

Yi Sang (1910–1937) was a poet and a short story writer during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Despite his brief literary career, he left behind perhaps the most influential body of work in modern Korean literature. Suffering from tuberculosis, Yi Sang channeled the pain of his illness as a metaphor for the tumultuous world in the early twentieth century. At the end of his life, he was arrested by the imperial police in Tokyo, who had power to detain without evidence any Korean they deemed suspicious. His respiratory illness, incurable at the time, worsened in jail, and he died soon after being released.

Yi Sang uses an inventive manipulation of autobiographical elements, a method which expands his intensely private narratives into broader meditations on love, life, and death. "The Wings," a dark allegory of infidelity and self-deception, probes the ambiguities of perception and language through an unreliable narrator who bears an uncanny resemblance to the author himself.

"The Wings"

Have you ever seen a stuffed genius? I am happy. At a time like this, even love is pleasant.

Only when the body sways from fatigue does the soul sparkle like a new, shiny coin. As nicotine seeps into my stomach infested by round-worms, a sheet of white paper opens in my head. I put down witty and paradoxical thoughts like checker pieces on that white sheet of paper. It is an abominable disease of common sense.

I again plan a life with a woman. I am a spiritual straggler who has been, so to speak, after a momentary peep at crystalized intellectualism, alienated from the strategies of love. I am planning a life granting only half to the woman-- half of everything, that is. One foot planted in that sort of life, a half of myself chuckles at the other half, like two suns. I might even give up the life, bored to the bones by its ordinary events. Good-bye.

Good-bye. You may indulge in the absurdity of hogging for the food you hate most. Wits and paradox....

It is worth trying to counterfeit yourself. Your creation would be sublime and conspicuous among the ordinary products you have never seen.

Close down the 19th Century, if at all possible. The spirit of Dostoevsky can be easily wasted. Wise was he who compared Hugo to a loaf of bread for France. You must not be deceived by life or its phantom because of its details, right? Be out of harm's way. I pray you....

(When the bandage is cut, it bleeds. The gash will heal soon, I believe. Good-bye.)

Sentiment is a certain posture. (I may only refer to the ingredients of that posture.) If that posture develops into a stagnation, sentiment ceases to dispose of itself.

In retrospect of my extraordinary maturity, I regularized my view point of the world.

A queen bee and a widow-- among the countless women is there any one who is not basically a widow? Pardon. Is it an insult, my theory that the whole of every woman in real life is a widow? Good-bye.