

Exploring the Aesthetics of Sexual Violence in Therese Park's 'A Gift of the Emperor': A Brief Study on Korean Comfort Women

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Abstract : The use of rape as a weapon of war has been in existence for as early as the middle ages. Women, during the conflict, have been treated as the spoils of war, a reward for the conquering soldiers granted to them by their superiors which is, arguably, most often overlooked as part of the collateral damage that is unavoidable in conflict zones. Korean-born Therese Park's first novel, *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), describes one such atrocious incidence wherein she highlights the active role the Japanese military played in procuring and condoning trafficking of women, who were euphemistically referred to as 'comfort women', for prostitution during World War II. This paper thus aims to look at the remembering and reckonings of these women, which fueled a range of creative gestures in the artistic representations and knowledge production by Korean American artists and writers. The essay divides into three parts wherein first it tries to highlight the relationship of the state and the self in relation to the 'comfort women' as to who bears the onus of the exploitation of these women, or the responsibility for the redressal with the present-day notions of human rights as studied through Ueno Chizuko's 'The Politics of Memory: Nation, Individual and Self' (1999). There are several narratological elements of the text that are of interest here which shall be viewed and analysed throughout the paper as well. The second part of the paper talks about the aesthetics of rape and sexual violence as represented or (mis)represented by Park in her novel as she attempts to give voice to the victim and retain her and her suffering as the central focus of the narrative. Finally, the third part of the novel explores as well as places the novel in the context of debates over the highly contested issue of 'comfort women' and the actual 'comfort women' survivors' testimonies. For this purpose, the present study focuses on Dori Laub's 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle' (1991).

Keywords : Korean comfort women, survivors' testimonies, sexual slavery, aesthetics of sexual violence, horrible memories

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