The Posthuman and Transboundary Imagination in Contemporary Korean Literature: Considering the Works of Pae Myŏnhun and Yun Ihyŏng

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Literature limited to the eyes of “humanity” as created by humanism is insufficient to explore the conditions faced in the twenty-first century. The posthuman forms, such as cyborgs, humanoids, and artificial intelligence, prevalent in contemporary South Korean literature, go beyond reflecting scientific developments, they operate as critical, political rhetoric with regards to discourses of modernity. This article focuses on the posthuman forms and also future time and space in Pae Myŏnhun and Yun Ihyŏng’s short stories in relation to critical posthumanism. Although Pae’s allegorical approach may seem somewhat simplistic, the posthuman forms which are brought to life in his works are highly innovative and effectively criticize modern systems. In contrast to Pae, Yun uses the futuristic subject to concentrate on humans, through narratives of coexistence where nonsynchronism is in operation. Yun’s narratives focus on a performative posthuman discourse which traverses gender, age, and class-based dualisms. With hybrid, multi-layered and performative identities, and the transgression of boundaries, the two writers undermine the modern notion of linear, progressing time, and cast doubt on notions of objectivity or totalized knowledge, urging a rethinking of the “here and now.”

Keywords: posthuman; transboundary; contemporary South Korean science fiction; Pae Myŏnhun; Yun Ihyŏng