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**A Comparative Look at the Portrayal of Parenthood in Korean and English Fiction**

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This topic suggested itself to me after I had read a number of nineteenth century English novels with my graduate students and was struck by how important the idea of parental duties was to many English novelists, and as I also recalled what weighty shadows parents cast on the lives of the protagonists in Korean fiction. It occurred to me that it might not be unprofitable to compare parent-child relationships as portrayed in English and Korean fiction.

The idea of parenthood is very different in the Korean mind from the European’s concept of parenthood. I can’t imagine a community on earth where the parent-child relationship is more reserved than in Korea, except perhaps in the Arab world, of which I know next to nothing. While almost limitlessly indulged in infancy and childhood by their parents, Korean children simply do not bring their problems to their parents once they reach their teens. It is not because they distrust or underestimate their parents; it is rather because such things are simply not done. In the old days, when Koreans lived in multi-generational families, parents were ashamed to show any marked fondness for their own children, especially when the latter ceased to be small children. Korean children grew up in the midst of numerous siblings, cousins, second cousins, etc., and learned survival strategies from each other. Besides, the parents were too busy with work to talk to their children and look into their psychological welfare in lower class families, or could not afford to be seen to associate with their children too closely on account of their dignity in yangban families. So, Koreans are not used to regarding their parents as human beings with complex wishes and desires. Parents are regarded simply as parents, who owe their children basic sustenance and as many educational opportunities as they can possibly afford, and who in return can demand absolute loyalty and obedience from their children. Few, if any, Koreans have had heart-to-heart talks with their parents even once. Sharing the details of one’s intimate life with one’s parents or children is [page 66] thought to be indecent, to say nothing of being embarrassing. So, until quite recently, Korean parents were basically required to work their fingers to the bone to feed and shelter their children and to punish them when they lied, stole, or cheated. Beyond this, it was eminently desirable that they practice what they taught their children, and be respectable members of the community, but they were not required to be their children’s ‘‘friends.” Sons did seek their father’s advice at critical junctures in their lives or, depending on the character of the father, report the need for decision-making and await the father’s decision, but few fathers ever talked to their sons “man to man.” Mother-daughter rela-tionships seem to have been much closer, but mothers and daughters could have few contacts after the daughters got married and became “outsiders.”

As close communication between parents and children is forbidden by rules of decorum, it is not surprising that in Korean literature many parental characters are stereotypes. The age-oid stereotype is the mother who is totally self-sacrificing and the father who is remote and awesome but ready with profound wisdom or noble sentiment at times of crisis. On the other hand there are wicked-parent stereotypes, such as mothers who elope with lovers and abandon their children, or fathers who get drunk every night and beat up their wives and children.

Korean literature, like any other country’s literature, has been shaped by the historical experience of the people whose lives it records. In pre-modern Korea, living conditions were harsh. Even many yangban were poor, either through excesive probity or from failure to obtain official appointments—they were often split between struggling and scheming for power and position and preserving their scholarly integrity amid poverty and royal disfavor. For the masses, it has been a story of oppression and exploitation generation after generation. And then, after the forcible opening of the Hermit Kingdom by foreign powers, one shock wave after another hit Koreans. First, it was the ideas of prosperity through technological progress and equality for all people. Then came the bitter humiliation of colonial subjugation for 35 long years. Then came liberation and the desperate ideological confrontation between the supporters of communism and free democracy. Then the division of the country and the bloody internecine war and the resultant scattering of families and destruction of property, and the wound has not yet healed for many Koreans.

Up till the end of the Yi Dynasty, much of Korean literature had overtones of sadness and regret, which is only natural in light of the condition of life in those times. However, much of the literature also had[page 67] rugged strength, buoyant zest for life, and a sense of irony, testifying to the courage and resiliency of ancient Koreans. It is only in the twentieth century that the tone of literature has become overwhelmingly gloomy. The many unhappy experiences of life have left their mark on Korean literature in various forms. The mark on parent-child relationships in literature is very distinctive. The prolonged resistance movement against the Japanese colonialists and the ideological warfare drafted many Korean men away from their homes into national and ideological battlefields, and it demanded greater and greater self-sacrifice of Korean women. As a result, Korean literature teems with absent fathers and mothers who are forced to do double duty. Many of the absent fathers, moreover, not only fail to fulfill their duties as fathers by reason of their prolonged or permanent absence, but put their families through unspeakable torment by causing them to be watched by the police. Families of independence fighters during the Japanese colonial rule and the leftists’ families during the Korean War and immediately after were subject to police surveillance, interrogation, even torture. While fear of communists ran high, they had to endure many forms of social prejudice and discrimination. Until quite recently close families of communists were barred from a number of im-portant professions, most notably executive and judiciary offices, and the stigma of treason and the suggestion of fiendish brutality clung to them. It is no wonder that many young writers today are exploring what it meant to be a leftist in the era of post-liberation ideological warfare and during the aftermath of the Korean War.

If I may be allowed a sweeping generalization, modern Korean litera-ture .reflects the story of the Korean people’s victimization at the hands of historical and social forces. Most characters in Korean literature are victims in some sense, often in more than one. Consequently, the parents of the central characters are viewed either as part of the victimizing force (brutal, negligent, incompetent parents) or victims like the central characters. Sometimes both parents belong to either the one or the other camp, and sometimes one parent belongs to one and the other to the other. Having a victimized parent or parents increases one’s sense of being a victim, as Korean children have an undeniable duty of redressing the wrongs suffered by their parents. This duty is even more binding than the parents, duty to protect and nurture their children. Naturally, parenting is very popular in Korea.

Of course it is not easy for literary protagonists, a sensitive breed in the literature of any nationality, to redress their parents’ wrongs suffered[page 68] at the hands of the inhuman forces of history or of gigantic social mechanisms. In many cases, coming to terms with their parents’ failures is about all they can do to make their lives supportable. The most common strategy employed to this end is to discover some noble trait of character in the defeated and failed parents. In Yun, Heung-gil’s ‘‘Fuel,” the father disappoints his son terribly by cringing before the forest guard when caught red-handed gathering timber in a forest preserve. In his inability to buy or obtain fuel in any way, the father looks more and more incompetent and weak, but the redeeming moment comes when he tells his son simply and affectionately that he will make his family warm that winter even if he has to burn his own body for fuel.

In “The House” by the same author the father is powerless to prevent his unauthorized shanty from being forcibly demolished by the city, and he brings horrendous shame upon his family by trying to thwart the demolition team’s job by locking himself in the hut and threatening to get crushed to death, but he does not have the willpower to stick even with this threat, and jumps out when the demolishers make as if to simply go on with the demolition regardless. The resultant loss of face makes his elder son ring the church bell like mad in the middle of the night, but presumably the younger son, the narrator of the story, will find pity and affection for his father in the hearts of the story’s readers.

For those who cannot come to terms with their fathers’ failures, like the young protagonists in “Filial Affection, or Hostility” by Kim Won-u and “Meditations on a Snipe Bird” by Kim Won-il, stories in which the fathers simply bear the oppressions of life’s various forces like beasts of burden, the vision is one of stark pessimism. In the latter story, the father is a victim not only of the world but of his grasping wife. He gets kicked out of his teaching job, because his wife forces him to embezzle money from his school’s funds to finance her investment and fails to reimburse him. Thereafter he is dependent on her for spending money which she, of course, begrudges him.

Victimization of one spouse by the other is of course as old as literature, but in Korean literature it is only quite recently that the husband’s victimization by the wife has become at all noticeable. The classic prototype has always been the abused wife who is neglected, cheated, robbed, and brutalized by the husband. Idiot Adada in the short story of the same name and the missis in “The Deaf and Dumb Bondsman Samyong” are classic examples of this type of wife. This type is in fact so numerous in Korean literature that it may well be said that there is a sub-genre spe-[page 69] cializing in the abused wife. As in Guy de Maupassant’s Une Vie, this type of wife symbolizes not just the pitiful lot of Woman, but the lot of the helpless and powerless in a brutal, unfeeling world. Bernard Malamud once said ‘‘all men are Jews,” in reference to the rootlessness and helplessness of all men before the cruel forces of life. In the same way, it can well be said that Korean literature suggests that all men are women. A delicious irony, considering the insidious chauvinism of Korean males!

However, in recent years, with the improvement of women’s status and the growth of women’s power, mysogynist sentiments have begun to tell in Korean literature, and a sizeable number of stories have been devoted to denouncing the termagant wife who creates “skirt wind” and wreaks havoc with the social and domestic order. The animosity against this type of woman approaches insane hatred, because women’s selfless sacrifice and submission have been the very foundation of Korean society, and women’s economic power and dominance pose threats not only to the male ego but the basic male identity. These self-aggrandizing and power- wielding women are almost always shown as veritable Medusas without any tender feelings. As yet, however, these women are in the minority, even in literature. Luckily, too, Korean writers, male as well as female are beginning to see the advantage of having interesting and complex female characters in their stories, instead of those strong stereotypes of old.

Writer Yun Heung-gil, who is in his mid-forties now, rather skillfully combines this abused and enduring wife theme with the woman-as- Medusa concept. His ambitious novel, Emi, presents a woman who gets cheated and battered by life as much as any woman can, and who keeps herself and her sons alive by working like an ox and by intimidating her neighbors with her spite and ill-temper, but who in the end rises above the pathetic to sublimity by virtue of her vitality and her capacity to transcend her own viewpoint.

At the end of the book, her son says, “I always believed that women are to be pitied, but I realized just now that women are not in the least pitiful. I think women are battered neither by national crises nor by men. They have always pretended to accept exploitation and abuse, but I think that such notions as exploitation and abuse do not apply to women because no brute force can completely overpower women. Instead of fighting violence women simply accommodate violence and men in their interior... I won’t say any longer that my mother was abused by my father all her life. Neither of them has won or lost because my mother[page 70] never regarded my father as an opponent. I think we can say that every-one—my father, myself, and my brother—are all lucky seeds who have survived the lean years because we have been planted on the rich soil of my mother.” To me, this sounds very much like male cunning used to encourage women to greater self-sacrince, and male impudence into the bargain which dares to envy women for the hardships they, men, have forced them to bear. But the novel is an impressive performance with a memorable central character, making splendid use of Cholla-do dialect.

Dealing with absent fathers is another major problem that has to be resolved by the young generation of writers. Korean fathers always tended to be remote and reticent, both in life and in literature, as Korean yangban males were required to place official duty before familial concerns, and were wont to be absent from home for study, for execution of official duties, or for any number of reasons. In fact during the Yi Dynasty families were not allowed to accompany government officials to their posts of appointment. Moreover, it was thought less than masculine to be obviously affectionate to his family or to be familiar with the details of household matters, so even resident fathers were distant and severe. Besides, fathers who are absent because they died in the post-liberation ideological struggle or because they defected to the North during those years pose special problems, as they are not only absent but have left lingering persecution and stigma behind them. It is only recently that writers were granted a measure of freedom to examine and discuss the ideological battles as conflicts between two valid ideologies and not as strife between patriots and traitors. Naturally, in the last ten years a host of fictional works that explore the characters and thoughts of the young leftist thinker or thinkers has been produced, and have greatly enriched Korean literature. Perhaps the greatest gain has been Yi Min-yol’s two- volume novel, The Age of Heroes. This very forceful novel has as protagonist a young leftist active in the forties and fifties, patently the writer’s own father.

Yi Mun-yol imaginatively reconstructs the life of his father who, from being an idealist who saw in socialism a solution to all the iniquities and backwardness of Korean society, becomes more and more embroiled in the political power struggle within the communist camp. Although he, too, has his drive for power, he cannot stoop to his colleague’s brand of party struggle, and he is inevitably phased out of the communist hierarchy. The novel is a story of a typical intellectual embroiled in an ideological contest that quickly turns into a deadly power struggle and forces him to [page 71] commit unheard-of atrocities in the name of sacred goals. Thus, it is much more than the story of one ideologue. It is a social history of those turbulent years and it is also an exploration of the interaction of the human mind and will and ideologies. Yi, Mun-yol writes: ‘‘In my boyhood, the word ‘communism’ was understood as something resembling blood-dripping swords or smoking guns, but as I grew older I came to realize that it was something that had neither color nor smell, but was just a bunch of thoughts contained in impersonal language. That made me wonder: how did that bunch of thoughts become transformed into dripping swords and smoking guns? Moreover, after I grew still older, I came to realize that democracy, which I had been educated to regard as a sacred religion, played the same role as communism to its enemies. So I came to wonder still more. So I began to speculate on the massive aberration of intellectuals that took place on the ruin of the ancien regimes of Asia; on their bewilderment and restlessness; on their self-righteousness and bigotry; on the deadliness of immature ideologies and all ideologies which confuse ends with means.” Yi once said that he became a writer to write this novel.

But not to leave you with the impression that no Korean home was ever normal, and that no Korean parent ever left beneficial legacies but only burdens and pains, I would like to close by introducing one set of eminently admirable and entirely natural parents from a roman fleuve that has recently received much attention from being dramatized as a television serial. In Nodaji, a strongly autobiographical four-volume novel by Sonu Hui, the hero’s parents are typical Korean farmers. The father had had some classical education in his childhood from his father, who had belonged to the yangban class, but after his family’s decline he does all sorts of rough work, including digging in a gold mine. After he is able to purchase his own land, he settles down as a farmer. When he has a son after three disappointments—i.e., daughters—he sleeps with his son and tells him folk tales and tales of heroes every night. He is never preachy, and he is not a hero as such, i.e., he is not a member of the resistance movement against the Japanese, but he is an embodiment of honesty and is capable of great courage, as becomes evident when he has to shelter a group of Chinese men wanted by the Japanese police. He is rather a survivalist who wishes that his children would stay out of the big social conflicts, but he allows his sons to join communist or democratic movements when the times drafted all educated young men into ideological warfare. In spite of his great love for his land and hometown, he orders his sons to flee to[page 72] the South and stay there, when he sees that life will be blighted in the Russian occupied North.

He is a man of great physical strength, and lives by the exertion of his muscles, but his delicacy is seen when, for example, his son quits his teaching job with the country’s liberation and loafs at home. His son entertains his friends at home day and night and feeds them chickens from the family poultry yard. The father disapproves of his son’s behavior, but instead of scolding him he asks his son if he knows how many chickens there had been in the poultry yard when he came home and how many there were then. And then he tells his son to throw one more party for his friends and exhort them to find some work, any work. Then he buys his son a calf, so that the son can look after the calf and thus put his time to some constructive use.

His mother is for the most part a hard-working and loyal wife, but she flouts her husband’s authority to attend church with her three daughters, because she finds true religion in Christianity and wants her daughters to get the benefit of the educational opportunities offered by the church. She decides to stop attending church, however, even though her husband gives his formal permission for her to do so, because she decides that she doesn’t want to be separated from her husband after death—i.e., lest she go to Heaven and he to limbo.

It may be wondered why I am comparing the portrayal of parenthood in twentieth century Korean fiction to that in nineteenth century English fiction, but the world of twentieth century European and American fiction is a world extremely alien to that of twentieth century Korean fiction and Korean society. It is to nineteenth century England that I naturally turn, to find similar problems and similar concerns. ‘‘Parent is a dirty word,” says the protagonist’s mother in Peter Schaffer’s Equus, and in twentieth century Western literature parents are just one more factor in making the heroes and heroines maladjusted, alienated, lonely, and suicidal, but not so in the nineteenth century. British fiction up to the emergence of Thomas Hardy can be said to deal with how the individual can be integrated into his society as a mature adult capable of contributing to the improvement and strengthening of the society. We might say that this concern arose in the process of building a stable and cohesive society amid rapid social changes and that the concern in its turn contributed to social cohesion in spite of the disintegration of many kinds of traditional structures. I will take two outstanding nineteenth century British writers, Jane Austen from the rural gentry and Charles Dickens from the urban middle-[page 73] class, to see what roles and responsibilities they postulated on their parents and parental figures in their protagonists’ struggle for achieving maturity and adulthood.

Jane Austen has been correctly evaluated as ‘‘the most forthright moralist” in English literature. Superficial readers are apt to think that Jane Austen novels are stories of young women finding marriage partners, but the right kind of marriage in Jane Austen novels means so much more than acquiring romantic happiness or realization of the Cinderella dream. The right marriage in her novels means the couple’s winning of citizenship in the adult world, and her novels show the process by which that citizenship can be won. Her heroes and heroines qualify themselves for marriage and for citizenship in the adult world by arriving at a knowledge of themselves—which means eliminating the conceit in them—and acquiring the ability to sympathize with, and be considerate of others, while the role of parents is shown to be crucial in inculcating in their children, to quote Austen’s own phrase, that higher species of self- command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of [their] own heart, that principle of right” which make them fit both for marriage and for participation in the real businesses of life. In fact, all six of Jane Austen’s novels can be seen as treatises on the crucial importance of parental duties and as stern criticism of those who fail in parental responsibility.

In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen’s first published novel and her most popular one, her high spirit and zest for life were stronger than her disenchantment with the world. Mr. Bennet, though clearly presented as a derelict parent, is still drawn with tenderness, Mrs. Bennet, with all her insufferable stupidity and vulgarity, is a figure of fun rather than a posi-tively destructive force, but Austen made it clear that their inadequate parenting exposed their children to grave risks.

Even though a man of intelligence, Mr. Bennet is mentally lazy and does not take the trouble to instill stability and a sense of moral responsi-bility in his daughters. On the contrary, he contents himself with being witty at the expense of his stupid wife and three immature younger daughters. Elizabeth is his favorite, being a young woman of keen wit and high spirits, but one gets the feeling that Mr. Bennett’s uncritical admiration and fondness for this second daughter has given her an undue confidence in herself and was the cause of her several misjudgments. The most reprehensible result of Mr. Bennett’s neglect of parental duties appears, however, in the character and conduct of his youngest daughter,[page 74]  Lydia. Instead of trying to check her thoughtless frivolity he allows her to go to Brighton, where an army is stationed, because, in his own words, “Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public pface or other,”Elizabeth pleads, “If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment.” Mr. Bennet, however, only responds with the hope that at Brighton she will realize her own insignificance. Lydia’s trip to Brighton results in her elopement with Wickham, which would have brought fatal disgrace on the whole family, if Mr. Darcy hadn’t been there to bribe and blackmail Wickham into marrying Lydia.

In Emma, Mr. Woodhouse is mentally and physically infirm and positively dotes on his daughter Emma. He is also totally lacking in sym-pathetic imagination. On the marriage of his daughter’s governess he says,

“Poor Miss Taylor!—I wish she were here again. What a pity it is that Mr. Weston ever thought of her!”

“. . . you would not have had Miss Taylor live with us for ever and bear all my odd humours, when she might have a house of her own?”

“A house of her own! —but where is the advantage of a house of her own? This is three times as large. —And you have never any odd humours, my dear.”

Miss Taylor, who might have been a surrogate mother to Emma,, thought too highly of her to be critical and disciplinary, and Mr. Wood- house, instead of being a parent to Emma, in reality becomes dependent on her like a child. So, Emma suffers from “the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.” It is only when she is chastened by a series of her own mistakes and humbly accepts the moral tutelage of Mr. Knightley that she becomes qualified for marriage as a mature, responsible adult.

In Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas Bertram is a grave and upright man with all the right principles, but he entrusts the upbringing of his children almost entirely to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Norris, from a mistaken confidence in her judgment and character. Lady Bertram is a whining invalid whose moral influence on her children is nil, so the Bertram children are left to the mercy of Mrs. Norris, who indulges their selfish tendencies to make them dependent on her. Edmund and Fanny have to guard themselves against the interference of Mrs. Norris and fight against her evil[page 75]  influence on the other Bertram children. In the end, they have to become their own and each other’s parents. It is in this novel that we have one of the passages of acutest criticism of British moral education that places more importance on outward form than inward feeling:

Julia... was now in a state of complete penance, and as different from the Julia of the barouche-box as could well be imagined. The politeness which she has been brought up to practice as a duty, made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it.

(Vol- I, ch. ix)

Sir Elliott of Persuasion is the deadliest of all Austen fathers. As a pompous fool he is laughable, but in this last novel Jane Austen is no longer amused by pompous fools. His selfishness makes him a villain as well as an idiot, and his callous coldness makes a hell of Anne’s existence. Anne does have a good surrogate mother in Lady Russell, but ironically it is Lady Russell’s well-meant advice which makes Anne decide to break off her engagement to Wentworth and pitches her into blackest misery for eight long years. Anne’s happiness is restored only after she has learned to completely ignore, and disassociate herself from her own family’s selfish claims and gained enough confidence in herself as the best arbiter of the prospects for her own happiness.

All in all, tracing Jane Austen’s development as an author, we can say that her novels exhibit a progressively deepening disenchantment with the realities of life and people. Whereas in her earlier novels Austen sees parental failures as arising from simple negligence or excessive trust in the children, in Persuasion Sir Elliott is a villain as well as a fool. Another notable aspect is that while in Pride and Prejudice, Emma and to some extent Mansfield Park the male heroes are tutelary spirits and father figures to the heroines, in Persuasion Wentworth abrogated the tutelary role altogether and his recognition of Anne’s unchanging worth consti-tutes an education for him alone. Thus, it can be inferred that Austen became more and more convinced that young people, especially young women, can expect precious little help from parents and surrogate parents in attaining adulthood and must become self-reliant if they are to have any chance of happiness at all. We can say that Jane Asuten saw every-[page 76] where truly reprehensible neglect of parental duties, sometimes amounting to moral destruction of children by parents, and that to her it accounted for so much of what was wrong with the world. Having never married and had children herself, she does not seem to have considered the psychological, moral and material obligation of children to their infirm parents and elders.

A child is at the heart of most Dickens novels, and Dickens children are often orphans; they are orphans because their parents have deserted them or have died. To children, their parents’ death cannot but look like an act of desertion. Some parents do even worse than dying or deserting, their children: they oppress and exploit their children. In all such cases, children are the victims of the adult world, and in the Dickens world, the child stands for not only the young in years but for all sensitive human beings at the mercy of forces larger than themselves.

It is well known that Dickens, own father’s sending him to the blacking factory to work when he was twelve remained a lifelong wound to him, and his mother’s wanting him to go back to the factory, when he was sent home by his employer, rankled in his heart till death. It is, therefore, no wonder that a Dickens parent is often seen as a persecutor and oppressor. Mr. Dombey in Dombey and Son is a prime example. He so completely cows and intimidates the first Mrs. Dombey that she lives and dies in mortal dread of him. His lovely and affectionate daughter Florence he regards simply as a nuissance, since a daughter cannot grow up to be a business partner. On his son, Paul, he lavishes such affection as he has, but he “loves” him solely as an instrument to carry on his business and perpetuate the name of his firm, so little Paul dies, crushed by the cruel weight of his father’s expectations and Florence grows up feeling unwanted and worthless.

Another set of Dickens children destroyed by a father are Louisa and Tom Gradgrind of Hard Times. Mr. Gradgrind is far from being a heartless monster like Mr. Dombey. Though severely deficient in imagination and feeling, he raises his children with the best of intentions and is a hard-working father. Firmly convinced that sentiment and imagination weaken character and mess up the affairs of the world, he brings his children up to be reasoning machines. Because he forbids all expression of emotion, Louisa finds an outlet for her abundant love only in Tom, her worthless brother; and Tom, being denied any healthy pleasure, surreptitiously purchases base pleasures with stolen money. Mr. Gradgrind’s repentance was sincere when he found out how his system had destroyed his children,[page 77]  but by then Tom had committed robbery and caused the death of an honest labourer, and Louisa was cast aside by her monster of a husband and had to live the rest of her life in disgrace.

Orphan Oliver’s tribulations in Oliver Twist have become an emblem of the suffering innocent at the hands of evil grown-ups. David Copper- field is a bit more fortunate, but he also has his period of blackest misery, terror and degradation. The numerous parents and surrogate parents in David Copperfield are all either perverse or inadequate. David’s mother was affectionate, but she was totally powerless to shield David from the murderous Mr. Murdstone. Mr. Peggoty’s love for Emily is clearly abnormal. Mr. Wickfield, through excessive love for his daughter Agnes, becomes helplessly dependant on her. Dora’s father Mr. Spenlow dies without leaving a will. Mr. Micawber, said to be modelled after Dickens’ own father, is a perpetual child no more capable of adult responsibility than any in his crop of children. Great Aunt Betsy is the good fairy, and creditably discharges the office of both father and mother to David, but her emotional inhibitions make her inadequate as David’s adviser in his relationship with Dora. In the end David has to find a true mother in his patient and loving Agnes and become his own father, which is what becoming a writer partly signifies.

Another child left to the mercy of a series of surrogate parents is Pip in Great Expectations. Both parents having long quitted him and the world, he is left to the mercy of the ill-tempered and selfish Mrs. Gargery, his sister. His brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, is his fellow-sufferer, companion and protector. Pip would have grown up to be an honest and stalwart blacksmith like Joe and all would have been well, had not destiny interfered by thrusting in Pip’s way two false surrogate parents: the rancorous, jilted old maid Mrs. Havisham and the vindictive escaped convict Magwitch. When informed that he has a patron who wishes to make a gentlemen of him, he naturally thinks it is Mrs. Havisham, she is the only rich person he knows. Seduced by the thought that she must be intending him to be the husband of her adopted daughter, the beautiful Estella, he accepts the offer without a moment’s hesitation and leaves behind his lifelong friend and protector without the least regret. Pip is almost the only Dickens child who has a corrupt heart and sticks to his corrupt choice. Not all Miss Havisham’s terrifying weirdness and vindictive rancor can dim the allure of the gentleman’s status. It is only after he learns that his patron was not Miss Havisham, but the brutish ex-convict he once saved from death by starvation with stolen food, that he realizes[page 78] the vanity of his dream. However, in the course of his struggle to smuggle Magwitch out of the country before he gets caught by the law Pip, finds himself able to pity and love the vulgar convict, and he is saved. In this moral salvation Pip gets a lot of help from Joe, that rare creation who is wholly good, entirely wholesome and completely believable—a character only Dickens could create. Although Joe has plenty of natural sagacity and native dignity, however, he is too simple-hearted to be a sufficient guide to Pip, living in industrialized London. Pip, therefore, has to acquire the wisdom to live his own life through tribulations and errors. Here, too, therefore, it could be said that Pip has to become his own father.

Summing up Austen and Dickens, we could say that both of them in the end arrived at the conclusion that one has to acquire one’s own wisdom and learn one’s own way in life, though a good parent can do ever so much for a child’s happiness and growth, but I think the two authors concluded this for different reasons. While Austen can be said to have despaired of the possibility of finding parents wise enough and caring enough to fulfill all the duties of parenthood, in Dickens it is much more because the world is changing so rapidly and the wisdom of the parents’ generation is never enough for the much more complex world of the children’s generation.

In conclusion, I think we can say that, broadly speaking, English literature emphasizes parents’ duties to children, and Korean literature often deals with children grappling with the legacies of their parents. Each addresses one of the most fundamental problems of human existence, and both are the stuff of important and meaningful literature.