

The Mirror Motif in the *Crow's-Eye View* (Ogamdo) Poems*

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The works of the avant-garde Korean writer Yi Sang (1910–1937) have puzzled many readers and confused many analysts. When his *Crow's-Eye View* (Ogamdo) poems were first serialized in a Korean newspaper in 1934, Yi Sang's playfulness was misread as a meaningless repetition of signs and regarded as an insult to his readers. The newspaper even stopped printing them before the series was complete. Most critics have sought only to unravel the content of the *Crow's-Eye View* poems and have not asked why he played with the poetic form itself. In this paper, I analyze a selection of *Crow's-Eye View*, paying close attention to Yi Sang's mirror motif and the theme of confinement he draws from it. I show how he manifests and undermines "the modern" through his deployment of this and other literary devices. I explore the political and historical position of the "modern boy" through his use of dissonance—combining a dark mood with a playful tone—and the strong visual elements in his poetry. Further, I try to provide a perspective from which to examine Korean literary modernism in the 1930s, and argue that Yi Sang's cryptic style can offer an appealing introduction to modern Korean poetry for Western readers.

Keywords: Yi Sang, *Crow's-Eye View*, mirror motif, visual devices, Korean literary modernism

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