This thesis is a feminist research on Korean gender ideology through the actual case of the popular actress Whang Sujung’s drug abuse and adultery case. Chapter 1 analyzes Whang’s representations in the media and the gender ideology in Korea based on feminist media and film theory. Chapter 2 discusses the influence of feminist theatre on the author in creating the play If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There in chapter 3. The play is an exploration of the ideology of gender in Korean society and women’s oppression as its result. Chapter 4 reports the two staged readings of the play and considers the play’s possible place in the feminist theatre.
A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF KOREAN GENDER IDEOLOGY
THROUGH THE PLAY IF YOU LOOK FOR ME, I WON’T BE THERE

A Thesis

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Introduction

It was a crispy afternoon in November in 2002. I was at a bus stop, waiting for my bus to go back home. As usual, I turned to the newsstand, which was full of tabloid newspapers with popular actors’ and singers’ faces under catching headlines. Silly gossips and stupid scandals, but very entertaining to pass the time with. But, that day, when I looked at the newspapers, even it was only for a few seconds, I couldn’t believe my eyes. The news said, “Top star” Whang Sujung was arrested for drug abuse, furthermore she insisted that she took only an aphrodisiac, not a philopon\(^1\). A lot of complicated thoughts passed in my mind. This woman is unbelievably stupid. She has been in “Korean” entertainment business for so long, and does not know what her mentioning of “aphrodisiac” bring about? The newspapers are already so excited with an expectation that soon enough some sex videos of Whang will be found out, or that they may have already been found out by the police and kept in some place, then where are they!… No, no, it is Koreans that is stupid; why are they making such a fuss about this? She is merely a woman, a human being. She can have sex, she can have fun. Of course, she has been the symbol of innocence, gracefulness and intelligence. But it was only her role in the TV dramas and commercials. Why do they accuse her of being a “liar” and “betrayer” for having fun that everybody else has?

Somehow, all of this happening felt hysterically funny to me. And yet, I felt something uneasy and uncomfortable in my mind. What went wrong? What was the problem at all? Why does this incident make a huge impression in my mind? Why do I feel this concerns me too?

When I encountered feminist theories and feminist theatre, I knew that now I had a

\(^1\) a kind of amphetamine. In America, it is called speed, crank or crystal.
useful tool to explore the identity of the uneasiness and discomfort I had felt about Whang’s scandal. With the tool, I started to dig into this problem.

The chapter 1 is a theoretical analysis of the incident. Researching and studying feminist media and film theory, I was able to understand this incident in a larger social context. Our gender identity comes from the representation system of dominant ideology of society. And the image of woman in the media is a constituted sign, reflecting and supporting the dominant ideology. And I am living in the same society, under the powerful influence of the same ideology.

The play in chapter 3 was written at the same time with chapter 1. The theory sometimes helped me by providing me an insight to interpret the materials such as newspapers and magazines. However, as I felt that I had to reflect in my play all the cool, sophisticated theoretical explanations I just discovered, theories also interfered the progress of writing. I wanted my characters to be three-dimensional human beings, but they sometimes turned into “theory.” And some of my choices seemed right in terms of the story and the character but not correct theoretically. It was a difficult challenge for me to balance the influence of hard and cold theory and the warmth and unexpectedness of “art.”

The chapter 2 functions as a kind of bridge between theory and art. I tried to explain how feminist theory affected my way of thinking and how it resulted in my writing. The chapter 4 is an afterthought of the play, and consideration for its future use and value.

Writing my thesis, I learned that the reason I write it is not because I know something about its subject but because I don’t know enough about it. It started with a question and went on as a journey to find the answer to it. I had to fill myself with new knowledge and theories and information, and spent hours to digest difficult concepts and their definitions. At the same time, I had to constantly struggle with such questions as “Are you certain what you are writing is right,
true or worth?” Furthermore the more I studied and researched, the more ignorant I found myself to be. And then I learned another thing; this process never ends. And perhaps this is why I’m doing this; constantly learning, constantly finding new explanations about the world, enjoying how what I have learned and found so far opens up new and unfamiliar territory, again realizing that I’m ignorant. My thesis, therefore, should be still in the process of becoming, because it left me with questions I had never even thought I would have, which will lead me onto the next step of knowledge and creation.
Chapter 1

The Ideology of Gender and Sexuality in Korean Society:
in the Case of Actress Whang Su-jung.

In this chapter, I will discuss the actual incident of actress Whang Su-jung using feminist media and film theory. This will provide a theoretical method of approach to the same material, which is used for the play in chapter 3.

In November 2001 in Korea, there was an incident that covered every newspaper and surprised a lot of Korean people. The news was that the popular actress, Whang Sujung had been arrested for drug abuse and adultery. Because she had symbolized in the TV dramas and commercial films the “pure,” “innocent,” “intelligent” beauty and because she was linked with the description of “traditionally Korean” or “the ideal woman,” it brought up huge responses. It was not the first time that a female entertainer had ever been arrested for the charge of drug abuse in Korea, but, in her case, what was more ‘shocking’ (as most of newspaper used this word in their headings) was that she was with a male companion at the time. This was completely contrary to her previous behavior since she had always denied any rumor of relations with men. Furthermore, it was reported in every newspaper that she told the police she thought what she took was only a kind of aphrodisiac, not an illegal substance. The worst was yet to come; the man was, in fact, a married man and his angry wife sued Whang and him for adultery (Korea is one of the rare countries where adulterers are punished by law). Everyday of that November, most of Koreans encountered pictures of Whang in a blue prison uniform with her pale face lowered down, on the front page of newspaper under headings such as “She thought it was aphrodisiac,” “Adultery as well,” or “Betrayal and Deception.”
The praise and admiration bestowed upon her in the media before the incident and the personal attacks and condemnation by the same media after the incident certainly revealed an aspect of the Korean ideology of gender roles and woman’s sexuality. On the most explicit level one might read the deep rooted dichotomy of whore and virgin; as long as you belong to the virgin category, chaste and modest and within society’s control, you are safe and respected, but the moment you cross the line and reveal yourself as having sex and even enjoying it, you are despised and outcast. However, I wanted to explore more about this incident because I feel that I have to clarify the reasons for the horror and, ironically, the excitement that I felt when I saw the actress in the newspapers in a blue prison uniform, stripped of all the make-up, fancy dresses and camera techniques that made her the symbol of ‘the ideal woman.’

In analyzing this whole incident, I was influenced by feminist media theories, especially those which consider images of women in the media as representations constructed by the ideological discourse of the society. These theories analyze the process of the construction of the representations and examine the cultural and social ideology that promotes, and in return is supported by the representations. Griselda Pollock, in her essay “What’s Wrong With Images of Women?” argued we should consider “the notion of woman as signifiers in an ideological discourse” (Pollock 136). This approach leads to the view that “representations are not merely reflections of reality, whether ‘true’ or distorted, but are the product of an active process of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, of making things mean” (Thornham 215). This view, drawing on structuralism and semiotics, focuses on the film and other media products as text. Thus, I will consider Whang Su-jung as a signifier and examine what was signified through her images in media. Also, I will also discuss the television drama, Hoe Jun (1999), which made Whang Sujung a top star and the symbol of “ideal woman,” as a text that contributed to producing the meaning of Whang Sujung as a signifier.
I will reflect on the ideological discourse that the structure and the narrative of the drama come from: the patriarchal ideology of Korean society, and its approval and support of man’s authority and control over women. I shall consider Claire Johnston’s assertion that “Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man” (Johnston 249). I came to the conclusion that the meaning of Whang Sujung as a signifier was created from and for “the desires and fantasies” of Korean men, separated from the reality of women. I explore what could be the effect of such representation on the spectators, both male and female. Finally, I will discuss how the scandal revealed Whang Sujung as a signifier, only existing in an ideological discourse, not in reality, and how the reactions to the scandal in the media showed the Korean ideology of female gender role and sexuality.

**Decoding the character Lady Yejin**

Now, I will analyze the character of Lady Yejin that Whang Sujung played in Hoe Jun. John Fiske said “the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture” (4). He explains that television, in its attempt to create the illusion of “real,” uses codes which consist of three levels. Level one is “reality”; appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behavior, speech, gesture, expression, sound, etc. Level two is representation; the conventional representational codes, which shape the representations of narrative, conflict, character, action, dialogue, setting, etc. Lastly, level three is ideology; the ideological codes of individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, capitalism, etc. (5). He says “The process of making sense involves a constant movement up and down through the levels…for sense can only be produced when reality, representations, and ideology merge into a coherent, seemingly natural unity” (6).

What I am trying to do in this essay is to, as Fiske explains, engage in semiotic criticism to “deconstruct this unity and expose its ‘naturalness’ as a highly ideological construct” (6). Thus, I
pay attention to Lady Yejin’s costume, behavior, speech tone, and her relation with Hoe Jun and other female characters in the drama as the signifying codes which the television drama put in the characterization of Lady Yejin. I especially paid attention to Lady Yejin’s relations to other characters, since John Fiske explains that a character can be understood “only as a series of textual and intertextual relations. The most obvious of these are the relationships with other characters”(153).

The drama’s hero, Hoe Jun, was a real person who lived from 1546 to 1615 during the Chosun dynasty, a highly patriarchal society under the ideology of Confucianism. The only son of a poor concubine, Hoe Jun later became the doctor for the royal family, the top position a doctor could reach at that time. There have been quite a few novels and TV dramas that have used his life for its material. The drama Hoe Jun was an adaptation of one of those novels. Dealing with a success story of a man who started from the lowest place to the highest in the society, it recorded the highest rating ever, unmatched by any TV drama to date.

Lady Yejin is the adopted daughter and able assistant to Yu Oetae, Hoe Jun’s lifetime teacher. She falls in love with Hoe Jun when he is studying under Yu Oetae. Because he is already married to another woman, she keeps her love for him only inside her heart. However, she is the very person who encourages and inspires him whenever he is faced with hardships and challenges. Later, wanting to devote her life to taking care of the sick, she becomes a medical woman in the king’s palace, where she meets him again and continues to support him until their fate parted them.

On Fiske’s reality level of appearance and behavior, she is the most beautiful and pleasing to look at throughout the drama. She always wears clean, pretty-colored silk dresses or a nurse’s uniform. Her hair is neatly braided into one, which indicates that she is a virgin. She speaks in a low, soft tone and never raises her voice. Her eyes are lowered except when she looks
admiringly at the man she loves. She walks quietly, and in whatever she does, she does it with grace and calmness. These behavior patterns are thought to be the “ideal” way of how a woman should look and behave in Korean traditional culture. Thus, we can see that Lady Yejin is encoded as ideal femininity.

If we look at Lady Yejin in her oppositional relationship to other main female characters in the drama, her representation might be understood more clearly, for she is also the most interesting female character in terms of her relationship with Hoe Jun. She is differentiated in many ways from his mother and his wife. While they are bound to the area of home and banned from his public life, Lady Yejin is not. She first meets him when she is an able assistant to his teacher. Whenever he faces severe tests and impossible challenges during his trainee days, she is the one who advises him what to do, keeping his company. She practically follows him everywhere he goes. Even when Hoe Jun is sent away by his teacher to a lepers’ village in a deep forest, she follows after him to support him while his wife has to see him off with tears at the gate of their house. The allowance given to Lady Yejin to be involved in Hoe Jun’s public life is quite an extraordinary thing considering the strict division of public and private space according to gender in Chosun Dynasty. Her intelligence and medical skill differentiates her from other female characters in this drama. Yet her ability never threatens or excels Hoe Jun’s. It is used only for his sake. She is an ideal helper and a guiding angel to Hoe Jun.

One of the things that drew my attention related to her relationships with the male characters in the drama is the way Lady Yejin’s sexuality is presented. Despite all her virtues, she loves Hoe Jun, a married man, which is forbidden. Even though Hoe Jun also has a deep affection for her, due to his upright personality, he keeps his boundaries. Their eyes may meet with sincere concern and unspeakable love, yet they remain innocent. Their love is portrayed as pure and noble: any kind of physical desire is denied.
When Lady Yejin becomes one of the medical women in the king’s palace, another interesting frame is added to her sexuality. Medical women were a group of women in the king’s palace, chosen and educated to assist the official doctors. In the drama, their sexuality is confined under severe surveillance by female supervisors and peers. Even smiling at a man is punished with a rod. On the other hand, another part of their duty is to keep company with government officials in their entertainment. Sometimes an officer might want the medical woman who accompanies him to sleep with him, which she has to obey. Yejin, also faces a crisis of losing her chastity but is rescued by a young officer who loves her. Even though Lady Yejin remains the eternal virgin and becomes the sign of pure and noble love, her sexuality is at the same time confined in the system which allows men to violate or protect it at any time.

Lady Yejin was often referred to as the ‘reappearance of the traditional Korean woman’ in media. Certainly she has traditional values that a woman must have in the traditional patriarchal Korean society. She is obedient, chaste, calm, and quiet. She endures any kind of pain for the sake of the man she loves. She values her chastity as precious as her life. On the second look, however, she is not that ‘traditional.’ Compared to Hoe Jun’s wife, who is also a woman of traditional values, Lady Yejin represents something different, some aspects more linked to contemporary Korean women. Unlike other female characters in Hoe Jun and other historical dramas, she has a job. She wants to pursue her career, even though it is not to climb up the ladder of social status but to devote her life to others. She is also characterized as having self-confidence, which is usually esteemed as a modern woman’s value. Whang Sujung, in an interview with a magazine, explained her character as “gentle and obedient, but when it is concerned with work, she does what she believes is right” (MBC Guide). Lady Yejin is a unique mixture of contemporary qualities and traditional values, suggesting that an ideal traditional
Korean woman, a good supporter of patriarchy, can exist in a contemporary woman, and she is beautiful, loved and respected.

Whang Sujung became a sign that signified all that Lady Yejin represented in Hoe Jun; the Korean traditional woman, innocent and pure, yet with some touch of modern quality such as intelligence. And this image carried her so well for a while. She was cast in TV dramas, in which she played similar roles. In Mother and Sister(Ummaya and Nunaya, 2000-2001), she played the eldest daughter of the family, who became mute when she was young from the shock and trauma of witnessing her mother faking a pregnancy in a desperate effort to secretly adopt a son. One of the story lines of the drama was her love for a third-rate swindler, whom she gives unconditional love and as result draws out the best from within. In Four Sisters, she played the eldest of the sisters, Sujin, who is born of a different mother from other sisters. Each sister was supposedly a representation of different characteristics of Korean women of younger generation, such as priority on the career, successful marriage, pure innocent love, or self-sacrifice. Whang Sujung’s role Sujin was the representation of self-sacrifice, the rare value that is hard to be found in young generations but still sought after and praised. She gives up the man she loves for the sake of happiness of the man and the third sister he loves. Not only in TV dramas but also in commercial films she was one of the most favored stars. Big department stores, construction companies, cosmetic brands, and credit card companies also wanted to use her image and all she signifies in their commercial films.

Newspapers and magazines also played an important part, as sites where the meaning making process happened by suggesting a set of interpretations and judgements of her representation and then reinforcing these to the readers. John Fiske considers the newspapers and magazines as the secondary texts for character reading. He quotes Bennett that “secondary texts act as cultural operators which bear directly on those(primary) texts and preorientate their
reading by culturally activating them in particular ways”(167). He also explains that “most of secondary texts promote readings that support the dominant ideology”(167). Then I will examine the following articles which are typical ones at the time the drama was being telecast and discuss how they supported the dominant ideology.

Is it because she is spending more time as Lady Yejin than as actress Whang Sujung that these days her laughter has become quiet and she finds herself talking in the historical dramatic tone even when she is with her close friends. Furthermore, she feels comfortable in Hanbok(traditional Korean clothes), which used to make her feel so uncomfortable at the beginning of the drama…That’s not all. As she memorizes her lines in the scripts, now she easily recites all kinds of folk remedies…As she smiles, she does look like Lady Yejin.(MBC Guide²)

There are many reasons for Hoe Jun to have the top rating, it is commonly thought that the role of Lady Yejin… is crucial to its popularity. She is getting absolute support especially from male viewers…Thanks to such high ratings of the drama, Whang Sujung, who is playing Lady Yejin is also enjoying great popularity. Especially the preference for her by advertisers and netizens are explosive…Whang Sujung was selected as the most eligible bride in a questionnaire survey of unmarried office men. She also ranked top as the best-likely lover or wife among male netizen³. (Ilyo Sisa⁴)

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² MBC Guide is a monthly magazine, issued by the broadcasting company MBC, which produced Hoe Jun. It is supposed to promote the productions of MBC, to give information on the programs.
³ Netizen is a newly coined word in Korea, combining ‘network’ and ‘citizen.’ It refers to people who participate in on-line communication.
⁴ Ilyo Sisa is a newsweekly that covers current affairs in political circles, society, culture and entertainment.
In the first article, there is a strong conflation of the actor, Whang Sujung with the role, Lady Yejin; playing the role of Lady Yejin, Whang Sujung thinks and behaves like her role. Thus, Whang Sujung is becoming Lady Yejin, and Whang Sujung may be Lady Yejin. In the second article, it is disregarded that the bride numerous Korean men desire is, in fact, Lady Yejin, the representation of ideal femininity. Instead, they adopt a formula that Whang Sujung equals Lady Yejin, therefore Whang is the best bride.

As I examined above, the newspapers and magazines promote the reality of the TV drama by conflating the character and the actor who plays it, endowing the actor with the qualities the character represents in the drama. At the same time, it also promotes the ideology embodied in the character and the actor; in Whang Sujung’s case, the ideal femininity of beauty, chastity, obedience, faithfulness, etc.

**Representations of Korean Gender Ideology**

The year *Hoe Jun* first was telecast was 1999, two years after the Korean market crash due to “the dramatic plunge of the Korean Won on the foreign exchange market” (Chossudovsky) in 1997, which in Korea is usually called “IMF crisis.” The Korean Won was devaluated and it caused a chain of bankruptcies. Many small–sized companies had to close their factories, and big companies downsized by firing the ‘surplus’ workers. A lot of men lost their jobs and fell into a state of panic. Their firm belief that their loyalty to their company would guarantee their safe income and therefore a stable life was betrayed. Also their position in the family as the head was drastically threatened as they failed to “provide for the family,” which is one of the crucial “components of hegemonic masculinity produced in the particular context of South Korea” where “men’s earning power is a commonly accepted indicator of their manliness” (Moon 84-6). We could easily find newspaper articles about disappointed wives demanding divorce from their
incapable husband. There were a lot of worried voices about fallen authority of the man of the family, which led to “national campaigns to foster appreciation for the overworked and underappreciated male breadwinner” (Kendall 4). In this background, the appearance of a hero who started from down below and reached the top with nothing but his honesty and ability, and a heroine who worshipped him (in spite of her modern characteristics) must have made a great appeal to the TV viewers.

However, I might have to consider who are ‘the TV viewers.’ Manki Kim, a Korean scholar in Mass Communication, says that “television always urges the viewers to have a particular position from which to receive (meanings). TV viewers are guided to a position of a particular value system and ideology” (M. Kim 214). He lists the positions of TV viewers that Korean television demands, among which are; married, male chauvinistic, valuing national unity highly, right-wing conservative, middle class in big cities, etc. Korean television produces signs and representations that can be best accepted by people with these values, who are assumingly or ideologically the majority of Korean. Besides, in the case of Hoe Jun, the director and the writer were both men. In the process of adopting the novel into this TV drama, they drew most of the main characters from the original novel, except Lady Yejin. Yejin in the original novel is a minor character, fiancé to the son of You Oetae, Hoe Jun’s teacher. But in the creators’ imagination, she was born as the “Lady Yejin” as a result of their intentions and careful choices.

I might be able to say that the construction of the representation of Lady Yejin and Whang Sujung, who had come to represent all that Lady Yejin represented, was established through the TV drama and other media, in the highly male centered society, reflecting the desire and fantasy of men. Just as Laura Mulvey argued that “the sign ‘woman’ is one constructed by and for a patriarchal culture, enabling man to ‘live out his fantasies and obsession’” (qtd in Thornham 217). And male spectators, “by means of identification with (the male hero), through
participation in his power, can indirectly possess (the woman)” (Mulvey 489). Then where is the
place for the female spectators? Mary Ann Doane points out that “the male spectator is destined
to be fetishist… ‘Woman’ is an object not only of the gaze but also of possession. However,
female spectators have tendency to identify with ‘Woman’ on the screen to the extent of ‘over-
identification’”(501). I may conclude, from the theories above, that the image of Whang and her
representation allowed and invited male spectators to desire her as an object of the gaze while
demanding the female spectators to become like her. Certainly TV commercial films took
advantage of this kind of reception of her representations, inviting male viewers to possess her
while challenging female viewers to become like her. The TV commercial for Magnus, a very
expensive automobile, might be a good example. The commercial was titled as “Happy Wife.” It
shows Whang’s happy smiling face in close-up as she is leaning on her husband’s shoulder or
looking at her driving husband, while the husband’s face is not seen in the focus. The final copy
is “My man’s confidence- Magnus.”

This commercial is delivering different messages according to the viewer’s gender. If you
are a man, you can insert your own face in the place of the husband. You are invited to ‘gaze’ at
her and also encouraged to buy and possess the car that is identified with this beautiful woman,
Whang Sujung. As you possess the car that is Whang Sujung, you can possess what she
represents, the ideal loving supporter of a successful man. On the other hand, if you are a woman,
you are challenged to become this happy loved wife. And to become this happy wife like Whang
Sujung, you have to persuade your husband to buy a Magnus, or reversely you are told to
become like her if you want or have such a successful husband.

The problem is that this meaning making process constructed by mass media looks real
and natural, while they are not. The imaginary character Lady Yejin was made to look real
through the beautiful, charming actress Whang Sujung, in the reality of the drama. And in the
newspapers and magazines, Whang Sujung, again, was constructed as Lady Yejin, the ideal woman Korean men dream of. And her representation was used commercially on the basis that Whang Sujung herself was the ideal woman. But, it was revealed that Whang Sujung was not what she represented. All the while the media promoted Whang’s smiling face as the ‘ideal woman’ who is innocent, faithful, and virgin, Whang Sujung the real person was enjoying sex with a married man, the pleasure of which was enhanced by the use of drugs, or aphrodisiac as she insisted.

Whang Sujung’s scandal made me question the ideology of “the ideal woman” itself. It may be only imaginary and not real. “The ideal woman” may not have existed in the first place. While her images were right in front my eyes, any real substance was absent. Althusser said “ideology represents not the system of the real relation which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (qtd in Lauretis 6). TV dramas and other related media produce “ideology” not the sincere picture of real lives. Furthermore, this ideology is the “product of specific power relations, functioning to defend the status quo and actively promote the values and interests of the dominant groups in society” (Thornham 216). In Korea, people tend to feel insecure when power is not in the hands of men. They would welcome an ideology that supports the status quo, in which the authority and power are given to men. And yet, the ideology is mingled with our daily lives, making it difficult for us to see the real relations that we make with the world and other people, affecting and maybe oppressing our process of subjective construction of identity.

The Scandal Reveals Social Constructions of Gender and Sexuality

I may have known, even before the incident happened, that Whang Sujung was only a product of mass media and its commercialism. However, at the same time, the success she
enjoyed and the admiration and praise of her by the media ensured that the specific ways of behavior and appearance that made her the ‘ideal’ woman was still validated in Korean society. Furthermore, the criticism and condemnation on her after the scandal was as if it was a serious warning to whomever does not go along with the status quo.

The media, the assumed representative of people’s voice, treated Whang as the betrayer and a liar who misled them. Forgetting that it was the media themselves that had endowed her with the title of the ‘ideal woman,’ they began to dig out the ‘real’ part of her life in a very nasty way. To locate newspaper articles about Whang Sujung, you can use two key phrases, which are ‘Lady Yejin’ and ‘Whang Sujung.’ Articles under ‘Lady Yejin’ are all about Whang’s elegant and oriental beauty, and her rare virtues as an actress and as a modern woman, and how she resembles Lady Yejin. Articles found under ‘Whang Sujung,’ however, are mostly written after the incident. Some report the process of her restriction and trial in detail, with a focus on guessing how many times she had sex with him. Others were written to the effect that they knew this would happen because she had always been a “bitch.”

The shock of the people, caused by Whang’s arrest for suspicion of drug abuse, is indeed great. However, most of people involved in entertainment business reacted as if ‘I knew this would happen.’ …Among the jokes that are told between the entertainment people, there is a saying ‘Did you too go to see the ocean with Sujung?’ It is said that Whang Sujung, who often drank heavily, told them ‘Let’s go see the ocean’ whenever she got drunk. Most of men interpreted this not as an honest hope to see the ocean, but with some different intention behind it. So, ‘so and so also went to the ocean with Whang Sujung’ was the
rumor that spread around the day after Whang Sujung had had a drink. (Ilgan Sports) 5

It was as if Whang Sujung before the incident and after the incidents are two completely different persons. The former Whang was a representation reflecting the ideology of the ‘ideal woman’ and the latter Whang was treated as a representation reflecting another ideology, that is of the ‘whore.’ While she was carrying out the role of an ‘ideal woman’, she had great value to mass media. Now, degraded from that place, she had different value as a sign of different thing. But that value could not last long. As soon as the trial was over, she had to disappear, because she represented things that are dangerous and inimical to the society; adultery, drugs, promiscuous sex…; things that threaten the social order that was designed to protect the patriarchal system.

The way the media treated Whang Sujung makes me think that the whole society, or at least the media, is viewing her with a “male gaze”; she is either an object of fetishism or one of voyeurism. Laura Mulvey, in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” explained that the fundamental problem with the female figure in cinema is “the absence of penis,” that is, “a threat of castration”(489). To avoid this threat, male heroes in the narrative, or spectators who watch the cinema, tend to investigate the woman and demystify her mystery. They devalue her, punishing or saving her as the guilty object. This leads to “voyeurism”, in which the pleasure lies in asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness”(490). Or they disavow “castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous,” and this “fetishistic

5 Ilgan Sports is a daily newspaper that focuses on sports and entertainment. This kind of tabloid newspapers are sometimes criticized as producing rootless and nasty rumors.
scopophilia builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (489).

Before the scandal, her physical beauty was considered a promise of ideal virtues of women, and she was "something satisfying in itself." She was overvalued and praised as a fetish object. After the scandal, she was “investigated and demistified” by “devaluation and punishment” or at best sympathy and forgiveness. And this voyeurism offered different pleasure to the audience of the society by “asserting control, and subjecting” Whang to “punishment or forgiveness.” The way the Korean media dealt with Whang Sujung implies that the objectification of woman, her representations in the male-centered narrative and her confinement within the male gaze, are happening not only in the living room where people are watching TV dramas or in the movie theatre, but in the society as a whole. Only the voice of men resounds as if it is the sole, objective, and general voice of the society.

Nevertheless, this incident radically broke the stubborn belief in ideology, as if ridiculing those who believed in it, revealing that there is no ‘ideal woman’ and that the ideology that produced it doesn’t explain our real life. This incident also brought out different, rather marginal voices that aren’t usually heard. They criticized the way Korean mass media treated Whang and other female entertainers, the way they oppressed and confined them into set images, depriving them of their subjectivity. Kim Hyunmi, a Korean professor in Social studies, said,

Even though we admit that stars reflect the public’s fetishistic ‘ego-ideal,’ this kind of emotional rage is apparently something ‘Korean’. What was the people’s desire that they projected on her when they defined Whang Sujung as a ‘Korean’ or ‘Oriental’ woman? To pay the cost of obtaining popularity with innocent, obedient and chaste image, does she have to stay in the place of a girl who stopped growing, excluded from the history? … Female entertainers remain
spiritless beings without achieving ‘the right to decide their minds’ in order to become a ‘star’. (H. Kim)

The same author further says

…Whang Sujung must neither pretend to be innocent saying ‘I didn’t know’ nor disappear as a recluse who committed a fatal crime. To solve the problem like that is to erase her own history of labor as a professional actress, and to support ‘abasement of woman’, the chronic disease of Korea. (H. Kim)

There was also an interesting interview in the same magazine one week prior to the article above. The facilitator wanted to hear what the young generation think about the media’s incitement of public “peeping Tom” attitude. The interviewees were Choi Bo-eun, editor of a movie magazine, and Lee Jae-hyun, administrator of the Culture Association, and they had a discussion under several headings such as “Confusion of Images,” “Violation of Privacy” and “Female Entertainers.” Choi sneered at the discourse of the “innocent and meek” type of woman. She said “How can an innocent and meek person survive in this jungle-like society? That image was demanded by the society to consume” (Lee). They also criticized Korean society’s oppressive control and surveillance over the individuals’ private lives. As the case of Whang Sujung showed, anything that is deviant from the norms of society, especially when it is sexual deviation, becomes the target of public gossip and severe criticism. Lee asserted that “Private life is not guaranteed in Korean society. That means the ‘modern individual’ hasn’t been constructed yet.” Choi concluded the interview by saying “I don’t want to criticize Whang, even for the benefit of myself. That is, to pursue my happiness” (italic mine, Lee).

As the former representation of Whang I received and consumed through media affected

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6 The magazine that featured this article is Hankyorhe, which is a weekly magazine which focuses on the political and social issues from rather leftist point of view.
the construction of my gender identity, the later representation of her and the new kind of discourse stimulated by the incident also had a great influence on me: now the arbitrary and insecure, and even unsubstantial relationship between the sign and its referent is broken in the case Whang’s scandal. Just like the relationship was revealed to be unreal, what she represented was found to be unreal as well; it doesn’t exist. Eternal virginity, spotless gracefulness, coexistence of intelligence and utter reliance on the man that we were lead to believe to be possible through Whang don’t exist in the real world. Then is there any need for me to submit myself to the ideology that is so unreal? Of course, the ideology still has enormous power over the reality. It still intimidates me; it is being produced by the power relationships in the society that will gladly silence me if I go against it. However, after realizing that it doesn’t explain my real life, should I go with it again? No, I will not.

Mass media in Korea still produces so many signs and meanings. Nowadays, it is all about nudity and sexiness, quite different from 2001. In 2003, more than five famous female entertainers issued their nude photograph album (the number may seem trivial to American readers, but think of the fact that South Korea is even smaller than the whole state of Ohio). They drew huge attention from the media and the whole society. Through internet services and mobile phone services of those pictures, some of the female entertainers could make a lot of money, and could regain popularity that had somehow been lost for them before. Unlike the time the media produced and sold images like Whang’s, they now focus on how sexy a female entertainer can be. Different from the time when Whang Su-jung was all the more respected for her rejection toward any kind of nudity, the media of 2003 and also 2004 are unsparing of their praises for female entertainers who reveals reveal their bodies more fashionably, more daringly, and unprecedently. Then, what kind of message are they sending to the viewers? And, again, how will it affect their gender identity? I hope the voices that came into the discourse related to
Whang’s incident continue to be heard so that they keep challenging people not to lose their subjectivity in the process of finding and constructing their true identity. And I hope to be one of the voices.
Chapter 2

Feminist Theatre and

the Writing of If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There.

This chapter is about the influence of feminist theatre on the play and the writing process of the play. First, I will discuss the theme that I am drawn to as a result of the influence of feminist theatre. Then I will talk about how some of the feminist playwrights have dealt with this theme in their plays. Secondly, I will think back on the writing process of If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There.

The Influence of Feminist Theatre; its Issues and Strategies

Feminist theatre to me, first of all, is a place where I can try and experiment to find my identity as a woman and a human being. It has not been an easy process for me to articulate my experiences as a woman because I never learned how to understand them, because I never learned that it is worthwhile and fair to express them, and also because I never knew that it was not just my problem. Something was hindering me from my own experience, my Self. Something was alienating me from my own experience and the real meaning of it. What could it be?

I realized that between me and my Self, there was another creature, keeping me and my Self from getting to know each other, from being one. She was someone I should be, some one I was taught to be. She was constantly telling me what to do, how to feel, and how to think. Sometimes, in fact many times, what she was telling I should feel and think contradicted what I was really thinking and feeling, but she was so strong that I could do nothing but fall into silence. I couldn’t resist her. She was like a heavy, thick wall that I could never overcome. I
remained in the silence with all my confusion and pain.

The creature between me and my Self was, I now think, a creation of the society, more specifically Korean society. And the society was, unfortunately, not favorable to women. The “power” was in the hands of the men; they are the center and the authority; they control and construct the society and its culture. And the ‘Woman’ it needed is thus created as dependent on men spiritually and economically. She can’t do without the guidance and protection of men; she is not a whole being by herself, that is, without men. And she should be worthy of men’s protection and provision; she must be beautiful, sexy, yet chaste and obedient, etc. only for her man. And this woman was everywhere; in the family, in the school, in the literature, in the movies, in the TV dramas, and in the theatre. I never doubted that this woman was real, and that I could be her. I was her. But my reality told me that I was not the woman. And this woman began to torture me. Then what is wrong? Am I wrong or is this woman wrong? Do I have to give up this woman, or me?

When I read Sue Ellen Case’s Feminism and Theatre, it gave me some answers to my question. Case notes, for example:

As a result of the suppression of real women, the culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was this fictional ‘Woman’ who appeared on stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women. (7)

The creature between me and my Self was, according to Case, a “fictional ‘Woman,’” invented by the culture. She was only a representation, not of the experience, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women, but those of men.

John Fiske says, “…our culture consists of the meanings we make of our social
experience and of our social relations, and therefore the sense we have of our ‘selves.’” But apparently, the culture that provides us the meanings and the sense we have of our “selves” is “deeply inscribed in the different distribution of power within the society” (20). And in the patriarchal society, the power is not distributed equally both to men and women. Men hold the dominant position; hegemony is in their hands. “Hegemony is a constant struggle against a multitude of resistance to ideological domination, and any balance of forces that it achieves is always precarious, always in need of re-achievement” (Fiske 41). Thus, patriarchy has controlled the meanings in the culture, especially the meanings of gender, in its effort to stabilize the power relations of the status quo. As a result, women were largely excluded in the meaning making processes of culture. Instead, they were forced to make sense of their identity out of the meanings constructed and controlled by men. They only had interpretations of themselves done by men (for example in the field of psychoanalysis), as men’s others, as their objects of desire, and women had to understand themselves from those interpretations. It was hidden and made invisible that the meanings in the culture were constructed and controlled, and also that the psychoanalytic and philosophical interpretations of women were only from men’s perspective. Instead, it passed as the general and natural truth.

Theatre, as a cultural artifact, certainly participated in producing and promoting fictions of ‘Woman’, the representation of patriarchal gender ideology, and in oppressing of real women. There are not many good female roles a real woman would want to perform. Most of the roles are too “simple,” without depth, and are relatively unimportant in the plot. In most conventional traditional theatre, written, directed and produced by male artists, the narrative centers around the male hero: his journey to find his identity, his victory and defeat, his achievement and failure in life. Female characters serve the plot as representations of the male hero’s desires and fears. She exists for the male hero, not on her own. Women are conjured into flat representation. To me,
Solveig in Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* is a good example for this because the picture of Solveig, “the quintessence of the ideal woman” (Templeton 106), alone in the small cabin up in the mountain far away from the world is, to me, an archetypal symbol of female characters’ destinies in the traditional cannons in the western literature.

When Solveig left her family to join Peer in the mountain, it was a start of her journey of life as well. But the very moment she becomes Peer’s woman, her journey ends there. She is placed in a small cabin isolated from the world while Peer travels all over the world in search of his Self. Solveig must wait for Peer so that he can always come back and confirm who he is through all the goodness and love Solveig has preserved only for him. And she has to lose her sight to be the perfect mirror on which Peer can reflect himself on; she has to be blind to everything else in the world except Peer. Furthermore, her suffering is emerged and lost in Peer’s final victory. It is either ignored or even praised.

Feminist theatre critiques have examined the images of women in the traditional canons and deconstructed those images. Some of the problems they have pointed out, and I also find crucial are: stereotyping of ‘woman’ (however modified it may be.); positing her as an object of men’s desire and a site where men’s desire is fulfilled; confining her action only as a reaction to the action of the male subject; justifying and even praising of her suffering for the male hero. Sue Ellen Case explains, using Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, that “the creation of theatre itself springs from the condition of unfulfilled desire in the male subject. He…establishes the stage as a site for his alienated, symbolic yearning for satisfaction.” And “the ‘woman’ is constituted as ‘Other’,” as “object of that desire”(120). And within the “typical narrative” thus created to serve the fulfillment of the desire of the male subject, “the male is the one who makes

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7 Solveig is also a stereotypical female character reflecting the virgin-whore dichotomy. Distinguished from other female characters, she is devoid of any sexuality and becomes the Mother, or Goddess who saves and protects the male hero.
something happen, who forces a change in another through a battle of wills…Within the narrative structure, the female plays the masochist to the male sadist” (124). In the narrative, the suffering of the ‘woman’ is justified and naturalized as the male hero must become the hero in the end, and her suffering is indispensable for his achievement.

Hoe Jun, the Korean TV drama that I discussed in Chapter 1 has all these problems as well. Lady Yejin, if I may put it simply, is a modified version of a sublime and pure woman, who fulfills Hoe Jun’s and the male viewers’ desire by suffering and enduring for him. I also find similar patterns and problems in contemporary Korean theatre as well. Let’s take In Quest of Love(사랑을 찾아서) by Kwanglim Kim⁸ for an example.

The brief plot and structure of the play is;

The action of this piece revolves around several days in the office of an insurance company, at the start of the 1980s. One day, a certain Kim Ok-man age 50, falls from a girder on the 11th floor of a building under construction. Two years earlier he had taken out a life insurance policy for one billion Won, and it is upon this revelation that the play opens: four employees who work at the company’s Bureau of Inquest, work at a dramatic reconstruction of the accident in order to prove that this death had been voluntary, insofar as it touches on the insurance policy. (Blanning 657)

The only woman in the office, Miss Lee, is “a Black Belter in Judo” and “adapts herself perfectly in all circumstances” (K. Kim). On the surface, the description of her character sounds quite strong and independent. But upon a close look at the structure of the narrative, she has “problems.” First, she is “distinguished by her beauty” (K. Kim) and that gives her power in the

⁸ Kim Kwanglim is an active playwright and director in Korea. In Quest of Love, written in 1990, is one of his plays that is continuously being produced in Korea theatre.
power structure of the office. The director fears her and doesn’t dare oppose her opinions because he believes she is the mistress of the president of the company. Since he eavesdrops on her conversation with the president on the phone, he changes his attitude toward her and even begins to use the honorific form of speaking to her. She seems to be powerful, but her power comes from her implied relationship (sexual relationship) with the president, who is the real source of the power. Mr. Ha, who is a rival to Mak-dong over the promotion, also builds a rivalry with him over Miss Lee. Ha tries to be nice to her, to draw her attention to him. Ha has an important journal article that is necessary for Mak-dong to finish his play, but won’t let Mak-dong see it out of jealous and rivalry.

When Miss Lee comes back with the article, after following after Ha, she comes back “exhausted and disheveled” (K. Kim). After sobbing on Mak-dong’s lap, she “pulls the journal article from her blouse” (K. Kim) and gives it to Mak-dong as a present. When Ha rushes in, he is wearing nothing but “underwear and shoes,” accusing her of stealing the article and calling her “whore” (K. Kim). Even though she later says that if Mak-dong thought that she had slept with him he is a fool, it is strongly implied that she physically seduced Ha to get the article. Mak-dong, who is her real lover, takes for granted her efforts to help him to get the promotion, ignoring what she had to go through to do so. As a married man, he always has a good excuse to avoid her when necessary, but he doesn’t hesitate to take advantage of her love. In a sense, he abuses her by being indifferent to her desperate efforts to make him love her continuously. As Mak-dong possesses her sexuality, she seems quite powerless with him.

In the relationships of the characters, it seems that all that Li has is her sexuality, her sexual body. And according to the value that the male characters invest in her sexuality, her power is decided in those relationships. But her power comes from men’s evaluation of it, not from her own ability or quality. She is ultimately powerless. The moment she finds out that she is
no longer desired or needed by Mak-dong, she decides to “disappear” from his sight. She is an “object” of their desire (for sex and for power), and a site where the male dominance is transmitted.

Secondly, her desire is bound to Makdong, the male hero. Makdong is the subject of the action of the play. He searches for the truth, constitutes the truth, while Li’s role is to support him in the process, even though it means she has to do something she does not want to do. The motivation for his action is his desire to be recognized in the company, to get a promotion. Her subjectivity is bound to the subjectivity of Makdong; all she can do to contribute to the completion of the play is to steal the article by making herself a “whore,” give the article to him and watch him achieve his goal. To Makdong, who is worrying that Ha won’t be calm when he finds out that the article has been stolen, Li says:

LI. I’m here with you, aren’t I? I don’t care whatever becomes of me, only if my husband is going to be successful. Please, continue writing your piece.

(seated, MAK-DONG begins to write, while she, also seated, observes him.)

LI: If you’re promoted, what will you do for me?

MAK-DONG; I’ll do whatever you ask me to do.

LI; Really?

MAK-DONG; Yes.

(They make a promise with their little fingers) (K. Kim)

As the dialogue shows, Miss Li desires for him and through him. She wants “him” to be promoted. Through his promotion and success, she can gain things she wants; his love and marriage. On the other hand, his desire is for himself and it is posited in the network of the larger social relations, Even though she exists in the same public space of the company, her boundary is limited to her private relationship with Makdong. Thus she is “excluded from the role of
subjectivity” (Case 120).

Searching for the truth of Kim Ok-man’s death, Mak-dong finds out that at the heart of this whole incident there was a noble and pure love of Ok-man and Sunrye, “a naïve and innocent woman who wasn’t even able to take care of herself” (K. Kim). Mak-dong learns a lesson. Succeeding in understanding their love, he comes to understand the “responsibility of our society and our history” for their death, “the heart of a human being, love, the true life…” And that “changes his thoughts” (K. Kim). The drama promises that he will be a better person after this recognition, or at least he has gone through a positive change. However, Li does not change. She is and will be the same person as she has been. She says that it was not the society but they themselves who are responsible for their tragedy; they couldn’t change their lives because they were cowardly. Even though she does seem to have a point, her argument inevitably has a negative effect since she is an obstacle to Makdong’s recognition and change. It may seem cool and sophisticated when she turns her back to him, saying “Isn’t it strange? Always, at the end, a new force is born, like a deep, profound spring” (K. Kim) But what is the force for? She may “fall ill with love, sinking into despair” (K. Kim) for another man as she did for Mak-dong. She is excluded not only from subjectivity but also from society and history, forever remaining in the small sphere of her relationship with her men.

Solveig, or Li certainly do not represent any reality of women, but the patriarchal ideology of “Woman” as constructed and controlled by men. However, the ideology is invisible. It forces itself as natural and real to the spectator. Then how do I, as a spectator, accept these female characters who do not represent my reality? Jill Dolan, using Teresa de Lauretis’ argument, says

If male desire drives all narrative and objectifies women, the female spectator is placed in an untenable relationship to representation. If she identifies with the
narrative’s objectified passive woman, she places herself in a masochistic position. If she identifies with the male hero, she becomes complicit in her own indirect objectification. (13)

Between her own indirect objectification and identification with the passive woman, it seems there is no comfortable place for women. Or perhaps, the real women are erased and only the representation remains. And in the gap between the ideology and the reality, women lose their voices and remain silent. And I do agree with Jill Dolan, when she said “I admit that I think it is ‘bad’ that so much of representation denies women subjectivity: I do not think it is ‘good’ that dominant cultural ideology relegates women to subservient roles”(17).

Then, what does feminist theatre “do” about this? According to Jill Dolan, the pressing issue for feminists are “how to inscribe a representational space for women that will point out the gender enculturation though the representational frame and that will belie the oppressions of the dominant ideology it perpetuates”(101). Feminist theatre reveals on stage that the representation of women is a construction by the dominant ideology, not the reflection of the reality, and how this ideology, the patriarchal mask, has oppressed women. Also, it serves as “a laboratory in which to reconstruct new non-genderized identities”(Dolan qtd in Gayle 19). And this new identity is women as individual subject. Feminist theatre explores and expresses “the point of view of women” and presents it on the stage. It seeks to “posit women in the position of the subject” (Case 143), first on the stage, and then ultimately in the society.

In this sense, Caryl Churchill’s Cloud 9 is to me the most impressive and influential work that deconstructs the representation of “Woman”. Betty being played and created by a male actor right in front of the audience’s eyes explicitly shows that ‘Woman’ is literally “a man’s creation” (Churchill 3), just as Betty says when she first appears on the stage; “I am a man’s creation as you see, and what men want is what I want to be” (Churchill 3). Betty is to her husband “all (he)
dreamt a wife should be” (Churchill 3) and to Harry, another male character in the play, “a star in my sky,” “safety and lights and peace and home” (Churchill 14). These descriptions even have a resonance of Solveig as she is fixed in the place the men have assigned her, her desires and subjectivity were oppressed and erased. And Churchill so effectively questions the ideology and discourse that surround Betty by presenting her physically created by a man. The character becomes a metaphor of artificiality of the notions of gender in society. Churchill leads the audience to pay attention to what constitutes a person as a woman; the clothes, particular patterns of behavior and gestures. What was thought to be natural and cohesive that constitutes a person is deconstructed and put to questions; they might be mere cultural and social codes that we recognize a person by. Then where do these codes come from? Who approves these norms?

Thus in Cloud 9, how other characters define Betty or the whole womankind and how Betty sees herself are all problematized. The male characters’ defining Betty’s place as “a mother and a daughter and a wife,” their admiration of a woman for her being “so delicate and sensitive,” their pity on her for the “weakness of her sex,” their fear of her for having something dark that threatens the best in men, their condemnation of her for being irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful are all questioned. They might be merely their fantasy or assumption about women. Also, Betty’s self objectification and inability to appreciate herself is also shown as a problem. She never says “I like you” or “I want you.” She only says “Please, like me” or “love me like you used to.” She sees herself from the men’s point of view, some one to be liked, or loved by them. For her own sexual desire or enjoyment, she has to “just keep still.” In the narrative of Cloud 9, these aspects are not portrayed as familiar or natural any more since the actual object that there is as “female”, is “male.”

In Act 2, Betty is played by a woman. Now she is beginning to discover her Self, her own body, her own desire. This is, to me, as if Betty is coming out of the symbolic small cabin up on
the mountain and sets out her own journey of life to be joined with her Self that has long been separated from her. She says “I thought if Clive wasn’t looking at me, there wasn’t a person there” (Churchill 82). She realizes that she has always looked herself through Clive’s eyes. But now she finds a person there. “I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn’t, and I thought well there is somebody there” (82). It was a long forgotten her Self. Identifying her individual being is not an easy thing for her. “Afterwards I thought I betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. And I cried because I didn’t want to be. But I don’t cry about it any more” (83). However, being separate from the notions from outside her that has defined her so far, she now can embrace herself which has been separated and alienated from her. And from now on, “if there isn’t a right way to do things” she is going to “invent one” (86).

Then how do women playwrights in Korea deal with revealing the oppression of women and positing them in the position of subjectivity? Sim Jung-sun, a Korean feminist theatre critic, pointed out in her essay in 1986 that Korean culture, based on Confucianism and unitary nationalism, emphasizes totalitarianism and unitary value. Historically, Korea has been constantly under the threat of being attacked or occupied by the stronger nations around it. Especially as Korea went through the Japanese colony and the traumatic Korean war, it was generally believed and emphasized that only the national solidarity can guarantee the survival of the country. Thus Korean society is, she argues, characterized by uniform standardization. In this cultural background, she asserts, Korean playwrights haven’t been able to free their consciousness from “the fetter of the patriarchal values” as far as it is concerned with the issue of women (Sim. Feminism 53).

In 1993, Sim observed that women’s theatre in Korea, having begun in mid 1980’s with the success of an adaptation of A Woman in Crisis by Simone de Beauvoir, had prospered
successfully. However, she worried that the commercialization of women’s theatre was resulting in productions without much relation to the original purpose of women’s theatre, thus misleading the audience. In 1997, she wrote that mid 90’s witnessed the emergence of “Korean theatre with women as its subject matter” that are “emotionally comfortable” for Korean audience to accept (Feminism 57). And according to her, this kind of theatre attempts to produce indigenous Korean feminist point of view in theatre. As an outstanding example of this attempt, Sim pays attention to the works of Jung Bok-keun.

The works of Jung Bok-keun draws my attention as well since she attempts to re-discover the historical women in Korean history. She tries to question the established patriarchal interpretations and judgments of these women and to restore their silenced voice. She explores ways to posit those women in the place of a real woman who lived the time, struggling to make choices with their own will against a society that was hostile to such women.

Princess Duck-Hye, who lived at the close of Chosun dynasty, is “known as a miserable woman, who was forced to marry a Japanese lord at the age of 14, restricted in an asylum for her mental problem, and finally came back to homeland at the age of 50”(Sim, Conclusion 128). She was being forgotten in silence; she was remembered merely as a woman who was sacrificed in the political contest between Chosun and Japan in a tragic time. But Jung Bok-keun revives her from the “deep mire of oblivion” in her play Princess Duck-hye. As the play begins, “headless shadows” escorts the princess to the stage. The shadows demand her to “speak. Who is this person?”(Jung 2). Nurse, who had died protecting her but accompanied her throughout the time as a ghost, asks them in return. “Who are you that want to listen to how she fought and resisted all by herself in the enemy’s land behind the wall of silence that she herself built, now

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9 Jung Bok-keun is an active female playwright in Korea, born in 1946. Lee Sang-woo, Korean theatre critique, says she “opened her eyes to feminist theatre since she adapted Woman in Crisis in 1986.”
after these long and broken time of 40 years? ”(3). Then she starts to tell the story on behalf of
the princess, who hasn’t been heard for too long a time and is still shutting herself in her inside.

Through Nurse’s eyes, that is, through the playwright’s eyes, we see Princess Duck-hye
as a living woman who laughed and danced when feeling happy, cried when feeling sad, who
starved herself as a way of resisting when she was forced to marry the Japanese duke, and later
bent her will for the country’s sake. In spite of her Japanese husband’s cruel treatment and
oppression, she keeps her dignity and goodness as the princess of Chosun. Her goodness even
changes her Japanese maid, Shoko. She was malicious and hostile toward this princess of the
falling country, but later, after watching her for a long time, she changes. She even criticizes the
princess’ husband for abusing and destroying her: ‘Princess never lied, never bent, never was
crooked. After she was married to you, she has always kept herself calm for thirty years…Isn’t it
surprising? She never loses her faith in human beings, in spite of such harsh and cold treatment.
Even to me, who was so mean to her”(35-6).

The princess had to pay a high price to keep her dignity. She gives up speaking. She
secludes herself behind a wall of silence, refusing to speak. “What’s the use? What’s the use?
When did words ever realize its will? There should be a heart in order for a will to be realized.
What’s the use when there is no ear that listens?”(33) She makes herself absent, and the world
around her liked it better that way.

Now the playwright becomes the ear that listens, and invites the audience to be the ear as
well. From the records and documents that are left in the history, she revived and created a living
woman, Princess Duk-Hye, who is worth listening to, “who was proud of her mother land, who
had distinct self-consciousness”(Sim, Conclusion 128).

However, in spite of the playwright’s success in re-establishing Princess Duk-hye as a
heroine who struggled to keep her dignity and subjectivity, her silence is a problem to me. She
doesn’t open her mouth until the end. We only hear her story from the nurse’s mouth. Also her oppression comes from both her Japanese husband (the political situation and the burden imposed on her by the male politicians) and her belief in the virtue of the princess of Chosun:

PRINCESS. (as if reading from a book) A princess should be gentle, respectful, generous and not narrow-minded. She should not hold on to hatred in order not to contaminate or narrow down herself. She should let what she saw stay where she saw it, let what she heard stay where she heard it, so that she does not confuse her heart. She should always make harmony and achieve goodness.(5)

Whenever she goes through affliction, she memorizes this virtue. If this virtue helped her to resist Japanese colonialism, it also drove her into silence, alienating her consciousness from reality. In her effort to become the ideal princess, she could not be honest about her true feelings. Bound to the duty to keep her virtue, she couldn’t act. Instead, she sank into a silence of unsolved anger and resentment. But it seems the playwright fails to notice this problem.

Korea, facing the threat of Japanese colonialism and westernization in early nineteenth century, put enormous value on tradition, which must never change in order for the national identity to be recovered and maintained. Because the tradition was always understood in relation to family of Chosun, family was the place that guaranteed the moral and spiritual superiority of Chosun. Women, who were considered to be the carrier of tradition and the central figure of family, had to be the object of regulation for the sake of the nation and the subject to embody the virtue of Chosun[…] the women who rejected family and enjoyed sexual freedom and luxury were objects of social contempt, branded as selfish and pleasure-loving women who looked away from the reality of
And the myth that supported this ideology might be, in the Korean cultural context, the image of the perseverant, faithful wife and mother who sacrifices her everything for her husband and sons. In this historical, mythical complexity, what Princess Duk-hye had to go through might have been considered as minor or inevitable sacrifice in order for the country to survive. Further more, as she had to be married to the intruder, her struggle and suffering would have been better forgotten so as not to remind Koreans the tragic failure and wound in the history of the nation.

The ‘Woman,’ the preserver and carrier of the purity of the culture and tradition, was stained and destroyed by the invaders. In this sense, Jung Bok-keun’s effort to revive the forgotten princess through Princess Duk-hye is all the more meaningful in the larger context of global feminism. In the countries that experienced colonialism and struggle to re-discover and re-affirm their identity as an independent and authentic nation, women are ideologically or mythically considered as the bearer or the carrier of the culture. In the similar context of Chicana culture, Cherrie Moraga insists that “the most valuable aspect of Chicana theory has been its re-evaluation of our history from a woman’s perspective through unearthing the stories of Mexican/Chicana female figures that early on exhibited a feminist sensibility.” Re-evaluating and unearthing historical female figures could be a way to “separate the myths told about us from the truth; and to examine to what extent we have internalized what, in fact, is not true” (Moraga 185). I think this was partly what I tried to do writing If You Look for Me, I Won’t Be There. The myth of Korean ideal woman that was embodied through Whang Sujung was not just a result of the popularity of the drama in a matter of a few months, but must have something to do with the myth, history and tradition of general Korean culture. I wanted to come up with a critique on such myth and to explore what could be the reality of our gendered life that exists apart from such myth.
Themes and Dramatic Devices in *If You Look For Me I Won’t Be There*.

So far, I have discussed the issues feminist theatre deals with and examined some examples. Now I am going to discuss the choices that I made in the process of writing *If You Look for Me, I Won’t Be There* to express and understand the experience of women in the society, to reveal the problems hidden in the patriarchal ideology and constitute a woman’s point of view.

*If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There* shares a similar starting point with the works of Jung Bok-keun, in terms of dealing with an actual woman, but looks at her from a different point of view, that is a woman’s point of view. By retelling the story from a woman’s point of view, I wanted to reveal that the dominant judgement on her is not the only truthful story that can be told, and that there are other possible ways to explain what happened and how it happened. In this new story, her crime of drug abuse and adultery is not just her individual problem. The part that society played in the incident should be explored. The force that drove her into the trouble not only comes from her weakness or immorality, but also comes from the power structure of the patriarchal society and its ideology. The web of social systems in which she was caught should be revealed.

One of the main issues I dealt with in *If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There* is our gender as representations of patriarchal ideology. We constitute ourselves as women or men more by adapting to the cultural codes of the society than by our individual personality and choices according to it. So I set the play in a make-up room. It is a place where Jung puts on different clothes and make-up according to the image and representation she has to portray. A make-room is a private place, but at the same time it actively responds to the desire of outside. The costumes and make-up are a metaphor for cultural encoding for the representations of gender ideology. We observe her consciously choosing the costumes and the color of make-up that can construct her
The Korean traditional dress that is hung on the wall in the epilogue and Jung puts on for filming of the drama suggests the strong presence of traditional values and its ideology in the contemporary Korean society. When Jung is in the traditional dress and plays the role of traditional woman, she is popular and loved. But the image and the role of the traditional woman constantly conflicts with Jung’s reality of today; her desire to control others rather than being controlled, her sexual desire, her strategic lies to secure her own space to move about.

Putting on clothes and make-up may be the “gestus” for this play, in the sense that it “demonstrates a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of society in a particular time” (Dolan 108). Dolan explains that;

[… ] Brecht’s gestus can be used to illustrate the gender-bias of social arrangements. Rather than a textual illustration, the gestus is a visual sign. Since it occurs within the theatrical moment, it prompts consideration of events and relationships drawn in the space. (108)

Our identity is constructed in the system of representations, accepting and using the cultural codes, as if we put on clothes. If the character Betty in Cloud 9, played by a male actor wearing a woman’s costume, challenges the audience’s notion of gender, their accepting the ideological representation system as natural, Jung’s constant change of clothes and make-ups is meant to do the similar thing. The different clothes Jung wears to portray certain personae (a traditional dress, a nurse uniform, or a prison uniform), and the act of putting them on and taking them off can be visual signs for the cultural codes for gender representations and adaptation to them and its artificiality.

As the play goes on, she is revealed to be “not” what she represents. The revelation is achieved by the conflict between what the “Voice” reports and what we actually see on the stage.
The “Voice” represents media, the society’s male gaze on her; continuously objectifying her as a sexual object, sometimes with fetishism, sometime with voyeurism. It fixes her in the place of her representation. But it can never catch her reality. What people are led to believe by media, by the society at large, is never the truth. Jung’s true identity never lies in the narrative of the “Voice.” The Voice rather interrupts the narrative of Jung’s struggle to maintain her power and subjectivity within the limited boundaries she is allowed.

The scene with the lawyer might be the highlight of the whole play because it clearly shows that “truth” and “meaning” can be made up and manipulated. The lawyer knows the rule of the game to survive in the society: if you are able to read what people want from you as the truth and make use of it, then you can constitute the truth. What we believe to be true can be artificial just like that. Our identity might be going through the same process as this. More specifically, we are constituting our gender identity in the same way; if we know the social and cultural codes that generally constitute a “good woman” or a “good man,” we can adapt the codes, apply them to our appearance and gesture, present ourselves as such, and make others believe that this is what we are naturally and truly.

Jung’s representation of the ‘ideal woman’ as a reflection of male desire also happens not only in the public space as in the narrative of the “Voice,” but also in her private life in her relationship with her father and her lover. They see in her what they want to see. Her father sees in her a good, obedient daughter. Her lover sees in her a beautiful, sexy mistress and a future wife who will support his family. And these two men believe that they possess her; her sexuality and her will. In the case of her father, he also believes that he possesses her money.

Cleverly, Jung gains her power by becoming the perfect object of their desire. By fulfilling their desire, which is indispensable for them to keep their status as the authority and the powerful, she wriggles her way through, achieving what she wants. However, her strategy can
only bring a temporary success. Her real crime is not drug abuse or adultery but not knowing her self, who she is. In being what others want her to be, she has lost who she is, who she wants to be, and inside her she stayed as a girl who stopped growing up.

The “Girl in a white dress” symbolizes the girl who stopped growing up inside Jung. She is her split self as a result of objectifying herself for others desire. She is not able to see that she is not what she thinks she is or what others think she is. Jung feels affectionate toward the girl because the girl is what she feels herself to be inside. It might be safe to stay as a girl, a good daughter of her father and an innocent love to her men. But Jung has to let go of this girl to grow up and find out who she is.

Another setting within the play is prison, where Jung takes off all her clothes and make-up, all the representations she has to put on. Thus she may be physically restricted, but mentally she has a lot more freedom than she had in the make-up room. Ironically, she is freer in the prison. Her real prison uniform is not the blue one she is wearing now, but all the fancy dresses she wore for other people. She feels embarrassed when she realizes that she has not known who she is, and falls into silence. But it would be a step backward to make a bigger leap. She puts the prison uniform on the “Girl in a white dress” and pushes her away. There was only the actress Jung, who was the image and the role she played. There was not much space for the woman Jung to exist; she might have been absent from the first place. Now the actress Jung disappears, must disappear so that the woman Jung will start anew, hopefully.

Apart from Jung, Sun, Jung’s personal stylist, can represent female spectators. She functions as the female gaze on Jung, making juxtaposition with male characters. She admires Jung for her beauty and ideal femininity, and the success they bring to her. She sometimes feels jealous but hides it, competes with her secretly. She knows the cultural code for “the ideal woman” so well that she participates and even controls the construction of Jung’s representation.
Through Sun, we can observe and reflect upon Jung’s representation and its authenticity; we can have the opportunity to distance ourselves from our gender as representation, to decide what meanings we are going to make out of this by agreeing or disagreeing with Sun’s choices.

**Conclusion**

So far, I have examined the influence of feminist theatre on me as a playwright. The issues of sexual oppression and discrimination, gender as representation of ideology and the understanding of these issues in relation to social and cultural context shaped my choice of material and my approach to it. Also, the ways other feminist playwrights dealt with these issues and created theatrical pieces for the stage inspired and challenged me in writing. The writing process was partly a result of my understanding of feminist theories and the inspirations and challenges from other feminist theatre works. I also sought to add my voice, which I hope will offer something new and creative, to the stream of feminist theatre. The next chapter is the play, the very fruit of it all.
Chapter 3
If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There

A Play in Three Acts

by Insoo Lee
If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There.

<CHARACTERS>

JUNG A woman in her late twenties. An actress.
SUN A woman. Two or three years older than Jung. Her stylist.
KANG Jung’s boyfriend in his middle thirties. A nightclub manager.
WHANG Jung’s father in his sixties.
IM Jung and Kang’s lawyer in his forties.
YUN Kang’s friend
MR. KIM Sun’s date
WOMAN An actress.
PHOTOGRAPHER
VOICE
GIRL in a white dress.
GUARDS

<a preface to the play>

This play is based on the newspaper and magazine articles about the drug abuse case of Whang Sujung in 2002. However, the characters in this play are completely fictional, totally created in my imagination. The characters have nothing to do with the real people who are involved in the incident.
Prologue

Make up room. The stage is very dark and audience can only see several outfits hung: a Korean traditional dress, a knee-length light blue skirt and a white blouse, a white dress with a pink rose bouquet, an extravagant and exotic dress, a light pink nurse uniform, a blue prison uniform, all of which JUNG will be wearing throughout this play. Jung comes in and looks at each of the outfits. As she picks up the Korean traditional dress, a girl in a white dress, who is about twelve or thirteen, runs in. As their eyes meet, the girl stops. They look at each other for a moment. JUNG smiles at her heartily and affectionately, the girl smiles back at her and runs out. JUNG feels that she misses the girl. She is standing with the traditional dress in her arms, while crews take out other dresses. Lights dim up, until very bright. There are a few big mirrors, lit brightly, and a dresser, on which there are various make-ups and make-up kits. SUN comes in. She is wearing a pair of torn jeans with beads and colorful patches and a T-shirt with a strange pattern. Her hair is very short. A male voice reading a newspaper article is heard. While the voice is reading, SUN helps JUNG to change into her costume. Then, JUNG sits at the dresser and SUN puts make-ups on her carefully.

VOICE (chatty and excited, like a reporter in “Entertainment Tonight”)

Jung, who has been loved for her clean and intellectual image, is now again drawing people’s attentionas Lady Yejin in the TV drama ‘The Doctor’. ‘The Doctor’ is a historical drama about Hoe Jun, the most excellent doctor in Chosun dynasty. It deals with his life as he was born of a concubine and finally became the doctor of the royal family in spite of his low birth, overcoming all the restrictions and hardships in the course. Lady Yejin, the character Jung is playing, is a nurse, who supports and inspires him throughout his life. Although she loves him deeply and is a lifetime companion to Hoe Jun, she cannot speak out her love because he is already a married man. Accepting her fate, she can express her love only through her tender eyes toward him or her hands barely touching his. In her innocent and pure figure, the audience discovers the love that
has been kept secretly deep in their heart. And the role of Lady Yejin is thought to be one of the crucial reasons for the high popularity of the drama. Thanks to the popularity of her role, Lady Yejin, Jung is enjoying the highest popularity in her career as well. She earned more than ten million dollars through commercial films and she was chosen as the best-likely bride in a questionnaire survey of men in their twenties and thirties conducted by a matrimonial agency.

JUNG

(Jung now has finished make-up and hair. While Jung is looking at the mirror and says the lines, Sun is looking at Jung in the mirror. She is practicing for an interview. As if talking in a talk show.)

At first, acting in the historical drama was so hard for me. Voice tone, clothes.. everything felt unnatural. Thanks to the director, I got much better.

(smile)

I find myself changed a lot since I was in this drama. Maybe it’s because I spend more time living as Lady Yejin than living as myself, the actress Jung. First of all, I used to talk and laugh a lot, but these days I laugh quietly and even when I talk with my close friends, I speak in this tone that I use in the drama. And…the traditional dress is now comfortable as if they are my second skin. And…as I memorize the medical terms and treatments in the scripts, now I’m almost an expert at folk remedies.

(smile)

They say my acting is now a lot more natural than before. And…I also feel more comfortable with my role. (She smiles and becomes a tableau.)

VOICE

As she smiles, in a passing moment, she does look like Lady Yejin.

(The light on her becomes brighter and brighter.)

VOICE

The white sun ray of an afternoon landed on her shoulders. Her smile was as radiant as the soft spring sun light.

Lights out.
ACT 1, SCENE 1

Make up room. JUNG is sitting in front of a mirror, dressed in a traditional Korean dress. She is reading a script of the TV drama she is acting in. She puts down the script on the dressing table. She looks into the mirror. She examines her make-up. SUN comes in, with a silk ribbon in her hand. JUNG looks at SUN and smiles. SUN goes to JUNG and ties her hair with the ribbon she brought in.

JUNG

(correcting her make-up) It’s sad today.

SUN

What is sad? Something wrong?

JUNG

I fall ill.

(pause)

He leaves. He has to. And I am the one who sends him away. Even though I love him, so much, so much that I cannot even tell him that I love him, I have to let him go his way and that’s the woman’s duty. Besides, I should avoid doing anything that can cause him any pain, any trouble.

(pause)

All that I can do is…encouraging him…telling him that he can do it…giving him timely advice he needs.

SUN

But what else can you do? He has a wife already, and you are living in Chosun era.

JUNG

Right.

(pause)

That’s why I feel sorry for her all the more.

SUN

But Lady Yejin is a lot more popular than his wife. While you are being offered so many contracts on the commercial films, she’s getting nothing. While you’ve come to have so many
fan clubs on line and off line, what, she has only one, two?

(Jung smiles)
Every man in Korea is falling in love with you. Everybody knows that the most loved actress of
the time appears on the soju advertisement. It’s you now. Every time I go to a restaurant, there’s
you! And they order the soju that you are holding in your hand and recommending with your
charming smile.

(imitates Jung’s pose and smile)
No…I can never smile like you.

(Jung laughs and stands up. She examines her face and costume in the mirror.)

SUN
You are so beautiful.

JUNG
Thank you.

SUN
I wish I were as half beautiful as you. Even that will be enough to get me a boyfriend.

(pause)
Oh, by the way, I have something to show you. My brother, self-acclaimed president of Jung fan
club, received this picture from one of the members. He wanted me to show this to you and ask if
it’ll be OK to post this picture on the site. In fact, I can’t even be sure if it’s you.

JUNG
Let me see.

(she looks at the picture carefully for a while.)
Oh. Who gave this picture?

SUN
I don’t know. Why?

JUNG
This is me…when I was 14 years old. The whole school went on a picnic.

SUN
(looks at the picture together)
Why are you wearing this white dress on a picnic? I mean, all the other girls are wearing jeans and shirts.

JUNG
My Dad. He wanted me to wear this. He admired me so much in this dress. I wanted to please him.

(pause)
Mom was sick then. She was in hospital. And...I wanted to please him even with the smallest thing. Oh...look at my face. It seems I tried so hard to smile, to look pretty.

(thinks for a while)
Well...can I keep this picture for a while? I think I need to think about this.

SUN
OK. It's your picture anyway.

JUNG
And could you tell him that I appreciate that he asked me about this? You know how some fans are.

SUN
Sure thing. You know, he is such a loyal fan of yours. You should see him when he is watching 'The Doctor'. He is so absorbed that he doesn’t hear me even if I scream. He always bothers me asking me to introduce him to you.

JUNG
Why don’t you bring him here someday?

SUN
No, no, I don’t want to do that. You’ll hate him. I know.

JUNG
(smiling)
Send my thanks to him any way. Well, let’s go.
(As Jung turns around to leave, Sun picks up the script and gives it to Jung.)

JUNG
Thank you. Actually, I don’t have many lines today. Just being ill in bed.

SUN
OK. But, still I’ll bring it just in case.

JUNG
Thank you.

(Sun picks up the make-up box and Jung’s jacket. They exit.)
ACT 1, SCENE 2

Make up room

JUNG is taking off the traditional Korean dress that she wore in the previous scene. SUN is helping her. She gives JUNG a knee-length light blue skirt and a white blouse which make her look all the more feminine and almost gives her some quality of a teen-age girl. JUNG sits at the dressing table and undoes her hair braids. She massages her head.

JUNG

I don’t know how those women in the past managed to keep this hairstyle all day long, and even at night. Oh!

SUN

(massaging Jung’s head)

They didn’t have other choice, did they? When they were girls, they wore their hair in one braid. And when they got married, they tied it up with a binyo. Practically, only two hairstyles were possible.

JUNG

Right.

SUN

How would your like hair for the interview, lady?

(trying a few different styles)

You should look soft…and pure…prudish and yet friendly.

JUNG

It seems I don’t have many choices either.

SUN

Shall we go with the usual one?

JUNG

The usual one.
SUN
OK.

*(starts to brush her hair)*

JUNG
You know, I have been picked up as the best-looking actress in traditional dress.

SUN
I read it in the newspaper. No doubt about it.

JUNG
I’ll be asked about it today.

SUN
And you are going to say?

JUNG
That I’m very happy and proud.

SUN
And even honored?

JUNG
You know too well. Now you can join the entertainment world.

*(Jung’s mobile phone rings.)*

Hello. Dad. Yes, I’m good. Yes, the party was fun. It went on until very late so I didn’t call you. I didn’t want to wake you up. It was too late to go home, so I went straight to Bangbae-dong. Nothing to worry, Dad. I’ll go home tonight. Sure. How’s Mom? Umm.. Is she in bed now? …Do you want anything? OK, you always say so, but you are the very one who eats the most. Bye. I love you, too.

SUN
Was there a party last night?

JUNG
No….yes, yes, we had a party.
SUN

I didn’t know.

(pause)

JUNG

Could you hurry up, please? I don’t want Kim to wait for me. You know how reporters are.

SUN

Alright.

(She finishes Jung’s hair.)

How do you like it?

JUNG

Well,

(pointing near her ear)

isn’t it too loose here?

SUN

Oh, I twisted that part. I did it on purpose. Last time I made it tightly fixed, it didn’t look very pretty in the picture.

JUNG

Emm…I… don’t like it.

SUN

Come on. You do look prettier and cuter that way. Trust me. I am your designer.

JUNG

…OK.

(She examines herself in the mirror and corrects her make-up a little.)

Let’s go. Kim will be waiting for me.

SUN

(as picking up Jung’s clothes and other stuffs)

When are you going to get a new manager?
JUNG
Dad is looking for one.

SUN

(pause)
Being a good daughter is one thing, but, being a good entertainer is another thing. How long do you think you can manage by yourself?

(Jung shrugs her shoulders.)

SUN
You should know that you are beginning to get a bad reputation among agencies. You seem to be all ready to make a contract with them, get all the benefits from them, and then suddenly you change your attitude and say No.

JUNG
Please, those things are not my concerns. I mean, you know, my Dad takes care of that kind of things. If Dad doesn’t like their contract conditions, I can’t help it.

(pause)
I’m doing fine. And Dad is meeting people from CI Entertainment recently and things are going very well as far as I know.

(smiles)
We’ll soon get a very able manager and…you won’t have to carry all those things around with you. I’m sorry.

(pause)
Please. I have to get going.

SUN

(lifting a heavy bag)
But I’m not doing fine.

JUNG

(Jung puts her arms around Sun’s arm.)
I know I owe you a lot.
ACT ONE. SCNE 3

Filming a CF.
A studio. Staffs come in and push the dressers and mirrors aside. They bring in a white horizon, a few strobes and set them up. PHOTOGRAPHER comes in and directs the staffs. In the meanwhile, JUNG changes clothes behind the folding screen, but the finish such as zipping up and wearing hair pins is done outside the screen by SUN. JUNG is wearing a light apricot-colored dress with a pink rose bouquet in her hand. As she sits in front of the horizon, lights are turned on. As PHOTOGRAPHER starts taking pictures of her, she smiles beautifully.

PHOTOGRAPHER
(after taking a few pictures)
Miss Jung. That smile is rather seductive. We don’t need that today. The concept for today is a lovely and blooming girl. Think of a flower not quite blossomed yet. Bashful yet full of life, expectations, and dreams. OK? Smile again. (flash) Again. (flash) Again. (flash) And again. (flash).

(At each flash Jung smiles with great effort.)

PHOTOGRAPHER
Good. (flash) Once more. (flash) Once more again. (flash) (pause. Nodding his head slantwise.) Almost but not quite there. OK. Let’s have a break.

(The light dims down.)

PHOTOGRAPHER
Thank you. (exits)

(Jung suddenly collapses and massages her cheek softly. Sun comes to Jung and corrects her make-up.)
SUN
How are you?

JUNG
Fine.

SUN
You’re doing great.

JUNG
Thank you.

(While Jung is drinking water, Sun examines her hair and the dress.)

JUNG
What was it that you were going to ask me?

SUN
What?

JUNG
When I was putting on the dress, you said…

SUN
Oh! …Nothing.

JUNG
Please.

SUN
Oh…Well, My mom arranged a blind date with this guy a week ago. And I met him and I kind of liked him.

JUNG
Good.

SUN
And I’m meeting him again tomorrow.

JUNG

And?

SUN

Can I borrow your clothes?

JUNG

Sure. They are not even mine after all.

SUN

But they are supposed to be worn by you not me.

JUNG

I don’t mind. Just pick up whatever you like and…make him yours!

SUN

Thanks.

(pause)

Can you help me pick one?

JUNG

What? You are the designer. You’re supposed to know better than I do.

SUN

Of course, but…right…I’m the designer.

JUNG

You know what to do.

SUN

Do I?

JUNG

Then why do you think I hired you, and pay you that large amount of money every month?
SUN

…Right.

JUNG

You’ll be fine.

SUN

Thanks.

(Photographer comes in again.)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Let’s go again!

(The light turns up brightly on Jung. Sun steps out of the light and watches Jung for a while and exits.)

PHOTOGRAPHER

OK. Are you ready, Miss Jung?

JUNG

Yes, I’m ready.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Remember, this is for a cosmetic advertisement. You have to tell the thousands of women in this country “use this product and you will become like me”. Be pretty. Be lovely.

JUNG

Sure.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Smile. (flash) Smile. (flash) smile (flash) smile (flash) I am the most beautiful woman in the world! (flash)

(At the last flash, the light on Jung becomes even brighter. And then lights out.)
ACT 1, SCENE 4

blind date
A café. Sun and Mr. Kim are sitting at a table. Sun is wearing the same outfit that Jung wore in Scene 2. They are having tea together. Throughout this scene, Sun behaves rather awkwardly, not quite herself. Perhaps she is imitating Jung.

MR. KIM
You look different than the last time.

SUN
Do I?

MR. KIM
Yes.

SUN
Is it because I’m wearing a skirt today?

MR. KIM
Well…Maybe.

SUN
Last time, I had to come right after work, so…I was quite messy, weren’t I?

MR. KIM
No, not at all. I liked it.

SUN
Mom scolded me that I wasn’t being polite to appear like that, you know, in the first date.

MR. KIM
I liked it, honestly. Your first impression was…fresh and even surprising.

SUN
MR.KIM
In a good way. And, that’s why I encouraged myself to ask you to meet me again.

SUN
Oh…

(pause)

MR.KIM
You love your job, don’t you?

SUN
Yes. I enjoy it.

MR.KIM
It’s never easy to do something that you can enjoy for your job.

SUN
Right.

(pause)

MR.KIM
You said you are a coordinator for an actress. That sounded like a very exciting job. Meeting lots of famous people, going places...

SUN
Yes.

MR.KIM
I don’t think you told me who you work for.

SUN
…You’ll be surprised.
MR.KIM
Really?

SUN
I’m working for Jung now.

MR.KIM
Wow, the Lady Yejin?

SUN
Yes.

MR.KIM
Why didn’t you tell me? You must be very good to work for such a best actress.

SUN
(smiles)

MR.KIM
Is she really so careful and calm all the time?

SUN
…Yeah…
(pause)

MR.KIM
I didn’t notice it last time, but you look similar with her.

SUN
Really?

MR.KIM
Is it because the same person decides what to wear for the both?
…Maybe. It’s possible.

MR.KIM
How do you decide what she would wear?

SUN
It depends on the character and purpose of the situation, the concept of the image that she has to portray …

MR.KIM
Then how do you decide what you would wear?

SUN
Well…

MR.KIM
For example, why did you choose that skirt and blouse for today?

SUN
…Don’t you like it?

MR.KIM
Oh, I didn’t mean it. They are very pretty. I was just interested to know what are the criteria in choosing clothes and stuff. You are professional at it. Well, to talk of that, could you give me some advice on what to wear?

SUN
Well… you look…perfect. I mean, I think you have a good sense of fashion.

*Lights out*
**ACT 1. SCENE 5**

Jung is being taken pictures of. She is in extravagant and exotic dress. She is sitting on the sofa, making poses. She maintains each pose for quite a long time in the full but soft light. She looks delicate and sexy. She is a figure not a breathing, living person. As the light on her fades, the makeup room brightens up. Jung stands up from the sofa and becomes herself, relaxed. She takes out the flowers from her hair. Sun comes in, saying ‘good bye’ and ‘thank you’ to some people outside the door. She is wearing

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JUNG
I’m so tired.
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SUN
No wonder. You didn’t get enough sleep last night. Why did you schedule the photo today? You knew you’d be working on the drama all night long.
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JUNG
(as if making a joke)
Money.
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SUN
My god.
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JUNG
When the editor called me and explained the concept and the dresses that I was going to wear, I just couldn’t resist.
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SUN
No wonder. The dresses were fantastic.
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JUNG
How did I look today?
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(goes to Sun with her back toward her)
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SUN

(pulling out some pins from the dress and then unzipping it)

Fantastic, of course.

JUNG

Really?

SUN

I never noticed you were tired and I never took my eyes off you, I couldn’t. You were absolutely beautiful. All the staffs were like, “Wow!”

JUNG

Really!

(feeling very happy)

Good. Actually I was worried my tiredness would show. You know, when I do my best, I feel I’m burning my spirit as a fuel. After that feeling, I get this terrible tiredness but I feel good.

SUN

(hanging the dress on the wall)

I do admire all your dresses today… but aren’t they rather daring, I mean, too sexy, considering your usual image of clarity, innocence and all that?

JUNG

Yeah, a little bit, but the photographer explained that he is going to give the pictures an atmosphere of oil painting of… some painter, and that the overall mood will be exotic and dreamy. Sometimes I need a little variation, I guess.

SUN

Right.

(Sun smiles at Jung. While Sun is hanging and checking the dress, Jung’s mobile phone rings.)

JUNG

Hello. Hi!
Yeah, I finished. I’m so tired that I think I’m gonna die. What? Oh…really? Thank you. You are amazing. Then, how long is it gonna take? OK, I’ll see you there. I’ll find you. Bye.

SUN

Who is he?

JUNG

How do you know it’s he?

(pause)

My uncle. My mother’s younger brother.

(Jung puts on her jeans and shirts.)

(pause)

SUN

Is it OK? I mean, the latest scandal dampened, like, only two months ago?

JUNG

He’s my uncle, I told you.

SUN

(pause)

Are you going to tell everybody you meet in the corridor that he’s your uncle? Please, remember what you had to go through when the reporters found out about you and that man. They all turned into cockroaches. They popped up from nowhere, and they were everywhere. At the last moment, you asked me to help you, explaining everything, when you couldn’t turn on your mobile phone even just for a minute and had to use mine. They were not like normal people at that time. And no surprise, Lady Yejin and Doctor Hoe Jun falling in love with each other in real life. Furthermore, he’s married!

JUNG

Please!

(pause)

I’m sorry I gave you so much trouble then. It was…it was my mistake.
SUN

Please, be careful.

JUNG

It’s nothing like that. I told you he’s my uncle.

SUN

I’m worried about you. At that time, both of you were the main actors in the most successful drama. So the boss himself subsided all the rumors and all the hungry reporters with money and threats. But who is he this time? If he is not a person of power enough to shut up all the reporters, you’d better stop here.

JUNG

(angry)

I’m not that kind of girl!

SUN

(pause)

I’m sorry. I didn’t mean…

JUNG

I know. I’m sorry.

(pause)

SUN

Did you read today’s paper?

JUNG

No. I was busy today.

SUN

That bastard was on the front page.
JUNG
Who?

SUN
Doctor Hoe Jun. He was reported to the police by a neighbor because some serious noise of fight was heard from his apartment. And when the police arrived, he was found to be with two women, “two women,” neither of them was his wife, of course. One in her early twenties and the other about his age. And…they both claimed to be his lover. They fought over him.

JUNG
My god… (laughs) I knew this was gonna happen.

SUN
How can you laugh? It could have been you.

JUNG
…What did he say about it?

SUN
It was said that he insisted that the older one was his life-time friend and the younger one was his stalker.

JUNG
(shakes her head)
He doesn’t have any stalker…He’s a good actor, though.

SUN
He’s a bastard. The way he treated you…

JUNG
…

SUN
The other day, my mother rented “Kiss me much”. I didn’t want to watch it but I did anyway. The way he pretended to be a good father and a loyal husband and all that…I almost felt like throwing up.
JUNG
He was only acting.

SUN
I know.

(pause)
Jung, you are beautiful, and you... have everything a woman could ask for. Don’t throw yourself too easily at their feet. It’s only you who get hurt.

JUNG
I don’t throw myself too easily at anybody’s feet.

(pause)
Please, let’s talk about something else. So... what happened to you and the nice guy?

SUN
The nice guy? Who?

JUNG
I mean you and the guy. You borrowed my clothes for him.

SUN
(pause)
It didn’t turn out good.

JUNG
I’m sorry. What happened?

SUN
I don’t know. When we first met, we... at least I felt that something was between us, you know some kind of feeling that we belong together, that sort of thing. But... it seems the more I tried, the worse it became. I don’t know.

JUNG
Then, maybe you shouldn’t have tried.
(pause)
Maybe. I don’t know.
(pause)

JUNG
I have to go. See you tomorrow.

SUN
See you.

JUNG
(turning back)
By the way…can you please do me a big, big favor?

SUN
What is it?

JUNG
My mom’s birthday is coming. But, you know, it’s really hard for me to go to the department store and do shopping myself. People constantly recognize me and stare at me all over, ask me for my autograph…

SUN
So…

JUNG
Can you buy something for my Mom, please? Like silk scarf…or a nourishing cream…whatever a middle aged woman might like.

SUN
…OK. I owe you one anyway.

JUNG
Don’t say that. Thank you so much. Bye.

SUN
After JUNG leaves, SUN begins to clean things up. Then, she looks at the dress hung on the wall. She goes to it and takes it off the hook. She holds the dress on herself and looks at herself in the mirror.
ACT 2. SCENE 1

Interview

A corridor in a broadcasting station. JUNG hurries in. She is wearing a black suit with her hair neatly tied. She stops at someone calling her.

JUNG

(awkwardly but with a smile)

Hi. How are you?

VOICE

(as chatty and excited as always)

Jung is now involved in a pink rumor.

JUNG

It’s just absurd. How is it possible? I’m so busy with this new drama that I don’t even have enough time to sleep. (smiles)

VOICE

She was seen with a man in a café very late at night.

JUNG

But I’ve never even been there. I have to focus all my energy on “Four sisters”. Work is the most important thing in my life. I’m not interested in men. Maybe after two or three years? Then I will consider, only if I find some gentle and understanding man.

VOICE

She strongly denies.

JUNG

(she listens to another question)

Well, Soojin, is a quiet and soft-hearted woman. Because she was born of a different mother from the other sisters, she keeps painful and sad memories inside her. But she doesn’t show it. Instead, she tries to make a better person out of the sad experiences by sacrificing herself for others.

(pause)
She loves Min, who grew up with her in the family after his mother died. But he is in love with Eun-jung, the third daughter. But I don’t blame him. I give my blessing to them and help them to be together.

(pause)
Yes...another unrequited love.

(smiles)
Well, I gotta go. Let’s have lunch someday, on me. Bye.

(Exits)

VOICE
In the recent TV drama “Four Sisters”, she is playing the eldest sister, Soojin. She was cast for the role through intense competition among several actresses. The executive PD said she was chosen because no other actress excels her classic and elegant image, which he wanted for the role.
ACT 2. SCENE 2

In a bar. KANG and his friend YUN are drinking and watching TV, which is hanging on the ceiling.

YUN
I think Jung is the prettiest of all the actresses.

KANG
Why?

YUN
Her image appeals. Clean, pure, smart.

KANG
I didn’t know you watch TV dramas.

YUN
Of course, I do. My wife is addicted to soap operas. When we first got married, I made fun of her looking into the TV so absent-mindedly, but these days I’m just like her. She infected me. But I found it the best way to get relaxed. Trusting yourself completely into the soft couch without having to think.

KANG
You’re right. Jung is in …what’s the title…“Four Sisters” now, right?

YUN
Yeah. But that’s not my favorite.

KANG
Why? Is she bad in it?

YUN
Not bad. It’s just that she is kind of repeating what she has been doing so far. You know, the best was “The Doctor”.

KANG
What about it?

YUN
Didn’t you ever see it? It was so big at that time.

KANG
I did, of course. I just want to know what you thought of it.

YUN
Well, like a lot of other Korean men, I wished I had a girl like that, beside a mere boring wife. Wouldn’t it be exciting to have such a pretty girl love you, always there for you, believe in you, give up everything for the love of you? The best thing is, she’s not your wife!

(They both laugh.)

YUN
It was such a well-made drama, a success story of a man, who had nothing but his clenched fist. That’s the world that I dream of, a world that allows a man like that succeed. I kind of envied the guy, Hoe Jun. You know, he just worked hard without looking at other things and he acquired the love of two most wonderful women. A wife at home, who takes care of every home business while he is gone. At work, he has his lifetime partner in this smart, beautiful woman, who loves nobody but him.

KANG
Success and women.

YUN
You know what, though she usually plays prudish roles, her body is one of the best thing I’ve ever seen.

KANG
(a little troubled but hiding it.)
When did you see her body? I mean, she is famous for avoiding any kind of nudity.

YUN
Yeah, she’s famous for it, but…I don’t exactly remember which episode it was, but in “The Doctor” there was a scene where Jung was soaked completely in rain wearing nothing but white underwear dress. Gee, she was something.

KANG  
(not feeling very good)  
Was she?

YUN  
Yeah, did you miss the scene? Then you missed a very important part of the drama. Maybe there is a completely different person behind that innocent face. You know there was a scandal that she had an affair with the actor, Hoe Jun.

KANG  
It was a false rumor.

YUN  
No fire, no smoke.

KANG  
How do you trust the yellow journalism? They make up things that has never happened or exaggerated things into such nonsense.

YUN  
(Yun shrugs and watches TV)  
Yes, she is pretty. Even I would give it a try only if I could have a chance. I like that car ad. I really would like to buy one, including her. (giggles)

KANG  
…

YUN  
…Something wrong?

KANG  
No. nothing.
(Yun feels a little uneasy.)

*Light out.*
ACT 2. SCENE 3.

Make-up room. JUNG is writing a card at the dressing table. As she folds it and puts it in an envelope, KANG enters. JUNG is surprised to see him.

JUNG
What are you doing here?

KANG
I thought you would be happy to see me.

JUNG
Of course…but I thought we were going to meet at your apartment.

KANG
So what? Does it matter?

JUNG
You know there are many eyes looking at us here. Being careful won’t do any harm.

KANG
Of course, but…this isn’t even the first time I came here to take you home. People think I’m your uncle. That’s what you tell them.

JUNG
But I cannot tell everybody I meet in the corridor that you are my uncle, can I? (pause) Let’s just be as careful as possible.

KANG
Alright. What’s that? (referring to the card in her hand)

JUNG
This is…

KANG
Why can’t you answer right away? Is it a love letter to any jerk?
JUNG

No!

KANG

Come on. Let me see.

JUNG

Are you jealous?

KANG

What is it?

(He tries to get it from her hand, and she wouldn’t let him have it easily. It’s more like a silly yet violent game between the two. Finally, he gets it and reads it.)

JUNG

(snatching the card from his hand)

“Dear Mom. Happy Birthday to you. I want you to know that I am so happy to have another mother in you. You always watch over us with your best wish and love. I really really thank you and that’s why I was so excited and happy shopping for your birthday present. I told everyone that I was looking for a present for my mother. Please stay with us as long as possible. I love you.”

(she puts the card into the shopping bag on the dressing table. She looks at Kang.)

It’s for your Mom. Are you satisfied now?

KANG

Sorry. (pointing to the bag.) Did you go shopping today?

JUNG

(lying)

…Yes. I did.

KANG

What did you buy?
A silk scarf.

She will like it.

I hope so.

(Kang touches her cheek.)
I missed you.

Me too.

(Kang hugs her tightly.)

(softly) You are suffocating me.

(Kang smiles and kisses her cheeks and forehead.)
Please, tell Mom I’m really really sorry I can’t see her on her birthday.

She’ll understand.

I should be with her and cook something for her.

It’s OK, You couldn’t do anything about it this time. Just make sure not to schedule any work on her next birthday. That’s all you need to do.

(nods her head and smiles.)
KANG

(pause)
You are a good woman.

(he smiles and kisses her)

JUNG

No, not here.

KANG

Why not?

JUNG

You know why.

KANG

I don’t know.

(Kang’s mobile phone rings)

JUNG

Answer the phone.

KANG

(wipes his mouth and looks at the number. He hesitates for a second and then answers with stern and low voice.)

What is it?

(He turns away from Jung. He makes only short answers like ‘yeah’ or ‘no’. Jung listens to the conversation.)

(With suppressed anger)


(hangs up the phone. And turns it off. He takes a deep breath. He comes back to Jung.)

JUNG

Your…wife?

KANG
Yes.

JUNG

What did she say?

KANG

Usual stuff. Money.

JUNG

(pause)

Are you OK?

KANG

Yeah, of course. I’m fine.

JUNG

Every time you talk to her, you feel bad. That makes me feel bad too.

KANG

I’m sorry. Please don’t feel too bad. It will sort out soon. I promise.

JUNG

(smiles)

Of course, it will.

KANG

We just haven’t agreed on the alimony yet. She is asking too much. It’s just a matter of time.

JUNG

Of course. I trust you.

KANG

Thank you. (holding her hands) I love you.

JUNG

(Shesmiles. Pause.)

By the way, I was gonna call you before you came.
KANG
Why?

JUNG
Daddy had called me. He’s worried about me so much because I didn’t come home for three days. Well, actually I couldn’t because of the filming schedule. You know that as well. So…

KANG
So…

JUNG
I’m sorry. But I don’t want to have him worried for another day.

KANG
But we’ve been planning for tonight for two weeks. You were busy and I was busy…

JUNG
So I’m saying I’m sorry.

KANG
…

JUNG
Besides, I’m really exhausted. I also had a photo session today. Please, understand me.

KANG
Does it have anything to do with…no, nothing.

JUNG
(ignoring what he just said)
I understand how you feel. Even I am disappointed, really. But Daddy knows that I don’t have any work tonight. I can’t think of a lie any more. I’ve already told him so many lies to stay with you.

KANG
When are you going to tell him about me?

JUNG

(pause. Looking at him straightly)

When the right time comes.

KANG

…

(Jung smiles at him.)

KANG

Let’s get out of here. I’ll take you home.

JUNG

What about my car?

KANG

I’ll drive your car. You can sleep. You said you’re tired. I’ll come back by taxi.

JUNG

Thank you.

KANG

I love you. (pause. Watching her packing her things.) I am the only man who sees you in this ordinary jeans and shirts, not in the pretty dresses you wear for the camera. I am the only man who sees you without make-up and still thinks you are beautiful. I am the only man who rides you home and kisses you good night, aren’t I?

JUNG

…(looking at him)

KANG

 Aren’t I?

JUNG
Of course, you are.

_Lights out_
ACT 2. SCENE 4

Make up room.
SUN is organizing the dressing table to do JUNG’s face. JUNG is changing clothes behind the screen. WHANG, JUNG’s father, comes in. He has a newspaper in his hand, with the stock market page opened.

SUN
Hi, how are you? I didn’t know you were coming. Have a seat.

WHANG
Thank you.
(he sits down on a chair.)
Where is my daughter?

SUN
Oh, she is changing clothes.

JUNG
(from behind the screen)
Daddy?

WHANG
Yes. It’s me.

JUNG
What are you doing here?

WHANG
I just wanted to see my daughter. I haven’t seen you for a few days. (to Sun) To have a very popular actress for a daughter is a lonely job.

JUNG
I’m surprised.
(Jung comes out from behind the screen. She is wearing a light pink nurse uniform. Whang stands up.)
JUNG

Why didn’t you call me that you’re coming? You didn’t have to come all the way. I was home anyway.

WHANG

You’re right. But…I have to discuss something with you. Do you have some time for me now?

JUNG

(looks at her watch)

Well, I have…about 15 minutes?

SUN

Well, I’d better be outside so you two can talk comfortably.

JUNG

Thank you.

(Sun exits)

JUNG

Would you like something to drink?

WHANG

No, I’m fine.

(Regardless, Jung gives him a bottle of juice.)

Thank you.

JUNG

(noticing the newspaper page)

Stock market?

(she looks at Whang, interrogatingly)

WHANG

(putting it into his pocket, clears his throat)

I was just…it’s nothing. (pause) Why didn’t you come home last night?
JUNG

(opens the bottle for him)
I was too tired to drive, so I went to Bangbae-dong. Is that why you came all the way here?

WHANG
You didn’t answer the phone either. I’m beginning to regret having rented the apartment.

JUNG
Why? I’m happy with it. And it was your idea in the first place. You thought I need a place to
sleep and rest when the work finishes too late or when I’m too tired.

WHANG
I know. But I didn’t mean to give you a reason not to come home.

JUNG
Daddy…

WHANG
(pause)
Are you seeing a man?

JUNG
What? How can you think of such a thing?

WHANG
You don’t come home and you don’t answer the phone.

JUNG
It’s because I turn it off when I work or…when I sleep. And if I did date a guy, I would tell you.
You and Mom will be the first people to know.

WHANG
Do you promise?

JUNG
Of course. Have I ever told you a lie before?
(pause)
Then, what is it that I hear these days?

What?

That you are seeing a man.

Who do you mean?

I was told that there’s a man who frequently visits your makeup room and waits for you until your filming is finished.

...He’s...oh...(laughs) he’s Sun’s new boyfriend. He often comes here to bring her some snacks.... And he waits to take her home and sometimes offers me a ride, too. There’s nothing to worry about, Dad.

Be careful, Jung. I don’t want you to get involved in any kind of scandal again. I’ll always be on your side and trust you but other people are different.

I know.

And CI Entertainment won’t like it.

...You are right.
WHANG
They are watching you carefully to decide whether you are worthy to invest money on. (pause) It doesn’t last long, Jung.

JUNG
I know what you mean. I’ll be careful.

WHANG
And you need their management to go on with your career and achieve greater things.

JUNG
You’re right.

WHANG
Come home tonight. Girls should not sleep outside home.

JUNG
Sure, Dad. I’m coming home tonight.

WHANG
Then, I think I’d better be going.

(Jeong stands up)

JUNG
Bye, Dad. I’ll see you at home.

WHANG
Take care, baby. I’ll see you.

(exits)

(Jeong turns around and looks into the mirror. She breathes out heavily. Sun comes in.)

SUN
What did he come here for?
JUNG
Nothing. Just to talk about the contract with CI Entertainment.

SUN
Anything wrong?

JUNG
No, not at all. Everything’s fine. Did I gain some weight? I feel this uniform is quite tight. Can I open just one or two buttons?

(She unbuttons them)

SUN
Come on! What’s wrong with you? You are Whang Sujung! Whang Sujung never has the buttons open.

(She buttons them again.)
Now, that’s more like it.

JUNG
You’re right. I just wanted…just thought that it’s too tight.

(she takes a deep breath.)

Lights out
ACT 2. SCENE 5

Kang’s apartment. The mirrors and dressing tables are pushed aside, only the sofas are left in the center. Late at night. Loud music. Jung and Kang are drinking together. Jung is wearing a slip. They are giggling at something. As the giggling calms down, Kang kisses Jung.

KANG
I love you. I love you so much that I don’t know what to do with you.

(Jung giggles and pulls herself out of his arms. She reaches for more wine.)

KANG
I love you.

JUNG
I know. You don’t have to say it over and over again. I know.

(Kang hugs her again.)

JUNG
(laughing)
You’re suffocating me.

(she pulls herself out of his arms.)

Love should be soft and tender.

(she pins him down and kisses him.)

KANG
Wow… I’m so happy you are mine, such a gorgeous woman like you.

JUNG
...

(Jung’s mobile phone rings.)

Just a second.

(She looks at it. She hesitates for a moment and decides not to answer it. She
doesn’t move for a while. The ring stops.)

KANG

Who is it?

JUNG

Dad.

(pause)

KANG

Why didn’t you answer?

JUNG

If I had, I would have had to either tell him a lie, or go home right away. (she suddenly feels depressed.)

KANG

Come here.

(Jung stares at him without moving.)

KANG

Come here. Let me hug you.

JUNG

(She smiles. She fills her glass with wine and drinks it.)

(pause)

KANG

What’s wrong?

JUNG

What?
KANG
Why are you doing this to me? We were so good for a moment and suddenly you don’t even look at me.

JUNG
Nothing’s wrong. If you think anything is wrong, you are wrong.

*she caresses his cheek lightly.*

KANG
Come on.

JUNG
Just give me a moment. I mean, could you give me just a minute to... put an end to these complex feelings... to figure them out?

KANG
What complex feelings? What are you talking about? Why do you have to be so selfish at a moment like this?

JUNG
I’m sorry!

KANG
Can’t you just think about us, the two of us?

JUNG
I will and I am.

KANG
We don’t have enough time. We don’t have a time for this kind of silly fight.

JUNG
I know. I know. I’m... just a little tired.

*(pause)*
KANG

Hey!

(Kang stands up grinning at her. He goes to the cupboard and takes out the plastic box with philopon in it. He comes back to the sofa.)

This will make you feel better. It did last time, do you remember?

(JUNG recognizes it. But she’s not completely sure about her feeling about the idea.)

KANG

It was good.

JUNG

Yeah, but…

KANG

You liked it. I could feel it myself.

JUNG

Right…

KANG

It’s gonna be good this time, too. It will make you feel better. I promise. You don’t know how beautiful you were that night. I just can’t erase from my mind how your eyes looked at me, how your body glowed in my arms. I’ve never experienced anything like that before. You were the most beautiful woman in the whole world that night. And that beautiful, gorgeous woman was in my arms, completely mine. Can you imagine how happy you made me? Let me see you again. Let me see that beautiful and sexy woman again.

(He puts a small amount of philopon in her hand.)

JUNG

…

KANG

Come on.
JUNG

(she smiles at him and pour it into her glass. As he caresses her, she empties her glass.)

Lights out.
JUNG

Dear Kang. Thank you for last night. It was good, though you exhausted me too much. I think I like having sex with you. You have this wonderful skill to make me almost faint and feel enormous waves sweeping all over my body. And I think I like you for it. Of course there are other things about you that I like. But, I hate you, at the same time. I hate you especially when you call me “mine.” I’m not yours. I’m mine. Whenever you call me “mine,” I have goose skin all over and feel like screaming. I’m nobody’s.

(she stops. She giggles reading what she has written. As she looks up, she sees mirrors. She stops giggling, staring at mirrors. She tears the letter to pieces. After thinking for a moment, she writes again.)

Dear my love. I’m sorry I’ll be gone when you wake up. So I’m leaving you my love in this short memo. I know you are going to have another busy day today. Whatever you do, please do take care of yourself. Don’t skip meal and eat good things. Please remember that your health is important to me. I’m going to learn how to cook myself soon so that I can make anything you want to eat. Then you’ll be so proud of me.

(pause)

I love you more than anything in the world because you are the best thing that has ever happened to me in my life. But I am sometimes silly and childish. I might say such silly things as “I don’t want to see you any more”. That’s when you have to hold me firmly and say to me “No, we will be together until we die.”

(pause)

I love you. Yours.

(She reads the note again.)

Lights out.
ACT 3. SCENE 1

Interview. The stage is emptied, except a table and a chair.
JUNG’s father is sitting at a table, with a cup of tea in front
him. He is disheartened and upset.

WHANG
No, no. The apartment is not Kang’s. I chose the place myself. When Jung was working on ‘The
Four Sisters’, she was so busy. I didn’t want her to come all the way back home after working
herself to death. My home is about 2 hours from Seoul. So I picked up three places in Seoul and
let her choose one of them. And as far as I know, she hasn’t closed the contract yet.

(pause)
No, I say again the apartment where the police…found her is not Kang’s. It cannot be.

(pause)
Right, ‘The Four Sisters’ was over.

(pause)
I don’t know why she stayed there that night. Well, I think…she had to meet some person from
CI Entertainment. There was a contract thing going on but it didn’t work out well. Maybe she
wanted to meet him and apologize.

(pause. A little angered.)
No. He cannot be any serious man in her life. She never mentioned any word about that man to
me. She is not the type of woman who indulges in men. Whenever I told her that she was of an
age to get married, she always told me that she was not interested in men, that, that her career is
more important for her.

(pause. Shaking his head sternly)
No. No. You don’t know my daughter. She is the type of person who won’t even take any cold
medicine. Not to mention…philopon. (choked) It doesn’t make any sense, does it? If she had
ever known that it was philopon, she would never have taken it.

(Pause)
When she is at home, she is so quiet. She spends her time reading books in her room or playing
with her doggies. Ask all the neighborhood. They will all say that she is a good daughter. They
all know that.

(pause)
Her mother has some heart problem. She is so weak. She couldn’t bear this at all. She fell sick
again. She even refuses to go to the hospital, afraid to meet people. When the rumor that Jung
was seeing someone, even then she couldn’t even go outside to discard the garbage. She was so
ashamed. My wife is that kind of person.
(pause)
Jung told me not to come to see her because she feels so ashamed and sorry. She looked so pale.
(pause)
No, that’s not true. My daughter is innocent. I believe in my daughter. I know my daughter.
ACT 3.SCENE 2

Prison Cell. Jung is sitting clasp ing her knees to her chest, vacant and stupefied. She is wearing a blue prison uniform.

VOICE

“Lady Yejin…how could you!” Her fans got shocked at the news of Jung arrested by the police for having taken philopon. What makes the situation worse for her is that she stated in the investigation that she thought it was an aphrodisiac, which means that she used it to enhance sexual pleasure with her boyfriend, Kang, who has also been arrested for the same charge. Her fans feel greatly betrayed particularly because her popularity was due to her clean and graceful image.

(pause)

An aphrodisiac…hmm.

(pause)

Her male fans are probably the most hurt by this incident, for Jung was their ideal woman. Even though they feel as if the memory of their first love has been stolen, they haven’t given up their hope for her. A college student, Lee said “If Jung is guilty of anything, it is just of having taken an aphrodisiac, which later turned out to be philopon, which she didn’t know at all. We can’t condemn her just because of it.” Park, who has always praised Jung’s beauty, said “Dressed in a blue prison uniform, Jung’s beauty still shines”. On the other hand, a lot of women’s reaction toward this news is cold and indifferent. They are quite saucy, saying “I suspected as much because there were a lot of rumors around about her. I think it’s only a tip of an iceberg.”

(Jung starts to chuckle.)

Most of her fan sites on line have been closed down, one of which left only a short passage that goes like this; “As one of her fans who loved her, I feel so disappointed and sorry. I apologize to anyone who has ever visited this site”…Many big companies that worked with her such as Samsung Construction and Lotte Department store have stopped broadcasting all the commercial films with her in them and are preparing to take a legal step to sue her.

(As JUNG keeps laughing, the voice stops. In a dreamy light, a girl in a white dress appears. She crosses the stage slowly as if dancing. Jung doesn’t see anything.)
ACT 3. SCENE 3

An interview room in prison. IM, JUNG and KANG’s lawyer is waiting for them. JUNG comes in accompanied by the guards. They take the handcuffs off from her. She sits in front of IM.

IM

How are you?

JUNG

… Do you have cigarettes?

IM

(little surprised)

Yes.

JUNG

Can I have one?

IM

Do you smoke?

JUNG

Do I smoke? I even take drugs.

IM

…

(he takes out his cigarette pack and gives one to her. He lights the cigarette for her.)

JUNG

Thank you.

(she smokes)
It’s so cold in here. My feet hurt. I think they have chilblains.

IM
I’m sorry. Do you want me to get you any medicine?

JUNG

Thank you.

IM

Kang will be here with us soon. We are going to prepare for the trial together. You said to the police a lot of things that you shouldn’t have said. We have to figure out what part we deny, what part we don’t remember that you said it, and what part to admit. Lucky that you are given one more chance. Even though you made a statement in the police station “officially”, if you deny the veracity of it IN the court trial, it’s practically nothing but a piece of garbage paper. It’s the law.

JUNG

OK. (pause) Can I use your cell phone?

IM

Sure.

(He gives it to her.)

JUNG

(she dials home)

…It’s me Dad. How’s Mom? …Can I talk to her? …OK. (pause) Could you ask her again? I, I want to…I miss her…OK. I see.

(She hangs up and gives the phone back to Im.)

She doesn’t want to talk to me.

(Angry, she tries not to cry.)

(Kang comes in accompanied by the guards. As he is un-cuffed, he looks at Jung and tries to smile. Jung stands up and goes to him. She slaps him on the face. Losing control, she hits him blindly. Im runs to them and takes her by the arm. )

IM

Calm down. Calm down. It doesn’t help. The guards are watching.

JUNG
I don’t care! I don’t care. I’m already ruined. What have I got to lose now?

(to Kang)
You ruined me. You fucked up everything! I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to be stuck in here. I want to go home. I want to sleep in some warm place, not this cold freezing place. You put me in here. Now, get me out of here! Get me out of here!

(she hits him again. This time, he grabs her arm.)

KANG
Jung. Stop.

(Jung calms down a little. She sits.)

KANG
I’m doing my best. I did all I could do for you. I told them you had no idea what you were drinking. I told them I lied to you to make you drink it.

(suddenly laughs)
And you told them you thought it was a kind of aphrodisiac?

(Jung laughs, too. Kang reaches out to touch her face but she avoids it.)

JUNG
Still, it won’t make much difference. Because…I’m condemned, whatsoever…I’m done thanks to you.

(pause)
I hate you.

KANG
No, you can’t hate me.

(pause)
You knew what you were doing.

JUNG
You never told me what it was.

KANG
I explained to you what it does. I thought you knew.
JUNG
You never told me.

IM
Now…please calm down, both of you. As your lawyer I can tell you this. The truth is not important. Whether you knew you were having philopon, whether Mr. Kang told you exactly what it was, only you know. But you don’t have to tell me. I don’t need to know. The important thing here, to get you out of this place, is what we decide to present as the truth, and how we plan to present it. Do both of you understand what I mean?

KANG
Yes.

IM
(to Jung)
Do you understand what I mean?

JUNG
Yes.

IM
Good. (pause) Besides, I have another bad news for you. (Kang looks away. Jung feels anxious.) Park, Mr. Kang’s wife, accused you for committing adultery.

JUNG
….what?

IM
I’m sorry. But don’t worry too much. We can deal with this. The problem here is that you already admitted that you had sex with each other, so from now on we are going to figure out how we can turn it over and say ‘no, we didn’t have sex’, and put it into a logical sequence. OK?

JUNG
So…what am I? A drug addict, an adulteress, a liar, a betrayer…a hypocrite. What am I?
(She covers her face with her hands. Kang comes to her to mitigate her agony but as she stares at him fiercely he stops.)

KANG
Don’t look at me like that. Why do you blame me for everything? You knew I was married. But you said you could wait. You said you loved me. And I believed you. And, and you knew it was philo pon you were taking. And you enjoyed it. I didn’t tell you this before but, I knew that you had used it before. OK. OK. I admit that I brought you into this hell. I am responsible. I admit it. And I’m sorry, but you too knew what you were doing. And you never said no.

JUNG
I never said no? I never said yes either. It was you who wouldn’t stop until I took them.

KANG
You wanted me to make you do it. You waited until you can’t say no. Didn’t you?

JUNG
…. 

IM
Like I told you, it’s no use for you to fight with each other here. Can we go back to our real issue?

KANG
Yes. I’m sorry.

IM
It’s OK. Now, we have to deal with two things at the same time. One is the philo pon case and the other is the adultery case. In the first investigation by the police, Mr. Kang said

(looking over the record of the investigation)
you told Jung that it was only some kind of tonic that reduces the feeling of tiredness.

KANG
Yes.

IM
(to Jung)
And you said that you thought it was some kind of aphrodisiac.

JUNG
...yes. Yes, I did!

IM
OK.

(to Kang)
Are you sure you want to go on with this story?

(Kang doesn’t understand what Im means.)

IM
I mean, if you take all the responsibility on you like this, Jung might be considered not guilty but you will get heavier penalty than...necessary. Is this what you want?

KANG
Yes.

(Kang holds Jung’s hand. She wants to refuse it but cannot. She lets him hold her hand.)

IM
Good. The power of love. Even so, we have another problem here. You told the police that you used philopon to... arouse her, to enjoy better sex. That means you had sex.

KANG
We were in love.

IM
The crime of adultery is committed the moment the man’s penis is inserted in the woman’s vagina, both party knowing that one of them, or both of them are legally married to someone else, their legal spouse, in other word. So, the legal spouse can accuse you only when you are caught in that very moment of action or when she has an evidence that.. it happened, like photos.
KANG
Does it mean…we can’t escape this adultery charge? Because I already said that we …and it was officially recorded?

IM
It may be difficult but not utterly impossible.

KANG
How?

IM
Jung, did you know that he was married when you first met him?

JUNG
…Yes.

IM
(pause. slowly)
Did you know that he was married when you first met him?

JUNG
…
(she gets Im’s purpose, but still confused.)
No.

IM
(to Kang)
When did you first inform Jung that you were married?

KANG
…

IM
About five or six months after you first met?
KANG
I…don’t exactly remember.

IM
(nods his head)
And after that did you have sex with her?

KANG
…No.

IM
(to Jung)
Did you?

JUNG
…

IM
Good. Not answering can be another strategy.
(to Kang)
But would anybody believe that young and beautiful man and woman like you lived together without having sex?

KANG
We…just…cuddled and had some light caressing.

IM
OK.

KANG
But like you said would anybody believe this? I wouldn’t believe it.

IM
In court you will make an oath that you will tell the truth. And…whatever you say from then on, it will be the truth.

(He turns to Jung and looks at her for a while.)
The test result came out.

(pause)

And it’s not very good. Both your hair and urine were positive.

JUNG

It’s inevitable, isn’t it?

IM

Yeah, but the hair. If the hair shows positive result, the prosecutor has a good reason to define you as an addict. Then, he will try to prove that you knew it was philopon that Kang gave to you. That’s more logical. Isn’t it?

(Jung doesn’t know what to say)

JUNG

…so…what…am I supposed to say?

IM

Just never say anything in the effect that you took any drug intentionally. Do not admit any of the crime the prosecutor accuses you of. That’s the rule here.

JUNG

OK…Sounds like a good scenario.

IM

May I give you another scenario? Whatever you did together, you did it in the name of love. Never make any scene like the one I saw today. It’s ugly. (to Jung) That way, you can never appear innocent. You two are still in love and will be so forever, and you two care for each other with all your heart. Smile at each other. Hold hands whenever you have a chance. That’s prettier.

JUNG

It’s something very familiar to me, something I always do.

(Kang stares at her.)

IM

OK.

(pause)
I think I’ve covered pretty much… everything. You two please, keep in mind what I told you today. And...take care.

(to Jung)
I will make sure you will get some medicine.

JUNG
Thank you.

KANG
What…Are you sick?

JUNG
Just some chilblains.

KANG
Let me see.

JUNG
It’s not serious.

KANG
Let me see.

JUNG
You cannot do anything about it. Don’t make a fuss.

KANG
Let me see!

JUNG
Why…

(pause)

KANG
Do you love me?
JUNG
What?

KANG
Do you love me?

(long pause)

JUNG
Of course I do. I love you. Don’t you remember we promised to be together until we die?

(Kang buries his face in her laps.)

Light out.
Dream

Jung is sleeping in prison. A girl in a white dress enters. She is a teen-age girl but behaves like a child. She is humming a song, walking about. Jung wakes up at the sound. They look at each other. (In the dialogue between the two, the girl is not merely echoing Jung. She really asks her.)

JUNG

Who are you?

GIRL

Who are you?

JUNG

Who are you? What are you doing here?

GIRL

Who are you? What are you doing here?

(pause)

JUNG

(grinning)

Who are you? You are not supposed to be here.

GIRL

Who are you? You are not supposed to be here.

JUNG

Who are you? Answer me.

GIRL

Who are you? Answer me.
JUNG

(pause)
I am Jung. And you?

GIRL
I am Jung. And you?

JUNG
No, no, I am Jung. You are not me.

GIRL
No, no, I am Jung. You are not me.

JUNG
Who are you?

GIRL
Who are you?

JUNG
Who are you!

GIRL
Who are you?

JUNG
Who are you!

GIRL

(pause)
Who are you?

(pause)

(long pause)

JUNG
I…I am….
GIRL
You are…?

JUNG
I…

GIRL
Who are you? I want to know who you are. I want to know.

JUNG
I…I…

GIRL
(grins and begins to hum a song and dance. She is going to the opposite side from the one she came in.)

JUNG
I am

GIRL
(turning around to Jung, she smiles and then exits)

Light changes. JUNG is alone in prison. LIGHTS OUT.
ACT 3. SCENE 5

Another interview room in prison. SUN and JUNG’s father are waiting for JUNG. As she comes in, SUN stands up.

SUN

Hi.

JUNG

(surprised)

Hi.

SUN

I…called your father to ask how you’re doing, and he said he was going to see you today. So I came with him.

JUNG

(to her father)

You should’ve asked me.

WHANG

I thought you’d like to see her. She’s your friend.

(pause)

SUN

I’m sorry. I was…

JUNG

It’s OK.

(she sits down. Sun sits down, too.)

WHANG

How are you feeling?

JUNG

I’m fine.
WHANG
How’s the chilblain? Does it get worse?

JUNG
It’s OK. (pause) How’s Mom?

WHANG
She worries about you.

JUNG
She worries about me, but never comes to see me.

WHANG
She’s not too well these days.

JUNG
I guess it’s because of me.

WHANG
She has some problems with her heart again. She told me not to tell you about that. She doesn’t want to worry you.

JUNG
Tell her that it’s OK for her to worry me. It’s OK.

(pause)

(she glances at Sun quickly. To her father)
I heard that Lotte and Samsung have sued me.

WHANG
Yes. I talked with the lawyer about that.

JUNG
What are you going to do about it?

WHANG
Nothing’s certain yet. We will try to persuade them to withdraw their charge against you.
JUNG
If they go on?

WHANG
We have to do our best. The lawyer said we will ask them to consider the profits you have made them so far.

JUNG
If they don’t withdraw their charge, what are you going to do?

WHANG
(looking away)
Then…we will have to negotiate.

JUNG
What, what is it?

WHANG
It will be OK.

JUNG
Tell me. What is it?

WHANG
…We don’t have money.

JUNG
What?

WHANG
I’m sorry.

JUNG
What about all the money I gave you? All the money I worked myself to death for?
WHANG
I invested it into stocks and…

JUNG
You never mentioned it to me.

WHANG
I thought it would work out well, the stock market was very good at that time.

JUNG
It was my money. I just entrusted you with it. I never said you can spend it as you like.

WHANG
I didn’t spend it. I invested it, and it was for your sake.

JUNG
If it was truly for my sake, why didn’t you ask my opinion? I should have known.

WHANG
I’m sorry. But don’t put all the blame on me. It is you who committed the crime and got yourself in this place. The loss could be a temporary thing if none of this had happened. Stock market is meant to be going up and down.

JUNG
How can you say that to me?

WHANG
Don’t act like a little girl. It’s not just you who is going through a tough time here. Your mom got sick because of you. And I…cannot walk in the street without hiding my face. How can I ever see my friends again after all of this happened? You put me into shame. You put everybody in the family into shame. You told me lies. You deceived me. I don’t know who you are any more.

JUNG
(Pause)
Right. Right.

(Pause)
WHANG
You must be exhausted with all this. I’m sorry. You just made a mistake. That’s all. It’s OK to make a mistake. Everybody does. It’s just…you are not like everybody else, so you are paying more than others do.

(pause)
But you’ll be fine. I know you. You’ve always been a good daughter for me.

(pause)
I’m doing my best to get you out of here. I’m doing my best. You don’t need to worry.

JUNG

(pause)
I’m sorry.

(Pause. Noticing Sun, she looks at her, who has been looking at her all the while. They look at each other for some time, then Jung looks away.)

SUN
I’m sure you’ll be OK. Everything will be OK in the end. It’s always the case.

JUNG
Thank you.

(pause)

SUN
I’m getting married.

JUNG
…Congratulations!

SUN
Thank you.

JUNG
Who…

SUN
JUNG
Oh! That’s nice.

(Smile)

SUN
The parents are going to meet and set the date soon.

JUNG
That’s….really nice.

(Pause)

Maybe I won’t be able to go to your wedding. I’m sorry.

SUN
It’s OK.

(Whang looks at his daughter pitifully. )

Lights out
ACT 3. SCENE 6.

Prison cell. JUNG is sitting alone on the floor, trying to warm her feet, massaging them. The girl in a white dress comes in and stands in front of JUNG. JUNG reaches out her hand to touch the girl’s cheek. She draws the girl near to herself, and strokes her hair and face affectionately. Pause. JUNG takes off her prison uniform. She puts the uniform on the girl. She looks at the girl for a while and pushes her away. The girl runs out.

Lights out.
Epilogue

As the voice reads the newspaper article, KANG enters his apartment, and SUN enters the makeup room. KANG sits on the sofa, where he finds the yellow note from Jung. SUN looks around the makeup room and gets lost in the memories with Jung.

VOICE
Whang Sujung, the actress, was given a suspended sentence of two years for taking illegal drugs. Fortunately, as Kang’s wife withdrew the charge of adultery, she and her boyfriend Kang were not sentenced for it. When she was released and left the prison this morning, a big crowd of reporters and photographers gathered to cover the incident. Whang Sujung was wearing a long coat and a hat, as if wanting to hide her pale and tired face lowered down. Even though she was without makeup and seemed to have lost weight, her beauty has not diminished. When the photographers asked her to take off the hat to take a better picture of her, her father removed it from her head rather roughly. Until she finally left the place in her father’s car, she didn’t say a single word. Kang, her boyfriend, left the prison separately in his mother’s car. It is said that Kang and Jung are still in love with each other. The hardship they went through together made their love even stronger. According to sources close to Kang, they are going to get married soon.

(As the voice stops, Kang crumples the note in his hand and Sun turns around to leave the room. The makeup room door opens and a young and pretty woman in a traditional Korean dress comes in.)

WOMAN
What are you doing here? Who are you?

SUN
I’m sorry. I used to work here. I just wanted to look around.

WOMAN
OK. But could you please leave? I have to change my clothes now.

SUN
Sure.
(pause)
By the way, I’m a great fan of yours. I watch the drama every week. You’re really good.

WOMAN

Thank you.

(pause)

SUN

Bye.

WOMAN

Bye.

(Sun leaves the room and at the same time Kang exits, too. The young woman sits at the dressing table and put on some make-up.)

Lights out.
Chapter 4

The staged readings of If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There
and the play’s possible place in the Korea feminist theatre.

This chapter is about the feedback I got from the two staged readings of the play. I will
discuss how the characters Sun and Jung were interpreted and accepted by the audience, and in
relation to it I will also talk about how the two characters developed in the writing process. I will
also explore how the cultural difference in the play was accepted by an American audience,
compared to the acceptance of the play by a few Korean audience members who came to the
second reading. In the second part of the chapter I will consider my possible position as a
feminist playwright in the context of Korean feminist theatre.

The staged readings of the play and the audience response

I had two staged readings for the second draft of If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There.
The first reading was for two young dramaturgs from Actor’s Theatre of Louiseville, who were
going to give some comments and feedback on the play. It was performed in the basement of
Presser Hall and the audience consisted mainly of theatre majors. The second reading was
produced as a participant of CelebrAsia festival, hosted by English department. It was open to
the public and the performing space was a small-sized auditorium in the Art Museum. In the
second reading, there was a talk back session, which was meant for the audience to give
comments on their understanding of the play.

The two readings were a good opportunity for me to understand my play from different
perspectives and to have a better understanding of what I had accomplished with it. For the first
reading I didn’t participate in the rehearsal process. I just talked with the director when she asked
me such questions as what kind of pace I wanted for particular scenes, whether I wanted comical or serious mood for some scenes, or what underlying meaning I intended when a particular character spoke his or her lines at certain points. Even though it was a short conversation, it made me think about my play from different perspectives: if I had written it just from the characters’ point of view, or from my own intentions with soundless language inside of me, now I had to convert it into communicable language articulately. And this process made it even clearer to me what I had intended in my mind. However, it was a sensitive process as well. For the second reading, I could participate one of the two rehearsals they had. Sitting with the actors and the director, I felt like explaining every hidden emotion and conflict under the actual lines. However, I also wanted to see what interpretations the directors would make of the script, or if they could find something I didn’t think of. Furthermore, I felt obliged to respect the directors’ visions, so I had to try to negotiate what to demand and what not to demand of the directors.

The readings benefited me by offering me an opportunity to “hear” the play. Particularly in the first reading, I paid a lot of attention to the reading of the actors. As with the directors, I wanted to see how they interpreted the script. I wanted to see if my writing was clear enough for them to agree with my intention, or if they came up with something different than what I intended, I wanted to see what I could learn from the unintended interpretation. In the second reading I also tried to pay more attention to the audience’s reactions to the play.

Because different actors played major roles in the two readings, I could see different possibilities for the different interpretations of the characters and the effect of it on the play. In the first reading, the actress who played Jung’s part had a sweet and gentle presence and she was from Thailand. Her rather monotonous and suppressed reading, however, was not very effective in showing Jung’s versatility in each situation or her sensuality. But it had the effect of magnifying Jung’s oppression in the relationships she had.
In the second reading, Jung was read by an American girl. Most interesting to me was that, since the actress came from a different cultural background, her idea of an “ideal” or “traditional” woman seemed to be different from mine. Especially when she portrayed the interview scenes, it was totally different from what I had imagined. Her gestures and facial expressions, I thought, seemed to come from the western or Hollywood female movie stars in 50s or 60s. Her portrayal of Jung was quite different from my vision. However, she was very good at catching and expressing details; effectively using the pauses that I put between the dialogue, showing how Jung lied or pretended things. It was good for me that I could make certain of how those small things worked on the stage. Unlike the former Jung, the American actress had a very strong presence, controlling the stage. So in her relation with Kang, she overwhelmed him to some degree. I was disappointed that some of the intentions I put in the subtle dialogue were lost and the tension between the two characters was obscured.

For the second reading of the play, there was a talk back. I prepared some questions for the session, one of which was “What sort of woman does Jung appears to be, and Sun?” which turned out to be naturally connected to the previous question, “What feeling were you left with at the end?” To this, one of the audience members said that he still didn’t know what to feel about the character Jung. He said, “we never see the real Jung,” and all that he could understand about her was the role she was playing; the role of pleasing others. I was surprised to hear this; I thought I created a substantial person in Jung with desires and thoughts, and this man was saying that he never saw the real Jung. But it was a pleasing surprise, because I thought he was right in saying that there is no real Jung, but only the roles she played. It may be another way of saying that she was embodying the representation of the social ideology of femininity. This was also interesting that he found Jung difficult or impossible to pin down within a certain definition, because that was what I myself felt about the actress Whang Sujung as I began to explore the
original materials of newspapers and magazines. It seemed to me that there was no way for me to grasp her reality. So many contradicting stories about her confused me. Even the things that came right from her mouth didn’t seem to be from the same person. She was smiling like an angel at one moment and then snapped at the prosecutor, who was accusing her rather like a personal attack, asking him in return “Are you writing a novel?” She takes drugs to enjoy sex better, and then the next morning writes a loving and caring letter to her boyfriend not to skip any meal and stay healthy. (If she did care about his health, why would she let him have drug that is harmful to health?) In one trial, she gets angry at the prosecutor, saying firmly “Watch out what you say. You are hurting my dignity;” and then in the next trial, drops tears saying nothing but “I am sorry. Please forgive me…” She was seen through so many eyes for so many different purposes. To find her real and true entity was impossible. I felt she was nowhere on earth, but somehow, she grew up as Jung, who had as many faces as she needs and use them as she needs. She did so as her own strategy to survive and have power over people. By becoming what others, more accurately men, want her to be, she wriggles her way through, achieving what she wants. It was exciting and also scary to see that the audience can read the problems I struggled with in writing exactly.

The audience’s interest in the character of Sun was also enlightening. Though Sun had grown even larger in the second draft than in the first draft, they still felt there was a lot more potential space for her to be developed. When I first conceived this play, Sun was not in my account. But later in the process of constructing the story, I realized that I need at least one female character who would have a relationship with Jung. Otherwise, Jung would be surrounded only by male characters and in that way, I could explore the character only partially. Thus in the first draft, Sun was rather a confidant in her relationship with Jung. In the discussion with the readers of the first draft, however, I found they were quite intrigued by Sun. Some of
them even suggested that Sun might have a homosexual desire for Jung. Certainly that was not my intention. Instead, I saw some possibilities to actively use her as a character in which I could mirror myself as a spectator of Jung or the other actresses in the media: a viewer of her image and a participant in the construction of her image, and also a consumer of the image.

Some examples of the changes for Sun’s part from the first draft to second draft are: in the “Prologue” when Jung is practicing her interview for a talk show, I made her “look at Jung in the mirror” “while Jung is looking at herself in the mirror.” The line in Act 1 Scene 2, “You should look soft…and pure…prudish and yet friendly,” which was Jung’s in the first draft, went to Sun. I also tried to understand Sun’s oppressions and desires as a woman who is living in the same society as Jung. Compared to Jung, who is the perfect image of “ideal” woman, the complete embodiment of the dream or ideology, Sun was supposed to be weird or peculiar, thus unstable. I had her dressed in “a pair of torn jeans with beads and colorful patches and a T-shirt with a strange pattern” (perhaps designed by herself) with “very short hair.” This kind of “unusual” and “not feminine” outfit (in the context of Korean culture) reflects her uniqueness, not yet belonging to any socially established categories. However, the society that wanted the image of Jung oppresses her too; she feels she has to have a man, and to have a man she has to become like Jung.

Society has blinded her to what she has as a unique, individual being and drives her to want what she does not have or perhaps what she doesn’t need to have.

Though I put considerable effort into Sun’s development, it was still surprising to find out that the ATL dramaturgs and the audience for the second reading wanted to see more of Sun. From the conversation with the ATL dramaturgs, I could understand that, compared to Jung, who starts on the highest point from which she has no place to go or reach any further, Sun was like a cup yet to be filled. The two characters were drawing two different lines with opposite
directions; one was going down, the other was perhaps going up or going shaky without knowing where to arrive. She is floating on the boundaries, not belonging to either side; she knows what constitutes the ideal image of femininity, even better than Jung, but doesn’t feel confident about applying it to herself; she admires Jung for her beauty and success, but competes with her secretly, sometimes even wanting to have control over her. The audience might have been intrigued by her mobility and her state of being “not yet decided,” which they might have felt that they too had.

However, I don’t feel certain about what further changes I can make for Sun, even though I agree with some people’s opinion that Sun has more potential and that Sun’s disappearance in the middle of the play seems unfair considering the importance of her part. I admit that her ending in the present draft is rather ambiguous; how she decided to marry Mr. Kim, how she feels about it, whether she was forced to make the decision for reasons other than her own can be more argued. I feel quite hesitant to make a clear ending for her. Perhaps I feel afraid either to put her under the oppression of the society and be defeated by it or to let her find “true” love and live happily ever after “as she is.”

Dr. Armstrong suggested that Sun could function as alternative choices that Jung could have or would have made. Though I agree with her, it still feels like too big a statement about the reality of Korean society for me to make. I think this is a meaningful problem for me to consider profoundly for the next step I am going to make both for If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There and other new plays.

I also learned from the two readings about the possible effect of my play on the American audience, since it is set in a different location culturally and socially. In the conversation with the ATL dramaturgs, I realized that legal restriction and punishments against drug use and adultery, and different criteria of ideal femininity in Korea were strange and unfamiliar to them. I felt this
strangeness could function as a space in which they could reflect on their own culture and society as they try to understand the differences and similarities between the two. For example, they could compare the image of “ideal woman” in America to Jung’s images. Also, they could think about how drug use is considered differently in America and what it implies about American culture.

Furthermore, when the audience in the second reading mentioned that they could easily think of American equivalence such Winona Ryder’s case, or the movie All About Eve, the play had certainly stimulated them to think about their own culture. I didn’t anticipate this when I wrote the play, but it was very interesting to see the effect that the cultural difference might bring to the audience’s acceptance of the play. It could even lead the audience to think about the events on the stage with their reason and come up with their own judgement on them.

With the Korean audience, however, who would already know the background of the actual event and the actress presented in the play, the result was rather different. The story that I reconstructed on the stage was conflated with their knowledge of the event, as if the play was “a” or “the” history of the event. I invited two Korean students in the English department to the second reading, both of whom were men. (Unfortunately, I couldn’t invite any young Korean women to the performance, who are the actual audience that I had in mind when I wrote the play. So I couldn’t find out if the play had any resonance with my original target audience.) After the performance, I asked one of them who stayed until the talk back session was over, yet without participating in the discussion, what he thought of it. The first thing he said was “So, this is how it happened.” I explained to him that I just used the actress’s case as basic material and that almost everything in the play was made up by my imagination. But he just kept nodding his head without saying anything. But later I could have longer and more detailed conversation with the other Korean man. He seemed to focus only on the fact that Jung is an actress, as Whang Sujung
is an actress to him. To him, it was definitely a story of an actress. So it seemed to me that the metaphor of our life as a performance, our gender as representations of patriarchal ideology was lost for him. It could be partly because the performance was just a reading of the play, not the complete staging; a lot of visual images couldn’t escape being lost. Another problem was that he thought he already knew Jung, as he knew Whang Sujung. When I asked him who he thought Jung was, he seemed to refer to the actual event that he knew; Jung was a popular actress enjoying a splendid and luxurious life, who down to the status of a prisoner because of her immorality, losing everything. Besides, as Whang Sujung, the famous actress, didn’t have much to do with his life, Jung also seemed to be irrelevant to his life. I didn’t take into account that the prejudice that a Korean audience already has about the actress would prevent their free and direct acceptance of the character Jung I created.

It was interesting, however, that he didn’t blame Jung for her downfall. Rather, in his opinion, the fault was more Kang’s; he was “morally” wrong as he didn’t tell her that he was married and he persuaded her to take the drug. I don’t know if it was his personal issue to judge things from the perspective of “morality” or it is a general attitude of most or all Korean men, but it was interesting to see him approach everything in terms of “right or wrong” in the moral sense, especially because it was never in my intention to have moral judgement on the characters.

I cannot tell whether it was because I failed to communicate my ideas or because he wanted to make sure that I should think that he understood everything, rather than to be honest with what he felt, but certainly his reaction to the play was a disappointment. However, my friend may be right when she said that my job was finished when I finished writing. What the audience makes of my play is not any more in my control. The meaning of the play will be made in their minds and thoughts. And whatever it is, it will certainly affect their thinking in any minor way, and that is all I can hope for.
Feminist Theatre in Korea and *If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There*.

For an American audience, I think *If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There* showed some possibilities for communicating the feminist issues I wanted to touch as I wrote the play. I also saw that the cultural and social difference, the strangeness and also the similarity between the two countries, can provide a certain space for both me as playwright and the audience to reflect on the cultural and social system of each in terms of gender role and sexuality.

What, then, is my place as a playwright writing about feminist issues in the context of Korean theatre? Sim, after observing the changes and development in Korean theatre since early 1980’s “with a woman’s eye”, asserts that “genuine feminist theatre” began to be performed in Korea in the mid 1980’s as an independent performance genre. Before that, there were several women playwrights who continuously wrote plays since the 1920’s, but they didn’t have much opportunity to be performed on stage, partly due to the male-centered tradition in Korean performing arts circles and also due to the lack of women audience members who would appreciate and support the works of women playwright. (Sim ii )

The performance of *Woman in Crisis* in 1986, an adaptation of the original novel by Simone de Beauvoir, is generally thought to be the starting point of feminist theatre in Korea. The first significance of this performance was that it drew middle-aged women audience to the theatre, women who had not been seriously considered as a target audience before. The second is that the commercial success of this production also led to the flourishing of feminist performances in small-sized theatres. Since *Woman in Crisis*, a lot of translated plays from western theatre dealing with women’s issues were performed successfully and original plays written by women playwrights have been produced continuously.
Apart from the flow of feminist theatre that began with the success of Woman in Crisis which mainly targets middle class housewives, women office workers or university students who are comparably economically stable, there was also a move of feminist theatre in the circle of labor movements in the 80’s. Adopting the structure and form of traditional mask dance theatre\(^{10}\)”, they dealt with the social problems women laborers experienced at work and also other social issues related to women, such as the systematic exploitation of prostitutes. They succeeded in revealing the problems directly and powerfully, but were criticized for lacking aesthetic beauty and artistic accomplishment because of the very directness. Yard theatre, however, continues to be produced with the strength of honest and casual approaches to women’s problems in the family and in the society at large, and with the use of a traditionally familiar form and lively interaction between the audience and the performers.

One of the problems in the flourishing of feminist theatre in 1990’s was its commercialism. Some of the characteristics of feminist theatre at this time in Korea was the casting of popular stars, dealing with light materials and subjects like those of television melodramas, the popular culture taste, the inclusion of spectacles. This resulted in feminist theatres in the name only, with performances promoted as a feminist theatre without any feminist consciousness. The performances were sentimentalism and, ironically, produced distorted and negative image of women as they used love, marriage, or sexual violence as their subject material without paying attention to the social conditions from which they resulted.

Another problem was that middle-class housewives, the main audience, consumed feminist theatre as an image of high culture which could confirm their status of high class life.

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\(^{10}\) this kind of theatre is called “yard theatre (madang-guck 馬당극)” in Korea, as it usually uses arena stage and encourages participation of the audience
Thus they enjoyed their ability to afford the time and the money to go to the theatre, and the feeling of living a luxurious life, rather than sharing and being challenged by the feminist issues.

As a reaction to these problems, feminist theatre declared its relevance to the feminist issues, and serious approaches to social problems from the women’s point of view began to appear (Park 11-9). Feminist Art Network (여성문화예술기획), for example, produced several important feminist plays after 1992, and actively works not only with theatre but also with films and the arts, and holds various workshops and lectures. Also, as I mentioned in chapter 2, around the mid 1990’s, feminist theatre which attempts to produce an indigenous Korean feminist point of view began to be developed.

Korean feminist theatre is generally categorized based on three theme: (1) theatre of women’s issues, which deals with various social issues that result from patriarchal system, such as sexual discrimination, violence, and oppression, and attempts to raise political consciousness among women; (2) theatre of women’s culture, which is based on the life experiences of women, such as sister-sister relationships or mother-daughter relationships, and suggests directions towards re-evaluation and re-establishment of women’s culture; and (3) theatre with women as its subject matter, which deals with general matters about women(iii ). The last category of “theatre with women as its subject matter” doesn’t necessarily have an explicitly political view of feminist movement, thus some of the performances in the third category are thought to be “women’s theatre” apart from “feminist theatre.”

If I could locate myself in the topography of Korean feminist theatre, I would belong to the category of “theatre of women’s issues” for the audience of middle class women. However, I think it is less important to decide where I could be positioned in the existing context than to consider how I could contribute to the further growth of Korean feminist theatre. Park Kwang-
jung, a theatre critic in Korea, suggested that, in order for feminist theatre to be developed in Korea, first, the audience’s recognition of the women’s problems in the society should grow and mature; the creators should provide serious and profound understanding of women’s problems; and multilateral theatrical forms of expressing Korean women’s reality should be accumulated (20). Furthermore, Sim Jung-sun asserts, “One of the projects Korean theatre should work on today is to construct and embody Korean emotions and mentality in theatrical languages that can survive in the midst of the wave of western-centered globalization, or Japan-oriented minimizing globalization”(62). How If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There could add to the accumulation of “multilateral theatrical forms of expressing Korean women’s reality” remains to be learned. Also, even if I successfully convey the atmosphere of Korean culture to the American audience, if If You Look For Me, I Won’t Be There’s appeal to the Korean audience, especially when it was originally written in English, is unclear. I suppose the translation process of If You Look for Me, I Won’t Be There must be, if I should translate it into Korean, not just a translation from English into Korean, but a huge rewriting of the play. For one thing, I should erase the shadow of Whang Su-jung or find a way to make the most use of the shadow to the benefit of the work. I also might consider modifying the background of the event; for example, replacing the TV dramas with different titles and different stories. However, I expect that the most difficult problem will be the language itself. I wrote some part of the play imagining Korean characters speaking in Korean and then translating them into English, but other parts came directly in English. And these parts may not have equivalence in Korean. Also, because language carries a particular way and process of thinking, when the characters begin to speak completely in Korean, their personality might change, though some ambiguities I couldn’t resolve might be clarified.

So far, I have discussed the result of the two readings of the play and the audience
reaction to them. These were precious experience for me to understand my work from various point of view. I gained helpful insights into my characters in terms of how they communicate to the audience and to what extent I was successful in conveying my ideas to the audience. I also learned how my Korean background is used in relation to American audience; through the difference and similarity of the two cultures, the audience seemed to reflect on their own culture and its gender ideology from a new perspective. In the second part of this chapter, I introduced Korean feminist theatre and considered what my position in its context could be.

I think the whole process of writing the play, having staged readings and meeting with audience was a valuable way to understand the problems and potentials of my work. However, it was done in a very safe place; in the school. Also, where my play goes next is unknown. I believe the real process begins now, when I go out to the world. Still, all the experiences and struggles I had with If You Look For Me I Won’t Be There are the basic manure and source from which I will continue to learn.
<Works Cited>


