

Literature facing the challenges of racial divides, re-imagining justice

Seogkwang Peter Lee

Gyeongsang National University

South Korea

A fabled reading of a Korean story: *The Hen Who Dreamed She Could Fly*

This paper endeavours to offer a critical reading of *The Hen Who Dreamed She Could Fly* through the lens of a fable in order to elucidate an illustration of eugenic restriction being transcended by transracial compassion.

This novel is translated from Korean and presents a farm of hens, mallard ducks, domestic ducks, dogs, roosters and weasels. In this setting, a hen, named Sprout, yearns for what is denied to her both genetically and environmentally.

Sprout is assigned the role of an egg-laying chicken, intended to lay unfertilized eggs for sale at the market by the profit-oriented farm owners. Her *raison d'être* is not to become a mother, as she wishes, but to provide a commodity. As such, the farm owners value their livestock selectively as per their ability to lay good quality eggs. Not only are her eggs defective and weak-shelled, but she is cordoned off away from any roosters. Her identity is defined eugenically according to her genetics and the orchestrated circumstances of her environment as well as how she is measured within it.

Furthermore, Sprout is unable to fly beyond floating in the air more than a few seconds. Despite this, she desires flight and this, due to her genetics, is even further beyond her than motherhood. She is thus presented as a somewhat pitiful creature who underperforms in her assigned role and is denied her wishes.

However, upon coming across and caring for a duck egg left behind after its father and the rest of its siblings were killed by weasels, Sprout becomes a mother to a duck. The novel describes the realised impossibility of her motherhood by conflating the sensation of flight with the fulfilment of finally attaining motherhood. This motif is further continued as Sprout comes to the completion of her role as her son grows to the point of being able to leave her and fly away with a passing raft of ducks.

At the close of the tale, her motherly compassion transcends all her bounds when she encounters a dying group of weasels. Previously depicted as a source of fear and horror, Sprout now sees a mother unable to feed her young and that her offspring will soon die for lack of food. Sprout offers herself as food and witnesses the weasel bringing

sustenance to her children whilst floating above them in ethereal form; she has attained flight at last.

This essay thus offers transracial motherly love as an answer to the restrictive prejudices of eugenics. By means of this compassion, Sprout is able to acquire identity and self that was denied to her, even to an impossible degree. As such, this novel, when viewed as a fable, offers a release from the false boundaries of eugenics, making a point to name and validate the animals that contribute to this journey as opposed to the invalidation by the farm owners. This essay thereby proposes a reinterpreted approach to understanding ourselves and other beings that constitutes 'a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole, and to do so within an understandable language.' (Braidotti).