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Dead Woman Walking: *Female Representation in Lee Jang-ho's Film Adaptation of Choi In-ho's* Byeoldeul-ui gohyang

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of female representation in Lee Jang-ho's film adaptation of Choi In-ho's novel, Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, within the context of 1970s South Korean literature and film. Both the novel and the film gained immense popularity as symbols of emerging youth culture, contributing significantly to the history of Korean popular culture. They played a crucial role in revitalizing the struggling film industry by catalyzing the hostess literature and film boom of the 1970s. However, despite their cultural impact, assessments of the novel and film remain mixed. This study focuses on analyzing the portrayal of the female character, O Gyeong-a, who has been both the source of their popularity and the subject of various criticisms. This paper particularly highlights the innovative elements introduced by director Lee Jang-ho, demonstrating that, contrary to popular and even academic belief that the film objectifies Gyeong-a to the extent of exploitation, it instead effectively problematizes and challenges the prevalent objectification of women in 1970s patriarchal Korean society. Furthermore, this study argues that the film marks a seminal moment in Korean cinema, showcasing the cultural adaptability and vibrancy of Korean visual media.*

Keywords: hostess literature and film, 1970s Korean cinema, male gaze, objectification of women, photogénie, montage, décadrage (deframing), close-up

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In the official history of Korean cinema, the golden age is often attributed to the 1990s[1] or, when referring to an earlier period, the 1960s (Abelmann and McHugh 2005; Jin-soo An 2005). The 1970s are known as 'the dark ages' of Korean film (Min et al. 1998; Kwon 2015, 8–9; Cho 2019, 48),[2] and films from this era are frequently disregarded in academic discourse as exploitation cinema (M. H. Kim 2016). However, the 1970s produced innovative and stylistically significant works that captivated mass audiences, exemplified by the remarkable success of Lee Jang-ho's *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* (Heavenly Homecoming to Stars),[3] a film adaptation of Choi In-ho's eponymous novel.[4] Initially serialized in the *Chosun Ilbo* from September 1972 to the same month the following year, it garnered enthusiastic responses and, when published as a book in 1973, became an instant bestseller.[5] Adapted for the screen by rookie director Lee Jang-ho the following year, the film attracted 464,308 viewers during its 105-day run in

1. Doobo Shim has noted that "modern Korean cinema's most important directors," such as "Kang Je-gyu, Kim Ki-duk, Lee Chang-dong, Bong Joon-ho, Hong Sangsoo and Kim Jee-woon," all released their first films between 1996 and 2000 (Shim 2011, 217). Dal Yong Jin also asserts that "the Korean film industry has been considered a very distinctive non-Hollywood cinema since the late 1990s" (Jin 2016, 68).
2. A more direct reason the 1970s are referred to as the *dark ages* of Korean film is the political oppression and economic difficulties faced by the film industry—censorship intensified, and the number of films made dropped dramatically due to the rise of television (Kwon 2015). However, the era would not have earned the epithet *dark ages* if the films produced during this period had not also been deemed inferior in quality.
3. *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* can be literally translated as *Hometown of Stars*. However, this was not the title initially proposed by Choi. He originally titled it *Graveyard of Stars*, but the newspaper editor objected to such a depressing title for the morning paper and changed "graveyard" to "hometown" (Choi [1973] 2013, 2: 450–451). The official English title of the film, *Heavenly Homecoming to Stars*, can be seen as reflecting the connection to death through the use of the term "heavenly."
4. Choi In-ho (1945–2013) made his debut in 1967 while still a college student at Yonsei University. Many of his works, starting with *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, were adapted to film. At the time of his death, he was still an active writer.
5. *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* was published in two volumes and sold 70,000 to 80,000 sets in 1973, with an additional 50,000 sets sold in 1974, making it an unprecedented literary hit in South Korea (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, December 27, 1974).

Seoul, shattering previous records (Korean Film Council 1999, 105).[6]

Why then were both the novel and its film adaptation such groundbreaking successes, and what were their societal and cultural implications for 1970s Korean pop culture? The 1970s, a period of rapid economic growth that earned South Korea the sobriquet *miracle on the Han River*, were also marked by restricted political freedoms under President Park Chung-hee's authoritarian regime often referred to as the Winter Republic (Ryu 2016). Culturally, however, this decade—epitomized by symbols like "blue jeans, acoustic guitars, and draft beer" (B.Kim 1974a)—became a crucible for significant shifts, most notably the rise of a vibrant youth culture (*cheongnyeon munhwa*), led by the post-liberation Hangeul generation. As the first generation to freely learn and use Korean in school after liberation from Japanese colonial rule, they became a formidable cultural force in the 1970s.

Central to this cultural shift was *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, which resonated deeply with this new generation. Its creators, including novelist and screenwriter Choi In-ho,[7] director Lee Jang-ho[8], and music director Lee

6. *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* premiered at Gukdo Theater from April 26 to August 8, 1974 (Korean Film Council 1977, 65). The previous Korean film record had been set six years earlier by *Miwodo dasi hanbeon* (Love Me Once Again; Jung So-young, 1968), which attracted 370,005 viewers (Byeon 1980, 30). *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*'s record remained unbroken for three years, until *Gyeoul yeoja* (Winter Woman; Kim Ho-sun, 1977) surpassed it with an attendance of 585,775 viewers (Korean Film Council 1999, 105). For context, between 1971 and 1974, a total of 245 films were imported and screened, with an average screening duration of 35 days. The average number of viewers for these films was 106,203 per film, based on the raw data of foreign films imported and screened (Korean Film Council 1977, 136–148). See Appendix for a list of these foreign films with some of the highest viewer counts between 1971 to 1974.
7. Choi In-ho made significant contributions to the screenplay, even though he was not officially credited as one of the screenwriters. Lee Jang-ho has revealed in a later interview that he was dissatisfied with the screenplay initially provided by the production company, and thus asked Choi In-ho to write a new screenplay. However, this time, the production company did not approve of the new screenplay, and in the end, Lee made a compromise by mixing the two (Mun, et al., 245–246).
8. It was unexpected that a novice like Lee Jang-ho would secure the rights to direct the film adaptation of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang,* a project sought after by many prominent producers and directors. This unexpected union of young creators was made possible by personal

Jang-hee,[9] all in their twenties and part of the Hangeul generation, crafted a film that not only appealed to but also shaped the sensibilities of their peers.[10] The film's success sparked a boom in literary adaptations throughout the 1970s (Jin-Kyung Lee 2010, 99), establishing a trend for novel-to-film adaptations (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 28, 1975).[11] These works came to be categorized as *hostess literature and film*, where the term "hostess" euphemistically referred to "prostitutes or bar girls in the Korean context of the 1970s and 1980s" (M. H. Kim 2014a, 456).[12]

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connections—Lee Jang-ho was Choi's classmate in high school, and Lee Jang-hee, their underclassman. In fact, Lee Jang-ho, using his friendship with Choi In-ho, somewhat coerced his high school classmate to surrender the rights to making the film, using his brother's college tuition as the down payment for the contract. Lee Jang-hee was also close to the two, having made his musical debut with a hit song titled "Winter Story" whose lyrics were written by Choi (Choi [1973] 2013, 2: 449-450). The song's success prompted Choi to change the name of the female character in the novel from No Seung-hye to Gyeong-a (Choi [1973] 2013, 2: 450).

9. The original soundtrack was completed well in advance of the film. Prior to the movie's theatrical release, Lee Jang-hee organized a concert showcasing the film's music, which generated a major sensation.
10. Choi In-ho and Lee Jang-hee were recognized as pivotal figures in the youth culture by literary critic Kim Byeong-ik even before the film's release (1974a).
11. The media was quick to notice a *new and strange trend* in the Korean film industry. This *Kyunghyang Shinmun* article, one of the first to address this phenomenon, noted an increase in both films with themes similar to *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* and in adaptations of popular novels in general. Since then, various critics have echoed and supported this observation. The production of a sequel to *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, based on Choi's original scenario in 1978, which was successful, and a third installment in 1981, which flopped, underscore the film's impact in the 1970s.
12. In her doctoral dissertation, Molly Kim lists the following as hostess films: *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang I, II, III* (Heavenly Homecoming to Stars, 1974, 1978 and 1981), *Yeongja-ui jeonseong sidae I, II* (Yeong-ja's Heydays, 1975, 1982), *Yeoja-deulman saneun geori* (Women's Street, 1976), *Gyeoul yeoja* (Winter Woman, 1977), *O yang-ui apateu I, II* (Ms. O's Apartment, 1978, 1982), *Nae-ga beorin yeoja I, II* (The Woman I Threw Away, 1979, 1982), *Nae-ga beorin namja* (The Man I Threw Away, 1979), *Achim-e toegeun haneun yeoja* (The Woman who Gets off in the Morning, 1979), *Miseu yang-ui moheom* (Ms. Yang's Adventure, 1978), *Miseu yang-ui oechul* (Ms. Yang's Outing, 1979), *77-beon agassi* (I am a No. 77 Girl , 1979), *26X365=0 I, II* (1979, 1982), *Gasi-reul samkim jangmi* (The Rose that Swallowed Thorn, 1979), *Kkotti yeoja* (The Woman Born in the Year of the Flower, 1979), *Aseupalteu wi-ui yeoja* (The Woman on the Asphalt, 1979).

The novel's popularity and the film's impact, however, had unintended consequences. Choi was labeled a commercial writer, losing his former critical acclaim,[13] and the film was retroactively viewed as a progenitor of *hostess films,* which tarnished its reputation.[14] Nevertheless, *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* not only triggered the hostess film boom but also laid the foundation for a new cinematic movement. While its success was often narrowly associated with the rise of hostess melodramas (Kwon 2015), it actually "invigorated the activities of young directors" (Jae-seok An 2001, 26) and allowed *young cinema* and the new generation of directors to gain recognition (Jae-seok An 2001, 24–25).[15] This momentum continued with the success of Lee Jang-ho's second film, *Yesterday's Rain* (*Eoje naerin bi*) released in January 1975, followed by Kim Ho-sun's *Yeong-ja's Heydays* (*Yeongja-ui jeonseong sidae*) in February and Ha Gil-jong's *The March of Fools* (*Babodeul-ui haengjin*) in May 1975, positioning these young directors at the forefront of the industry.

Encouraged by the success of these films, Lee Jang-ho, Kim Ho-sun, and Ha Gil-jong launched an ambitious initiative known as Yeongsang sidae (Age of Images) on July 18, 1975.[16] This collective of film directors and a critic aimed to usher in a new era of Korean cinema inspired by movements like the French Nouvelle Vague and the American New Wave (Ha 1977, 27–35). They sought to elevate the artistic standards of Korean films in both content and form, as detailed in their film magazine of the same name,

13. Prior to the serialization of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, Choi was highly regarded among critics and won various literary awards. However, the clear distinction between *pure* and *popular* literature was, then, clear and insurmountable, and he was quickly shunned by literary circles after the novel's serialization (Choi [1973] 2013, vol. 2).
14. Lee Jang-ho once wrote that the exorbitant audience numbers for his debut film "produced the effect of turning a diligently crafted work into a joke," stating, "I felt mortified. It wasn't a blessing but a curse" (Jang-ho Lee 1975, 70).
15. An Jae-seok (2001) notes that while many young directors made their debuts in the early 1970s—Lee Du-young in 1970, Lee Won-se and Lee Gyeong-tae in 1971, Ha Gil-jong in 1972, Hong Pa, Park Nam-su, and Kim Su-hyeong in 1973—it was not until Lee Jang-ho's success with *Byeoldeul-ui* gohyang in 1974 that the new generation of directors started to gain significant attention.
16. The collective consisted of film directors Lee Jang-ho, Kim Ho-sun, Ha Gil-jong, Hong Pa, Lee Won-se, and film critic Byeon In-sik (Jae-seok An 2001, 7).

Yeongsang sidae (Jae-seok An 2001, 38).[17] The foreword to the magazine's inaugural issue, penned by Byeon In-sik, encapsulates this mission: a commitment to transforming Korea's cinematic landscape to reach "artistic heights" (Byeon 1977, 11).

The efforts of Yeongsang sidae, although short-lived (it ended in 1978), ignited a significant transformation in Korean cinema. Despite the coterie's dissolution without substantial outcome, some critics regard it as the first forceful cinematic movement in Korean film history (Byeon 1995, 211; Jae-seok An 2001). It also served as a stepping stone for the Korean New Wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s, officially recognized as new cinema (S. Lee 2019, 3). Yeongsang sidae was evidently a precursor to this later wave, aspiring to new cinematic achievements.[18] Yi Hyo-in (1994, 23), a renowned film critic, once remarked, "The credit for sustaining Korean cinema in the 1970s should be given to such directors as Lee Jang-ho, Kim Ho-sun, and Ha Gil-jong."

Therefore, *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* should not be dismissed merely as a hostess film; it was the cornerstone for a groundbreaking cinematic movement in Korean cinema. Lee Jang-ho, already in his debut film, experimented with the concept of photogénie through cinematic techniques such as montage, décadrage and close-up, which resonated with the young generation as new and innovative. Lee's role as editor-in-chief of *Yeongsang sidae* underscores his and the collective's dedication to exploring film theory, cinematic techniques, and global trends. However, the contribution of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* to young cinema and the new cinema movement has long been overlooked, overshadowed by its association with the hostess film boom.

Although prior scholarship often categorizes *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* as a hostess film[19] and criticizes it for its exploitative portrayals of women (M. H.

17. The first issue of *Yeongsang sidae* was released as the summer 1977 edition (July 20, 1977), and the second as the summer 1978 edition (June 30, 1978). It appears that two additional issues were printed in small numbers and distributed exclusively among its members.
18. Byeon In-sik praised Lee Jang-ho's *Eoje naerin bi* (Yesterday's Rain) as a "new cinema possible in the Korean film climate" (1995, 231).
19. Although the unsavory label of *hostess literature and film* emerged later, in the aftermath of

Kim 2016; Roh 2017), this paper argues that labeling *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* as a *hostess film*—contrary to popular belief—is a mis-categorization that hinders a fair analysis of the film and its unprecedented success. Such an approach overlooks the film's critical examination of patriarchal society and its innovative and stylistic achievements. In the following sections, we will analyze the film's messages and its innovative techniques, which have been obscured by the hostess film boom.

His Herstory vs. Herstory, Unmediated

The novel opens with the male protagonist, Kim Mun-o, being summoned by the criminal investigation section of the Seodaemun Police Station. Initially, Mun-o fails to recognize the woman in the photograph he is asked to identify. However, upon closer inspection, he recalls her as O Gyeong-a, a woman with whom he lived for about a year, around three years earlier. He learns from the investigator that Gyeong-a was found dead on the streets the previous night, with only his name and telephone number in her bag.

From the outset, the narrative presents a dead woman and police questioning Mun-o, sparking questions about her death: was it murder, and if so, who is responsible? Using a detective novel structure (H. J. Lee 2020),[20] the story intrigues with the mystery surrounding Gyeong-a's death. Although it soon becomes evident that Mun-o is not a suspect, as she died from an overdose of sleeping pills, questions still linger about her life and death. As Mun-o leaves the police station, thoughts of Gyeong-a persist, setting the stage for the unravelling of her life story.

Byeoldeul-ui gohyang employs a dual structure of a frame narrative; the

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the novel and its film adaptation's initial success, *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* was also included under this label as it marked the beginning of this new cultural trend.

20. "The Relationship between Popularity and Female Representation in Choi In-ho's Works: Focusing on the Analysis of Narrative Strategies in *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*" was the first study to discuss the significance of the detective novel structure of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, making a detailed comparison between the novel and Choi's award-winning short story, "2 and 1/2" (2-wa 1/2), published four years prior to the novel.

framing story incorporates elements of a detective story to explore who is responsible for Gyeong-a's death, while the embedded story delves into her tragic life, culminating in prostitution, and ultimately suicide. This setup differentiates the novel from classics such as *Madame Bovary*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Anna Karenina,* aligning it with genre literature by using her death not as a climax, but as a catalyst—a starting point for a *problem* that unfolds throughout the narrative.

In contrast, the film adaptation omits the detective element; instead of a corpse, we see only Gyeong-a's ashes, and instead of a police station for interrogation, the setting shifts to a hospital for cure and healing. However, it retains the theme of the *woman problem*; the first dialogue in the film is spoken by a male doctor who, upon diagnosing Mun-ho with gonorrhea, announces, "Women are always the problem."[21] This early mention of a *women problem* has sparked criticism for its underlying misogyny. Nevertheless, the film critiques this societal tendency to unjustly pin ills on women, as illustrated by the misattribution of gonorrhea, thereby aiming to subvert the misogynistic notion. The film concludes with a dialogue between Mun-ho and the paddler: "Did someone die?" the paddler asks, to which Muh-ho responds, "*Woman* has died,"[22] indicating that the problem is not women, but the society that kills them.

Critics have denounced the novel and film for sexualizing and victimizing its female protagonist, a hostess, and objectifying her through the male gaze. Yet, these views overlook the story's immense resonance with its female audience, particularly those in socio-economic positions similar to Gyeong-a's (Min et al. 1998). It is a well-known story that many *hostesses* changed their names to Gyeong-a (Choi [1973] 2013, 452–453), signifying deep identification with her plight and the story's cultural impact.

Who were these women the story brought before the public eye? In the 1970s, many women migrated to urban centers to support their rural

21. This expression appears only in the film, although a similar scene occurs in chapter 8 of the novel, where Mun-o visits a doctor for treatment of a sexually transmitted disease.

22. The Korean phrase is "*yeoja-ga jugeosseumnida*." The English translation should be "a *woman* has died," but to emphasize that in Korean there are no articles and the meaning transcends the scope of a single woman, "a" was purposefully omitted.

families (Jin-Kyung Lee 2010), facing precarious lives in cities with an expanding sex industry condoned by the government for economic gains, including services provided to US military camps and foreign businessmen (Jin-Kyung Lee 2010). While many found employment as "factory girls" (Barraclough 2012), an increasing number entered work euphemized as the *hostess*, sometimes by choice but more often due to deception or a lack of alternatives. Despite strict societal norms, these women navigated the complexities of an environment that both commodified and concealed them.

The novel not only highlighted their struggles but also provided a platform for their stories in the public sphere, resonating with and garnering support from those who saw their own experiences reflected in Gyeong-a's story, including hostesses and women facing sexual harassment, rape, and other various forms of violence in the city. *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* was received by its readers and audiences as telling Gyeong-a's side of the story—of her repeated failures in relationships with men and marriage, from *her* point of view. The table below illustrates the non-sequential order in which the novel presents its story, along with the shifting narrators of each section.

The embedded story is told by an omniscient third-person narrator, with Gyeong-a as the focalizer. This creates the illusion that the story is told from her perspective, yet with the added authority of an objective narrator. Given the lack of representation for women, especially those working in marginalized sectors or on the brink of such circumstances, it becomes clear why they embraced *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* as Gyeong-a's *herstory*—a story they could relate to and empathize with. From this perspective, the novel can be viewed as a realistic portrayal of marginalized women in urban Korea.[23]

However, while the novel seemingly portrays Gyeong-a's experiences from her perspective, its narrative structure ultimately limits her agency.

23. Junhyoung Cho sums up the works of Lee Jang-ho, Kim Ho-sun, and other Yeongsang sidae directors in the 1970s: "By illustrating the sexual and emotional exploitation committed against women, the imagery drew attention to the lives of the lower class and showed a dark side of South Korean society" (Cho 2019, 50). This analysis acknowledges that the film is not an exploitation of women but is rather exposing the exploitation of women in Korean society.

Table 1. The Novel *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*'s Narrative Structure and Voice

Chap.	Subtitle	Dates serialized	Installments	Narrator	Timeline
1	A Sudden Event	1972.9.5–9.22	1–16 (16)	1st person	H
2	The First Man	1972.9.23–10.29	17–18 (2)	1st person	E2
			19–25 (7)	omniscient	A
			25–48 (23)	omniscient	B
3	Winter, that Year	1972.10.31–11.23	49–69 (21)	omniscient	B
4	Maiden's Room	1972.11.24–1973.1.12	70–72 (3)	1st person	E3
			73–109 (37)	omniscient	C
5	Wife's Room	1973.1.13–2.14	110–111 (2)	omniscient	-
			112–115 (4)	1st person	E4
			116–137 (22)	omniscient	C
6	A Doll's House	1973.2.15–4.5	138–180 (43)	omniscient	C
7	Journey into the Night	1973.4.6–6.6	181–197 (17)	1st person	D*
			198–232 (35)	1st person	E1
8	Flowing Room	1973.6.7–7.28	233–277 (45)	1st person	E5(D)
9	The Holy Virgin	1973.7.29–9.2	278–302 (25)	1st person	F
			303–308 (6)	omniscient	G
10	Goodbye, Gyeong-a	1973.9.4–9.9	309–314 (6)	1st person	H

* A: Gyeong-a's childhood / B: Gyeong-a's first love / C: Gyeong-a's marriage and divorce / D: Dong-hyeok / D: Mun-o's story before meeting Gyeong-a / E: Mun-o meets Gyeong-a / F: After Mun-o and Gyeong-a's separation / G: Gyeong-a dies / H: Mun-o finds out about Gyeong-a's death

Introduced posthumously, Gyeong-a never becomes the story's driving force. Instead, her life is refracted through Mun-o's memories, making her a passive figure within her own story. Before each segment narrating Gyeong-a's past loves and failures, Mun-o's first-person recollections are inserted, enveloping her story within his memories of her (E2, E3, E4). Despite its focus on *herstory*, the narrative filters Gyeong-a's voice through Mun-o, the active protagonist seeking the truth behind her death. Gyeong-a remains the object of this quest, a mere specter or ghost, unable to speak through her own voice (H. J. Lee 2020).

In contrast, the film adaptation shifts this dynamic by presenting

Gyeong-a more directly, allowing her to embody her narrative without mediation. By bringing Gyeong-a back to life on screen and allowing the audience to hear her voice, the film adaptation deconstructs the premise of mediated storytelling in the novel and challenges Mun-ho's status as the sole protagonist.[24]

Both the novel and the film deconstruct linear storytelling. However, the film, through flashbacks and direct dialogue, enables Gyeong-a to reclaim her narrative, transforming her into an active participant in her own story. Actress An In-suk's portrayal grants Gyeong-a agency and, in a sense, reverses her death, presenting her as the rightful owner of her destiny, *live* before the audience. Thus, the film exemplifies "pictorial realization," a term Thomas Leitch uses to describe "cinema's power to show things words can present only indirectly" (Leitch 2007, 97). Lee then blurs the line between cinema and reality by featuring Choi In-ho[25] in the film, holding a baby girl in the public playground near Mun-ho's apartment—a symbolic site within the film.[26]

Members of Yeongsang sidae, with Lee Jang-ho at the forefront, were dedicated to expressing the cinematic image, hence their group's name—Age of Images. This focus is intimately connected to the concept of photogénie, introduced by another member, Byeon In-sik, in his essay, "Cinematic Reality and Photogénie—Italian Realism and Korean Film."[27] Photogénie, as

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24. In the novel *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*, the name of the male protagonist is Mun-o, whereas in the film it is changed to Mun-ho, which dilutes the connection between Mun-o and O Gyeong-a. Thus, in this article when Mun-o is used, it is in reference to the protagonist of the novel, while Mun-ho references the character in the film adaptation.
25. Choi's cameo appearances in films adapted from his novels are well-known; notably, he plays a drinking contest judge in Ha Gil-jong's *March of Fools*, and a character wearing a banana peel over his head in *Don't Walk but Run!* as mentioned by Byeon In-sik in his essay "*Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*'s Gyeong-a and Her Dad" (1995, 200). However, his first appearance is as himself in Lee's *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*.
26. Gyeong-a initially moves in with Mun-ho by crossing over the playground fence, and later leaves in the same manner. The playground symbolizes both innocence and danger. It becomes a recurring site for Dong-hyeok's threatening appearances and a venue for confrontation with Mun-ho, where Dong-hyeok asserts his prior claim over Gyeong-a.
27. Byeon In-sik made his debut as a film critic with this paper first published in 1965, in which he discusses Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein (Byeon 1972, 290–296). It was also

elaborated by Jean Epstein, is "an attempt to define the uniqueness of the cinema ... to claim that cinema represented a new mode of perception and experience" (Gunning 2012, 17). Photogénie "occurs in brief, electrifying flashes," signifying "the quality which the filming of an object confers upon that object, a particularly photographic (with all of its effects) and cinematic (by dint of its mobile nature) quality that allows us to see the object in a new light" (Keller 2012, 25). Lee Jang-ho's filmmaking techniques meticulously embody this concept. The subsequent sections will focus on how the film adaptation of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* harnesses this power of "words made flesh" (Leitch 2007, 98), highlighting the stylistic achievements that bring Gyeong-a's character vividly to life.

Death Becomes Her

Lee Jang-ho reportedly focused on "presenting fast-paced, fresh, and sensory visuals" and emphasized "cinematic techniques" in making *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang,* distinguishing it from previous novel-based films that merely stopped at storytelling (*Chosun Ilbo*, April 9, 1974). This article will primarily discuss several cinematic techniques Lee employs—montage, décadrage and close-up—with an initial discussion on how he innovatively uses montage to materialize the film's overarching theme.

Adapting *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* for the screen presented the challenge of depicting Gyeong-a, who is deceased from the story's outset. The film adheres closely to the novel's frame narrative structure, marking Gyeong-a's death immediately in the opening segment with Mun-ho carrying an urn wrapped in white cloth across a snowy field. The film concludes with Mun-ho scattering Gyeong-a's ashes into a river from a paddled boat, completing the frame narrative arc. Although the frame story spans only a few hours—the time taken to scatter the ashes—it encapsulates a lifetime through a montage of time. Gilles Deleuze elevates montage from a mere editing technique to a profound cinematic concept tied to the unique representation

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reprinted in the third, unpublished issue of *Yeongsang sidae*.

of time. The film's organization of *movement-images* articulates distinct changes, making time perceptible to the audience (Deleuze [1986] 2001, 29). In the frame story, Gyeong-a is already dead, but in the embedded story, she is vividly alive, though always marked by death, making her a compelling subject for time montage.

The film employs flashbacks, insertions, and jump cuts as forms of time montage, as detailed in the table below.[28]

Table 2. Storyline Breakup of the Film *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang*

Time	Storyline	Timeline
0:00:18–0:02:44 (2:26)	Mun-ho goes to a ferry dock and scatters the cremated remains of Gyeong-a into the river. **Insertions (01:13–02:06): Three sequences depicting Gyeong-a during her days of innocence are inserted.*	H[A]
0:02:44–0:05:29 (2:45)	Mun-ho feels sick in the crowded streets and at the hospital discovers he is infected with gonorrhea.	D
0:05:29–0:15:35 (10:06)	Mun-ho meets Gyeong-a for the first time at a bar as a customer, then again at another bar where she works and he invites her out for a drink. **1st flashback (10:46–15:06): Gyeong-a meets Yeong-seok at the office, and they start dating.*	E1[B]
0:15:35–0:29:54 (14:19)	Mun-ho and Gyeong-a begin spending time together and visit Mun-ho's apartment. **2nd flashback (21:17–27:23): Gyeong-a goes to a motel with Yeong-seok.*	E2[B]
0:29:54–0:30:42 (0:48)	A nude photo shoot takes place, and the model turns out to be Gyeong-a, with Dong-hyeok overseeing the event.	E3/D
0:30:42–0:41:27 (10:45)	Gyeong-a and Mun-ho start living together in his apartment. **3rd flashback (40:21–41:16): While whistling together, Gyeong-a mentions a man who could not whistle, referring to her husband Man-jun.*	E4[C]
0:41:27–0:44:41 (3:14)	Dong-hyeok appears before Gyeong-a, and under Mun-ho's questioning, she hesitantly reveals her past. **4th flashback (43:07–44:41): Dong-hyeok treats Gyeong-a violently, hitting her and tattooing his name on her body.*	E4[D]

28. Although we will not discuss jump cuts in detail, the transition from the deterioration of Gyeong-a and Mun-ho's relationship (E4) to a year after their separation (F), followed by a subsequent flashback revealing how they parted (E5), serves as a notable example.

0:44:41–1:15:54 (31:13)	Mun-ho consoles Gyeong-a, and she continues talking about her marriage. **5th flashback (45:32–1:11:19): Gyeong-a learns that her husband Man-jun is still obsessed with his deceased wife, leading to a major argument; Gyeong-a's hope from a presumed pregnancy is dashed when it turns out to be imaginary, and Man-jun, upon learning that Gyeong-a had a previous abortion, demands an explanation. (*6th flashback (1:11:19–1:12:44): Gyeong-a's abortion and Yeong-seok's wedding.) After hearing Gyeong-a's story, her husband leaves home.*	E4[C[B]]
1:15:54–1:26:42 (10:48)	Gyeong-a becomes despondent and resorts to drinking. Dong-hyeok continues to appear near Mun-ho's place. These disturbances lead to the deterioration of Gyeong-a and Mun-ho's relationship.	E4
1:26:42–1:28:02 (1:20)	Dong-hyeok meets Mun-ho at the college where he now works and tells Mun-ho that he wants to "return" Gyeong-a to him. **Insertion (1:28:02–1:28:35): Gyeong-a works and sings at a bar.*	F
1:28:35–1:32:50 (4:15)	Mun-ho tells Gyeong-a that he will be leaving Seoul; crying, Gyeong-a leaves Mun-ho while he is sleeping.	E5
1:32:50–1:39:11 (6:21)	Gyeong-a and Mun-ho meet again at a bar where she works, and Mun-ho goes to Gyeong-a's house where they lie down together; Mun-ho leaves while Gyeong-a is still sleeping.	F
1:39:11–1:47:25 (8:14)	Gyeong-a visits a cheap bar on a snowy night, and sells herself to one of the men who makes advances at her; Gyeong-a walks through the snow consuming sleeping pills and dies in the snow.	G
1:47:25–1:49:39 (2:14)	Mun-ho takes a paddled boat out to the river and scatters Gyeong-a's ashes in the river.	H

* A: Gyeong-a's days of innocence / B: Gyeong-a's first love / C: Gyeong-a's marriage and divorce / D: Dong-hyeok / D: Mun-ho's story before meeting Gyeong-a / E: Mun-ho meets Gyeong-a / F: After Mun-ho and Gyeong-a's separation / G: Gyeong-a dies / H: Mun-ho learns of Gyeong-a's death

Six lengthy flashbacks are triggered either inadvertently—through actions like flipping a matchbox (E1[B]), Mun-ho's sexual advances (E2[B]), or the sound of whistling (E4[C])—or through deliberate recollections prompted by the men she loves: Mun-ho (E4[D]) and Man-jun (E4[C(B)]). Mun-ho pressures Gyeong-a to confide her past with Dong-hyeok (E4[D]), initiating the fourth flashback, which soon leads into the fifth, focusing on her life with her husband (E4[C]). This fifth flashback culminates in a scene where Man-jun discovers Gyeong-a's past abortion and coerces her into revealing more of her history. This, in turn, triggers the sixth flashback, depicting her abortion and Yeong-seok's subsequent abandonment (E4[C(B)]). The sixth

flashback is particularly notable, as it is embedded within the fifth, forming a flashback-within-flashback, adding complexity to the film's structure.

Lee also incorporates various sequences that disrupt the narrative flow, functioning as another form of time montage. The most significant of these appears in the opening segment (H[A]), where Mun-ho is shown carrying an urn across a snow-covered field. This dialogue-free opening, accompanied only by the theme music, lasts about two minutes and 26 seconds, with three consecutive sequences inserted, spanning a total of 53 seconds. These three sequences provide context about the deceased, portraying her as a vibrant young woman through striking, photogenic images that exude the charm of her innocent days, sharply contrasting with her depiction as a fallen woman in the embedded story that follows. We will analyze these sequences in detail here and in the subsequent sections.

In the first inserted sequence, the camera follows Mun-ho carrying the urn, then zooms in on it, transitioning to focus on a vase filled with flowers, including a white chrysanthemum—an evident symbol of death. This sequence includes shots of a woman performing various tasks such as typing, working with an abacus, and answering the phone.

The camera moves from a close-up of the flowers to reveal a young woman at work, initially showing only her torso, then moving up to her face (Fig. 1). This purposeful camera work is repeated in the subsequent two cuts featuring her at work (Figs. 2 and 3). These cuts, where the young woman is first shown without a face, depict her as a disjointed collection of body parts rather than as a whole, illustrating the technique of décadrage or deframing. Pascal Bonitzer describes décadrage as "ironic and sadistic" due to its "off-center framing," which can frustrate viewers and distort the portrayal of subjects. He further describes deframing as "the response of a cruel mastery, a cold and aggressive death-drive: the use of the frame as a cutting-edge, the living pushed out to the periphery, beyond the frame" (Bonitzer 2000, 200). Lee effectively uses this technique of cinematic killing to continuously remind us that the vibrant young woman shown live in front of us—who turns out to be Gyeong-a as the film progresses—is, in fact, already dead. This unconventional deframing of Gyeong-a contrasts sharply with the depiction of Mun-ho, who is first introduced in a long shot that captures

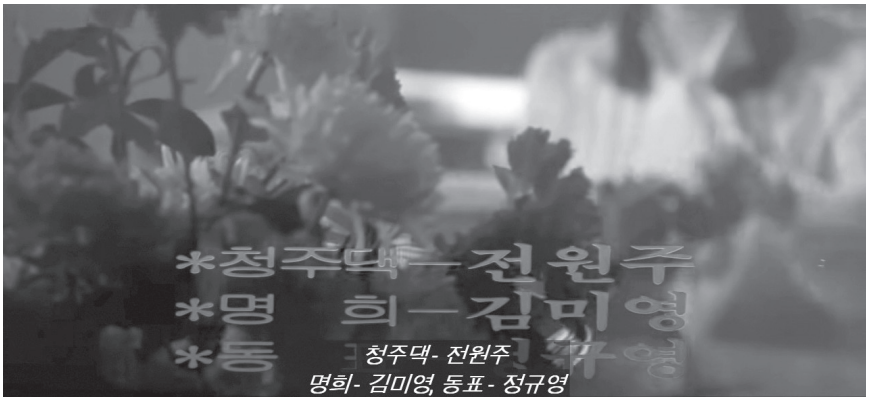

Figure 1. Gyeong-a at work, typing

Source: Lee Jang-ho (1974, 00:01:15). Copyright Hwacheon gongsa.[29]

Figure 2. Gyeong-a at work, calculating (00:01:24)

Figure 3. Gyeong-a at work, answering the phone (00:01:31)

him in his entirety.

Throughout the film, Gyeong-a is depicted without her face in various scenes utilizing the deframing method, as shown in figures 4 to 23 below. This patchwork presentation intentionally obscures her face initially or shows her walking out of the frame headfirst. These deliberate framing choices serve to disconnect Gyeong-a's head from her body at specific points, akin to a beheading, and this motif is repeated throughout the film.

29. All images from the film refer to Lee Jang-ho (1974), with timeframe inserted. The copyright of all images from the film belongs to Hwacheon gongsa.

Figure 4. Gyeong-a with Mun-ho (00:18:41)

Figure 5. Gyeong-a with Mun-ho (00:32:34)

Figure 6. Gyeong-a with Mun-ho (0:36:56)

Figure 7. Gyeong-a with Mun-ho (1:31:20)

Figure 8. Gyeong-a's married life (00:49:34)

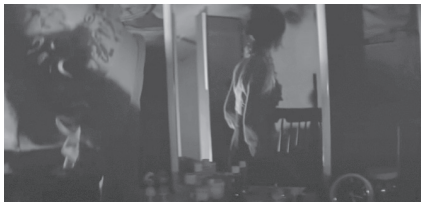

Figure 9. Gyeong-a's married life (00:56:41)

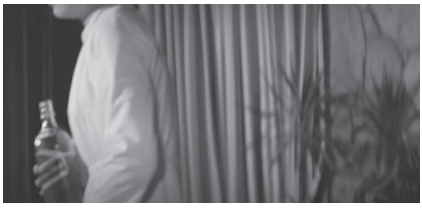

Figure 10. Gyeong-a's married life (1:04:04)

Figure 11. Gyeong-a's married life (1:06:54)

Figure 12. Gyeong-a's married life (1:12:46)

Figure 13. Gyeong-a's married life (1:13:26)

Figure 14. Gyeong-a meets Mun-ho (0:07:35).

Figure 15. Gyeong-a working at a bar (1:28:11)

Figure 16. Gyeong-a and Mun-ho meet again (1:34:14).

Figure 17. Gyeong-a and Mun-ho meet again (1:34:38).

Figure 18. Gyeong-a at a shabby bar (1:39:45)

Figure 19. Gyeong-a sells her body (1:42:59).

Figure 20. Gyeong-a sells her body (1:43:16).

Figure 21. Gyeong-a returns to the shabby bar (1:43:50).

Figure 22. Gyeong-a's last moments (1:45:36)

Figure 23. Gyeong-a's last moments (1:45:38)

Such imagery is epitomized during a love scene with Mun-ho that escalates into conflict, marking the beginning of the deterioration of their relationship when the plaster cast of Venus is knocked over and shatters (Figs. 24 and 25).

The camera captures the broken face of Venus, the goddess of love, just as Gyeong-a moves into the frame, her face aligning with the fractured sculpture (Fig. 26). This foreshadows the disintegration of Gyeong-a's future

Figures 24. Gyeong-a and Mun-ho making love under Venus (1:18:15)

Figures 25. The plaster cast of Venus shatters to the ground (1:18:23).

Figures 26. Gyeong-a and Mun-ho making love behind the shattered Venus (1:18:40)

with Mun-ho. Upon seeing Dong-hyeok's name tattooed on Gyeong-a's thigh, Mun-ho's demeanor turns cold, abruptly ending their intimacy, and Gyeong-a is again captured in a deframing shot without a face (Fig. 27). Later, having lost all hope in the relationship, she is found sitting alone outside the apartment at night, her expression mask-like and reminiscent of a broken doll (Fig. 28).

Lee introduces the method of deframing in the opening sequence as an effective way of portraying the soon-to-be-dead Gyeong-a in the embedded story. This technique is repeated throughout the film, as analyzed above, inviting the audience to witness this recurring symbolic violence inflicted

Figures 27. Gyeong-a and Mun-ho's relationship deteriorates (1:19:22).

Figures 28. Gyeong-a loses hope (1:21:16).

upon Gyeong-a.

Gyeong-a's actual death is meticulously depicted later in the film as she consumes sleeping pills and succumbs to an eternal sleep in the snow. Her death, however, is not a singular event confined to this climactic scene; it is repeatedly staged before this final, irreversible moment. Interestingly, both staged deaths occur in Gyeong-a's home during her marriage.

After being abandoned by her first boyfriend, Gyeong-a marries Yi Man-jun, an older widower consumed by delusional jealousy over his late wife, which presumably led to her suicide. Gyeong-a's striking resemblance to the deceased wife was the reason for Man-jun's initial attraction to her. Upon discovering the truth about her husband and his late wife, Gyeong-a experiences a hallucinatory vision of the wife's suicide in the attic, surrounded by her belongings (Figs. 29 and 30).

Figure 29. Gyeong-a's hallucination of the deceased wife at the moment of her death (0:56:46)

Figure 30. Gyeong-a's hallucination (0:56:50)

An In-suk, who portrays Gyeong-a, also plays the dead wife, emphasizing their near-identical appearances. This scene foreshadows Gyeong-a's eventual death in the snow, marking the first imaginary killing on screen.

The second imaginary killing occurs after an argument between Gyeong-a and Man-jun about her clearing the attic of his dead wife's belongings without his permission. Frustrated, Gyeong-a attempts to assert her existence:

Man-jun: I cannot understand why you would feel disturbed by my dead wife!

Gyeong-a: Why, did you ask? Because I'm alive. See, I can speak, move my hands, like this, you see? I can also sing. [*Gyeong-a singing*] *I don't know how to put on makeup. 'Cause this is my first time being in love.* And I can run. See? [*She circles around the fireplace in the middle of the living room at full speed.*] I can dance, too. [*She makes dancing movements by herself.*] I can even drink. [*She takes a whiskey bottle and gulps down the liquor.*] I am not a dead person. But everything in this house is. There's nothing alive here. I can't take it anymore. I can't breathe.[30]

Ironically, this assertion of vitality becomes, to the audience, a testament to all the things she can no longer do due to her death. Drunk and defeated, Gyeong-a retreats to her bedroom, encounters her reflection in a twelve-panel mirror (Fig. 31), and mimics shooting her twelve reflections one by one (Fig. 32) before collapsing onto the bed (Fig. 33), paralleling the earlier hallucination scene. Another symbolic killing of Gyeong-a is thus presented on screen.

The most unsettling moment follows shortly thereafter. Man-jun finds Gyeong-a lifeless on the bed, overwhelmed by alcohol. Captivated, he gazes at her and whispers, "I'm sorry. I love you more than anyone else. You're beautiful—just like a painting." This scene reveals that Man-jun's affection

Figure 31. Gyeong-a shooting herself in the mirror (1:05:35)

Figure 32. Gyeong-a shooting herself in the mirror (1:05:40)

30. Author's translation.

Figure 33. Gyeong-a mimics shooting herself in the mirror and then falls on the bed (1:05:43).

for his wife is only valid when she is in a state resembling death, much like the attraction of Madeleine in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* with its various implications (Zizek 1992, 85).

These scenes showcase meticulous construction of the mise-en-scène. During their argument, the living room prominently features a nude picture

Figure 34. Gyeong-a pleads that she is a living human being while a nude photo of a woman hangs behind her (1:01:58).

of a woman (Fig. 34)—resembling Gyeong-a's forced nude photo, which we will discuss in the next section—and a glass case displaying a doll in a wedding dress (Fig. 11).[31] The camera moves between these two objects during the argument, symbolizing Gyeong-a's objectified status in the household. Additionally, the birdcage in the bedroom (Figs. 12, 13, 31–33), accompanied by the chirping of birds, clearly alludes to Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* adding a subversive twist to the otherwise oppressive imagery.

Lee uses flashbacks, insertions, and jump cuts to craft a montage of Gyeong-a's life and death, vividly bringing her to life for the audience. Yet, through techniques like deframing, hallucinations, and mimicry, the film repeatedly enacts Gyeong-a's symbolic killing on screen.

The Gaze that Kills

In the second sequence inserted in the opening segment, Lee captures Gyeong-a mesmerized by a shop window on her way home from work (Fig. 35). Her gaze fixates on the mannequins dressed in various outfits, turning us, the audience, into voyeuristic observers. This shot positions Gyeong-a as the subject of her own gaze, directed at objects such as clothing and mannequins (Fig. 36). Gyeong-a then fantastically swaps places with the mannequin, assuming various poses in different outfits, as if she herself has transformed into a mannequin (Fig. 37). This sequence not only portrays Gyeong-a's imagination but also foreshadows her future—like the mannequin, she will be objectified and subjected to countless gazes, which we, as viewers, will witness throughout the film.

Then, a remarkable cinematic moment occurs. Gyeong-a, now standing in place of the mannequin, looks directly at the audience and winks (Fig. 38)! This shot intriguingly shows Gyeong-a reciprocating our voyeuristic gaze with a wink, boldly asserting herself as the subject of her own gaze. This moment briefly breaks the fourth wall, creating a direct connection between

31. The nude photo shoot in the film occurs much later in Gyeong-a's life, after she is deserted by her husband and becomes a fallen woman (Figs. 39–42).

Figure 35. Gyeong-a gazing at the mannequin (00:01:45).

Figure 36. The mannequin (00:01:54)

Figure 37. Gyeong-a posing as a mannequin (00:01:56)

Figure 38. Gyeong-a winking at the camera, standing in as a mannequin (00:02:03)

Gyeong-a and the audience. This encounter reveals that the viewer is both the subject of their own gaze and the object of the other's, highlighting the reciprocal nature of the act. As we objectify Gyeong-a through the camera's voyeuristic lens, her returning gaze suddenly places us in the position of the object. Her wink explicitly marks this shift, captivating us with her gaze. We are literally won over, if only for a moment.

In the rest of the film, however, Gyeong-a often appears without a face, achieved through deframing, alluding to her impending death and also graphically evidencing her objectification and the lethal nature of gazes directed at her. Men gaze at, sketch, and photograph her, using their gazes to metaphorically sever her head at the neck. This objectification is vividly depicted in the nude photo shoot scene about thirty minutes into the film (E3/D).

In this scene, a woman is photographed nude in a suspicious office building at night, surrounded by numerous cameras. Initially, only her bare back is shown, accompanied by a voiceover of a man ordering, "Let's not shoot the face, as promised," to which another responds, "Will do" (Fig. 39). The woman receiving the camera flashes is then revealed to be Gyeong-a (Fig. 40).

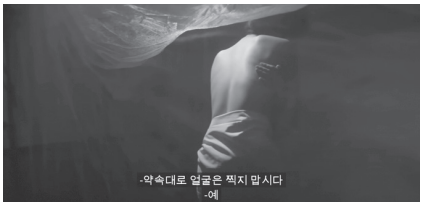

Figure 39. Nude photo shoot (00:30:04)

Figure 40. Gyeong-a in front of the cameras (00:30:19)

The commanding voice belongs to Dong-hyeok, the pimp who forces Gyeong-a to pose as a nude model. The dialogue between the two men controlling her body clearly suggests that excluding her face from the photos symbolizes Gyeong-a's metaphorical beheading, staged on screen. The

Figure 41. Gyeong-a posing (00:30:33)

Figure 42. Resulting nude photo (00:30:36)

sequence includes Gyeong-a posing for the shoot (Fig. 41) and the resulting faceless nude photos that become the session's final product (Fig. 42). Throughout this sequence, Gyeong-a remains silent, her body framed and manipulated by the photographers at their whim, much to the voyeuristic delight of the audience.

After the photo shoot, Gyeong-a escapes from Dong-hyeok and seeks refuge with Mun-ho, whom she had previously met at a bar. Although Mun-ho is kinder than other men Gyeong-a has encountered, their relationship still reveals inherent limitations. Their first encounter is symbolically telling: Mun-ho, noticing Gyeong-a drinking alone, sketches her face and sends the drawing to her via the bartender (Fig. 43). When Gyeong-a examines the sketch, the camera's focus leads to her symbolic decapitation through deframing, presenting her as a collage of Mun-ho's drawing and An In-suk's headless body (Fig. 44).

This fragmented portrayal of Gyeong-a recurs when she poses nude for

Figure 43. Mun-ho sketching Gyeong-a on the day they first meet (00:05:32)

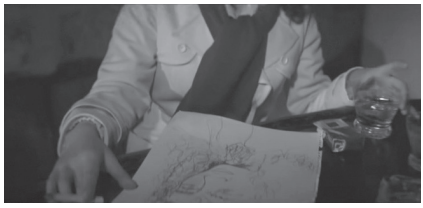

Figure 44. Gyeong-a looking down at Mun-ho's sketch of her face (00:07:02)

Figure 45. Mun-ho painting Gyeong-a as a model (00:38:29)

Mun-ho's painting. By this point, we have pieced together fragments of Gyeong-a's life through her recollections of Yeong-seok's betrayal and Dong-hyeok's exploitation. Ironically, soon after escaping from Dong-hyeok's forced nude photo shoot, she finds herself in a similar situation, posing nude again, this time for Mun-ho (Fig. 45).

In the painting scene, Mun-ho is centrally positioned, working on a large canvas. Behind him, Gyeong-a's legs are visible, juxtaposing her actual body with Mun-ho's painted representation of her nude body and face, while the rest of her body is obscured by Mun-ho and his shadow. Once again, Gyeong-a is depicted as a collage, a combination of real and represented parts. Even in Mun-ho's company, Gyeong-a is portrayed as trapped in the role of an object, subjected to gazes that paint, dissect, and reconstruct her, ultimately objectifying her. Although Mun-ho symbolically restores Gyeong-a's severed head in his painting, reclaiming what her past lovers had taken from her, he still retains control as both the painter of her face and the creator of the collage. This mirrors Mun-o in the novel, who mediated Gyeong-a's story through his voice and recollections.

Such fragmentation of Gyeong-a reveals the nature of the crime committed against her. In the novel, Mun-o repeatedly expresses his guilt, proclaiming, "We killed her," and speaks of "our responsibility" for her

death, despite not being directly responsible. His use of *we* instead of *I* and *our* instead of *my* reflects his complicity in the broader societal crimes against women, suggesting a collective guilt. In the film adaptation, Mun-o's verbal expressions of guilt are omitted; instead, the crimes committed against Gyeong-a are visually depicted through the objectifying male gaze, symbolized by the camera's deframing. This fragmentation of the female body seems to cater to voyeuristic male desires, echoing Laura Mulvey's critique (1975), which has often been the theoretical basis for criticism of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* (Roh 2017). However, in Lee Jang-ho's film, this portrayal is not the result of an unconscious gaze that objectifies women, but a conscious effort to implicate and condemn such a gaze.

Gyeong-a's relationships with men—her first love Yeong-seok, her husband Man-jun, and the pimp Dong-hyeok—involve severe mistreatment, including date-rape, physical abuse, and objectification, symbolized by Gyeong-a's repeated on-screen beheadings. Even Mun-ho, our protagonist, is not entirely innocent. She is depicted as decapitated, losing her voice and the ability to reciprocate the controlling gazes, deprived of agency and subjectivity. This contrasts sharply with earlier scenes where she confidently returns the audience's gaze with a wink (Fig. 38), or alongside Yeong-seok, gazes back at the camera (Fig. 46). However, by the end of the film, Gyeong-a loses all ability to return the gaze and stares blankly into space, the sparkle gone from her eyes (Fig. 47).

Just before her death in the snow, Gyeong-a visits a run-down bar, a pivotal scene in both the novel and the film. In the novel, this scene uniquely transcends Mun-o's narrative control, unfolding after his separation from

Figure 46. Gyeong-a and Yeong-seok gazing back at the camera (00:13:45)

Figure 47. Gyeong-a's blank face (1:42:26)

Figure 48. Men in the bar watching as Gyeong-a leaves with a man (1:41:11)

Gyeong-a and immediately before her death.[32] In the film, as Gyeong-a sits alone in the shabby bar, a group of men at a nearby table begin to hoot and catcall. Eventually, one man approaches and persuades her to leave with him. Despite her initial refusal, persistent pressure forces her compliance, and they head to a motel. The camera then captures the gazes of three men, portrayed almost like a mug shot (Fig. 48), implicating them as accomplices to her imminent fate. In the motel, Gyeong-a lies down beside the man with a resigned expression, selling herself not out of desire but from an inability to refuse.

Throughout her life, Gyeong-a faces relentless objectification: Yeong-seok desires her only for sexual pleasure; her husband values her merely for her resemblance to his late wife; and Dong-hyeok, the pimp, treats her as a marketable commodity. These experiences, where she is seen as a *thing* or *possession*, gradually erode her ability to assert her existence as a living being. Eventually, she loses the capacity to resist others' demands, her eyes losing their sparkle and leaving behind a blank, mask-like face.

The film *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* explicitly exposes and deconstructs the

32. This episode has a distinctive acoustic quality that sets it apart from the rest of the film. The ambient sound changes, with the reverberation time deliberately extended to give a fantastical texture to the sound.

violent power of the male gaze, holding it accountable for Gyeong-a's tragic end. Unlike the novel, the film portrays Gyeong-a as both alive and marked by death—a *dead woman walking*. This paradox works to undermine her objectification, highlighting the absurdity of objectifying someone who is metaphorically absent. The gaze is thus destined to miss its mark, leading to a slippage: for how can we objectify someone who is not there, someone who is both dead and walking?

What Does the Image of Gyeong-a Really Want?[33]

In the third inserted sequence of the opening segment, Lee depicts Gyeong-a lying belly-down, surrounded by possibly a thousand paper cranes—a symbol of her aspirations for future happiness (Fig. 49). Her gentle smile and averted gaze from the camera adhere to societal norms of a *lady-like* demeanor, subtly reflecting the societal pressures faced by women in patriarchal Korean society. These paper cranes symbolize Gyeong-a's

Figure 49. Gyeong-a with paper cranes (00:02:05)

33. The heading "What does the Image of Gyeong-a Really Want?" is adapted from W. J. T. Mitchell (1996 and 2005).

Figure 50. Paper cranes falling from the sky (00:25:11)

Figure 51. Gyeong-a scattering paper cranes from the rooftop (1:21:45)

Figure 52. Paper cranes falling from the sky at Gyeong-a's death (1:47:00)

innocent hopes, and reappear three times throughout the film, each instance marking a decline in her fortunes: during coerced sexual relations with Yeong-seok (Fig. 50), amidst depair with Mun-ho (Fig. 51), and finally, at her tragic death in the snow-covered field (Fig. 52).

All three sequences inserted in the opening segment which we have been discussing thus far, depict Gyeong-a in her days of innocence. The narrative then shifts back to Mun-ho carrying an urn toward the river, the ashes being all that remains of Gyeong-a. These brief sequences, all three totaling only 53 seconds, convey what the newspaper serialization of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* took seven installments to express—demonstrating film's superior ability to *show*.

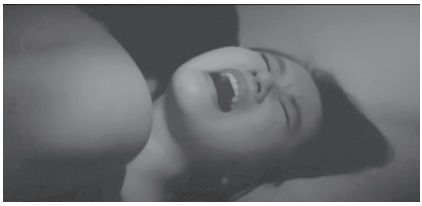

Figure 53. Gyeong-a's first experience with Yeong-seok (00:26:57)

Figure 54. Gyeong-a abandoned by Yeong-seok (1:12:37)

Figure 55. Gyeong-a's blank face in extreme close-up (1:42:51)

Figure 56. Gyeong-a dies in the snow (1:47:18).

Gyeong-a's face, often erased through deframing, is vividly captured in various close-ups that depict her anguish (Figs. 53–56)—another form of symbolic decapitation. These images, magnified to fill the entire theater screen, become a *privileged site* for experiencing photogénie—a concept summarized as "a supplementarity, an enhancement, that which is added to an object in the process of its subjection to a photographic medium" (Doane 2003, 89). These close-ups not only convey Gyeong-a's pain from the violence inflicted upon her, but also transmit her emotional and physical agony directly to the audience, intensified by the close-ups' overwhelming size and proximity.

The film vividly reenacts Gyeong-a's metaphorical killing, a theme Choi highlighted in his "Author's Note," written forty years after the novel's publication. He describes his initial intent as telling the story of "a woman whom we recklessly own, then throw away—a woman ultimately killed by the city" (Choi [1973] 2013, 429). Director Lee Jang-ho brings this narrative to life by repeatedly showcasing the violence inflicted upon her through

techniques such as deframing and close-ups, which produce fragmented bodies and metaphorical decapitations.

Byeoldeul-ui gohyang centers on deciphering the significance of Gyeong-a's death. Was it murder, and if so, who is responsible? The film implicates us, the audience, suggesting that we are not only witnesses but also accomplices in the crimes committed against Gyeong-a, our objectifying gazes having contributed to her victimization. What then does the image of Gyeong-a really want? It seeks to reclaim the power of the gaze, to restore her voice and agency—essentially to win back her ability to return our gazes with a wink.

Past critiques of the film often overlooked these nuanced portrayals, focusing on broader themes without detailed frame-by-frame analysis. However, a closer examination reveals that the film is a bold declaration by a young and audacious auteur, introducing innovation and style to Korean cinema. Lee's later films from the 1980s underscore his commitment to engaging with social issues and portraying society realistically, delivering impactful social messages. *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* showcases the seeds of this tendency.[34] Through Choi In-ho and Lee Jang-ho's depiction of Gyeong-a's descent from innocence to alcoholism and prostitution, the film serves as an indirect critique of societal issues, skillfully circumventing political censorship.[35] Unfortunately, the film's widespread popularity overshadowed its innovative messages, and the proliferation of hostess films, which often veered into exploitation, has led to further misinterpretations. Yet, it is crucial to assess *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* on its own merits—as a stark portrayal of a *dead woman walking*, whose ghostly presence will continue to haunt us until she gets what she wants.

34. Some critics categorize *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* as a "social melodrama," reflecting such interpretations (Kang 1992).

35. The fact that Lee was banned from film directing at the peak of his career—following the consecutive successes of *Byeoldeul-ui gohyang* and *Yesterday's Rain*—although officially due to marijuana use, suggests that his work did not align with the preferences of the authorities.

Appendix: Most Popular Foreign Films Screened in South Korea Ranked by Audience Number, 1971–1974

Title	Country	Director	Released	Theatre	Released in Korea	Screened (days)	Audience
Rebel without a Cause	US	Nicholas Ray	1955	Jungang	March 26, 1971	43	164,199
River of No Return	US	Otto Preminger	1954	Myeongbo	April 27, 1971	53	183,404
The Graduate	US	Mike Nichols	1967	Danseongsa	June 19, 1971	41	156,964
Notre-Dame de Paris	Italy/ France	Jean Delannoy	1956	Scala	July 31, 1971	55	268,593
Darling Lili	US	Blake Edwards	1970	Gukje	August 20, 1971	50	204,357
Love Story	US	Arthur Hiller	1970	Gukje	December 15, 1971	76	241,771
Diamonds are Forever	US	Guy Hamilton	1971	Piccadilly	February 29, 1972	51	176,386
Splendor in the Grass	US	Elia Kazan	1961	Hollywood	March 1, 1972	65	236,580
For Whom the Bell Tolls	US	Sam Wood	1943	Myeongbo	March 18, 1972	49	125,009
Ben Hur	US	William Wyler	1959	Daehan	September 7, 1972	93	419,311
A Place in the Sun	US	George Stevens	1951	Hollywood	October 28, 1972	34	109,994
Gone with the Wind	US	Victor Fleming	1939	Jungang	December 23, 1972	82	254,916
Quo Vadis	US	Mervyn LeRoy	1951	Danseongsa	January 13, 1973	53	206,825
Purple Noon	France/ Italy	René Clément	1960	Hollywood	February 3, 1973	49	144,597
The Ten Commandments	US	Cecil B. DeMille	1956	Gukje	June 16, 1973	64	184,138
Taras Bulba	US	J. Lee Thompson	1962	Myeongbo	June 29, 1973	58	193,613
The Summertime Killer	Spain/ Italy	Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi	1972	Hollywood	July 11, 1973	72	306,657

The Godfather	US	Francis Ford Coppola	1972	Danseongsa	September 1, 1973	32	91,529
				Gukje	September 1, 1973	90	182,976
The Stone Killer	Italy/US	Michael Winner	1973	Myeongbo	January 1, 1974	41	204,605
Live and Let Die	UK/ US	Guy Hamilton	1973	Danseongsa	January 1, 1974	45	159,605
Deux hommes dans la ville	France/ Italy	José Giovanni	1973	Piccadilly	June 28, 1974	62	282,122
Battlefield Constantinople	Greece	Nikos Foskolos	1970	Danseongsa	September 7, 1974	75	321,483
Papillon	US/ France	Franklin J. Schaffner	1973	Myeongbo	September 7, 1974	82	317,392
Samson and Delilah	US	Cecil B. DeMille	1949	Myeongbo	December 21, 1974	42	158,373

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