This paper presents a queer reading of *Mujŏng* (Heartless, 1917) by Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950). Often touted as Korea’s first modern novel by virtue of its innovative vernacular language and concern with themes of individual subjectivity, this text illuminates the tension between the diverse modes of writing existing in pre-colonial Korean and the pressure to conform to a hegemonic modern form of written language. At the same time, the novel depicts a variety of romantic relationships—many outside the bounds of compliance with heteronormative notions of acceptable love—and the pressure on subjects engaged in these romances ultimately to comply with modern sexual norms. Thus, the novel depicts the simultaneous constriction, in colonial context, of acceptable possibilities in the realms of language and sexuality. Nevertheless, *Mujŏng* also offers sites of resistance to these imperial reconfigurations. This paper explores these sites, viewing the multifarious nature of the novel's language as a form of queerness that mimics the queer sexualities presented in the course of the story. I argue that even as the politically tenable possibilities available under colonialism are diminished, the queer practices legible in Yi Kwangsu's text offer the chance to forge new and empowering linguistic and sexual identities.

Keywords: Yi Kwangsu, *Mujŏng*, colonial modernity, queering, sexuality, vernacular