

Performative character of Yi Sang's prose: between literature and theatre

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Yi Sang (1910-1937) is undoubtedly one of Korea's most original and unique writers. His work shook Korean literature in the 1930s and are seen to this day to as a formidable challenge, for generations of readers and literary scholars. Research on Yi Sang's work was undertaken as early as the 1930s, just a few years after Yi Sang's literary debut, and has grown tremendously over the next nearly a century. This is evidenced by the state of research on Yi Sang's literature, which covers more than a thousand academic works. Researchers describe Yi Sang's work from many perspectives: historical, aesthetic, philosophical, psychological; juxtapose it with the work of other Korean and Western writers (Yi Hyo-seok, Kim Yu-jeong, Franz Kafka), interpret the main motifs of Yi Sang's work (death, mirror, door, room), analyze the textual layer (narrator, space, language). In my presentation, I will make an attempt to demonstrate the performative nature of Yi Sang's literature. Based on selected examples of his work, I will try to prove that the narrator consciously theatricalizes his own actions and creates them as a spectacle. This hypothesis seems to be justified by the narrator's exaggerated concentration on his own person, his awareness of his multiple selves, his assumption of poses and attention to his gestures, as well as his perception of the outer reality as a theatrical stage. This research combines two domains: literature and theory of performance, and as such seems to go beyond the limits of the purely literary approach that has dominated research on Yi Sang's prose. Hopefully, it will contribute to a deeper understanding of the works of this outstanding writer.