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Embracing Performative Dialects in Hyŏn Chingŏn's “Mistress B and the Love Letters”

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Hyŏn Chingŏn's (1900-1943) short story “Mistress B and the Love Letters” is a paradigmatic example of early modern Korean fiction. Published in 1925, this story, along with the rest of the author’s oeuvre, was composed during the Japanese colonial annexation of Korea (1910-1945). In his short stories, Hyŏn renders brief character sketches of life in this particular colonial landscape. Rather than engaging the political climate directly, he focuses on subjects from the everyday. The colonial experience is embedded into the mundane elements of these subjects’ existence, shaping their imaginations. In “Mistress B and the Love Letters,” Mistress B, a strict dormitory superintendent, guards the moral virtue of the students at an all-girls boarding school. In Korea, universal primary education and formalized education for girls was introduced by the imperial authority through a series of reforms beginning in 1911. Thus, a boarding school for girls was at this time a foreign concept, one that represented the modernizing influence of the metropole along with the pervasive Japanese colonial presence that punished any sign of resistance with a variety of brutal disciplinary mechanisms.

In the story, the metropole permeates daily life, most immediately through modern, imported consumer goods. The reader encounters elements of Western furnishings or modern appliances throughout the narrative. For example, Hyŏn interrupts his story to mention the Western-style bed in the room, in place of the traditional floor mattress. Mistress B’s nighttime read-aloud sessions are illuminated by an electric lamp, not candlelight. Along with the tangible objects that locate the story within the modern colonial era, the clash of beliefs between subjects (and perhaps within subjects) is at the core of the narrative. The reign of Mistress B’s de-sexed Christian morality is challenged by an unruly European Romanticism in an institution where young women are educated as modern subjects with an allegiance to Japanese colonial (and cultural) authority. In her capacity as disciplinarian for the young women, Mistress B seems to model a devout adherence to Christian teachings, while the students are vulnerable to secular notions of romantic love. In the opening scene, this antagonism surfaces in the Mistress’ diatribe. She laments “free love” 자유 연애 (chayu yŏnae), a new concept popular with the younger generation. Chayu yŏnae celebrates individualism through freely chosen marriage partners, in a revolt of sorts against the custom of families arranging marriage through matchmakers.

New vocabularies of desire allow for new ways of understanding and relating to love. The novelty and possibility that chayu yŏnae offered is most poignant in the three students’ fantasy imaginings. It is primarily through the format of a motion picture that they are able to make sense of the romantic encounter they overhear from the Mistress’ quarters. They are part of the early twentieth-century circulation of cosmopolitan romantic ideals through new media forms such as radio and film. Importantly, love-letter correspondence was a similarly newly-imported practice. These letters read like a student’s dutiful imitation of the genre of European Romantic literature. The story’s title underscores the novelty of love letters for Hyŏn and his contemporaries, as the term is Romanized from the English (러브 레터). Hyŏn also indicates a degree of general unfamiliarity with the convention by prefacing his use of the term with 소위, translated as “so-called”. The final scene captures the irony of Mistress B unwittingly enacting the dramas of chayu yŏnae for the very students whose moral conduct she regulates through dramas of interrogation and confession.

Within the new and ambivalent setting of the Japanese-style boarding school for girls, the characterization of the Mistress is decidedly performative. The text reads in places like a
script, with stage direction and settings. The rhythmic flow of the lines, most apparent in line breaks and tense shifts, adds a sensation of breath in the work; of a live performance, as with Mistress B's enactment of the confiscated love letters. As a translator, my approach to the text aimed to extend this dramatic perspective. In my reading and interpretation of the text, it was most important to preserve the performative gestures that embodied the original. In order to do so, I made conscious alterations in syntax and emphasis when necessary, in order to establish a corresponding rhythm that would translate effectively for a wide range of target readerships, both commercial and academic. Using this criteria, I opted for a more semantic approach to this translation, according to Newmark's definition, which was to deliver the contextual meaning of the source text “as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow” (39).

To retain the rhythm of the original, I also domesticated certain terms which would have otherwise interrupted the flow. For example, rather than give the full cultural context behind the term 장승 (changsŭng) (a carved wooden or stone idol thought to bring good luck to villages and communities), I opted for a compromise, using the familiar target language term, “totem pole”. In context, the use of the original term simply implies that the student is keeping still, or speechless. With this translation, I attempted to keep the same indigenous connotation while also conveying the idiom in context. It was also important to keep the alternating narrative tone of the original, which varies throughout the story and affects the rhythm in reading. At some points, the narration is curt and commanding, as in the early interrogation scene. In others, the narration tends to be romantic and ornamental, most notably when the three young girls fantasize about a potential love affair taking place in the dormitory. To render these shifts, I chose target-language terms that seemed appropriate to the given tone, as well as to the period in which the story takes place. For example, to translate 활동 사진 (hwaldong sajin), I used the term “moving picture” rather than “motion picture”. As the story centerpieces the tensions encountered by early twentieth-century Koreans between pre-modern and modern, colonial and metropolitan, and so on, it was critical to make the target audience aware of these differences.

Another challenge was the ‘anecdotal’ perspective applied to Mistress B’s character. The readers’ perspective overlaps with that of the students. For them – and, by proxy, for the reader – the Mistress’ identity depends on the availability of witnessing students; she is never depicted alone or outside of her interactions with the students. These traumatizing exercises in moral re-education are serialized and dramatized through students’ hallway gossip. It is through this intersubjective lens that we access the Mistress’ character. Thus, the writing reflects a dramatization of events. Her exaggerated movements and utterances are the result of a snowballing, cumulative rhetoric based on rumor – a mingling of happenings condensed into one exaggerated prototypical happening. In the last scene, however, Hyŏn upsets our prejudiced view in his presentation of Mistress B in her intimate space. Consistent with the stage metaphor, the reader's view of the character is framed by her scripted, onstage performance as “The Mistress”. The final scene offers a glimpse backstage through the eyes of the willful, curious, and sympathetic young women living under Mistress’ reign of terror. Through her pitiable monologue behind the curtain, we encounter a complexity to her character, a dimension which Hyŏn carefully withholds until the narrative’s very close.

With this in mind, I employed a distinctive English dialect to portray Mistress B, which corresponded most closely with the spirit of the original, yet would remain intelligible in English. In this story, the liberal use of onomatopoeic phrases and vulgar metaphors create a flow to the narrative and a metre to the wording. Thus, the summary description of the Mistress embodies both a written and oral flair. A literal or Romanized translation of these unique phrases would not render the same effect into English. Instead, I highlighted their exaggerated,
colloquial quality with verb choices and a few domestic clichés. To illustrate with the underlined phrases in the below excerpt:

달짝지그한 사연을 보는 족족 그는 더할수 없이 홍분되어서 얼굴이 붓으락푸그락, 편지 듯 손이 발발 떨리도록 성을 냈다.

(Hyŏn, 1993:754)

Each time her eyes encounter some sugar-coated message, she plunges into a manic state; shades of red and indigo alternate on her face, the paper trembles in her fingers as the rage boils over.

(My translation)

For the first expression, 얼굴이 붓으락푸그락, I expanded the English translation to emphasize the meaning, inserting a minor alliteration to echo the lyricism of the original. In the following clause, 편지 듯 손이 발발 떨리도록 성을 냈다, I added an English colloquialism to the verb in the form of "rage boils over" to replace the visceral aspect of 발발.

Another major issue was the text’s inconsistency in its use of tense. Though it was, and still is, common practice for Korean authors to mix present and past tense indiscriminately, it seemed – at least in this case – to be a clear and tactical use of tense. The deliberate pattern emerges through a line-by-line reading of the source text. The switch to present tense in this story signifies a moment in which the reality or origin of the featured speech is called into question. For example, the tense stays consistently in the past when the three girls are in their room, but switches whenever the mysterious noise outside the room is described. Hyŏn attaches the same present tense he used during the episodic reprimand scene in the beginning to the unknown origin of this noise (which we later discover is Mistress B). He subtly connects these two events through tense endings, both of which involve the Mistress. This use of tense conveys a dramatic inflection not present in the depictions of the three schoolgirls. Such tense shifts, when read in Korean, are not as apparent as in English, as they alternate fluidly from line to line. When translated, however, they may appear jarring for the reader. Still, I have opted to keep the tense as-is, delivering a similar juxtaposition of dramatic levels within the text. In the process, I have tried to keep the transitions as smooth as possible, while working to deliver their intended mood change.

A thorough appreciation of the range of Hyŏn’s literary techniques is vital to the interpretation and effective translation of this work. Throughout the translation process, I experimented with syntax and word choice to clarify the text’s anecdotal quality and faithfully render the author’s intent. The performative aspect of this story acts as a subtle interpretation of the outward projection of the self, juxtaposed with the reality discovered in private spaces. To preserve Mistress B’s tragic arc to the full extent of the original, it is important to treat expressions embedded between the lines with the same meticulousness – or even passion – that the Mistress accorded the “so-called love letters.”

Bibliography

Mistress B and the Love Letters

Hyŏn Chingŏn
Translated by Carrie Middleditch

Here comes Mistress B of C Girls School, whose absolute reign over the dormitory and classroom, along with her righteous singlehood and devout faith, has earned her a certain fame. The blush of youth is entirely stamped out of the almost-forty-year-old spinster’s freckle-ridden face. The withered, tough, dry, yellowed skin reminds ones of dried-out fish.

Perhaps it’s her widening forehead overrun with wrinkles, or the way she combs her thinning hair into a goat dung-sized mound on the back of her head—whatever the cause, any trace of her fleeting youth is long gone. With pursed lips and icy eyes peering over reading glasses, the fierce severity contained in a single glance is enough to induce shudders and shakes in any student.

The foremost appalling and vexing concern of this Mistress B was the so-called “love letters”. As a girls’ dormitory, notes of the like are to be expected. Still, the high repute of the institution or the uncommon number of beauties contained therein likely caused several lovesick ballads to flutter in daily. And with all correspondence monitored, these love letters invariably end up in Mistress B’s hands. Each time her eyes encounter some sugar-coated message, she plunges into a manic state; shades of red and indigo alternate on her face, the paper trembles in her fingers as the rage boils over.

However unfairly, these letters spelled calamity for the recipient. The girl is summoned to the Mistress’ office at the end of class. Unable to contain her fury, Mistress B paces lines across the room, seething through her nostrils. The
그는, 들어오는 학생을 잡아먹을 듯이 노리면서 한 걸음 두 걸음 코가 맞닿을 만큼 바짝 다가들어서서 막 마주선다. 엽문인지 알지 못하면서도 신선한 기색을 살피고 검부터 잡아먹는 학생은 한동안 어쩔 줄 모르다가 간신히 모기만한 소리로,

"저를 부르셨어요?"

하고 묻는다.

"그래, 불렀다. 왜!"

그 무는 듯이 한 마디 하고 나서 매우 못마땅한 것처럼 교의를 우당통탕 당겨서 철저 추지 않았다가 학생이 그저서 있는 걸 보면

"장승이나? 왜 앉지 못해!"

하고 또 소리를 빼 지르는 법이었다. 승과 제자는 조그만한 책상 하나를 사이에 두고 마주 앉는다. 앓은 뒤에도, ‘내 죄상을 내가 알지!’ 하는 것처럼 아무 말없이 눈살로 쏟기만 하나가 한참만에야 그 편지를 끝BCM에야 학생의 코앞에 동댕이를 치며,

"이건 누구한테 오는 거냐?"

하고 문초를 시작한다. 앞장에 제 이름이 쓰었는지라,

"저 한테 오는 것이야요."

하고 대답을 하지 않으려다. 그러면 발신인이 누구인 것을 제자 묻는다. 그런 편지를 할 수 있는 발신인의 성명이 틀림없이 있기 때문에 주저주저 하다가 자세히 알 수 없다고 내밀일 양이면,

"너한테 오는 것을 모르단 말이나?"

고 불호령을 내릴 데에 또 사건을 익어서 보라 하여 무심한 학생이 나지막하하마 꼿꼿한 구절을 입술에 올리면, B 여사의 역경은 더욱 심해져서 어느 놈의 소행인 것을 가리켜 알리는. 기술 보도 등도 못한 남성이 한 노릇이야. 자기에게는 아무 죄도 없는 것을 변명하여도 곧이 들어지는 않는다. 바른 대로 야속이야 방정이지 그렇지 않으면 퇴학을 시킨다는 둘, 제 이름도 모르는 여자에게 편지할 러가

moment the girl steps over the threshold, she pounces. One stride, and another, until their noses nearly touch. The oblivious pupil sees the woman’s state and dread begins to sink in. Stupefied, at last she musters the thinnest voice,

“Did you summon me, Miss?”

“That’s right, I did. Do you mind?” she snaps.

Demonstrating her displeasure, she drags a chair across the room and crashes down. Eyeing the girl still standing, she strikes again, screeching,

“What are you, a totem pole? Sit down!”

A small desk separates teacher and student as they sit facing one another. The Mistress continues her piercing glare, as if to say, “you know why you’re here!” Eventually, she produces a letter and shoves it under the girl’s nose.

“Who is this addressed to?”

The interrogation begins.

Spotting her own name on the page, the student can all but reply,

“To me, Miss.”

The next question – the identity of the sender. The girl hesitates. With such correspondence, one can never be sure... She eventually answers that she doesn’t know. The Mistress erupts,

“So, you have no idea who sent this to you?”

She then orders the girl to read out the contents. As the unwitting student mumbles through each honey-soaked line, the Mistress’ frenzy escalates to the point that she must know the culprit’s name. No matter the girl’s pleas – that she’s never heard of that name, that it doesn’t involve her – the Mistress won’t hear it. The student is threatened to fess up or face expulsion, and goaded for an explanation as to how it was possible for the boy to send a letter without knowing her name. The Mistress makes accusations of immoral behaviour,
만무하다는 등, 필연 행실이 부정한 일이 있으리라는 등….

하나둘해 어디서 한 번 만나기라도 하였을 텐 아예해서 남자와 접촉을 하게 되었다는 등, 자주 잘못하여 학교에서 주최한 음악회나 바자에서 혹 보았는지 모른다고 뜻하다 못해 주위를 것 같으면 사내의보는 눈이 어렁다는, 표정이 어려니라, 무슨 말을 건네더라도 미주알 고주알 캐고 파며 어르고 불야시 넉넉히 십년 감수는 시킨다.

두 시간이 남도록 무초를 한 끝에는 사내만 밤이 못할 것, 우리 여성은 잡아먹으러는 마귀인 것, 양에 자유자신이니 하는 것도 악마가 지어낸 소리인 것을 입에 침이 없이 얼을 띄어서 한참 설법을 하다가 담지도 않은 방바닥 (침대를 쓰기 때문에 방이라 해도 마룻바닥이다)에 그대로 무릎을 꿇고 기도를 올린다. 눈에 눈물까지 쌓여거리면서 말끌마다 하느님 아버지를 찾아서 악마의 유혹에 떨어지기를 하여 양을 구해 달라고 뒤팔고 꿈살는 벼이었다.

그리고 둘째로 그의 심어하는 것은 기숙생을 남자가 변화하려 오는 일이었다.

무슨 명계를 하든지 기어이 못 보게 하고 만다. 친부모, 친동기간이라도 규칙이 어머니 상학 중이니 무슨 명계를 하든지 따돌려 보내기가 일쑤다.

이로 말미암아 학생이 동맹 휴학을 하였고 교장의 설유까지 들었지만 그래도 그 버릇은 고치려 들지 않았다.

이 B 사가의 감독하는 그 기숙사에 금년 들어서 피상한 일이 ‘생겼다’느니보다 ‘발각되었다’는 것이 마땅하는지 모르라라. 왜 그런고 하면 그 피상한 일이 언제 ‘시작된’ 것은 귀신밖에 모르나가.

그것은 다른 일이 아니라 받아 깊어서 새로 한 점이 되어 모든 기숙생들이 담고 곤한 잡에 멀어졌을 때 insist the girl has brought it upon herself.

She applies more pressure, insisting the two must have met at least once. If the student, unable to endure more harassment, creates an excuse that they accidentally met eyes at a school-sponsored concert or charity event, the Mistress probes every detail. How did the boy look at you? What was his expression? What did he say? She digs and digs until she’s dug at least ten years from the girl’s life.

After over two hours of questioning, the Mistress begins a crazed sermon. She spouts that boys cannot be trusted… they’re demons set to prey on females… the likes of “free love” and “sacred love” are the devil’s fictions… She rambles on in a feverish state without stopping, not even to swallow saliva. Then, collapsing to her knees, she begins to pray on the coarse, unkempt floor (as the beds are of the Western style, the concrete floor is left unfinished). Her eyes swell with tears as she repeats her pleas to the Heavenly Father, repeatedly begging deliverance for this young lamb who has strayed onto Satan’s path…

After love letters, the Mistress above all hated male visitors to the dormitory students.

Regardless of whether they were a parent or relative, she made any excuse necessary for the meeting not to take place. She might say that the student was busy in class, or cite some other regulation, and send them away. This led to students skipping lessons in protest, with the issue going as high as a reprimand from the principal. Still, the Mistress made no efforts to change her habit.

As autumn set in, a strange happening was "discovered" involving Mistress B in the dormitory she oversaw. "Discovered" is a more accurate term than "began", because only the ghosts would know just when this happening "began."
The discovery occurred during the darkest part of night, when every student was fast asleep. It was at this hour when sudden bursts of laughter, mingled with soft murmurs, were heard echoing through the halls. Occasionally a few lighter sleepers were roused by the noise, but in their drowsiness they passed it off as dried leaves blowing on the nearby hill, or geese fanning their wings under the moonlight. One girl spooked herself with the thought of goblins playing pranks. She tried to wake her roommates to no avail, but eventually realized her childish logic. Assuring herself of a simple neighbourly ruckus, or girls talking in their sleep, she drifted off again. The mystery was soon brought to light. As it happens, one night three students of the same room all woke by chance. The first girl, after stirring to use the toilet, heard the noise and woke the next two.

“Listen to that! What could that be at this hour?” She said, her eyes glossy with fear.

“I heard the same noise last night. It can’t be a… goblin… can it?” ventured the second girl, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. The third and eldest among them (though, despite this distinction, she was just seventeen), known for her playful, mischievous manner, kept a doubtful silence before perking up her ears, adding,

“How strange. Come to think of it, I’ve heard this same noise before… I’m sure it’s just some girls who can’t sleep.”

Just then, the strange noise erupted in a roar of laughter. The three shrunk in fear, their ears homing in on the sound. Every odd word rang out clearly in the still night, where no other sound carried through the air. It was as if it were transpiring right next to them.

“Oh! Mr. T’aen! How marvelous that would be.”
“경숙 씨가 좋으시다면 내야 얼마나 기쁘겠습니까? 아아, 오직 경숙 씨에게 바친 나의 타는 듯한 가슴을 이제야 아셨나니까?" 

정말에 든 사내의 목청이 분명하다.

한동안 침묵......

"언제 고만 놓아요. 키스가 너무 길지 않아요? 행여 남이 보면 어떻게해요?"

아앙띠는 여자 말씨.

"길수록 더욱 좋지 않아요? 나는 내 목숨이 끝나질 때까지 키스를 하여도 간다고는 못하겠습니다. 그래도 짧은 것은 한하겠습니까."

사내의 피를 뻗는 듯한 이 말씀은 계집의 자거러진 웃음으로 뿜혀 버렸다.

그것은 묻지 않아도 사방에 거둔 남녀의 허물어진 수작이다. 감금이 지독한 이 가숙사에 이런 일이 생길 줄이야! 세 처녀는 얼굴을 마주보았다.

그들의 얼굴은 놀랍고 무서운 빛이 없지 않으니 점점 호기심에 번역이기 시작하였다. 그들의 머리 속에는 한결같이 로맨틱한 생각이 떠올랐다. 이 안에 있는 여자 애인이 보려고 하고 학교 근처를 둘돌고 꿉돌던 사내 애인이 타는 듯한 가슴을 향상 calle 듣기로 받아 이순하기를 기다려 담을 뛰어 넘었는지 모르리라.

모든 불이 다 깨지고 오직 밝은 달빛이 운가루처럼 서린 장문이 소리 없이 열리며 여자 애인은 환 수건을 혼들어 사내 애인을 부르짖지도 모르리라. 활동 사전에 보는 것처럼 기타긴 떼를 내리워서 하나는 위에서 닦기고 하나는 밑에서 매달려 담동동하면서 올라가는 정경이 있었는지 모르리라. 그래서 두 애인은 만나 가지고 저와 같이 사랑의 속삭임에 찾아갔는지 모르리라…….

꿈결같은 감정이 안개 모양으로 눈부시게 세 처녀의 몸과 마음을 휘싸 들었다.

그들의 뻗은 후끈후끈 달았다. 괘상한 소리도 또 일어났다.

A coquettish woman’s voice.

“If you agree, Kyŏngsuk, how happy would I be! Do you now trust my burning devotion to you?”

Undoubtedly, the fervent pleas of a young man.

A long pause…

“Let me go! Your kisses are too lengthy, are they not?” the lady bleats.

“What if someone catches us?”

“The longer the better, surely? If my lips never left yours, even till the day I die, I wouldn’t think it lengthy... but I’ll keep it short.”

His heartfelt words were obscured in the woman’s pealing laughter.

Without question, it was some unrestrained exchange between lovers. That such an affair could occur in the dreadful confinement of this dormitory! The three girls exchanged looks. Shock and fear mingled in their faces... but a sheen of curiosity soon took over. A whole host of romantic scenarios formed in their minds. Perhaps this man had come to see his love, and wandered around the school walls, unable to quell the scorching embers in his heart... and awaiting the cover of night, leapt over.

With every light extinguished, the lady pushes open the moonlight-dusted window ever so mutely, dangling a white handkerchief to signal to her lover. Like a scene in a moving picture, a long sheet lowers for one to pull above and one to climb below; the cloth sways to and fro.

In this way, they unite and are carried off by whispers of love...

A dreamy haze of shimmering sentiments swathed the three girls, body and soul.

Their cheeks glowed. The strange noise erupted again.
“난 싫어요. 당신 같은 사내는 난 싫어요.”

이번에는 매몰스럽게 내어내는 모양.

“나의 천사, 나의 하늘, 나의 여왕, 나의 목숨, 나의 사랑, 나를 살려 주시오. 나를 구해 주세요.”

사내의 애를 줄이는 간청…….

“우리 구경가 불결?”

깊곳은 셋째 처녀는 몸을 일으키며 이런 제의를 하였다. 다른 처녀들도 그 말에 찬성한다는 듯이 따라 일어섰으며 의아와 공구와 호기심이 뒤섞인 얼굴을 서로 교환하면서 얼마나 별말이나가 마침내 가만히 문을 열고 나왔다. 썰бил레같은 그들의 발가락은 가장 소심히 많은 죽니는 곳은 향해서 꼼실공실 거려간다. 검검한 목도에 자다가 일어난 세 처녀의 흔 모양은 그립자처럼 소리없이 움직였다.

소리나는 방은 어린지 않게 채울 수 없었다. 찾아는 나무로 깔아 세운 듯이 주춤 결음을 헤들 만큼 그들은 놀랐다. 그런 소리의 출처야말로 자기네 방에서 몇 걸음 안되는 사감실일 줄이야! 그렇듯이 사내라면 못 먹어 하고 절이라도 배알을 듯한 B 여사의 방일 줄이야! 그 방에 여전히 사내의 비대발광하는 푸념이 되풀이되고 있다…….

“나의 천사, 나의 하늘, 나의 여왕, 나의 목숨 나의 사랑, 나의 애를 살려 죽이시 테요. 나의 가슴을 빼앗아 죽이시 테요. 내 생명을 맔으신 당신의 입술로…….”

셋째 처녀는 대답스럽게 그 방문을 빼 démarch였다. 그 듯으로 여정 눈이 방안을 향해 쏟았다. 이 여전 기괴한 황경이나! 전등불은 아직 끄지 않았는데 침대 위에는 기숙생들에게 온 소위 리브레티의 봉투가 너지분하게 휘어졌고, 그 알뱅이도 여기저기 두쳐있지 불처럼 가운데 B 여사 혼자 아무도 없이 저 혼자 잔여 아니었다. 누구를 끌어당길 듯이 두 꼴을 벌리고 안경을 씹은 귀시안으로 잔뜩 한 곳을

“I hate you. I detest men like you!”

This time a tone of cold refusal.

“My angel, my sky, my queen, my life, my love! Will you drag out my love and slay me? Will you carve out my heart and end me? With those lips, those which control my fate…”

The mischievous third girl boldly cracked open the door and six eyes peered into the room. Who could have guessed! The source of the sound, only a few paces from their own, was Mistress B’s room! The same Mistress B who would happily spit in the face of any man! From within, the young man’s exacerbated woes continue…

“My angel, my sky, my queen, my life, my love! Will you drag out my love and slay me? Will you carve out my heart and end me? With those lips, those which control my fate…”

The mischievous third girl boldly cracked open the door and six eyes peered into the room. And what a bizarre sight it was! With the electric lamp still burning, envelopes belonging to the students’ so-called love letters were strewn across the bed, their contents scattered here and there. Perched among them was the Mistress, alternating poses—completely alone. With her arms stretched out, she reaches to pull someone close; without the aid of her spectacles, her short-sighted eyes strain to locate their target. Her
dried, fish-like face is puckered up in anticipation, impatient for a kiss. One moment she grumbles pleas in a masculine low-tone, the next, she assumes a woman’s rejecting mode, waving her arms in protest.

“I hate you. I hate men like you!”
Then, in an eruption of laughter, she snatches up another letter (one addressed to a student) and rubs it over her face.

“Really?” she cries. “You really love me that much? You love me with your whole life? Me?”
She draws herself in, a tearful pinch caught in her throat.
“Oh my, what is this!” whispered the first girl.
“She must be mad,” chimed the second. “What else could explain this?”
“How sad…” muttered the third, swiping away the unbidden tears brimming in her eyes.