KIMKI-DUK, “SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER... AND SPRING”

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Kim Ki-Duk who was born in South Korea is a self-educated director and he differs from his contemporaries with his unique style and technique in his films. One of the best films of the director is “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring”. The director also acts as a middle-aged Buddhist monk at the end of the film. The film tells the story of a life by relating every stage of life with a season just as childhood with spring, adolescence with summer, maturity with fall, and senescence with winter. The film also reflects the characteristics of the stages such as innocence and ignorance of childhood, mistakes and lust of adolescence, tragedies and passion of maturity, and wisdom coming with senescence. In the film, where the seasons of the life of a Buddhist monk are reflected in a metaphorical narrative, the director shows that he can use silence as effectively as a scream. He relies on silence and actions rather than dialogues. The film is also perfection of simplicity, the story is told by images more than by words. The film tells the story of a monk who is isolated from the outer world and his self-quest for inner peace. The film begins with the opening of the doors into an isolated floating temple in the middle of the lake which is isolated from the outer world in terms of grief, aggression, violence, hustle and bustle in daily life, hatred among people, covetousness, and so on.

Kim Ki-Duk uses so many symbols, metaphors, and allusions in the film to draw attention of the audience to the film and direct the audience to think about the symbols. It is possible to see the symbols in almost every scene. He reflects the cycle of life by passing the seasons of nature, colours, atmosphere, and by using some animals in the film. He wisely uses some animals such as fish, snake, frog, cat, puppy, rooster, duck, tortoise in the film. Each of them has a metaphorical meaning. For instance, fish symbolizes fertility; snake symbolizes rebirth by shedding its skin and also symbolizes transformation; frog symbolizes cleansing, healing and also symbolizes metamorphosis, cycle (it transforms from tadpole to frog). Puppy symbolizes sweetness, mischievousness, youthful ignorance, and innocence just like the characteristics of the boy in the first scenes. Rooster symbolizes sexuality, lust and masculinity. Tortoise symbolizes a long life, wisdom, and peace.

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After the apprentice ties down the animals with a stone, his master gives him a meaningful punishment. The master ties the waist of the apprentice with a stone and he provides that the apprentice can empathize with the animals. The master says “Go and free the animals. If any of them dies, you will bear the stone in your heart for the rest of your life”. The stone symbolizes the conscious and the sins of the apprentice. He bears his sins on his back. So, the sins of him are symbolized by the stone on his back in the film. Also, it can be said that the stone on the back symbolizes the cross of the Christians and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. According to Christians, Jesus Christ was crucified for his sins and compensation for the sins of the Christians. So, the director uses the stone symbol on the back to show and give a message that wherever people go, they take along their sins with them.

In summertime, the apprentice is shown as an adolescent person. He goes to the forest and while he is wandering, he sees the snakes mating. By this scene, the director implies that it is the time for sexually self-awareness for the apprentice. By the coming of the sick girl, the life of the apprentice changes. Living under the same roof with a young girl is hard for him in terms of sexually restricting himself. From time to time, he wants to discover the body of the girl. In one of the scenes, while the master is sleeping, the apprentice wants to go near her, and he must use the door which has no walls on both sides of it. Door symbolizes privacy -symbolically represents morality and discipline- and wall symbolizes boundary which breaks the bond between outside and inside. However, he does not use the door and he moves towards the girl by using the empty side of the door. It means that he breaks the rules and the boundaries, and he ignores the discipline and moral values. And, just as the first sin which is committed by Adam and Eve by breaking the ban, he breaks the rules and becomes a sinner. After a while, he falls in love with the girl. They have sexual intercourse. One of the scenes, when they wake up in the boat, the master realizes them naked and he pulls the boat towards himself with the aid of the rooster. By this scene, it can be clearly understood that rooster is the symbol of sexuality, lust and masculinity. The master wants the girl to go home because he thinks that the girl was healed by love and there is no need to stay there anymore. The apprentice objects it. Shortly after, the master tells the apprentice “Lust awakes the desire to possess that awakens the intent to murder”. His expression is actualized after a while. The apprentice cannot restrain himself from going after his sweetheart. While the master is sleeping (Seemingly sleeping), the apprentice takes along the fetish and the rooster with him. It can be interpreted that he is carrying his faith with him which is the only assurance of him and the rooster which symbolizes masculinity, sexuality, and lust.
In the Fall time, the apprentice comes back with a different appearance and with symbolical dirt and rust of the outer world. He brings the Buddha back and he brings also the murder knife with him. Bringing the Buddha back can be interpreted as his making amend to the master for his going away without notice. Apart from this, the murder knife symbolizes that he comes back with the hatred, symbolically rust of the outer world. He cannot accept that his wife cuckolded him. He has excessive passion of ownership. He wants to control his emotions. However, he cannot achieve it. So, he tries to get rid of all these troubles by committing suicide. It is noticed and intercepted by the master. It can be said that the master intercepts the suicide because he thinks that it is an act of disrespect to the Buddha and the values. Also, it can be added that the apprentice breaks the cycle by a suicide attempt. Therefore, the master punishes the apprentice by hitting his back with a bat and by hanging him to the ceiling with a rope. Then, the master wants him to engrave the names of people that he hates on the ground with the murder knife and throw the hatred out of his heart. The police officers come from the outer world to arrest the apprentice. However, at first, the master does not allow them to arrest the apprentice because he thinks that the apprentice needs to throw out the hatred in his heart and he tells the apprentice to continue to engrave. By this scene, it can be seen that the order in the inner world is much different from the outer world. When the inner world is compared to the outer, the inner world is much more peaceful, quiet, balanced, and there is no aggression, violence, hatred, hustle and bustle in daily life, covetousness, and so on. By telling the apprentice to continue to engrave when the police officers aim guns at the apprentice, the master breaks the rules of the outer world and he shows that the rules of the outer world are not valid in the inner world. The master has some secret powers such as moving the isolated floating temple, preventing the boat to move forward while the police officer is rowing, calling the boat to himself across the lake, and so on. After a while, the master senses that he fulfilled his duty and he needs to quit his duty. He organizes self-cremating ritual and he hands down his duty to the successor. It is the time for the continuation of the cycle and takeover the duty.

In the wintertime, the director acts the Buddhish monk who takes over the duty. In this part of the film, there is no dialogue and this part becomes the most meditative part in the film. The mysterious woman whose face is covered with a cloth, arrives at the temple and delivers her baby to the new master. It can be inferred that the mysterious woman is a desperate person in a terrible distress that she is forced to conceal her real identity and find a depart way with her son. Moreover, it is reflected that the new master tries to achieve salvation and purge himself from all his sins. In order to be forgiven, he carries the millstone and the Buddha to the top of
the hill, near heaven (according to Buddhism). By ascending to the top with his burdens and by suffering, he purges from his sins and attains redemption through struggle.

In conclusion, the film is about the endless cycle of birth, growth and death (Breheny, 2004); about solitude and love, innocence, corruption and redemption (Uk, 2004), self-quest, self-awareness. It is also represented in the film that how anyone can achieve nirvana through self-examination, meditation, isolation from the society (or the outer world) and doing good no matter to whom. It is also the story of the apprentice that how he learns about love, lust, jealousy, hatred, and eventually rage through the events that are beyond his control. He makes choices that ultimately affect his life and cause turmoil and distress, yet, somehow, he finds his way back to the isolated floating temple on the lake where his journey began. It is during his final visiting home he learns of his final journey in life. In order to pay homage to the life which he has led, he embarks on a final journey by using his master’s lesson. The film ends with a new apprentice and a new cycle: implying an endless repetition with subtle variation.

REFERENCES
