

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Diabolical desire: six by Kim Ki-young</b>
Author(s)	Alissa Simon
Source	<i>Art Institute of Chicago. Film Center</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	10
Subjects	Kim Ki-young (1919-1998), Seoul, Korea (South)
Film Subjects	Yukcheui yaksok (Promise of the flesh), Kim Ki-young,, 1975 Hayno (The housemaid), Kim Ki-young,, 1960

# The Housemaid

35mm, 90 min., b&w

Produced by Korea Munye Films in 1960

Screenwriter : Kim Ki-young

Cinematographer : Kim Tok-chin

Cast : Lee Un-shim, Chu Jung-nyo, Kim Chin-kyu

Music composer (Kim Chin-kyu) rapes his housemaid, a country girl who used to work at a manufacturing firm. Then, the housemaid starts behaving like his wife. As the housemaid gets pregnant, the composer and his wife force the housemaid to have an abortion. The housemaid goes wild, finally destroying the family of the composer. In despair, the composer and the housemaid commit suicide.

*The black-and-white film is still hailed as the one of the masterpieces in a history of Korean cinema with the creative expressionistic style...Ed.*



The Housemaid ('60)

# Promise of the Flesh

35mm, 95 min., color

Produced by Dong-Ah Export Co., 1975

Screenwriter : Kim Chi-hon

Cinematographer : Chung Il-song

Cast : Kim Ji-mi, Lee Jung-kil, Park Jung-ja

Sook-young, a woman in her mid-30s, gets on a train bound for Mokpo, a southwestern port city in Cholla-namdo. As the train starts to move, Sook-young recalls what had happened during her trip to Mokpo several years ago. Then, Sook-young was a prisoner on furlough to visit her mother's grave. On the train she met Hoon, on his way to collect a debt. The generous-minded female guard escorting Sook-young senses an attraction between the two, and allows them to enjoy freedom for several hours. When the two finally consume their passion, it is in the presence of police nearby.

*It is a remake of Lee Man-hee's Late Autumn. In comparison with Late Autumn, in which lyricism is culminated, Promise of the Flesh reveals Kim Ki-young's preoccupation with passion and sexuality...Ed.*

# Biography

Born on October 10th, 1919 in Seoul

Moved to Pyongyang in 1930

Graduated from Pyongyang National High School in 1940

Moved to Japan, spent his youth traveling

Upon the end of the Second World War, came back to Pyongyang

Attended Kyungsung Medical School of Dentistry in 1946

Involved in various theater projects

Entered the National Theater in 1949

Graduated from Kyungsung Medical School of Dentistry in 1950

Met screenwriter Oh Young-jin in 1951

Married Kim Yu-bong in 1951

Created National Defense News with Oh, became a producer

Joined U.S., produced & directed several short films

After directing Jugum-ui Sangja(The Box of Death) left U.S. to become a full-time director

Set up the Chunchu Films in 1957

Published "Kim Ki-young Scenario Collection" in 1996

Member of the Academy of Arts

Currently in progress with his next feature film



# Filmography

*Jugum-ui Sangja(The Box of Death)* (1955)

*Yang San Do* (1955)

*Bongsonhwa(A Touch-Me-Not)* (1956)

*Women at the Front* (1957)

*Twilight Train* (1957)

*The First Snow* (1958)

*Resistance of Teenagers* (1959)

Special Award. Ahn Sung-ki, the 4th San Francisco Film Festival

Best Actor, Hwang Hae-nam, the 2nd Kuk-San Award

*A Sad Pastral Song* (1960)

*The Housemaid* (1960)

*Hyonhaetan Knows Everything* (1961)

Best Supporting Actor, Lee Ye-choon, the 1st Grand Bell Awards

*Koryojang(Burying The Old Alive)* (1963)

*Asphalt* (1964)

*Soldiers Talk After Death* (1966)

*Woman, Woman, Woman* (1968)

*Hong-rang, the Beauty* (1969)

*Love Song of Ren* (1969)

*The Woman of Fire* (1971)

Best Director, the 8th Blue Dragon Awards

Best Actress, Yoon Yeo-jung, the 8th Blue Dragon Awards

*The Insect Woman* (1972)

*Violation of Buddhist Commandments* (1974)

Official Entry, the 3rd Tehran Film Festival

*Promise of the Flesh* (1975)

Best Actress, Kim Ji-mi, the 14th Grand Bell Awards

Best Supporting Actress, Park Jung-ja, the 14th Grand Bell Awards

*Love of Blood Relations* (1976)

Best Art Direction, the 15th Grand Bell Awards

*Iodo* (1977)

Official Entry, the 28th Berlin Film Festival

*The Soil* (1978)

*Killer Butterfly* (1978)

*A Nun* (1979)

*Numi* (1979)

Best Actress, Jang Mi-hee, the 1st Critics Choice Awards

*Story of Ban Gum-yon* (1981)

*The Woman of Fire '82* (1982)

Best Art Direction, the 27th Pan-Asian Film Festival

*Free Woman* (1984)

*Hunting of Fools* (1984)

*Carnivore* (1984)

# Interview with Kim Ki-Young

Interviewers: Kim Young-jin / Kwon Yong-min (Yang San Do), Park Ji-yeon (The Housemaid & Ca Lee Sang-yong (Iodo & Promise of the Flesh)

## On Housemaid Trilogy

Q: The Housemaid trilogy comprises of The Housemaid (1960), The Woman of Fire (1972) and The Woman of Fire '82 (1982). The stories are very similar, but the plots vary. Confusion arises as present and past are interwoven in these movies. The audience is also confused between what's reality and what's fiction in these films.

A: Originally, *The Housemaid* was shot in chronological order. After seeing the workprint, I thought the movie was just so so. That's why I decided to add the opening and closing sequences. Eventually, it worked out great. Confusion necessarily arises as fiction and reality are intermingled.

Q: The Housemaid is a black-and-white film. Most remarkable are the refined camera movements and the effective use of sound. Then, the use of colors and the depth of space are more noticeable in such color films as The Woman of Fire and The Woman of Fire '82. What made you change your style?

A: Technical improvement led me to change my style. In *The Housemaid*, it was quite natural for me to emphasize the movement of the camera and the use of effective sound. For example, *The Housemaid* starts to play the piano at the very moment when Dong-shik, the music composer, confesses that he has a baby born out of wedlock. His wife asks with whom





her husband had a sexual relationship. Suddenly the music becomes discordant sound. I was designed to indicate the collapse of the peaceful family. It was the discordant piano sound that created tension and... In *The Woman of Fire* and *The Woman of Fire '82*, I could take advantage of color. It was only possible with the availability of technology.

Q: The refined camera movement in *The Housemaid* is very reminiscent of the representative German expressionist film, *Last Laugh*?

A: Is that so? I didn't know that.



Q: In addition to *The Housemaid*, many of your films deal with feuds of families in the middle-income bracket. What's the reason for that?

A: I didn't know much about the underprivileged classes or high-society. I was born to a middle-income family. In the 1960s, petit bourgeoisie started to emerge in the industrialization process.

Q: Why did you focus on the moral collapse of petit bourgeoisie?

A: It was a phenomenon of the 1960s and the 70s, owing to the country's rapid industrialization. Young women coming from rural areas fell prey to the peril of the urbanization and industrialization. The problem of housemaids was just one thing that the nation's industrialization had brought forth.



Q: *The Housemaid* trilogy is better structured than your other films. And your films shot in studios are much better than those shot on location. Why?

A: I prefer studio shooting. It allows me more freedom and opportunity to concentrate. In the case of the *Housemaid* trilogy, I was given relatively excellent circumstances. *The Housemaid* consisted of about 500 scenes. It took about two months to shoot the movie. It was relatively long period of shooting by the standard of the early 1960s when many movies were shot within a month.

Q: Your movies have the best visual effects in the scenes depicting sex than any other films made in that period.

A: Traditionally it was not possible to talk about sex openly, but I wanted to tackle it straight on. Sex is beautiful and great.

Q: Why is *The Housemaid* less explicit than *The Woman of Fire* and *The Woman of Fire '82* . Was it because of censorship?

A: Definitely yes. *The Housemaid* is rich with sexual metaphor, because of stiff censorship.

Q: Why did you use the semitransparent glass or resort to the typical montage method to show sex scenes in *The Woman of Fire* and *The Woman of Fire '82*?

A: Today, sex scenes are too explicit and graphic. I don't like that. I want to show sexual fantasies rather than graphic depiction of sex.

Q: Why did you make the sex scenes look like rape in the *Housemaid* trilogy and *Carnivore*?

A: Sex itself has both a sadistic and masochistic nature. At the same time, sex was a great tool for women to climb upon the social ladder.

Q: The stairway is also an important setting in your movies. The stairway indicates the housemaid's wish to upgrade herself socially. Why did you employ it so prominently and consistently.

A: The stairway is a very good prop in creating a hazardous atmosphere. The two-story house used to be a status symbol for the middle-income bracket. So naturally, the stairway was importantly employed in my movies.

Q: Usually, characters are focused in the center of the frame, but, why did you put them on the margins of the frame and instead put such things as furniture and the columns of the house in the central position?

A: In paintings, figures are not usually centered in the frame. I prefer







to put figures on the side to the traditional division of the frame. Especially when it comes to creating an uncanny image, this method was effective.

Q: Space is shown with more depth in *The Woman of Fire* '82 than *The Housemaid* and *The Woman of Fire*. In the previous films, refined camera movement is very effective. The triangle relationship among the housemaid, Dong-shik and Dong-shik's wife is well captured with depth.

A: The mise-en-scene is a good way to tell a story, instead of through dialogue and sound effect. *The Woman of Fire* '82 won the art direction award at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival. I put emphasis on creating effective mise-en-scene, because I am a stylist. I hate abstract conception.



Q: In your movies, the image of the male protagonist is quite different from that in other movies in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Men are inactive and fragile, while women are strong to stand on their own. Men's dignity is entirely destroyed in *Carnivore*. What's your view of men themselves?

A: Largely speaking, women offering chief labor became an important source of manual power in the early period of industrialization. The image of feeble and frail male characters is reflection of men then and myself.

## On Promise of the Flesh

Q: In terms of twist and turn, *Promise of the Flesh* is relatively simple.

There are drastic twists and turns in the movie which evolves around a woman's pursuit of happiness. Is there any special reason you made *Promise of the Flesh* as a simple melodrama?

A: It's one of my quickies. It is not a thriller. Instead, it is a melodrama between a man and a woman.



Q: It was virtually a remake of director Lee Man-hee's *Late Autumn*. What's the most striking difference between *Promise of the Flesh* and *Late Autumn*?

A: *Late Autumn* was a failure at the box office. But *Promise of the Flesh* was a smash hit. The big difference lies in the fact that *Promise of the Flesh* is a more condensed melodrama between a middle-aged woman and a man in his 30s. The focus centers on an emotional and physical relationship between the two when they are situated in a very limited time and space.

Q: Do you believe women's happiness lies in her encounter with men?

A: No. At that time, the fate of women definitely depended on her social status. I believe it is men who teach women how to betray and act violently.

Q: What's the major issue in *Promise of the Flesh*?

A: I thought the story of *Late Autumn* was little bit abstract. Love and betrayal is too conventional and at the same time too abstract. So, I put the two major characters into a very limited time and space. Time works as a time bomb in the movie. So within a limited time, the story gets more condensed. I hate the abstract vision of the story. Cinema is a realistic and expressive medium.

## Epilogue

Q: Have you attended preview sessions of your movies?

A: No. I hate to go them. Because of my mistakes or other reasons, especially technical problems, my movies have lots of flaws. I have to admit that.

Q: Can you say you are so lucky to have become a movie director?

A: Yes. It's absolutely because of my wife. We were classmates at the Medical College of Seoul National University. After graduation, my wife said she would patronize my artistic activities. At last, she was a good patron to me. Whenever she watched my movie, she burst into tears, saying "That's all my money!"

Q: It's hard to categorize all your movie.

A: I am a technician in every inch. I must say that I'm not an auteur director. That credit goes to director Yu Hyun-mok. I loved to make movies. Sometimes, I was a simple technician, churning out movies, whether they were good or not.



## The Housemaid

1960. Director: Kim Ki-young [Kim Ki-yông].

Producer: Kim Ki-young. Screenplay: Kim Ki-young. Cinematography: Kim Dôk-jin. Editor: Kim Ki-young. Music: Han Sang-gi. With: Yi Ün-sim, Chu Chûng-nyô, Kim Chin-gyu.

35mm, 90 min., b&w, in Korean with English subtitles

US Premiere. In person: Director Kim Ki-young

The overdetermined codes of melodrama, already familiar to the American audiences through the films of Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli, undergoes another dramatic reconstruction in this highly sophisticated film. Presented with stark black and white photography, haunting sound effects, and detailed props and set design, the film both establishes and defines the Expressionist cinematic conventions in Korea. As in all of Kim Ki-young's films, the women characters are unusually powerful, and even demonic. A music teacher finds himself caught between the manipulations of his wife and the young women factory workers he teaches. His wife also works hard so that they can move into a coveted and prestigious two-story house. She then decides she needs a maid. The film features a stable family whose unity and harmony become unspeakably threatened when a young, cigarette-smoking housemaid is hired. Seductions, attempted poisonings, murders, and suicides follow in quick succession as the maid determines to take the pawn-like music teacher from his wife. Kim Ki-young who displayed his talent in his directorial debut, *The Revolt of the Teens* (1959), established himself as one of the distinctive directors in Korean cinema through this second feature. —Chris Berry and Kyung Hyun Kim

**The Housemaid (35mm, 90 mins, b&w, 1960, Produced by Korea Munye Films, written and directed by Kim KiYoung).**

The Housemaid makes Fatal Attraction look like The Brady Bunch. An ambitious wife wants to have a maid for her new two-storey house. But when her husband has the maid, too, all hell breaks loose. This overwrought parable about the dangers of domestic help was Kim KiYoung's breakthrough film and firmly established his penchant for sexually predatory women. Shot in contrasty, German Expressionist-style black and white with eye-popping acting to match, it marked his first move away from realism, and after its success he never looked back. However, Korean audiences loved hating the maid so much that the actor found it hard to work again.

Chris Berry