucial thing is to rectify them right away. I am your mother. If not me, who else would say this to you? No matter how you live, others won't bother to care or interfere*" (source, p. 103). Deep down, her mother refuses to acknowledge her daughter's gender identity and continues to expect her to rectify her perceived mistakes by marrying a man and having children. She believes her daughter is making a grave error, and only she—the biological mother—is inclined to offer such advice, as others would not. Her mother urges Green to rectify her mistakes promptly before it's too late, as delaying could hinder her chances of building a family and having children, potentially leading to a life of solitude.

- *I am still your mother, dear. The days of youth pass by in the blink of an eye. Before you know it, you're already 40 or 50 years old and aging rapidly. Do you plan to live alone like this then?*
- *Mother, this is not someone else's concern, but my own. At some point, it may become my reality. And right now, I am not living alone.*

¹² Source:

http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002559836&CMPT_CD=P0010&utm_source=naver&utm_medium=newsearch&utm_campaign=naver_news.

¹³ Recently, thanks to a statement support from the current Minister of Justice of South Korea, who expressed their solidarity with the queer community during their candidacy in early September 2019, queer advocacy activities have gained momentum. On September 21, 2019, a vibrant queer parade took place in Busan, South Korea, along Gunam Street. Source : <http://www.busan.com/view/busan/view.php?code=2019092219201973494>.

- *Not alone, you say? You are alone, my dear. What do you have? Do you have a spouse? Do you have children? Friends or colleagues, they will eventually leave. Despite your extensive education, why do you choose such thoughtless words to express yourself?* ([7], p.104-105)

Green's mother has been strongly influenced by heterosexual normalization, firmly asserts that despite her daughter being in love and living together with Lane, she is still living alone. In her eyes, one must marry and have children in order to have a family. According to her conception of marriage, a girl must marry a man and have to give birth to build a family. But in contrast to her mother, Green "counters" firmly, *"Why is it that only a spouse or children constitute a family? Mom, Lane is my family. Not just a friend. In the past seven years, we have truly lived as a family. What is family, after all? Isn't it about supporting each other and always being there? Why is one considered a family while the other is not?"* Green poses a poignant question: Why is heterosexual marriage deemed as the formation of a family, while homosexual marriage cannot be recognized as such? She asserts resolutely once again in front of her mother..

- *Mother, I have already told you that Lane is not just a friend. To me, she is both my husband and my wife. She is my family.*
- *Being a husband, being a wife? What can the two of you really achieve? Can you get married? Can you both have children? What you're doing feels like playing house. No one plays house past the age of 30" (source, p. 106)*

Thus, both parties have argued, struggled, and clashed, yet in the end, they have failed to find a common ground. Green feels disappointed in her mother, as her mother has never been willing to listen to and understand her. She believes that those who do not understand the LGBT community, like her mother, are the ones hindering acceptance of individuals like herself and Lane in society. Meanwhile, Green's mother also feels heartbroken, as Green has robbed her of *'The right to see the child she has worked so hard to raise can live a normal and rustic life.*

Not only does Green's mother feel heartbroken, but she also feels ashamed to be the mother of an abnormal child. Furthermore, she denies both her child and herself, as well as all the sacrifices made throughout the years of raising her: *"Why would my daughter, out of all things, be attracted to other girls? Why would she throw at me a problem that all parents have no reason or need to think about, urging and tormenting me with the notion of just letting it pass? Why does she make her birth mother so sad? Why is my own daughter so cruel? Why do I feel ashamed to be her mother? I despise myself for feeling ashamed of being her mother. Why does she make me deny her, deny myself, and deny every moment I've lived?"* ([7], p.84). She reminisced and lamented, *"My child used to consider me the whole world, listing to all her mother's words is like a sponge to grow up. My child, who understood that 'no' meant 'no' and 'right' meant 'right' when I spoke, has now surpassed and distanced herself from me... Perhaps my daughter will never return to my embrace again"* ([7], p.97). *Now over 30 years old, Green is no longer the obedient child in her mother's arms. In fact, even at the age of 18 - when she stepped into the gates of university, she asserted her own identity by choosing to live independently. Unable to alleviate the pain and powerlessness in the face of her daughter's resolute affirmation of her gender identity, Green's mother cried out in frustration to Lane, "Do you know how it feels in my heart when I see that? Try putting yourself in my shoes. Try imagining yourself as a parent."* ([7], p.121)

In the end, despite going through various events that somewhat improved the relationship between Green's mother and Lane, she still couldn't fully accept her daughter's gender.

- *I do not know. Will I be able to understand the two of you, I wonder if that day will come while I'm still alive ([7], p.194)*
- *Will there be a miracle that can help me understand the two of you? Because sometimes miracles come in terrifying disguises. If I don't give up, it will eventually come. It could happen. But that takes time. I don't know if I have enough time," She murmured to herself. ([7], p.194-195)*

In the documentary film "Troublers" (2015) directed by Lee Young, the life of lesbian woman Lee Mook is recounted through her own narrative. Lee Mook reveals that in the 1970s, the Korean slang term "person in pants" was used to refer to lesbian women. Prior to the introduction of the term 'lesbian' in South Korea in the 1990s, works related to the theme of "people in pants" had already emerged as early as the 1920s. However, in these works, people who practice non-standard sex are pitiful or punished for misdemeanors, this stigma and punishment has been maintained from the 1950s to the present ([1], p. 204). Thus, it can be said that the deeply ingrained dominance of heteronormativity in Korean society has a long-standing history and is not easily transformed.. For Koreans, love and marriage are only recognized between a man and a woman. Gender, for them, is binary, either male or female, and they staunchly reject queer identities. Green's mother, at the age of 60, grew up in a Korean society where there were laws that deemed homosexuality as a minor offense. It is understandable, given these circumstances, that she struggles to accept the queer identity of others, including her own daughter. She has always harbored fear and made declarations of non-acceptance towards queer identities. However, the event of Green and Lane moving in together with her marks a turning point, creating a context where non-queer individuals like her coexist with queer individuals. Living under the same roof, engaging in small interactions like sharing a cup of coffee or cooking in the kitchen, hanging clothes in the yard, and witnessing Lane's presence silently, these gradual encounters begin to reshape her psychological state and thoughts. There, she also witnesses and experiences Lane's sacrifices and love for her daughter. She directly observes the struggles that her daughter endures to protect those who face discrimination based on their shared gender identity. Through these experiences, her own prejudice undergoes a "gradual" transformation towards greater acceptance of queer individuals. Kim Hye Jin mentioned queer but did not take queer as the main character, she built the main character as the mother of a lesbian, portraying the lesbian experience through the eyes of a non-queer individual. By employing this character-building approach, the author successfully depicts queerness with relative objectivity while simultaneously portraying the emotions and thoughts of a mother, evoking a sense of empathy in the readers.

2.0 Conclusion

Cultural critic Alexander Doty argues that queerness is always inherent in popular culture and literature, but "cultural education that promotes homophobia and stigmatizes homosexuality prevents people from recognizing queerness" ([8], p. 34 - cited in). However, in recent times, through works of literary art, the struggle for affirmation by queer individuals has grown strong. Kim Hye Jin has also made a significant contribution with her work " *About My*

Daughter," where she affirms the diversity of queer love and sexuality. This study has taken *heterosexual normalization* as a theoretical basis to explain the mother's attitude and psychology towards her daughter's homosexual love. Given the normativity of heterosexuality, Green's mother believes that love and marriage should only be established between individuals of different sexes, where women should love, marry, and bear children with men. This mindset has rendered Green's mother unable to accept her daughter's same-sex love, leading to deep conflicts within their relationship, as well as between her and Lane, her daughter's "partner." Living together and experiencing close encounters and clashes, these circumstances have gradually influenced the mother's entrenched beliefs, causing them to undergo a transformation. At the end of the story, the author depicts the mother character as someone who may never fully understand her daughter, but who is on a path towards wanting to comprehend her. "*About My Daughter*" affirms the existence of the queer message, and with time, it suggests that one day everyone will come to understand and accept it..

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