

## Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village<sup>1</sup>

--A Few Paragraphs from a Journal of Travels to Sŏngch'ŏn<sup>2</sup>

Yi Sang

More than twenty days have passed since I last savored my fragrant MJB.<sup>3</sup> Here the newspaper seldom comes, and the postman only occasionally appears bearing “hard rolled”-colored news.<sup>4</sup> Both contain stories of silkworm cocoons and corn. The villagers appear distressed about some relatives living far away. I too am apprehensive concerning matters left behind in the city.

They say there are roe deer and wild boar over there on P'albong Mountain. And some even say they've seen a “bear” that comes down to catch crayfish in the gully

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<sup>1</sup> This is a translation of the original essay as included in Kim Chuhyŏn, ed., *Yi Sang chŏnjip 3: sup'il* (*The Collected Works of Yi Sang, Volume 3: Essays*), Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2005. It was first published in the daily newspaper Maeil sinbo from September 27 to October 11, 1935. I must also express my gratitude to Kwŏn Yŏngmin, whose modern rendition of the essay appears in Kwŏn Yŏngmin, ed., *Sanch'on yŏjŏng* (*Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village*), Seoul: T'aehaksa, 2006, and proved extremely helpful in sorting out some of the more arcane and idiosyncratic aspects of the original.

<sup>2</sup> During September and October of 1935 Yi spent about three weeks in Sŏngch'ŏn, South P'yŏngan Province, where his friend Wŏn Yongsŏk was working at the time. Yi and Wŏn were classmates at three separate schools: Tonggwang School; Posŏng High School; and Kyŏngsŏng Technical High School. Much later, Wŏn would go on to record his memories of his enigmatic friend in two separate essays. “My Last Memories of Yi Sang (*Nae-ga majimak bon Yi Sang*)” appeared in the November 1980 edition of the journal *Munhak sasang*, while the piece “Yi Sang's School Days (*Yi Sang ūi hakch'ang sijŏl*)” appeared in the June 1981 edition of the same journal.

<sup>3</sup> This was incorrectly spelled “MJR” in the original version. There are several similar examples below, and all appear to be due either to illegible handwriting on Yi's part, lack of knowledge on a typesetter's part, or a combination of the two. In any case, it was corrected to “MJB” in the first three editions of Yi's collected works. Only versions two and three, however, felt the need to add the note “A type of coffee”. This is interesting for what it tells us about a counterintuitive increasing lack of exposure to Western goods and culture following Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945.

<sup>4</sup> The original for “hard rolled” reads “*hadorong* (하도롱)”; it was placed in quotation marks by Yi Sang, and provided with the following footnote by Kim Chuhyŏn:

A durable paper, glossy on one side, often used for wrapping. It was made using a chemical pulp and given a brown color. The name originates from the English “hard rolled paper.” It was produced and used for packaging and envelopes up until the beginning of World War II.

Except where otherwise noted, this translation will maintain the quotation marks as used by Yi. And while he most often employed them for transliterations of foreign words, it should also be noted, as will be discussed in the accompanying article, that he at times elected to use quotation marks for certain Korean words, and to omit them for certain foreign words.

where they used hold rituals to pray for rain. I continually suffer from the delusion that these animals, which I have only seen in zoos, have not been captured from these mountains and put in zoos, but rather have been taken from zoos and put in these mountains. When night falls, just as men retire to their chambers, P'albong disappears into the lacquer-black, moonless night.

The air is so crystal clear, however, I feel I might easily read my cherished Gospel of “Luke”<sup>5</sup> by starlight alone. And I could swear there are twice as many stars out here as in the city. It is so quiet that I seem to hear for the first time traces of the movement of those stars.

At a peddler’s inn, I light an oil lamp. Its subtle odor, reminiscent of the city’s evening paper, arouses dreams from my youth. Oh, Chǒng!<sup>6</sup> I remember our gluing up “*Hokka*”<sup>7</sup> (paper packets of tobacco) deep into the night beneath such a light. A lone grasshopper perches atop the lamp, and with its light green hue, as if crossing the letter “T” in English, “underlines” the peculiar portions of my languid dreams. Feigning sorrow, I hang my head and stilly listen to its ballad, so like the sound of a streetcar conductress punching tickets in the city. Then that, in turn, becomes like the sound of scissors in a barber shop. At last I close my eyes and calmly, carefully listen.

I then produce my journal and, in wild grape-colored ink, set about drafting the

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, Yi places this foreign title in quotation marks; the original reads “*Nuga bogŭm* (누가福音)”.

<sup>6</sup> The original reads, simply, “Chǒng *hyǒng!* (鄭兄!). This provides the reader with very little detail, other than that the author is reminiscing about a male friend whose surname is Chǒng. He is, however, most likely referring to Chǒng Int’aek, an intimate friend and fellow writer who worked as a reporter for the *Maeil sinbo*, the newspaper in which this essay first appeared.

<sup>7</sup> The original reads “...*pam-i isŭkhadorok* “*hokka*”—*yǒnch’o kapji—puch’idŭnsaenggakinamnida*. (밤이 이슬하도록 “『호시卜』”—煙草匣紙—부치든생각이남니다.)” “*Hokka* (호시卜)” is most likely a Korean rendition of the Japanese ほうか (包裹), meaning a packet or pouch. There is a slight possibility, however, that Yi is referring to smoking a Hokka pipe deep into the night with his friend. The original text is somewhat ambiguous. The fact, however, that Yi was quite poor, and worked several odd jobs while a student, leads me to select the interpretation of *hokka* as envelopes or packets that Yi and Chǒng were filling with tobacco and sealing for later sale.

poetic sentiments of this intermontane hamlet.

Torn up newspaper day before yesterday

A tarnished white butterfly

A balsam resembles my lover's beautiful ear

In that ear stand visible the articles of bygone days

Before long I grow thirsty. Drinking water at my bedside—I consume the liquid, cold as if drawn from the sea's depths. Taking in its quartzose, mineral odor, I feel the path of the mercury plummeting past my lungs. I sense that, if I so desired, I could trace that frigid curve upon a blank sheet of paper.

When the stars shine down upon the bluestone roof, it cracks with the sound of a crock exploding in the depths of winter. The sound of insects is deafening. Because autumn, at this time, has come only enough to fill a single postcard. At times like these, how could I even begin to hope to fathom the mysteries of time? The sound of my pulse turns the entire inside of the room into a clock, and the long hand and short hand's revolving around the drive screw makes my eyes itch by turns. The smell of machine oil wafts in and out of my nose. I feel sleep approaching beneath the oil lamp.

I have a brief dream in which a young city girl appears; she looks like the "Paramount" Pictures logo. And then, before I know it, in my dream I see the poor family I have left behind in the city. They stand shoulder to shoulder, as prisoners of war do in photographs. And they bring me worry. Which finally wakes me from my slumber. Shall I just die? I entertain such thoughts. I stare at my threadbare Korean coat, which hangs from a nail in the wall. Ah, yes, you have followed me here across the vast northwestern provinces.

I turn up the wick, and, after relighting the lamp, use my pen to plant ultramarine

“seedlings” in my notebook. Upon the page, one by one, a wretched population comes to life. A dense population—. <sup>8</sup>

Tomorrow, all day long, I shall spend gazing at flowers. I shall soak a cotton swab in “alcohol” and wipe away all manner of anxiety. I feed on such thoughts. It is because my dreams are so incredibly confused. Flowers in full bloom dreams, “gravure” full-color reproduction dreams—I want to have pleasant dreams, as if looking at a picture book. For which, by way of simple explanation, it would be nice to compose an uplifting poem and lay it out in 7“point”type.

In the city I have a magnificent hometown. In this village, the mountains are covered solely with broad-leafed trees that occlude the view of my hometown, while the iron skeleton telegraph poles running P’albong’s ridges seem to transmit only headlines, and even then only in code.

In the morning I am awakened by the rustling sounds of the courtyard afflicted by the sun’s warmth. In the middle of the enclosure, heavy with the “burden” of another day, a crimson dragonfly stirs like a disease. I fell asleep with the lamp on; its flame still burns—a trace of the lost night, it lingers like the “button”<sup>9</sup> on my threadbare vest. It is a “doorbell”<sup>10</sup> that allows me to call on last night. Leaving last night’s body heat behind in my room, I step out into the court to find a flower bed in one corner. Blazing cockscombs, and balsams.

I feel my breath grow hot at the passion of these flowers, drawn up from the depths of the earth. Some white balsams are mixed in with those used to color the tips of young

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<sup>8</sup> These two sentences, though quite brief, bring to mind the first-person narrator’s musings on Malthus in Yi’s acclaimed short story “Wings.”

<sup>9</sup> This is yet another example of a Korean word, *tanch’o* (단초), being put into quotation marks. Here it would appear that Yi uses the quotation marks to denote that it is not actually a button he is discussing but a flame.

<sup>10</sup> The original here read “*yobiring* (요비링),” a Koreanization of the Japanese *yobirin* (よびりん), or doorbell/call bell. Yi Sang often employed this word when he wanted to evoke the sense of calling something back.

maidens' fingernails. I wonder if the white ones will also turn red?—Quite naturally, the white balsams do dye a fine madder red.

On the millet stalk fence, “orange” bitter melons ripen. They commingle with kidney bean vines, making one panel of a folding screen with a “sepia” background. In the vines beyond this, atop an artless yet intrepid pumpkin blossom, sits a lone and “Spartan” honeybee. Reflected in amber hues, it is as magnificent as a “Cecil B. De Mille” film, and extravagant in its golden shade. Listening closely, I hear the sound of the electric fan in the reception room of the “Renaissance.”<sup>11</sup>

There is yet another flowering plant; it looks like the “asparagus”<sup>12</sup> leaves placed atop a vegetable “salad.” I ask the boy at the inn what it is. “*Kisang*.”—He means *kisaeng*.<sup>13</sup> What do its flowers look like?—It has scarlet, silky blossoms.

I reminisce about the actual *kisaeng* in the city—their sort of beauty would not have been approved of by our forefathers—wrapped in “josette” skirts, svelte as “Westminster” cigarettes. The scent of “Wrigley’s Chewing Gum,” more pleasingly warm than actual peppermint,<sup>14</sup> the sound of their lips smacking like pages turning in a

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<sup>11</sup> The sound he hears is most likely the buzzing of the bee’s wings. His immediate conflation of it with the sound of a fan in the “Renaissance”—most likely the name of a café in Seoul—continues his ongoing juxtaposition of country and city, and his own unequivocal identification with the latter.

<sup>12</sup> This was misspelled “*masŭp’aragasŭ* (마스파라가스)” in the original. With the level of sophistication displayed by Yi in other portions of this and other writings, it is difficult to attribute the error to him. Rather, as with “MJR” coffee, it is likely that a typesetter not versed in English, and perhaps not able to decipher Yi’s handwriting, committed these errors.

<sup>13</sup> Yi plays here with three different versions of the word *kisaeng*. The first is a type of flowering plant that, apparently, he has not seen before. The boy then pronounces it in dialect—“*kisang*”—adding to the disconnect between Yi and the things and people of Sŏngch’ŏn. Once the urban Yi has “corrected” the rural boy concerning the proper pronunciation of this plant—never mind the fact that Yi was unable to identify the plant on his own mere seconds before—he goes into a reverie concerning actual *kisaeng* (female entertainers). The current ones in the city are dressed in Western clothes and smacking American gum. He appears to appreciate their nontraditional beauty. By contrast, the *kisaeng* he may be able to chance upon in Sŏngch’ŏn will likely resemble those of the past—meaning both Chosŏn dynasty paintings and Yi’s own, less modern, childhood. Thus, all three uses of the word *kisaeng* serve to reinforce Yi’s emotional and intellectual distance from rural Korea.

<sup>14</sup> Yi continues his juxtaposition of nature/real and city/artificial—always preferring the city/artificial.

thick ledger—but the *kisaeng* that bloom out here must undoubtedly resemble those glimpsed in the paintings of Hyewŏn,<sup>15</sup> or perhaps they may be like the *kisaeng* seen in boyhood, red parasols riding in rattling rickshaws, now mere episodes from days gone by.

A pumpkin has fully ripened. It will be sliced thin, dried, and steamed with radish to make rice cakes—led by such delicate aromas, wafting on vapors, do the rustic spirits of our departed patriarchs return on appointed days for ancient rites. But its sense of security, broad and weighty, and its imperturbable color, which first bring to mind farsighted plans for the nation, seem also to await the burly arms of the young heroes of this “generation” that run carrying “rugby” balls.

They say when the citrons ripen, their skins separate to reveal the inner flesh. I pluck one, fasten it to the end of a string, and hang it in my room. Beneath its dripping, voluptuous flavors, I feel as if my own body, even as it wanes gaunt as a pencil, may begin to wax ever so slightly. But this “humorous” figure, neither vegetable nor fruit, possesses no fragrance. Only the carnal redolence of my city, from which another layer disintegrates with each washing, hovers about the room.

Beside the entrance to the narrow grassy path leading up P’albong, a monument erected in honor of a certain Mr. Ch’oe,<sup>16</sup> and another one for the everlasting remembrance of some other fellow, stand like airmail “post”s.<sup>17</sup> The way I hear it, they are both still living. Ridiculous, isn’t it?

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<sup>15</sup> Hyewŏn is the pen name of the Chosŏn dynasty genre painter Sin Yunbok (1758-?). He is especially renowned for his paintings of women, particularly *kisaeng*, some of which are quite explicit.

<sup>16</sup> The original reads “Ch’oe XX (崔XX).” As Yi is discussing an actual stele dedicated to a person alive at the time, he avoids direct mention of the man’s name. This was standard practice at the time, and still is today, at least in South Korea.

<sup>17</sup> The original reads “*hanggong up’yŏn ‘p’osŭt’ŭ*” (航空郵便 『포스트』). It is somewhat ambiguous, but most likely means that these steles resembled a certain type of mailbox. Even today in South Korea, many government mailboxes—though they are bright red—are shaped somewhat like stele and have the English word “POST” written across the front.

I wanted to see a church.<sup>18</sup> I wanted to repent before the god who loves even the farmers of this village, thousands of miles from the holy land of “Jerusalem.” My steps follow the sound of hymns. A “goat” stands tied beneath a “poplar” tree. He wears a beard in the style of old. I go before him and gaze into his sagacious pupils. Like exquisite “celluloid” beads wrapped in “*oblato*,”<sup>19</sup> they are clear, transparent, clean, and beautiful. His peach-colored eyes move about, regarding with disdain my inferior physiognomy and meager appearance.

The corn fields are one great military review. When the wind blows, I hear the rustling of armor and helmets. “Carmine” tassels fall from their headgear, curved and undulating at their backs. I hear the report of a gun from P’albong Mountain—definitely the solemn sound of a salute. It was actually the sound of an air rifle right beside me terrorizing a small bird. Then dogs of all kinds and colors—white, beige, black, grey, and then white again—emerge from the corn fields marching in formation. The stimulation of the “sensual” season adds yet another layer of splendor to this “Cossack” parade.

The remnants of newly rinsed cabbage remain on the stepping-stones across this clear mountain stream. The fresh flavor of kimchi prepared with young vegetables brings to mind “Smile” eye drops.<sup>20</sup> As I squat like a crooked letter N<sup>21</sup> atop one of the

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<sup>18</sup> The original is somewhat ambiguous because it lacks the spacing between words that makes at least certain aspects of the contemporary Korean written language so unequivocal. The original reads, “教會가 보고싶습니다”, making “I wanted to go to (a) church.” another possible reading. Contemporary readers may demand that the lack of the dative-locative “-e (에)” after church demands the reading I have chosen. But that would be quite anachronistic; Yi Sang and his contemporaries were not abiding by modern Korean grammar, they were inventing it. Both Yi’s grammar and orthography quite often flout the conventions that were only later codified and enforced. I have opted for the translation above due to context (there is another reference to seeing a church below) and out of deference to certain eminent scholars of early modern Korean literature who also interpret it as “I wanted to see a church.”

<sup>19</sup> This is written 『오브라—드』 in the original. It refers to the Japanese *oburāto* (オブラ—ト), which is in turn a rendering of the Portuguese *oblato*, a diaphanous paper made from starch and used to wrap medicines that would otherwise be difficult to swallow.

<sup>20</sup> Here, again, Yi juxtaposes the countryside, which he is viewing, with the city for which he pines. Like

smooth igneous rocks, two young women, bearing water jars on their heads and hesitating at stream's edge, come into my field of vision. I feel bad and thus stand up, but I then deliberately face them and walk to their side. I brush past. From their “hard rolled”<sup>22</sup> skin comes the scent of green vegetables. Their “cocoa” lips are stained with wild grapes and hardy kiwifruit. A processed blue sky is “canned”<sup>23</sup> in their pupils, which do not regard me.

These maidens' skin was exactly the same wheat color as the socks worn by the “Misono”<sup>24</sup> cosmetics “sweet girl” at M Department Store.<sup>25</sup> Ultrastreamlined hats donned at rakish angles, and lithe “handbags” like cats' stomachs adorned with “fasteners”—this is how I remember the modish ladies of the city. I also recall the roundworm-like fingers of the pallid factory girls who pound the “asphalt” at dawn. Will not all the same sorts of ponderous fingerprints fall upon the delicate skin of those various classes of city girls without questions regarding their wealth or poverty?

Despite their poverty, however, it is these comely country lasses, whose skin is tough as canvas yet without blemish, who pluck the fruits out of ground cherries and inflate their husks in place of “chewing gum” and “chocolate,” whom I more urgently wish to know. I want to bless them. The church is nowhere to be found. Shrinking before the insidious gaze of the urban dweller, they retreat into the woods, leaving only

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his earlier paradoxical deployment of “hometown,” Yi uses “kimchi” (and all its connotations) here in a most unexpected manner. The flavor of kimchi made from cabbage freshly washed in a pure Korean mountain stream is likened to “Smile” eye drops, an artificial liquid medicine manufactured by the Lion Corporation in Japan.

<sup>21</sup> Here, with the letter N, Yi elects to omit quotation marks. This contrasts with his earlier use of quotation marks around the letter T. The crucial difference, not apparent in English translation, however, is that “the letter T” was written out in a mixture of Korean and Chinese script (“『트』字”), while the N in “letter N” above was simply written using the Roman alphabet (“N”).

<sup>22</sup> As in footnote 4, Yi uses “hard-rolled” to express a brown color, this time not for envelope paper but for the skin of these country maidens.

<sup>23</sup> The original reads “『간쓰메』가 되어있습니다.” “간쓰메” is the Korean rendition of “かんづめ,” which means “packing in cans, canning, or canned goods.”

<sup>24</sup> Misono is the name of a Japanese cosmetics brand that was popular in the 1930s.

<sup>25</sup> M Department Store most likely refers to Mitsukoshi, the building in downtown Seoul atop which Yi's short story “Wings” draws to a close.

the echoes of a bell to hover the area like a lingering scent. Or perhaps this is nothing more than a hallucination heard by my restless soul.

In the very center of a field of millet stands a tall mulberry tree. The maidens picking its leaves are near the top, riding high like workers on a telegraph pole. A most delectable fruit ripened in virgin white. Two of them are up in the tree, while one below fills a basket. It is a scene from that folk song in which they only have to pick a couple of leaves before the whole basket overflows.<sup>26</sup>

The ears of millet have all dried up and died. Light as “cork,” they hang their heads in apprehension. Oh, rain, please come. They long to soak up your waters like a sponge.<sup>27</sup> But, as if rain has been forbidden, the sky is cloudless, blue, clear, and completely dry. So will the SOS of shallow roots reach the subterranean water flowing beneath this rock floor?

Two boys remove their rubber shoes, take them in hand, and wade out into the stream to catch fish. A vein into which runs the ground’s resentment—what sorts of fish might live in such foreboding and baneful water—the stream penetrates the earth’s fever, and flows out across the inclined steppe. It is a rumor of autumn.

Yes, autumn shall come—does it not whisper its request for permission? The millet ears crumple with a sound like a bride’s bowing in a wedding ceremony. The wind, old and cunning, urges the millet leaves to full maturity. But the millet’s heart is green and impatient and young.

Who has put the millet field in such disarray?—Millet’s no good anyway.—Was it done thinking this? Someone really fouled it up. Silkworms—there are silkworms in every household. Fatter even than millet ears, silkworms devour mulberry leaves in no time at all. This healthy palate is as regal and extravagant as that of kings and princes.

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<sup>26</sup> This is a reference to the lyrics of the Korean folk song “*Toraji t’aryŏng*,” or “Ballad of the Platycodon,”—also set deep in the mountains—which mention a large basket’s overflowing after having gathered only a couple of these edible roots.

<sup>27</sup> The original sentence, like so many in Korean, does not contain a subject. From context, I have elected to translate it as “They (the millet) long to soak up...”, but “I” or even “We” would also be possible and make a certain, albeit slightly altered, sense.

Maidens consider gathering mulberry leaves the ultimate glory of their being. But there are no leaves left. The maidens' passion is all aflutter, as if the ceremonial offerings at a wedding had been exhausted.

## X

Under cover of darkness, the maidens come out in light attire. In the direction pointed by their blushing faces—there are trophies on the mulberry tree. They need only go there. They trample the field of millet. Their feet, tastily roasted by ultraviolet rays, crush the millet ears where they stand. It is a “scrum.” And thus this absolute devotion fattens the sacred, noble livestock housed within the autumn<sup>28</sup> silkworm-raising room. It is a pulpy “romance” that brings to mind Madame “Colette”’s<sup>29</sup> *La Chatte*.<sup>30</sup>

In a room visible from the street, in a house next to the temporary school building, two are chattering away. A young virgin with plaited hair jogs a machine with her bare feet. At which the machine, as if tickled by the long, slender thread brushing against its waist, rolls with great laughter. With one laughing, the other coercing, the famous xx silk<sup>31</sup> is spun into a 15-foot bolt that will be used when visiting ancestral graves, when making festive clothes for children, and will even be used as a dustpan for sweeping away a daughter-in-law's grief, and for obliterating one dream after another—such is my absurd rapture.

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<sup>28</sup> The word translated here as “autumn” is actually *ch'ŏn'go mabi* (天高馬肥). While this is most often employed as a stock phrase to refer to autumn, some of the connotations of the Chinese characters are lost in English translation. Most significantly for this essay, and the context provided by the words “...fattens the sacred, noble livestock...” is the fact that the last two characters, *mabi* (馬肥), mean fat(ened) horses.

<sup>29</sup> This is a reference to the French novelist Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (1873-1954). Among her representative works are *Chéri* (1920) and *La Chatte* (1933).

<sup>30</sup> That Yi mentions this work, *La Chatte*, written in French only two years prior to his essay, is a telling index of certain Koreans' level of knowledge of and interaction with the people and ideas beyond their borders. Although a footnote in the Kim Chuhyŏn volume provides a Korean title (암고양이), the title of this work in the original essay is written in Chinese characters (牝苗). This makes it likely that Yi read the work in Japanese translation.

<sup>31</sup> The original reads “*myŏngsan xx myŏngju* (名産XX明紬).” The “xx” is used to represent the omission of two syllables. They most likely represent the name of a famous brand of silk or the name of a city or region renowned for producing silk. The same convention was used earlier when avoiding direct mention of a certain Mr. Ch'oe's given name (崔XX).

This evening's twilight has already been placed in the room beside the cigarette store. In those few "gallons" of somber air, vivid conifers grow luxuriant. On foreign vegetation that lives only in the twilight, that is like an immigrant, ripen untold virgin white and pleasingly oval fruits. Cocoons—naturalized "Marias" gather these fruits of the most current knowledge in a most graceful style. Lamenting their son's tragic end, they combine to form a "Pieta" in which a "Christmas tree" is torn apart.

"Cosmos" bloom in the school yard where pupils are learning their letters. They are also working hard at simple arithmetic, converting their honesty and simplicity into resourcefulness and cunning. What a deplorable way to calculate interest. A couple of white butterflies, like pages torn from a genealogy, transitorily flutter above a flower bed that smells of chalk. In turn, the sound of a soft "tennis" ball, like that of a popping cork, seems to transform into traces of a noise and linger as a series of points along a contour line. Tonight in this yard they are going to show moving picture advertisements for a financial association. Cinema? This century's pet child—a "number" reigning over all other forms of art. The victory of the eighth art.<sup>32</sup> What could possibly rival its

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<sup>32</sup> This appears to be a reference to the work of Italian writer Ricciotto Canudo.

Italian writer Ricciotto Canudo (1879-1923), who is considered the first theorist of film, considered cinema to be the "the Seventh Art." As Canudo argued in his manifesto "The Birth of the Sixth Art" (1911), cinema was "plastic art in motion." He understood that film incorporated the distinctive elements of both the spatial arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) with the temporal arts (music and dance). He later added poetry to the list in his 1923 better-known manifesto "Reflections on The Seventh Art."

In the 1920s and for some time thereafter, it was common to hear movies referred to as "the seventh art."

What remains puzzling, however, is Yi Sang's reference in this essay to cinema as "the eighth art." Later in this article—on video games—we find the following:

Today, almost 100 years after Canudo wrote his manifesto, video games have now become part of the "new art" discussion, i.e. *the eighth art*, and employ the elements of film, but add another new and crucial aspect – interactivity. Canudo understood early on how cinema, the medium of the 20th century, was a site of artistic convergence in its synthesis of the other arts. For Denis, video games mark a new site of convergence, one comparable to cinema. Video games are truly characteristic of our new century, in that they involve the audience through interactivity."

charm, at once aloof from the mundane world and dissolute? But the denizens of this place still possess intact their dreams of movies as mere fairy tales. Pictures that can move—they seem at once like conjuring learned from the redheaded barbarians and also like the enviable skill of our own countrymen.

The plain nihilism tasted after watching a movie—Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream must have been something like this. Has my entire round, flat head become a camera, and, albeit through a tired "double lens," filmed and projected several times over this early-autumn scene of ripening corn?—shallow pathos flowing in through a "flashback"—it is a heartbreaking "still" I send to my few lonely "fans" left in the city.

Night has fallen. The moon, nearing its tenth day, appears a bit into eventide. Townspeople like those from a folktale gather upon straw mats laid out in the yard. Are they the least bit different from a bunch of North Pole "penguins" tilting their heads before a gramophone? A piece of parchment upon which to record life, at once so short and long—the "screen," amidst this darkness, is the preparatory expression of a "biography." It appears a woman of urbane manner has arrived at the inn across the way, where I happen to be staying. I hear a mixture of dialects coming from its courtyard.

It begins. The Pusan Suspension Bridge appears. Next is Pyongyang's Moran Peak. The Yalu River Railroad Bridge rolls historically forward. Applause and ovation—the finest directors of the West are on the verge of losing face. During the 10-minute break, there is a speech given by the association director through an interpreter.

The moon is hidden in the clouds. No smoking—that's what it feels like. They shine the "spot" of electric lights on the director's face as he delivers his speech. All nature

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Professor of Film Studies  
<http://blogs.ign.com/silicon-knights/2007/06/21/58004/>  
Emphasis added.

Yi Sang was obviously familiar with Canudo's work and terminology, a fact no less noteworthy than his earlier references to and knowledge of Madame Collette, et al. Less certain, however, is why Yi elected to change cinema, Canudo's "seventh art," into his own "eighth art." Perhaps, like the passage on video games qua eighth art above, Yi was proposing a new "artistic convergence" that would "involve the audience through interactivity."

must be astonished. Electric lights—the bumpkins here have never seen them, save for the “headlights” of passing automobiles bound for xx.<sup>33</sup> Amidst these blinding rays, the deathly pale director steps down from the stage. Not a single one of these benighted commoners applauded the director’s eloquence—of course, I too had no choice but to be one of those benighted commoners—. This evening of cinematic appreciation did not come to its “happy end” until well after 11 p.m. The association employees and film technicians held an appreciation ceremony in this village’s one and only eatery. I returned to the inn, turned up the lamp’s dying wick, and began to read. It was the exquisite book *The Way of Humanity*<sup>34</sup> by Doctor Kōda Rohan,<sup>35</sup> lent to me as an admonition against my idleness and melancholy by the aged gentleman in the adjoining room. In the distance, a dog barks on incessantly. Unable to forget the refined “high collar” fragrance, the crowd must have yet to disperse.

The clouds break up and the moon appears. Sounding as if the windows to a great dance hall have been opened, the insects are remarkably clamorous. I have an urbanite’s nostalgia, a deep longing for strangers by the roadside.<sup>36</sup> Ladies fresh as the cover of a newly-published magazine—gentlemen the same age as a “necktie,” and my various pallid companions—the hometown that does not wait for me<sup>37</sup>—I want to adapt the words of my naked body and send them to the city. Sleep—a dream of incoherent printing type, of the printer who was picking type for the Bible when he spilled all the letters and put them back in random order—I too become an apostle, the path before me torn, and deny my starving family not three but ten times over.

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<sup>33</sup> Here “xx” is used to avoid mentioning a specific city, while the sentence itself reconfirms Yi’s distance from and distaste for the “bumpkins” of this place.

<sup>34</sup> In the original, the title— 『人の道』 —was placed in quotation marks. I was unable to find an English translation of this work.

<sup>35</sup> Kōda Rohan (the pen name of Kōda Shigeyuki, 1867-1947) was one of Japan’s most talented, and prolific, writers of fiction, essays, and drama.

<sup>36</sup> This appears to be an oblique reference to prostitutes, of whom Yi was rather fond. I opted for a fairly literal translation, but it might be more liberally translated as “...a deep longing for streetwalking strangers.”

<sup>37</sup> Here, again, Yi toys with and subverts the trope of the “hometown.” Rather than the unchanging, eternally waiting rural Eden, it is the city of Seoul, and it surges on, waiting for no man.

Anxiety is larger than the world that subtracts from me. When I open the floodgates, the tides of anxiety permeate this ruined flesh. But I have yet to uncork my “masochist.”<sup>38</sup> In the time that anxiety engulfs me, this flesh, worn by wind and reduced by rain, will certainly all wither and disintegrate.

Spreading night’s sad air upon my pad, I write a letter to my pallid companions. And with it I enclose my obituary.

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<sup>38</sup> The original reads “*mesoisŭt’ŭ* (메소이스트).” Although no explanation is provided in the Kim Chuhyŏn volume, given Yi’s breadth and depth of knowledge, this also appears to be a typesetting error. Simply changing the “*i* (ㅇ)” to “*k’i* (ㅋ)” would provide the “proper” pronunciation. These sorts of errors (*masŭp’aragŭsŭ*, etc.) are particularly interesting given the fact that the portion of the essay just above this one actually concentrates on the incomprehensibility caused by typesetting errors (“... a dream of incoherent printing type, of the printer who was picking type for the Bible when he spilled all the letters and put them back in random order.”). Perhaps, since this essay was serialized in the daily newspaper *Maeil sinbo* from September 27 to October 11, 1935, Yi was actually reading the errors produced by typesetting in the earlier pages, and then commenting on them, albeit obliquely, in his later submissions.