



Emotional Resonance in "Please Look After Mother": An Affect Theory Analysis

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Abstract: This study uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Affect Theory to look at feelings in Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother." The research shows that characters have strong emotional ties, and these emotions affect their behaviors and relationships, especially concerning love, loss, guilt, and desire, with a focus on the mother-child bond. This research uses qualitative methods and thematic analysis, collecting data through close reading and examining key character moments in the story. Findings indicate that these emotions are important for character development and influence how they deal with family and societal expectations. This analysis reveals that the emotional depth of the story not only engages readers but also highlights universal themes of care and the difficulties of familial love. This exploration shows that affect theory is essential for understanding the complex emotional themes in the text, emphasizing the importance of emotional expression in grasping human relationships within wider social contexts.

Keywords: Affect Theory, Character Development, Emotional Ties, Familial Love, Mother-Child Bond.

Research Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Kyung-sook Shin's book "Please Look after Mother" looks at family ties, focusing on the deep connection between mothers and their children. This paper uses affect theory to explore the feelings in the story, focusing on themes of love, loss, guilt, and desire. The story portrays the mother as a selfless individual who makes significant sacrifices for her children, often going unacknowledged. By looking at important moments in the plot, this study shows how characters deal with their mother's absence and think about her sacrifices, considering society's views on family roles.

Affect Theory suggests that emotions come from social and cultural settings, going beyond personal experiences. To understand the emotional experiences of the characters, it's important to know the Korean culture, which stresses family obligations and respects mothers. By combining theme analysis with a qualitative method, this paper seeks to reveal how emotions and identities

connect, showing how love, duty, and guilt shape the characters' moral and emotional journeys.

In the end, this research points out themes of care and lasting family love, showing how affect theory deepens our understanding of these emotional narratives. This paper encourages readers to connect with the text more deeply, engaging with the genuine feelings and complicated family relationships found in "Please Look After Mother." The main point is that looking at the story through Affect Theory highlights not just personal challenges but also wider social issues regarding family roles and sacrifice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on maternal love, family connections, and emotional storytelling has gained attention among scholars, especially when looking at emotional complexities. In this overview, I will combine existing research with affect theory, showing links and differences among various scholarly ideas and the topics

found in Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother." This will set the stage for examining the story's themes of maternal love, memory, and identity.

Chodorow (1978) presents an important view on maternal love, stressing its impact on identity and emotional development. Affect theory, especially as explained by Sedgwick (2003), suggests that affect operates below consciousness and significantly affects relationships and self-identity. Chodorow's claim that the mother-child connection is vital for forming identity supports Sedgwick's notion that maternal feelings go beyond rational emotions, creating a lasting legacy that shapes individual identity. Shin's depiction of motherhood illustrates this commitment, where the mother's often-ignored sacrifices play a key role in her children's growth stories.

Halbwachs (1992) introduces socially constructed memory, crucial for understanding a mother's legacy. This aligns with Affect Theory's emphasis on how experiences shape collective feelings. The characters in Shin's story struggle with their memories of their mother, figuring out their identities in her absence. Assmann (2008) further argues that memory affects both individual and group identities, highlighting the mother's role in family stories. The interaction between these theories underlines how Shin's work connects with shared emotional experiences linked to memory and grief.

Exploring cultural views of motherhood is vital to uncover the emotional layers in "Please Look After Mother." Kim (2010) highlights the conflict between traditional maternal duties and personal goals, reflecting Sedgwick's idea of socially influenced affections. Shin examines these cultural pressures while also recognizing mothers' resilience. This complexity shows the tension between personal ambitions and cultural norms, revealing that maternal love can evoke both satisfaction and struggle.

Research by Fivush *et al.*, (2006) points out how family stories aid emotional understanding and connections. Shin's representation of different views on motherhood reveals the emotional intricacies within family relationships, echoing Massumi's (2002) difference between affect and emotion. Characters undergo intense, often unconscious feelings of loss, heightened by their mother's absence, shaping their actions and relationships.

Recent research increasingly examines maternal sacrifice, as noted by Hays (2019). Her view that mothers' identities frequently merge with family roles aligns with Shin's depiction of the selfless mother. This representation evokes questions about societal

pressures and the emotional toll of maternal roles. Analyzing maternal sacrifice in this way clarifies how emotional aspects influence personal stories and societal views of motherhood.

Wang (2021) highlights the importance of memory in shaping identities, especially in loss contexts. Shin's examination of her characters' connections to their mother's memory aligns with Wang's focus on the dual experience of comfort and pain in reminiscing. This duality exposes a crucial aspect of family love, which is linked to Affect Theory's focus on the subconscious and the relationship between memory and relationships.

Park (2023) talks about food as a strong symbol of love and identity in family stories. "Please Look After Mother" clearly illustrates this idea, as cooking traditions serve as a reminder of maternal care and family ties. Making and sharing meals together helps build emotional links, connecting to Sedgwick's views on how feelings work within families.

Current feminist analyses, like those of Choi (2021), explore the challenges of gender roles in motherhood, echoing the issues in Shin's tale. Lee and Kim (2023) further explain how broken storytelling shows the family's confusion and sadness after the mother goes missing. This brokenness matches affect theory, showing how emotional reactions can change regular storytelling and uncover deeper truths about personal and shared experiences.

Johnson (2023) states that emotionally resonant literature promotes empathy and understanding. The deep emotions in Shin's look at family dynamics make readers think about their own experiences with love and loss, thus deepening their connection to the themes in the story.

The discussion about maternal love, memory, and family connections provides a rich context for looking at Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother." This review demonstrates the deep connections between themes of sacrifice, identity, cultural norms, and emotional intensity by combining ideas from affect theory and other literature. Examining these elements enhances our understanding of Shin's insights on emotional connections and the challenges of motherhood.

Research Gap

The current studies about maternal love, memory, cultural views on motherhood, and family emotions give helpful insights into Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother." Yet, there is a clear gap in using affect theory to examine the emotions in the text. Earlier studies have looked into maternal sacrifice,

identity, and cultural expectations, but they mostly missed how the subtle emotional reactions of characters affect their goals, relationships, and the overall story. Kim (2010), for example, discusses the conflict between traditional maternal roles and personal dreams, yet the emotional dynamics underlying this conflict remain largely unexplored. Research on emotional storytelling tends to focus on obvious emotions instead of the deeper, often hidden feelings that affect how characters act and interact.

Furthermore, Chodorow (1978) and Sedgwick (2003) talk about how mother-child connections and feelings affect identity. However, there is a lack of research examining how these concepts manifest in Shin's work. Specifically, there are no in-depth studies on how feelings influence character growth and reflect broader societal ideas in "Please Look after Mother." This lack of research indicates that a detailed study of emotional reactions through affect theory could provide valuable insights into the emotional aspects of the text and its implications for understanding maternal love.

Thesis Statement

This study seeks to address this research gap by applying affect theory to examine the emotional journeys of characters in "Please Look after Mother." By analyzing key moments in the narrative that show the depth and intricacy of emotional experiences, this research will uncover the underlying emotional factors that influence character motivations and their relationships with one another. By connecting affect theory to themes of maternal love, memory, and identity, this study will improve our grasp of the story's emotional complexity and intricate interactions, contributing to a broader understanding of how emotions affect personal identities and family relationships. By tackling these gaps, the research not only broadens the discussion around Shin's work but also enhances the academic study of emotional storytelling.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick Affect Theory

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick chiefly created affect theory, which examines how our feelings influence our relationships and interactions in society. Sedgwick often links her concepts to identity and sexuality, but her ideas about affect are useful in many situations for various audiences. Here is a clearer summary of Sedgwick's Affect Theory main points:

Affect vs. Emotion

Affect:

This is like gut feelings—those quick, nonverbal reactions that happen before we think. Consider experiencing warmth when encountering a loved one.

Emotion:

This is how we name or understand those gut feelings, influenced by cultural signals. For instance, social ideas of romance may influence the emotion of love you experience when you meet your partner.

Physical Signs of Affect

Affect: is not just about feelings; it also appears in our bodies. You might feel a lump in your throat when anxious or butterflies in your stomach when thrilled. This physical reaction shows how closely linked our bodies and feelings are.

Social Interactions

Emotions: can draw people together or push them apart. Sharing happiness, like during a party, creates bonds. On the other hand, jealousy can lead to loneliness. Recognizing these dynamics helps us deal with friendships, family, and social systems.

Cultural Backgrounds

Our experiences shape our feelings and how we show them. For instance, some cultures promote open affection, while others encourage emotional control. Therefore, the expression of sadness varies greatly depending on one's cultural background.

Connection to Queer Theory

Sedgwick indicates how emotional ties can affect sexual identity. For instance, the ways we express love can challenge societal views on relationships and attraction.

Linking Affect Theory to "Please Look After Mother"

In "Please Look after Mother" by Kyung-sook Shin, we see clear examples of affect theory as characters explore their feelings. Here is how Sedgwick's Affect Theory concepts relate to Shin's story:

Affect vs. Emotion

The characters convey deep, often hidden feelings of loss and guilt about their mother. Their affective responses—like immediate sadness from her loss—happen before their emotional realization, which develops as they share memories and regrets.

Physical Signs of Affect

The story depicts characters exhibiting physical reactions to their emotions. For example, the main character might feel tightness in her chest when thinking about her mother not being around. These physical feelings show how closely linked affect and our bodily experiences are Social Interactions:

The story highlights how complicated emotions within families can either bring them together or create gaps. The siblings' various ways of dealing with their mother's absence show how emotional experiences can unite them in grief or isolate them due to their feelings.

Cultural Backgrounds

The story reflects Korean values, like respect for elders and family duties. Cultural expectations shape the characters' feelings, demonstrating how society shapes their sense of love and duty toward their mother.

Connection to Queer Theory

Although the story focuses more on familial love than romance, it sheds light on the challenges of emotional connections and societal pressures. Characters' difficulties in expressing love within cultural limits highlight how societal norms can affect genuine emotional expression. By using affect theory with "Please Look After Mother," we can better understand how Sedgwick's ideas clarify complicated emotional experiences. The dynamics in Shin's story add to our understanding of both the theory and the literature.

Rationale to apply Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Affect Theory

Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's affect theory is beneficial for analyzing Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look After Mother." The book's themes connect well with her focus on the blend of emotions with narrative and cultural contexts. Sedgwick's method provides a deeper insight into how characters' emotions shape the storyline and its themes, as well as how these emotions.

Importance of Current Research Applying Affect Theory to "Please Look After Mother"

Utilizing affect theory in analyzing Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother" enhances the understanding of the story's emotional layers, particularly regarding maternal relationships. This framework allows for an exploration of how characters deal with their feelings following their mother's absence, highlighting love, loss, longing, and personal conflicts within family contexts.

Furthermore, affect theory clarifies the emotional connections between mothers and their children, illustrating how societal expectations in Korean culture often overshadow individual needs. This view emphasizes the role of emotional experiences in shaping personal identities and connections. The conflict between individual emotions and cultural standards helps clarify how the story can generate empathy in readers. By concentrating on memory and family identity, this study analyzes the romanticized views of motherhood while recognizing the difficult challenges and complications that come with it. Using affect theory in this examination adds depth to literary discussions and

aids in better understanding family experiences and emotional truths in literature, contributing to the wider dialogue on emotional insight and empathy.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a common qualitative research approach that seeks to identify and interpret patterns or themes within qualitative data. Since the 1980s, many scholars have used thematic analysis, significantly influenced by Braun and Clarke in their important 2006 work, "Using thematic analysis in psychology." Thematic analysis involves several important steps that help understand qualitative data, especially in Shin's text. It starts with familiarization, where researchers look closely at the data to find themes. Researchers create initial codes to highlight key features, and then combine them to create main themes that represent larger ideas like identity or resilience. We carefully check the themes to ensure they align with the data then define and name them for clarity. Finally, the research ends with a report that explains how these themes answer the research question, using detailed descriptions and relevant quotes. However, researchers often encounter challenges such as personal bias in interpreting themes, managing large amounts of data, contextual details that can alter meaning and time constraints that can negatively influence the quality of their work. Acknowledging these issues enhances the thematic analysis of Shin's text in terms of quality and transparency.

Reasons for Choosing Thematic Analysis

Choosing thematic analysis alongside affect theory is essential for exploring emotional tones in Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother." This method enables the identification and examination of key emotional ideas like love, guilt, loss, and family ties that greatly influence character choices and behaviors. Its adaptability allows researchers to apply thematic analysis across various types of qualitative data, thus enabling detailed exploration of complex character emotions.

Moreover, thematic analysis reveals the emotional forces that drive the story forward, aligning well with studies that focus on emotional impact in literature. Its capacity for critical analysis allows for a thorough interpretation that connects character experiences to larger cultural and social issues. Therefore, merging qualitative methods with thematic analysis creates a strong structure for examining emotional themes in Shin's writing, with Affect Theory serving as the core analytical framework.

Objectives of the Study

This study intends to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Affect Theory to explore the emotional

aspects of Kyung-sook Shin's story "Please Look after Mother." The study focuses on how emotions shape character interactions and relationships, specifically examining central themes such as love, loss, guilt, and desire, with a particular emphasis on how the mother-child relationship influences the characters' development and connections. Furthermore, the research investigates the cultural backdrop of Korean motherhood, highlighting how societal pressures intensify emotional challenges faced by the characters and influence their family duties. By utilizing affect theory, this study aims to address gaps in current research, enhancing discussions about emotions in literature while promoting deeper understanding and empathy in readers regarding Shin's narrative. Ultimately, this research aspires to uncover the complexities of human relationships in today's world, emphasizing the role of emotional experiences in nurturing bonds between characters and the audience.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine the complex emotional landscape of Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother" through specific research questions:

1. How do emotions shown in "Please Look after Mother" affect character behaviors and relationships, especially regarding maternal affection and responsibilities?
2. What emotional themes—love, loss, guilt, and desire—are present in the story, and how do these shape the characters?
3. How do cultural and social norms, especially in a Korean context, affect the characters' feelings?
4. What insights can Sedgwick's Affect Theory bring to our understanding of the emotional interactions in the story, especially with the characters' unconscious reactions?
5. How does the emotional depth of "Please Look after Mother" increase reader involvement and create empathy for the characters' challenges?

These inquiries aim to offer a thorough examination of the connections between emotion, culture, and character evolution in the text.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a qualitative research method to investigate the emotional aspects in Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look after Mother," using affect theory to reveal the deep emotional ties among characters. The qualitative approach allows for a detailed study of personal stories, highlighting the complicated emotional areas surrounding family bonds, memories, and the often-ignored sacrifices of mothers. This research also points out how cultural and social contexts shape emotional experiences, stressing the complex

interactions that accentuate the important role of maternal love.

Thematic analysis enhances this study by pinpointing and explaining recurring themes in the text, showing how cultural settings connect with emotional experiences. In conclusion, the blend of qualitative methods and thematic analysis offers a strong foundation for comprehending the emotional layers of "Please Look After Mother," contributing to the wider conversation about emotions in literature and deepening the understanding of the strong emotional ties in Shin's story.

Data Collection

We read the story several times to start the research, which helped us understand the plot, character growth, and main themes while capturing emotional reactions. Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Affect Theory, we focused on key emotional themes like love, loss, and family connections, analyzing their effects on character interactions and the unfolding of the plot. We organized the text by categorizing and grouping excerpts that represented specific emotional themes into wider concepts that relate to the characters' intricate experiences, especially concerning maternal love and societal expectations.

We carefully polished the identified themes to guarantee their relevance and accuracy regarding the emotional aspects of the text. We clearly defined each theme and explicitly linked it to affect theory, highlighting its importance within the story.

Our focus was on the emotional journeys of the characters, especially the main character and her mother, to analyze "Please Look after Mother" thoroughly through the lens of Affect Theory. Affect Theory underscores the significant impact of emotions on human actions and relationships, allowing an examination of the expressions of love, guilt, loss, and longing throughout the story.

From an affective perspective, "Please Look after Mother" reveals a rich emotional environment that greatly impacts character connections and personal experiences. The main character's path is filled with feelings of love, guilt, longing, and vulnerability, illustrating how these emotions guide personal views and decisions. Analyzing specific quotes and moments reveals how affect theory grants essential insights into the emotional dynamics in the text, emphasizing the need for emotional expression to comprehend the complex nature of familial love and the larger human experience.

In-Depth Review of "Please Look After Mother" Through Affect Theory

Love and sacrifice

"Mother gave you the money for the book, the full price."

"Mother was always raising sesame and mulberry leaves." "And cucumbers."

These phrases highlight the mother's caring role and the sacrifices she made for her children. By funding her child's hobbies, the mother demonstrates her love, while her labor in the fields symbolizes her dedication. Affect Theory illustrates how these acts of love forge strong emotional ties within family dynamics. The protagonist's subsequent regrets about these moments emphasize the often-overlooked love embedded in everyday experiences. This narrative transition depicts how love often intertwines with sacrifice, creating a rich emotional landscape that deepens the reader's engagement with the characters.

Guilt and Regret

"I bet she had to manage everything alone as a widow, but she ought to have sent me to school."

"Do you recall that from when you were three?"

These lines encapsulate the protagonist's feelings of guilt and regret, particularly in their later acknowledgment of their mother's sacrifices. The recognition of her mother's hardships generates a strong sense of remorse for failing to appreciate her efforts fully. The protagonist's childhood memories express a longing to reconnect with the past, revealing how affect theory emphasizes emotional obligations toward family as a critical aspect of character growth. This section transitions smoothly into the following theme, highlighting the complexity of familial relationships while maintaining a clear connection to the protagonist's development.

Loss and longing

Since learning about Mother's disappearance, you've been unable to focus due to the sudden return of old memories.

"You checked your watch. Three o'clock. Mother left at that same time."

These phrases poignantly capture the protagonist's emotional turmoil following her mother's disappearance. The inability to concentrate illustrates profound loss and yearning, while the second phrase links memories with an acute awareness of time. Affect Theory identifies loss as an intricate emotional state that evokes nostalgia and sadness. The protagonist's reflections emphasize the emotional gap created by her mother's absence, reinforcing themes of longing and memory within the narrative.

Fear and vulnerability

"How could you leave her alone like this?" Anger surged in your mind.

"Your heart raced. You thought she might be dying, just like that."

These remarks express the protagonist's fear for her mother's safety and underlying anger about her vulnerability. This response accentuates the vulnerability felt when loved ones are at risk. The protagonist's urgent thoughts indicate a deep instinct to protect her mother, highlighting how Affect Theory suggests that these feelings fuel the desire for emotional bonds and support. The transition here bridges the fear of loss with the earlier themes of love and sacrifice, illustrating how interconnected emotional dynamics can shape character actions and relationships.

Empathy and understanding

You thought, "Does Mother realize I'm like this?"

"When you expressed your frustrations about seeing the Braille version of your book, she listened closely as if her headache vanished."

These reflections reveal a yearning for mutual understanding and emotional closeness between the protagonist and her mother. The protagonist's thoughts about her emotions signify a desire for recognition, while the mother's responsive attentiveness underscores her engagement with her child's feelings. Affect Theory stresses empathy's role in reinforcing emotional ties, suggesting that these reflective moments cultivate a deeper intimacy and understanding. Creating a bridge between differing emotional dynamics, this section emphasizes the growth of relationships forged through shared struggles and understanding.

Anger and Frustration

When you first discovered Mother was missing, you exclaimed, 'Why didn't anyone from your large family go to bring her and Father home?'

"You all blamed each other for Mother's disappearance, and you all felt hurt."

These lines articulate the protagonist's anger and frustration over her mother's absence, highlighting a complex blend of concern and powerlessness. The shared blame among relatives highlights how anger can coexist with love, prompting deeper contemplation of family responsibilities and connections. This section introduces the idea that anger, while often disruptive, can also lead to a richer understanding of familial relationships.

Despair and Helplessness

"You knelt before Mother and shook her firmly, causing her eyes to open slightly." They were red, and sweat was on her forehead.

"But then Mother's eyes opened and focused on you. It should have surprised her that you were there, but she reacted calmly."

These lines convey the protagonist's profound sadness and helplessness regarding her mother's condition. The vivid descriptions instil a sense of urgency and despair, while the mother's placid response hints at a disconnection in their emotional bond. Affect Theory posits that these moments of despair can prompt a re-evaluation of connections, emphasizing the struggle between hope and helplessness. This transition effectively melds the themes of vulnerability and despair, reinforcing the narrative's emotional depth.

Emotional Landscapes and Character Growth

The story begins with a palpable sense of loss and urgency, as the family searches for their missing mother. Feelings of guilt and regret underscore the protagonist's emotional distress. A telling moment occurs when she reflects in a clothing store: "I should have tried on that dress," which encapsulates her regret for not honoring her mother's desires and sacrifices. This self-reflection drives character growth as she confronts her understanding of her mother's love and the impact of her own decisions, ultimately illustrating how affect theory can elucidate the journey of self-discovery.

Cultural Context and Emotional Reactions

The cultural backdrop of Korean society significantly influences how characters navigate their emotional landscapes. The expectations placed on women, particularly mothers, resonate throughout the narrative. The main character feels keenly aware of her mother's sacrifices, which often prioritized the family's needs over personal desires. This reflection leads her to a deeper understanding of her identity, shaped by cultural norms and maternal sacrifices.

Sedgwick's Affect Theory posits that cultural and social contexts define emotions, intertwining them with broader experiences rather than isolating them as mere personal sentiments. The protagonist grapples with feelings of guilt, loss, and longing intricately linked to her upbringing, which instilled a strong sense of duty toward family.

Preconscious Reactions and Emotional Dynamics

According to Sedgwick's theory, preconscious feelings—those emotions that manifest before clear articulation—are critical in this narrative. Characters often display intense emotional responses that, while unvoiced, are deeply felt. Memories of the mother invoke love and nostalgia, as seen in the reflective moment when the protagonist recalls her mother singing quietly while cleaning: "Your mother sang softly." This demonstrates how preconscious emotions derived from memory can shape self-awareness and emotional journeys.

Furthermore, the story's emotional depth allows readers to forge personal connections with the characters. As the protagonist navigates her self-discovery, her

evolving perception of her mother's sacrifices encourages readers to reflect on their familial bonds, facilitating a process of introspection.

Overall, using affect theory, "Please Look after Mother" creates a complex picture of emotions that greatly affects the characters' experiences and their relationships. The main character's path through themes like love, guilt, longing, fear, empathy, anger, and despair shows how important emotional expression is in understanding the complications of family love and human connections. The analysis highlights how cultural backgrounds and character development work together to deepen our understanding of these complex emotional interactions.

CONCLUSION

"Please Look after Mother" is a deep look into feelings, culture, and how characters grow, which helps us understand family relationships better. Using Sedgwick's Affect Theory, the story shows how a mother's love and social norms shape emotions. It stresses how vital it is to share feelings for both personal and relationship development. This study shows the often-ignored sacrifices mothers make and deals with love and regret, offering a complex view of family ties filled with unspoken but important emotions.

This story prompts readers to think about their own family experiences and the feelings they often do not express. This highlights the need to see and appreciate family bonds before they fade away. Today, such stories are important in starting conversations about family dynamics, showing why emotional awareness and communication matter. By focusing on the complicated emotional struggles tied to family love and duties, Kyung-sook Shin's work encourages a greater understanding of the feelings that connect us to our families and the importance of recognizing and valuing these ties.

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