LOCAL PERFORMANCES, GLOBAL STAGES: POSTCOLONIAL AND INDIGENOUS DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE IN GLOCAL CIRCUITS

DISSERTATION

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The dissertation investigates drama and performance produced in four regions: Ireland, Nigeria, Native North America, and Korea. I identify a paradigm shift in postcolonial and Indigenous artists’ navigation of shifting historical contexts. Roughly speaking, in the 1960s and early 70s, quite a few postcolonial artists appropriated or evoked dominant global (Western) themes/theatre conventions, the most important of which for this study is the genre of absurdist theatre, to address local political concerns. During and after the 1970s, however, as each of these cultures gained distance from its colonial trauma, and experienced increasing cultural self-apprehension, writers and performers re-centered their own local heritages and histories within highly syncretic contemporary artistic frames. Unlike the previous scholarship that tends to focus exclusively on works produced during the later phase, I trace and engage this mode of transition within each region and during individual artists’ careers, examining a range of texts (including plays, productions, a radio play broadcast, and archival performance footage), and argue for more spatio-temporally and politically sensitive understandings of cultural syncretism. Analyzing works by such artists as Ola Rotimi (Nigerian), Taesuk Oh (Korean), Marina Carr (Irish), and Monique Mojica (American Indian), this study challenges orthodox postcolonial scholarship that is organized by limited geographical
areas, by a vertical relationship between colonizers and the colonized, and by an
exclusive focus on European languages. This interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and
bilingual project situates postcolonial and Indigenous dramatic and performance texts in
their multiple historical and cultural contexts, and it develops new methodologies for
dramatic interpretation through a lateral emphasis on colonized-to-colonized connections.
In loving memory of my brother,

권중

For my mother, father, and sister,

박연숙, 권희천, 권나현

It is because of the love of my family that giving up was never an option.
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INTRODUCTION

This project began with my desire to find my own distinct scholarly voice during the graduate program in English at Ohio State. These were times when I explored and expanded my areas of interests, and I was, therefore, under multiple intersecting intellectual influences. Deep down I was hoping to find ways to make valuable contributions through my academic work in a fuller and more productive way. And, for quite a while, I was constantly turning to the possibility of comparative studies. After all, studying English literature in the U.S. was always a transnational experience for me. Even when I read Victorian novels, I filtered them through my Korean subjectivity: “Just like in Korea,” I would write in the margin of a novel, for instance.

I grew up in a beautiful and mountainous provincial region of South Korea. In a nation where Western hegemonic values are strong and English is a language to be reckoned with, I chose English as my major in college, like many other students. For one thing, I felt that English would lead me to a wide range of world literatures. Eventually, it brought me to the English department at Ohio State. Since college, I developed my interest in drama and theatre, which I have continued to pursue passionately at Ohio State. One of the main new influences at Ohio State was learning about postcolonial theory and reading postcolonial literature. I encountered some postcolonial theory, such as Homi Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man,” Ngugi wa Thiongo’s “The Language of
African Literature,“ and Gayatri Spivak’s, “ Can the Subaltern Speak?,” while I was preparing for my Masters comprehensive exam in 2003. These theories about colonialism and colonial legacy immediately led me to reflect on the history, language, and culture of my own country that had endured Japanese colonialism. Before I moved on to the doctoral program in English, I deferred my enrollment one year to take some time to sort out what I really wanted to explore as a Ph.D. student. During this time I lived in Korea and taught English to secondary students while educating myself more on Korean history and postcolonialism. I had two immediate responses from this self-study: 1) a postcolonial perspective illuminates so much about my own country’s history and culture; 2) current postcolonial studies does not explain all colonial experiences, and generally equates colonialism only with the West.

Furthering my understandings of postcolonial and Indigenous studies as well as drama, theatre, and performance studies during my doctoral program, it was clear to me that I wanted to combine my two passions. I cannot forget how surprised I was when I first found my strong identifications with the cultures and the human subjects depicted in postcolonial and Indigenous literatures—novels, plays, memoirs, and poems by Nigerian, Ghanaian, Irish, American Indian, and Maori authors, to name but a few. Working on a postcolonial project as a person from a “neglected colony,” however, was not easy. Things might be different now, but, at least four years ago, some of the initial responses that I received when I said I would like to include Korea in my comparative studies of postcolonial drama were: “Define what you mean by postcolonialism,” or “I’ve never heard of Korea being discussed as the subject of postcolonial study.” Fortunately, with my candidacy exam / dissertation committee’s support and guidance, I was able to bring
Korea into the comparative dialogue with postcolonial and Indigenous theatre produced by other (former) colonial relations.

Previous Scholarship and My Project

One of the most groundbreaking books on postcolonial theatre is Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins’s *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, and Politics* (1996). This book considers “plays from Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, and the Caribbean” to provide reading and viewing strategies of postcolonial drama, using diverse topical categories. The book consists of six main sections: 1. Re-citing the classics: Canonical Counter-Discourse, 2. Traditional Enactments: Ritual and Carnival, 3. Post-colonial Histories, 4. The Languages of Resistance, 5. Body Politics, 6. Neo-Imperialism. Under these sections are located such topics as “counter-discourse and the canon,” “ritual,” “carnival,” “fracturing colonialist history,” “story-telling,” “Creole and Pidgin,” “Race,” “gender,” “framed bodies,” “global neo-imperialism,” and “tourism” (v-vi). This book is an important first study to examine such a wide range of postcolonial plays, “intersect[ing] [them] with and develop[ing] an understanding of post-colonial theories” (“Abstract,” Routledge). *Post-colonial Drama*’s interpretive frameworks are highly useful and convenient, and equip readers of postcolonial drama with postcolonial theory-infused dramatic and performance critical vocabularies.

There are other introductory books on postcolonial drama/theatre, such as Brian Crow and Chris Banfield’s *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theatre* (1996), as well as Bruce King’s *Postcolonial English Drama: Commonwealth Drama Since 1960* (1992). Crow and Banfield deal with the work of “major dramatists from Third-World and
subordinated cultures in the First World” (“Abstract,” Cambridge), such as Soyinka (Nigeria), Athol Fugard (South African), Derek Walcott (West Indian), August Wilson (African American), Jack Davis (Aboriginal), and Badal Sircar (Indian). Another recent book on postcolonial theatre is Awam Amkpa’s *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (2004), which places Nigerian postcolonial theatre (Part I) in dialogue with England’s anti-imperial theatre (Part II).

Like these books, my project engages postcolonial drama and performance beyond one area study, but my study is distinct from all the existing models in its methodology and frame. First, all these books have an exclusive focus on Anglophone postcolonial drama and performance, with the exception of Crow and Banfield’s, which features two (out of six) chapters on English translations of Indian plays originally written in Bengali and Kannada. My dissertation is bilingual in that it discusses Korean plays written in Korean.

The wide (but brief) coverage of the copious plays in Gilbert and Tompkins’s *Post-Colonial Drama*, under numerous topical headings, makes their book more of a survey of the field; hence, their study is different in nature from my comparative study in which I immerse myself in each of my case studies (e.g., the area, authors, and specific texts) to develop a comparative view (see the section, “Comparative Approach and Cultural Literacies,” in the Introduction). Further, another critical difference between my study and Gilbert and Tompkin’s study is that Gilbert and Tompkins include both settlers’ and Indigenous people’s plays from Australia and Canada in their study of “Post-colonial Drama.” Gilbert and Tompkins do note the differences between settlers’ and Indigenous people’s works, showing that the Indigenous subjects have more
disadvantages than settler subjects, and calling settler nations “settler-invader colonies” (6). However, even with this distinction, including works by these two politically asymmetrical groups under the same “post-colonial drama” rubric implies thinking in a paradigm that, as Indigenous studies scholar Chadwick Allen asserts, “privilege[s] […] the ‘plight’ of the [indigenous minority peoples’] oppressors” (29). Gilbert and Tompkins write about the dilemma of such regions as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand that “neither quite satisfy the requirements for acceptance into the ‘first’ and ‘old’ world of Europe, nor are they ‘poor’ enough to be included in the economically and politically determined ‘third-world,’ a term that is still used on occasion to define the post-colonial world” (6). While they include Canada and Australia, they do not include the United States because of its economic and political power.1 Unlike Gilbert and Tompkins, I believe that the “criteria” for postcolonial communities should be determined not so much by the community’s (variable and changeable) economic status, as by the historical (un)consciousness of the colonized or formerly colonized groups, specifically those whose collective cultural identities were placed under severe challenges through policies of assimilation and coercion to the dominant culture. Consequently, my project does not discuss settlers’ plays in my postcolonial/Indigenous study. To clarify different political realities further, I also distinguish postcolonial regions with territorial independence from Indigenous people under settler nation-states, both in my dissertation title and within my chapters; their circumstances and histories have a lot in common, but they are not exactly on a horizontal plane.

Crow and Banfield’s study, on the other hand, is somewhat closer to my methodology in the sense that their chapters show a clear level of immersion into each
site of examination. However, whereas their study does not have a specific focus, except that they discuss major postcolonial playwrights’ works from “the Third-World and subordinated culture in the First World,” my project does. I believe that a clear focus or a question beyond the similar situations of investigation sites strengthens my comparative study. Amkpa’s study, which compares the former colony’s postcolonial works with the former empire’s anti-Imperial works, has a clearer organizing focus than other previous postcolonial theatre scholarship. However, perhaps in his attempt to see the good-intentions of both Nigerian and English artists’ works, he surprisingly gives a “postcolonial identity” to the former colonial center. Ampka writes, “They [English playwrights] acknowledged, indeed celebrated, England’s emerging postcolonial identity by imagining nationhood through the prism of cultural pluralism” (16, my emphasis). I understand that England might have what Ampka calls “postcolonial desire,” but this desire does not make England “[invent] postcolonial national destinies” (Ampka 17), especially when, as Ampka indicates, Nigeria continues to live with colonial legacies. Overall, Ampka’s conclusion seems rather too leveling of the different historical, political, and economical positions between the former colony and the former empire:

I saw dramaturgies of resistance in the contexts of both Nigeria as well as its former master England, as sharing a common allegiance to what I have already described as postcolonial desires, that is the aspiration to overcome the legacies of colonialism by imagining alternative universes anchored in democratic cultural pluralism. (16, original emphasis)

Even while my study attends to the complexities of binary pairs, such as the colonizer/colonized and the West/non-West, I maintain a basic boundary between colonizers’ subject positions and those of the colonized, as well as settlers’ subject
positions and Indigenous people’s. National independence or postcolonial desire does not make these different subject positions blurry or the same, as their historical and cultural subjectivities have distinct historical formations.

**Case Study Groups**

Like the existing books on postcolonial drama and theatre, my comparative study does not, and cannot, cover a comprehensive range of all postcolonial and Indigenous regions. However, my dissertation examines dramatic and performance texts from four groups that underwent (and/or continue to endure) distinctive and representative colonial relations—Ireland, Nigeria, Native North America, and Korea. Ireland is situated in an interesting position in that it was colonized by and fought for liberation from England, and yet, unlike most other (formerly) colonized peoples, the Irish are white and European. Nigeria represents a classical colonial/postcolonial model with a British colonial center. Native North America is significant in that Indigenous people in this region continue to fight colonial/imperial forces on their lands, reclaiming their history and rights. Korea, which endured Japanese colonialism and its legacy, is an unexpected case for many Euro-American scholars but one that pushes the boundaries of Eurocentrism even within postcolonial studies. Postcolonial literary studies, in particular, have privileged the literature of former western colonies, and have focused exclusively on European language literatures (especially English). Korea presents a complex case in that it deals with both non-Western colonialism (Japanese) and its legacy of Western hegemony.
In its investigative and linguistice range, therefore, my dissertation challenges orthodox postcolonial scholarship, the perspective of which is limited to the experiences of the formerly colonized peoples in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. Examining artworks produced by the above four culturally different regions poses challenges. However, it can lead to productive results at the global and local scales if the study is channeled through an effective focus.

**Initial Focus**

For my comparative study of drama and performance from colonized or formerly colonized regions, my initial focus was mainly an aesthetic question which I had begun to form slowly during the time of my personal exploration of different but related areas of interests. In college and during the Masters program at Ohio State, I had been working on Beckett’s and Pinter’s drama, or so-called “absurdist theatre.” Partly inspired by my own dual interests in absurdist theatre and postcolonial theatre, I wanted to investigate how these two theatres might possibly intersect. I was particularly interested in the political aspects of both theatres. In addition, what interested me further was the historical intersection between absurdist theatre’s popularity and canonization in the 1950s and 60s and drama and performance texts that postcolonial and Indigenous artists began to produce from the same period onward. This historical and political intersection seemed to me a productive site that had never been examined. I was aware that both existentialist plays and absurdist theatre have been quite popular in Korea, and that certain Korean playwrights are associated with this theatre. And it is curious that along with many Korean scholars, I (a person from a postcolonial region) developed a strong interest in
plays that are called absurdist. There was something about the bleak outlook, 
tragicomedy, and avant-gardism in absurdist theatre that appealed to me. After all, as 
many would agree, Beckett’s work is about suffering, frustration, and failure. Given the 
on-going form of colonialism or colonial legacy that most (formerly) colonized regions 
have endured even after World War II or independence, I hypothesized that absurdist 
theatre’s sentiments of alienation and discord might explain certain, if not all, 
postcolonial artists’ dispositions as well.

With regard to this question, I was not unaware of the danger of imposing a 
Western theatre form to explicate postcolonial and Indigenous drama and performance. 
Because of this concern, I phrased my initial main questions for my dissertation in an 
intentionally exploratory way: to examine how and why some artists might show certain 
affinities with absurdist motifs, and how and why some might diverge from them. I 
thought this exploratory question would be enough to prevent the flaws of forcing an 
argument. It turned out that it both was and wasn’t.

Revision

My ideas for revision did not come through a euphoric flash of insight, but as an 
excruciatingly painful moment of feeling that I was wrong. In a way, having never taken 
a course on postcolonial theatre (even now, this course is rarely offered in most 
universities), and with a handful of introductory or survey books on postcolonial theatre 
from geographically limited areas, it was perhaps natural that I could have only begun 
with an oblique bird’s eye view of this field. Given this circumstance, in hindsight, it also 
seems natural that I was able to see the important patterns (to which I did not pay enough
attention at the beginning) in my comparative study more clearly, only when I was moving to my third case study group.

I learned it the hard way. My essay on an aspect of South Korean theatre, which I revised from my paper for the working group at The American Society of Theatre Research (ASTR), was already accepted by *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, and would be handed to the publisher in a week. I had already worked hard on this essay, within my capacity, going over it as many times as I could to make sure that the essay was as accurate and true as possible. The publication occasion pushed me harder to think more deeply about my arguments. I remember that those days I often woke up in the morning, feeling troubled, and thinking that something must be done to the essay. One day, while I was researching more about my next chapter on American Indian artists, it suddenly dawned on me that I was not paying adequate attention to paradigmatic shifts in artists’ choices in my case studies, and because of that, my approach in the manuscript for JDTC was also partially (luckily not entirely!) flawed. I was in a panic. My fears confirmed by Professor Erickson’s comments, I immediately went ahead and managed to revise an aspect of my argument, fortunately before the manuscript was passed to the publisher. Consequently, the revision of my essay on South Korean theatre, which was part of my dissertation, also prompted me to revise my dissertation thesis, and led me to restructure my dissertation—from the previous ethnically divided chapters to one that is based on concepts.

**Paradigm Shift**
“American Indian renaissance,” “the modernization of tradition,” “re-indigenization,” and “the re-discovery of cultural identity.” These are some of the phrases that often characterize contemporary postcolonial and Indigenous arts. Even at the beginning of my project, I was aware that many postcolonial artists draw on their tradition, and that postcolonial and Indigenous cultures have come to achieve a visible “renaissance.” But I did not realize how global was the scale of these phenomena which have taken place/are taking place, and, more importantly, how concurrently they were/are occurring. As my study progressed, patterns emerged. The period of the 1970s kept coming up in several case study groups of mine as a specific shifting point. Even if it does not neatly coincide with this period, my study suggests that, in each postcolonial or Indigenous culture, there has been a certain shifting point from which more postcolonial and Indigenous artists began to use their heritage more actively and more creatively, with more confidence and conviction. I was particularly struck by the ways in which the shift to cultural heritage is shown within many individual artists’ careers (for more details of this shift, see the chapters and the conclusion).

**Methodology/ Main Questions**

My initial focus, the lens of absurdist theatre motifs, worked well to a certain point (particularly for the works produced during the early decades after the Second World War). But, for a lot of postcolonial and Indigenous works from the later phase, I realized that I needed a different focus: namely, pre-colonial/indigenous cultural memory. What connects these two seemingly different focuses—absurdist and pre-colonial/indigenous cultural memory—is a more central focus at the heart of my project:
the artists’ navigation of diverse global and local artistic options within shifting historical contexts. This new revised focus places a greater emphasis on the interconnection between aesthetics and history.

Not surprisingly, many scholars of postcolonial theatre address artists’ use of heritage and cultural memory. In fact, they usually begin with, or focus mainly on, these recuperatory aspects of postcolonial and Indigenous arts. The uniqueness of my study is that it a) traces and examines the transition from before-the-shift and after-the-shift, b) investigates the ways in which postcolonial and Indigenous artists navigate global and local artistic possibilities, and c) explores the reasons for, and the significance of, this shift. Through a focused analysis of both artworks themselves and artists’ choices within global and local intersecting influences, my study explicates complex intertextualities in dramatic and performance texts from four distinctive (formerly) colonized regions.

While my dissertation, dealing with a diverse range of (post)colonial cultures in shifting historical contexts, should be multi-perspectivist, it is based on four central perspectives—postcolonial, historicist, performance studies-oriented, and glocal. By a postcolonial perspective, I mean that I am fundamentally interested in respecting and writing from the perspectives of the (formerly) colonized subject positions, which is different from applying a particular set of postcolonial theories to entire sites of investigation that reflect diverse (post)colonial cultures. Depending on the given texts and areas, I use more specific postcolonial or Indigenous theories, if they are necessary. By a historicist perspective, I mean that I contextualize my case studies in their multiple historical contexts, with particular attention to biographies, interviews, and regional/national/global histories, as well as theatre and performance histories of each
area, as much as I can. By performance-studies orientation, I mean that I analyze dramatic, performance, and archival texts, in terms relevant to, and building on, existing conversations in the fields of drama, theatre, and performance studies. By a glocal perspective, I mean that I consider both global and local contextual factors in my analysis.

**Key Concepts**

Structurally, my dissertation is divided into two parts, engaging the two main configurations of postcolonial and Indigenous drama and performance within global and local circuits of artistic possibilities. Here, I will briefly explain two key concepts, “glocality” and “glocal-locality,” which organize my chapters. First, I clarify that I use the words global and local as relative terms. The global covers wider areas than the local. Further, roughly speaking, global culture refers to something at the center of globally widespread knowledge, whereas local culture is located at the periphery or off-the-center of global understanding.

For the etymology and evolution of the term “glocal,” it will be useful to review Singaporean theatre scholar Eng-Beng Lim’s detailed footnote explanation in his article on *Asian Boys Vol. 1*, a queer play produced in Singapore:

Based on the origin and the subsequent use of the term, “glocal” refers to the simultaneity and co-presence of globality/locality and universality/particularity, and to the intersections of these seemingly polarizing tendencies.

Despite the term’s capitalistic business origin, and deviating from Robertson’s own attitude to the term (see the Conclusion), the usage of the term “glocal” in cultural studies, and, emergently, in drama and theatre studies, tends to place more emphasis on locality. Evan Winet, guest editor of the Spring 2009 special section on “Glocal Dramatic Theories” in the Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, writes that “[g]locality describes the adaptation of elements of global culture to serve the specific contexts and exigencies of local communities and cultural traditions” (43, my emphasis). Winet goes on to explain that this term “represents an alternative to the hegemonic interpretation of globalization as a unidirectional totalizing process, and a lens through which to attend to what Arjun Appadurai has described as our ‘many modernities’” (43). My use of “glocality” in the dissertation follows Winet’s and other cultural studies scholars’ deployment of the term as a way to stress local particularities in the midst of, and in intersections with, global and globalizing influences. Consequently, Chapter One in Part I considers the political and local aspects of absurdist theatre, as opposed to “universal”
and “apolitical” understandings of that theatre. Chapter Two in Part II is concerned with how the motifs of globally dominant absurdist theatre in the 1960s and early 70s are localized, or come to show particularities, in certain postcolonial plays.

Compared to the terms “global” or “globalization,” the “glocal” paradigm encourages us to consider both global and local components interrelated in cultural formations. However, glocality does not distinguish different modes of global and local cultures at the temporal and political levels. On the other hand, whereas Raymond Williams’s cultural Marxist classification of residual, emergent, and dominant cultures consider the political and temporal aspects of cultures, his concepts, conversely, lack spatial explanatory power that the discourse of glocality brings. Therefore, particularly in Part II, I combine an understanding of temporal and political distinctions among cultures (Williams’ concepts included) with the spatially-attuned discourse of glocality. In other words, Part II pays special attention to local cultural memories that originate from the culture’s suppressed/ repressed past via colonial history and Western hegemonic values, which are distinct from other contemporary local cultures within the communities. I conceptualize postcolonial and Indigenous artists’ desire to turn these residual cultures back to the heart of their artworks on global and local terms. Extrapolating from Korean playwright/director Oh’s case, Chapter Three provides the definition of what I call “glocal-locality.” Chapters Four and Five as well as the Conclusion elaborate and explore this mode of global navigation further.

**Dramatic and Performance Text Selection**
Although Gilbert and Tompkins focus on postcolonial artworks’ “expressions of resistance to colonization” (2, my emphasis), I would prefer to consider postcolonial works as those that express the colonized or formerly colonized people’s desire to come to terms with a past saturated with colonialism and its effects, and envision alternative (postcolonial) futures. I believe this definition is more enabling because the focus on resistance could potentially limit our understandings of postcolonial theatre to mainly that of “protest” or “resistance” theatre, and because artworks in certain (formerly) colonized regions might not necessarily draw on familiar postcolonial rhetoric but nonetheless work to envision a more self-determined future. Accordingly, the selected works for my analysis in the chapters are not necessarily vocally resistant to colonialism specifically, but they nonetheless respond to their past and present implications with colonialism, often allegorically and metaphorically. Also, because of my initial focus on absurdist theatre, selected works tend to be on the side of the avant-garde with non-realistic and non-linear forms. This means that some well-known postcolonial plays written in the form of dramatic realism are not included in the dissertation. Nonetheless, all the works analyzed in the chapters are created by well-known writers and performers in their fields, some of them generally considered as representative writers of their fields. The postcolonial playwrights and performers analyzed in these chapters also happen to be those who reside in their homelands, rather than those who are diasporic. However, though in differing degrees, all of them are exposed to global (theatre) cultures, through education and travelling, or through other venues.

Comparative Approach and Cultural Literacies
Some of the possible concerns for a comparative project like mine that involves multiple area studies might be: a. Can one have a cross-culturally comparative project without making any sweeping generalizations? b. Isn’t the study’s depth sacrificed for its breadth? As I have briefly indicated in the section “Previous Scholarship and My Project” in the Introduction, my approach to this comparative study was to try to immerse myself as sufficiently as I could in each area study, within the time/funding limits of my dissertation process. I used this approach to develop a truly comparative view and to obtain a level of depth as well as breadth. This approach required patience, and a great deal of what might be called “submerging” in each area with a comparative focal lens. As I moved through each case study group, I had to invest time first in surveying the area field and the region’s general historical context (listening to major scholarly voices within the field) and in examining a range of “candidate texts” for my analysis. Consequently, my understanding of postcolonial drama and performance is informed and influenced by numerous texts that are not necessarily included in my analysis and arguments, not only through my dissertation research but also through my candidacy exam preparation. Having written my dissertation, I see that some chapters still require more of the “submerging” than others, but this direction was at least necessary to situate my analysis within multiple local contexts.

What helped me greatly in my comparative study was that I was rooted in some of the areas. Because I have continued to pursue my interest in Western absurdist theatre since college, I have obtained a level of foundation in plays of this theatre genre. Further, importantly, when I began to work on South Korean theatre, I soon realized that I could go deeper into this field because of my native language and native cultural literacy.
Working on the chapter about South Korean theatre was a particularly emotional experience. It soon became clear to me that I was seeing humans in history through the dramatic and performance texts, not just dramatic characters on the page for analysis. After this experience, I have tried to apply the same type of attitude and sensitivity to American Indian, Irish, and Nigerian texts. For these areas, I had to acquire cultural literacy by “submerging” myself more in the field. Like learning a second language, however, I feel that this method is not impossible. Further, historical commonalities and cultural affinities among the cultures that underwent colonialism facilitated the learning process. In this process, while I was able to see the diversity and uniqueness of these cultures more clearly, I was also able to see that what some area scholars describe as unique aspects of their cultures have global connections with other (formerly) colonized cultures as well.

**Chapters**

**PART I: GLOCALITY**

Chapter One engages with what is often called absurdist theatre, a major avant-garde European theatre of the 1950s and 60s, constituted by such writers as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter, whose cultural identities originate from the margins of Western culture. Analyzing absurdist plays, I engage the heterogeneity of the theatre of the “West,” reveal absurdist plays’ “political unconscious,” and prepare for the following chapter about postcolonial playwrights’ relationship with this theatre. Section One theorizes unsettling jokes of a political nature, or what I call “absurd jokes,” in the works of Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, and Samuel Beckett, building on but departing from
Freud’s joke theory. Section Two focuses on the Irish aspects of Beckett’s works, discusses diasporic/exilic/cosmopolitan motifs in his works (comparable to certain postcolonial symptoms), and offers a postcolonial reading of *Waiting for Godot*.

Chapter Two examines the intersection between global theatre trends and local agency, analyzing how playwrights of different postcolonial nations have engaged with the motifs of absurdist theatre. Sections One and Two discuss Korean playwright Jo-Yeol Park and Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi, respectively, examining how they use absurdist theatre (especially Beckett’s) for their local political engagement. I also address local critics’ resistance to this conscious borrowing of Western theatre. Section Three investigates how a female playwright from a postcolonial nation appropriates this traditionally male-authored genre. Irish playwright Marina Carr’s *Low in the Dark* is replete with images of subversive maternity and gender transgression.

PART II: GLOCAL-LOCALITY

Chapter Three traces Korean playwright/director Taesuk Oh’s move from his early plays that controversially evoked “absurdist” theatre to his later plays that center on Korean traditional heritage. To demonstrate this shift, I analyze Oh’s arguably most tradition-inspired play, *Chunpung’s Wife* (1976), a recording of its 1999 production, Oh’s comments in interviews, as well as literary sources to which his play alludes. From this analysis, I extrapolate a specific mode of glocality, or what I call “glocal-locality,” which is distinct from Singaporean scholar Eng-Beng Lim’s postmodernist use of the term glocality. Oh’s syncretism is centered on, or rooted in, indigenous local memories that had been suppressed via colonial history and Western hegemonic values. Many other
postcolonial and Indigenous artists share this global navigation that is fundamentally inspired by cultural self-apprehension.

Chapter Four responds to critics’ prevalent view that Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*... evokes Greek mythology. I analyze the play, and Carr’s comments about her playwriting, by way of the traditional Celtic belief system and the Celtic archetypal motifs of the “Daughters of Branwen” preserved in Irish mythological and folkloric stories. This approach illuminates how *By the Bog of Cats*... functions as an allegory of the suppression of Celtic culture, that culture’s perseverance nonetheless, and its power to bestow distinct cultural identities. Further, my methodology of drawing on lesser-known local traditions and myths that originate from the culture of the given artwork stresses the importance of a local contextual reading for an artwork, over the often uncritical application of a globally dominant interpretive paradigm.

Chapter Five examines a radio play by Monique Mojica (Rappahannock/Kuna) and a rehearsal performance of James Luna (Luiseño) on multiple-performance levels, such as dramatic text, broadcast recording, voice acting, rehearsal DVD footage, and book performance. I argue that Mojica’s use of an exclusively sonic medium, radio, and Luna’s multi-media performance art update, respectively, American Indian oral storytelling tradition and embodied tradition. This chapter shows Indigenous groups’ link to and distinction from postcolonial cultures with territorial independence, and discusses American Indian agency, (Indigenous female) subjectivities, performance media, and the idea of evolving cultural “essence” and artistic syncretism.

In the Conclusion, I connect my discussion about postcolonial playwrights and absurdist theatre to studies of adaptation and appropriation, and argue that glocalizing
Beckett, for instance, complicates predominantly resistance-focused responses to the Western canon in postcolonial theatre scholarship. I engage with the significance of the paradigmatic shift that my case studies show, clarify where my view of glocality and glocal-locality stands amongst existing debates on globalization, and stress the need for more spatio-temporally and politically sensitive discussion of cultural syncretism to offset homogenizing discourses. Further, I discuss the implications of new interpretive methodologies that place a lateral emphasis on colonized-to-colonized connections.
PART I

GLOCALITY
CHAPTER 1

FROM OFF-THE-CENTER OF THE WEST:
POST-WORLD WAR II “ABSURDIST” THEATRE

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Immediately after WWII, a group of European playwrights (including Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, Rumanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco, and ex-prisoner and homosexual playwright Jean Genet), mostly living in France as outsiders, produced plays that were soon categorized as the Theatre of the Absurd by theatre scholar Martin Esslin. The Theatre of the Absurd, although it was not a conscious movement declared by these playwrights, was the most prominent avant-garde theatre genre of the 50s and 60s, countering theatrical Realism (a 19th and early 20th-century theatre genre concerned with maintaining the illusion of reality on stage). Scholars generally agree that experimental absurdist theatre grew out of the postwar zeitgeist, responding to the atrocity and human cruelty of World War II (especially the Holocaust) and/or expressing the outsider’s perspective on language and social structures.

In preparation for the following chapter about postcolonial playwrights’ relationship with absurdist theatre, this chapter will examine the “political unconscious” of absurdist theatre, and engage the heterogeneity of the theatre of the “West.” Chapter
One will demonstrate the latent political power of absurdist theatre by analyzing representative absurdist plays with a focus on the structures of unsettling jokes employed in those plays. Section Two will focus on the Irish aspects of Beckett’s works, discuss diasporic/exilic/cosmopolitan motifs in his works (comparable to certain postcolonial symptoms), and offer a postcolonial reading of *Waiting for Godot*.

**1. Absurd Jokers: Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, and Samuel Beckett**

Plays that are called absurdist tend to have a mixture of comedic elements, black humor, and/or tragic pathos. It is the combination of, or contrast among, these varied elements in these plays that accentuates each kind of sentiment. These elements in absurdist theatre are interwoven and cannot easily be separated as each contributes to, or makes up part of, the others. Many scholarly works have illuminated the source or the continuing tradition of comedy in the absurdist works of such playwrights as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee. It is now well established that the absurdist plays that emerged in the 1950s and ’60s continue the long comedic tradition of clowning, the Irish and English music hall, American vaudeville, and the silent film comedy. However, the menacing and tragic side of the comedy in absurdist plays remains under-theorized: This section explores the logic of that side of absurdist works. As for major sites of this unsettling energy in absurdist plays, I propose what I call absurd jokes, a particular kind of joke often employed in, but not limited to, absurdist theatre. While black humor, broadly surveyed in André Breton’s *Anthology of Black Humor* (1940), refers to writing that combines appalling or morbid elements with comedy, this
section will provide a specific definition of absurd jokes, which are part of the larger category of black humor.

My theorization of “absurd jokes” stems from Sigmund Freud’s theory of jokes in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). I follow Freud’s basic understanding of the term joke (witz in German), which stresses the theatricality of jokes. In this section, I use the word theatrical to describe an event in which there is a heightened sense of the presence of an audience that has relationships with what it perceives, and I use theatricality as a noun form of theatrical. I theorize “absurd jokes” because Freud’s joke theory is insufficient to account for a particular type of joke that often appears in absurdist theatre: namely, jokes that are not designed to make others laugh. I call these absurd jokes because I intend on keeping with Martin Esslin’s definition of the absurd, which adds Albert Camus’s notion of the absurd to the conventional definition of absurd: “out of harmony with reason or propriety” (qtd. in Esslin 23). In keeping with Camus’s notion that the absurd produces a sense of “nausea” in people when they are faced with “the image of what [they] are,” or of “man’s own inhumanity” (Camus 15), absurd jokes are serious jokes pertaining fundamentally to characters’ existence in works that concern humanity; absurd jokes are thus “out of harmony” with Freud’s joke theory.

**Freud’s Theory of Jokes and Theatre**

When we think of Freud’s theory of jokes, we have to remember that the original German word witz has a broader meaning than the English word wit and differs slightly from the English word joke. Wit tends to have a restricted meaning, reserved only for the
“most refined and intellectual kind of jokes” (xxx), according to James Strachey, the editor and translator of Freud’s writing on jokes. However, \textit{witz} includes such diverse items as witty, hostile, obscene, funny, and nonsensical comments and stories. At the same time, Strachey finds the English word \textit{joke} itself rather too broad, since it covers the German word \textit{scherz} (something like \textit{jest} in English). Freud distinguishes \textit{witz} from riddles (184), and points out that joke-technique alone, such as in puns and double meanings, is insufficient to characterize the nature of jokes (86). Freud’s main contribution to the specific definition of \textit{witz}, or joke, is that he accentuates a theatrical structure of the joke-work and makes that theatricality essential for the event of joking.

Freud states that the joke-work consists of three components—the first person (the self), the second person (the object of the joke), and the third person (the outside person), which I will call in this section the joker, the butt of the joke, and the audience for the joke. The theatricality of jokes becomes clearer when Freud makes a sharp distinction between the comic and jokes. Whereas the comic requires the first and second components only—“the self and the person who is the object” (176)—“a joke, on the contrary, \textit{must} be told to someone else” (175). We can have a comic situation without a third-person who listens to our story or joke. However, telling a joke is a theatrical event, which necessitates an audience. I would add that although the self and the second person have the capacity to imagine themselves as their own audiences, in the comic situation the self is not considered a joker since the self has not yet made any verbal or gestural speech-act about the situation with a \textit{desire} to affect a certain audience in a certain way. In other kinds of speech-acts, such as riddles, the first person also requires or, at least, imagines an audience, but these acts do not necessarily have a butt of the joke; these acts,
too, can function as jokes if they create a theatrical context, having all three components of the joke-work. My section follows the joke’s theatricality deriving from Freud’s triangulation of the joke-work, while it complicates Freud’s joke theory and demonstrates a collapsed triangulation by positing the Joker’s and the Butt of the joke’s capacity to imagine themselves as the joke’s audience.

Francesca Coppa notes the theatrical structure of jokes, illuminated in Freud’s theory, and employs the theory to explain “important jokes,” or what she also calls “sacred jokes,”9 in Pinter’s early plays, such as The Room, The Dumb Waiter, A Slight Ache, and The Birthday Party. Coppa argues that Pinter’s early plays are political because his plays are “structured like Freud’s tendentious jokes,” (44) which illustrate “dominance and subjugation” (45). Coppa aptly explains that in order to laugh at a (tendentious) joke, one needs to ally oneself with the Joker (or the aggressor), not with the Butt of the joke (or the victim). With regard to Pinter’s jokes, which often do not result in the laughter of the joke’s audience, Coppa insightfully argues that Pinter’s “important jokes” lead the third person to have a moment of uncertainty rather than to laugh. In Pinter’s “important jokes,” the third person begins to question his alliance with the Joker, and thus does not fulfill what Freud posited as the third person’s expected role of laughing at the joke.

While it is true, as Coppa has stated, that Pinter’s plays are structured like Freud’s tendentious jokes, one can in fact argue that not only tendentious jokes but any successful jokes in general require the control of the Joker—the director, actor, and often author of his or her performance of the joke—over the joke’s audience and the Butt of the joke.10 Further, Coppa’s culminating argument about the third person’s unusual response in
Pinter’s plays (having doubt about his or her alliance instead of laughing at the joke) shows that her conclusion in fact moves away from Freud’s joke theory.

This section makes a clear distinction between Pinter’s “important jokes” (i.e., absurd jokes) and Freud’s (tendentious or non-tendentious) jokes, and argues that notable jokes in absurdist plays and jokes discussed in Freud’s theory are in fact structured quite differently. I want to push Coppa’s insightful observation of “important” or “sacred jokes” further, because jokes in absurdist plays often do much more than just make the joke’s audience uncertain about their alliance with the joker. In Pinter’s and other absurdist plays, the audiences for the joke not only question their relationship with the joker but often come to realize that they are the butt, or one of the butts, of the joke. I propose that the conflation of the audience for the joke and the butt of the joke is the basic formula of absurd jokes, and argue that the third persons’ suspicion or recognition of themselves as the butt of the joke fuels a sentiment of menace in plays employing absurd jokes. The entire plot structure of Pinter’s The Dumb Waiter, in effect, follows the form of the absurd joke, while the plot structure of Krapp’s Last Tape, arguably, follows an additional formula for certain absurd jokes—the conflation of the joker, the butt of the joke, and the joke’s audience. As implied here, absurd jokes, mockery, and self-mockery are closely related. However, as we shall see, they are not the same.

In Pinter’s and other absurdist plays, absurd jokes emerge often in the midst of ordinary jokes that can be explained by Freud’s theory. However, when absurd jokes emerge, Freud’s concept of jokes collapses. In the following, I will show the characteristics of absurd jokes by noting the particular ways in which they deviate from Freud’s theory of jokes. Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Pinter’s The
Homecoming, and Beckett’s Endgame will serve as case studies for unfolding the logic of absurd jokes. While Albee’s and Pinter’s plays have more naturalistic surface details than Beckett’s, this section suggests that absurd jokes, whether verbal or non-verbal, contribute to the metatheatricality of absurdist plays and are an important characteristic that absurdist plays tend to share, these plays’ differing degrees of theatrical naturalism notwithstanding.

Conflation of the Audience for the Joke and the Butt of the Joke

Freud’s theory posits that the three components of the joke-work are distinctly separate. Freud writes that the third person, the joke’s audience, “does not correspond to the [second] person who is the object” of the joke (176). He also states that since even a slight intimacy between the third person and the second person can ruin the success of the joke, “[t]he third person cannot be ready to laugh at an excellent obscene joke if the exposure applies to a highly respected relative of his own” (177). However, absurd jokes collapse the boundary between the second and third components of the joke-work because the audience for the joke is also the joker’s (consciously or unconsciously) intended second person.

Let us first look at both Martha and George in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, a play replete with ordinary and absurd jokes. In Act II, George, a history professor at a university in New Carthage, suggests playing a game of “Get the Guests” to his wife Martha and their guests, Nick, a new faculty member in the Biology Department and his wife, Honey. This suggestion comes after Martha has ridiculed George in front of the guests for not having been successful in his department and in academia. Moreover, this
scene comes right after she hints to the guests that George is guilty of his mother’s and
father’s death, by telling them that George’s novel about a “naughty boy,” which he tried
to publish, was in fact autobiographical. Martha’s account of George’s novel is structured
as an absurd joke, since the butt of the joke, the “naughty boy,” is George—one of the
listeners to her joke, along with Nick and Honey (hence, in George’s case, the butt of the
joke = the listener of the joke). George, well aware of Martha’s mockery of him from the
onset of her absurd joking, perceives the two other listeners, Nick and Honey, as
complicit, because they allied themselves with Martha, the joker, by laughing at George:

George: I will not be made mock of!
Nick: He will not be made mock of, for Christ’s sake. (Laughs)
(Honey joins in the laughter, not knowing exactly why.) (135-6)

Before taking “revenge” on Martha through a game he calls “Hump the Hostess,”
George takes revenge on his guests first. George tells a story about his “second novel,”
which he pretends to have written:

Well, it’s an allegory, really—probably—but it can be read as straight, cozy
prose . . . and it’s all about a nice young couple who come out of the middle
west. It’s a bucolic you see. AND, this nice young couple comes out of the
middle west, and he’s blond and about thirty, and he’s a scientist, a teacher, a
scientist . . . and his mouse is a wifey little type who gargles brandy all the
time . . . and . . . (142)

As soon as George’s story begins, Nick suspects that the story might actually be about
Honey and himself and expresses his shock at George’s blunt joking. Nick utters, “No
kidding” with a “shaking” voice (143). Honey, however, initially falls into George’s
story, not having a clue that the joke is on her. In a “[d]reamy” way, she says, “I want to hear the story. I love stories” (142). However, Honey’s dreamy response changes to horror, as George continues to tell this “allegory” about a young couple, which is in fact an absurd joke, abusing the secret, revealed to him by the drunk and gullible Nick, that they did not marry for love, but for convenience and money and because of Honey’s hysterical pregnancy. Honey is “[p]uzzled” to find George’s story “familiar” (143) and begins to recognize the characters in George’s story: “I know these people…,” says Honey (145). Soon, with a feeling of “some terror,” she says, “I don’t like this story” (145), and, with “outlandish horror,” she yells at Nick, “You…told them! You told them! OOOOHHHH! Oh, no, no, no, no! You couldn’t have told them . . . oh, noooo!” (147)

Honey feels disgusted that Nick exposed their unspoken but shared secret about the nature of their relationship, and humiliated that she has become a laughingstock in front of people she does not know well. Recognizing that she was the butt of George’s joke nauseates her, and she cannot help but run out of the space where the joke was told:

HONEY (Hysterical): Leave me alone . . . I’m going . . . to . . . be . . . sick. (She runs out of the room.) (148)

As Nick’s and Honey’s responses to George’s story demonstrate, successful absurd jokes do not elicit the audience’s ordinary laughter. Rather, they elicit the audience’s anger, insecurity, nausea, or tragicomic laughter.\(^\text{14}\) Nick’s response shows that the absurd joke’s audience can be shocked and angry upon realizing that the joke is on him, while Honey’s response reveals that the joke’s audience can be horrified and nauseated. In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, it turns out that, although George is initially defeated by Martha’s
successful jokes, which he calls “Humiliate the Host” (140), he becomes the stronger joker in the end. We can also say that both George and Martha use their guests both as the objects of, and as the audience for, their collaborative mockery.

If Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? shows two competing, but ultimately collaborative, absurd jokers (George and Martha), Pinter’s The Homecoming presents even more characters competing through absurd jokes. All male characters except Sam try to take Ruth as both the object of their competition and the audience for their games. For instance, the cryptic stories that Lenny tells Ruth, his brother’s wife, when they first meet in the house at night, are structured as absurd jokes. When Lenny asks Ruth if he can hold her hand, Ruth asks him why. Lenny answers in the form of an absurd joke:

Lenny: I’ll tell you why.
(Slight pause.)
One night, not too long ago, one night down by the docks, I was standing alone under an arch, [...] when a certain lady came up to me and made me a certain proposal. [...] Well, this proposal wasn’t entirely out of order and normally I would have subscribed to it. [...] The only trouble was she was falling apart with the pox. So I turn it down. Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn’t be expected to tolerate [...] It was on my mind at the time to do away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it. [...] I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that. (38-9)

In Lenny’s story, the lady “with the pox” (according to Lenny’s “decision”) is the butt of Lenny’s joke, through which Lenny advertises his sexual magnetism, his potential for violence, and possibly his pimp identity. This kind of joke is repeated in his subsequent story about an old lady who asked for Lenny’s help with her iron mangle and whom he gave “a short-arm jab to the belly” (41). Lenny’s very first story about the commonplace
clock being loud at night can also be regarded as an absurd joke, with the nocturnal clock suggesting Ruth’s hidden identity. However, Ruth, the listener, remains surprisingly calm throughout Lenny’s series of jokes; there is neither nausea like Honey’s nor anger like Nick’s. She seems to understand that in all these stories Lenny is trying to make her the butt of his jokes. She sees that Lenny’s stories of violence against these women are veiled threats, the women’s fates standing in for Lenny’s projections of Ruth’s possible fates, if she does not comply with his demands. However, Ruth is a type of audience who refuses to give the absurd joker what he wants. Lenny’s absurd jokes fail to produce fear and insecurity in Ruth, as she questions him (“Why?”; “How did you know she was diseased?”; “Have you?”; and “Could you?” (38-40)), disagrees with him (“[The ashtray]’s not in my way” and “I haven’t quite finished [drinking the water] (41)”; and puts him down, by calling him “Leonard” (41), the name his mother gave him. Absurd jokes can fail in the face of a resistant and resilient third person.

When Lenny insists on taking Ruth’s glass in his attempt to gain control over her, Ruth says, “If you take the glass . . . I’ll take you” (42), implying the sexual and possessive meanings of the verb take. Lenny responds to her, saying “How about me taking the glass without you taking me?” (42), to which Ruth responds, “Why don’t I just take you?” (42). When Freud says that a joke is a “double-dealing rascal who serves two masters at once” (190), he means that there is a give-and-take of pleasure between the joker and the joke’s audience, and they are mutually dependent for their pleasure on the joke. Whereas Freudian jokers are interested in giving the “greatest possible pleasurable effect on the third person” (190), an absurd joker’s pleasure is at the expense of the joke’s audience. Given that an absurd joke has to serve only one “master,” Ruth ascends to the
position of the absurd joker, defeating Lenny. Lenny’s comment, “You’re joking” (42), which he says to trivialize Ruth’s boldness, reveals his insecurity, and at the same time says more than he knows or admits: Ruth is, in fact, joking, and the joke is on him.

Ruth’s absurd jokes come out more strongly, perhaps, in her bodily performance than in her words. Although Freud’s joke theory is limited to verbal jokes only, I include body language in my theorization of absurd jokes. As long as the butt of the joke is conflated with the joke’s audience at the event (e.g., as long as non-verbal gestures and images create a theatrical context for the butt of mockery that is its audience), even caricatures and paintings can be considered absurd jokes. For instance, Alfred Jarry’s satirical play Ubu Roi, regarded by Esslin as one of the antecedents to absurdist theatre, is a good example of the combination of verbal and non-verbal absurd joke, using caricature and grotesquity. Ruth’s attempt in Act I to pour her water down Lenny’s throat, having him lie on her lap or on the floor, is her vision of a physical absurd joke (42-3). In so doing, Ruth renders Lenny helpless and child-like, while she herself simulates a somewhat perverse mother-figure. The image that Ruth creates is also potentially sexual; given the context of sexual aggression that Lenny has created in his attempt to assert dominance over Ruth, Ruth’s watering image connotes the fetish of urinating on a sexual partner to show domination. Through this joke, Ruth controls Lenny, throwing him into confusion and insecurity; assured of her power, she laughs shortly and smiles. Although Lenny has tried to control Ruth, he turns out to be the object of her joke. Whereas Ruth was a perceptive audience for Lenny’s joke, Lenny does not know what position he occupies vis-à-vis Ruth’s joking:
Lenny: What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal? 

*Silence.* (43)

Ruth’s verbal joke, illustrated above, which projects a potential gestural joke, has led Lenny to doubt and insecurity, two examples of the unsettling audience-responses for absurd jokes. Perhaps, one of Ruth’s most representative verbal absurd jokes is when she mocks male characters who wrestle on the topics of “the unknown,” “being and non-being,” and “a table” at the level of verbal abstraction. The male residents’ participation in this “ontological” discussion indicates that they try to challenge Teddy’s authority, a professor of philosophy, taking him, not Ruth, as the potentially dominating presence. However, Ruth knows how to draw attention to herself: “Don’t be too sure though. You’ve forgotten something. Look at me. I…move my leg” (61). Emphasizing her bodily movement over words, Ruth mocks the men who are preoccupied with their games on the verbal level only. Through her joke, with its sexual double meanings, Ruth reminds the men of her superior performative power which cuts across both verbal and physical levels: “Perhaps the fact that they [lips] move is more significant…than the words which come through them,” says Ruth (61).

The physical structure of the images and movements of the play’s ending—with Ruth relaxingly enthroned at the center of all the subjugated or bewildered male characters, some kneeling and some being patted by Ruth—embodies her non-verbal absurd joke and its impact. Right before Teddy departs for America alone, Ruth mocks his identity as her husband: “Don’t become a stranger” (88). After Teddy leaves, Ruth “sits relaxed on her chair” (88) until the end of the play. It is her telling silence and
relaxed posture through which she outwits Max who, rambling and stammering insecurely, asks her if she thinks he is too old for her and if she understands what work she has to do for the men in the house. Lenny, on the other hand, has not yet been able to answer Max’s question about Ruth’s understanding of their plan, and thus represents a stuck audience for an absurd joke, “stand[ing] still” (88). Watching Ruth touching Joey’s head lightly at the play’s end, Lenny might finally come to get Ruth’s absurd joke, as the audience in the auditorium might, as well.

**Conflation of the Joker, the Butt of the Joke, and the Audience for the Joke**

Freud writes that “we are compelled to tell our joke to someone else because we are unable to laugh at it ourselves” (190, original italics). According to his joke theory, the first person cannot laugh at his own joke, or even a joke that has already occurred to him. One laughs when a joke comes to him or her only as a surprise or as a novelty, because conscious intellectual awareness or awakening interferes with the possibility of laughter (184). Absurdist plays, however, present jokes that subvert Freud’s premise that one cannot laugh at one’s own joke, and collapse the boundaries of all three components of the joke-work. Laughing at a joke directed at oneself is in fact a crucial part of certain absurd jokes. This pathetic realization and performance of personal shortcomings adds a tragicomic dimension to the works which employ this kind of absurd joke.

George’s apparently autobiographical story about a boy’s insane laughter in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* suggests that one can laugh at one’s own joke because one can laugh at oneself. In the story, a boy who accidentally killed his mother with a shotgun finds out that he also killed his father accidentally as a result of his bad driving.
As in the following excerpt, the boy’s laughter is that of self-mockery, since he probably
laughs at the absurdity of his own unhappy condition:

GEORGE: He was not killed, of course. And in the hospital, when he was
conscious and out of danger, and when they told him that his father \textit{was} dead,
he began to laugh, I have been told, and his laughter grew and he would not
stop, and it was not until after they jammed a needle in his arm, not until after
that, until his consciousness slipped away from him, that his laughter subsided .
. stopped. And when he was recovered from his injuries enough so that he
could be moved without damage should he struggle, he was put in an asylum.
That was thirty years ago. (96)

Since the boy represents some version of George’s young adulthood and George is one of
the listeners to his own story, the story about this unfortunate boy collapses the distinct
Freudian boundaries between all three components of the joke-work. In other words,
George’s storytelling can be regarded as an act of self-mockery (i.e., the joker = the butt
of the joke = a member of the audience for the joke).

George’s concluding joke at the end of Act II is also a finely constructed case of
an absurd joke conflating all three components of the joke-work. Apparently, George and
Martha have been creating private stories about their fictive son as a substitute for their
childless lives. By this time, Martha, obsessed with the illusory son, has exposed the
existence of the son to her guests, against George’s wishes. At the end of Act II, when
George comes up with a joke that could prevent further jokes, Martha is trying to have
sexual relations with Nick in another part of the house, an instance of \textit{“would-be
infidelities”} (189), which is probably a \textit{“very old ritual”} (131) that George, possibly
impotent and infertile, lets or makes happen. Turning away from the still-present Honey,
George is \textit{“quite by himself now”} (181), and says softly:
(Very softly, so MARTHA could not possibly hear)
Martha? Martha? I have some . . . terrible news for you.
(There is a strange half-smile on his lips)
It’s about our . . . son. He’s dead. Can you hear me, Martha? Our boy is dead.
(He begins to laugh, very softly . . . it is mixed with crying). (181)

In this particular moment when George tells of the terrible news, or his terrible joke,
there is no other audience than George himself. He might be rehearsing his joke for a
future opportunity, but still he is listening to his own joke and laughing at it. His response
to his own joke is significant: a “strange half-smile” and a mixture of laughter and crying.
Here, George, the joker and the only listener, takes his and Martha’s lives as the butt of
the joke (hence, the joker = one of the butts of the joke = the audience for the joke). In
Act III, George suggests this “terrible” joke, or the game of “bringing up baby” (205), to
Martha, in the form of his revenge game on her: “I’m going to have at you […],” says
George violently (208). However, given the play’s predominant theme of “[t]ruth and
illusion” (201), George’s tender attitude toward Martha after they are left alone in the
house and his reassuring words that “[i]t was…time” (240) indicate that George’s
“terrible news” and his and Martha’s ritualistic games in the play are more mockery of
their shared lives, comprised of illusions, than mockery of their guests.

Metatheatricality and the Scope of Absurd Jokes

Repetitive behavior, as Jon Erickson writes about Krapp’s Last Tape, “convinces
one of one’s existence” (Erickson 78) and represents “attempts at survival, or endurance,
whether physical or psychic” (68). In this sense, the repeated performance of absurd
jokes in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Homecoming* can ultimately be understood as about the characters’ desire for existence. However, Beckett’s *Endgame* shows the existential nature of absurd jokes most clearly through its unconcealed concerns with life and death. Hamm, the most notable story-teller in the play, has repeatedly told a story of a man who had asked the story’s narrator for bread for his little son. In the story, the narrator is more affluent than the beggar, who lives in abject poverty. The narrator, a stand-in-for Hamm, loses his patience while responding to the beggar’s request:

> Corn, yes, I have corn, it’s true, in my granaries. But use your head. I give you some corn, a pound, a pound and a half, you bring it back to your child and you make him—if he’s still alive—a nice pot of porridge,
> 
> *(Nagg reacts)*
> a nice pot and a half of porridge, full of nourishment. Good. The colors come back into his little cheeks—perhaps. And then?
> *(Pause.)*
> I lost patience.
> *(Violently.)*
> Use your head, can’t you, use your head, you’re on earth, there’s no cure for that!
> *(Pause.)*
> *[…]*
> *(Pause. Violently.)*
> But what in God’s name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there’s manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?
> *(Pause.)* *(52-3)*

The narrator is skeptical about the possibility of life and regeneration on earth, and perceives the man as stupid for trying to combat the inevitable misery of human life. Further, the paradox of his having feared his mortality since he was young while realizing that his life of suffering has been painfully protracted makes him laugh at himself:
[...] And then I imagined already that I wasn’t much longer for this world.

*(He laughs. Pause.)*

Well?

*(Pause.)*

Well? Here if you were careful you might die a nice natural death, in peace and comfort.

*(Pause.)* (53)

Hamm’s entire story about the beggar and his child, which is regarded as the origin story of Clov’s servitude to Hamm, is an absurd joke in which the narrator mocks the futility of the beggar’s attempt to save his child (the butt of Hamm’s joke = the beggar’s human effort for regeneration). However, ironically, Hamm is also touched by the beggar’s effort and consents to help him. The last witty line quoted above, in particular, is a little absurd joke contained within Hamm’s story, the larger absurd joke, since the line is not only directed at the beggar but also at himself. In that line, the butt of the joke could be his own mortality, the futility of life, and the absurdity of continuing the struggle of existence. Because the audience for this joke includes Hamm (the joker himself) and the butt of the joke refers to life on earth in general (which includes the joker’s life), this line collapses the boundaries of the three components of the joke-work.

Hamm’s father, Nagg, shares with Hamm an affinity for re-telling the same stories with variations. If Hamm’s stories are existential, Nagg’s stories push the scope of absurd jokes even further, to a metaphysical level. In his story about a tailor and God, an Englishman’s tailor keeps postponing the pick-up date for the Englishman’s trousers, promising that the trousers will be ready next time. Upon finding that the ordered trousers
are quite bungled even in three months—“the bluebells are blowing and he ballockses the buttonholes” (22)—the Englishman explodes:

“God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it’s indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!”

(Tailor’s voice, scandalized.)

“But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look—

(Disdainful gesture, disgustedly.)

—at the world—

(Pause.)

and look—

(Loving gesture, proudly.)—at my TROUSERS!”

(Pause. He looks at NELL who has remained impassive, her eyes unseeing, breaks into a high forced laugh, cuts it short, pokes his head towards NELL, launches his laugh again.) (22-3)

Like Hamm’s story, layers of absurd jokes are contained in Nagg’s story, which is itself an absurd joke, and which is placed in Endgame, a play arguably also structured as an absurd joke. First, the Englishman mocks the tailor for his slow work and lack of skill, referring to God’s creation of the world in six days. However, the tailor outwits the Englishman, indicating the inferiority of the world to the bungled trousers. The punch line of Nagg’s story is of course the tailor’s clever response to the Englishman, which reveals that the ultimate butt of Nagg’s joke is God and his creation, the universe, which in turn appears to be God’s bad joke. As demonstrated by Nagg’s story, absurd jokes are metatheatrical, with their inherent theatrical structures and their capacity to contain layers of jokes. Therefore, the weighty presence of absurd jokes in many absurdist plays that are then performed for audiences in theatres, or imagined for readers, contributes to the metatheatricality of absurdist theatre, calling attention to layers of theatrical devices that
make up theatre events. Further, Nagg’s story, which takes God and the universe as the butt of the joke, shows the potentially metaphysical scope of absurd jokes.

Throughout *Endgame*, the universe, the world, or life on earth, is presented as the butt of absurd jokes. Daily activities in life are compared to “farce” (32); the whole universe “stinks of corpses” (46); the mad painter that Hamm once met only remembers ashes (44); the idea of holding onto one’s honor, if there is any, is hilarious for Hamm and Nagg (50); and, even the idea that “humanity might start from [a flea] all over again” is perturbing for Hamm (33). These comments of apocalyptic vision are responses to the utmost misery of human existence, corresponding to such extreme human conditions as those endured in World War II, particularly the Holocaust. As what Rosette C. Lamont calls “an unidentified Beckettian aphorism” says, “*Quand on est dans la MERDE jusqu’au cou, il ne reste plus qu’à chanter*” (qtd. in Lamont 138).¹⁶ Thus, the potentially self-mocking and simultaneously irreverent and rebellious form of the absurd joke may appeal to and express both the outrage felt in the face of abominable conditions, and the fear of the futility of human action that so often accompanies the realization of the enormity and seeming inevitability of human cruelty and suffering. The emergence of absurdist drama in Europe in the years after World War II attests to how thoroughly that war, and its accompanying atrocities, changed the European psyche; a joke structure, seemingly unimaginable to Freud, who published his first German edition of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* in 1905, dominates the most lively avant-garde theatre of the post-war years.

Nell sums up the overall pathos of *Endgame* when she says, “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that” (18). In a Beckettian context, finding unhappiness the
height of comedy is more self-mockery than mockery, precisely because neither the butt of the joke (the human race or the universe) nor the audience excludes the joker. Human folly and illogicality can be so absurd that they are hilarious; but this absurdity can also stifle laughter, the further one reflects on it: 17

Hamm: The whole thing is comical, I grant you that. What about having a good guffaw the two of us together?  
Clov (after reflection): I couldn’t guffaw again today.  
Hamm (after reflection): Nor I. (pause.) (60)

Beckett’s Endgame shows the existential and metaphysical scope of absurd jokes, which allows the play to take the entire human race or the universe as the butt of the joke. The total conflation of the three components of the joke-work, within such a grand scope, brings about the tragicomic pathos that allows Beckett’s work to reach out to such a broad audience.

Thus far, in the process of explicating the logic of absurd jokes, the concepts of mockery and self-mockery have conveniently expressed the conflation of the second and third persons, and that of all three components of the joke-work. Then, what is the relation of absurd jokes to mockery and self-mockery? According to The Oxford English Dictionary, mockery has five definitions. Of those, the two most relevant to this investigation are: 1.a. (“a mocking or derisive utterance or action; an instance of mocking”) and 1.c. (“to make a mockery of: to cause to appear foolish or absurd.”) 18 If we limit ourselves to these definitions, absurd jokes can be briefly defined as mockery and/or self-mockery in a theatrical context, producing unsettling feelings in the joke’s audience. By “unsettling feelings,” I mean such states of mind as anger, shock, fear, horror, insecurity, nausea, and tragicomic laughter. By “a theatrical context,” I remain
consistent with my use of the term *theatrical* (as articulated in the introduction of this section); in the case of absurd jokes, however, the audience who is present at the event is also the butt of the mockery and/or self-mockery. Two clear differences between absurd jokes and mockery (or self-mockery) are that 1) mockery, like the comic, does not necessarily require an audience; one can make a mocking utterance about somebody or something without any audience in the setting. Further, 2) in the event of mocking, the second person (the butt of the mockery) does not need to be the same as the third person (the audience); one can mock someone or something in the presence of an audience who is not the butt of the joke. Absurd jokes, however, must be told to someone who is conflated with, or comprised by, the butt of the joke.

**Repetition of Absurd Jokes**

Freud states that jokes have short lives, as novelty is key to their full effect (188). Novelty is not an issue for absurd jokes, as old jokes or joke-patterns are often recycled, if in variations. Absurd jokes tend to have long lives, as the goal is not to make others laugh but to unsettle them through the repetition of the jokes; for the same reason, absurd jokes tend to be delivered in a long-winded way. The endings of all three plays under discussion in this essay hint at the characters’ continual engagement with absurd jokes. In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Martha describes George as one who “keeps learning the games [they] play as quickly as [she] can change the rules” (191), indicating that George and Martha have played their games with pawn-like guests before. Although George has made the decision to kill their fictive son, the play’s ending is not altogether unambiguous, since Martha remains insecure and because the same verbal ability to kill
“their son” can also revive him as well. In *Endgame*, also, retelling stories is what Nagg and Hamm live for. Although Hamm says that he will “soon have finished with [his] story” (54), we know that even at the end of the play he has his “old stancher” to talk to, if not Clov, who still remains on stage. In an extreme case, Hamm could also talk to himself, as he compares himself to “the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark” (70). Similarly, *The Homecoming*, a play featuring repeated competition among multiple absurd jokers, indicates that absurd jokes will probably continue, since Ruth has a strong inclination for on-going performances, with her propensity for “renew[ing] [her] wardrobe” (64).

These characters’ performances of their absurd jokes are, thus, ritualistic. However, they are not rituals as “self-conscious act[s]” in which the performers are “aware of” or “remind[ed]” of “the symbolic or metaphorical nature of [their] repetitions” (Erickson 68). Rather, their repeated engagement with absurd jokes in these plays appears habitual and addicted.19 In keeping with Freud’s demonstration of the deep connection among the joke-work, the dream-work, and the unconscious, these characters’ performance of absurd jokes is closer to their unconscious than self-conscious rituals with the understanding of the symbolic meaning of their repetition. My case studies, of course, show some differences in the characters’ level of self-consciousness in their repeated behavior. While Hamm and Martha could be seen as addicted to their engagement with their stories, George appears less addicted, for he is able to “end” the game by the end of the play. Arguably, Ruth is the least addicted of the absurd jokers in my case studies, as she shows the most control over, and most pleasure for, her behavior.
Absurd Jokes and Political Theatre

Ruth in *The Homecoming* is distinguished from the other absurd jokers in my case studies. Not only does she have more control over her performance, she also thoroughly enjoys it, and she does not show a single suggestion of tragicomic self-mockery in her assured performance. Absurd jokes in *The Homecoming* demonstrate that the meaning and effect of absurd jokes differ greatly, depending on who is telling the joke, and to whom. When used by a character who represents a traditionally marginalized group, absurd jokes, or mockery of the listener in a theatrical context, can be a powerful dramatic/theatrical technique to question the existing power structure, not simply a way of establishing an asymmetrical relation between the absurd joker and the joke’s audience.

In *The Homecoming*, with the exception of Sam who does not put his sexual desire into aggressive practice, all male characters assume their superiority in relation to Ruth, or women in general, as they see Ruth mainly as “a woman in the house” (83). Although Ruth does not herself explicitly attach a symbolic meaning to her subversion, we can read Ruth allegorically. Not only does she represent a resistant and resilient audience for others’ jokes on her, but she is also a successful absurd joker who, as a member of a traditionally marginalized group, makes use of absurd jokes, questioning and mocking existing male aggression against women. With her absurd jokes, the conventional male pimp’s grip on female prostitutes is overturned, the exclusive imposition of the mother/wife identity on women through the institutional force of marriage is resisted, and all other physical and verbal kinds of male dominance over women—including the habit of perceiving women as commodities—do not work as they would in a male fantasy. Is she truly empowered, or is she ultimately a slave to her own
inclination to use her sexuality to attain power? From the perspective of absurd jokes, Ruth resists even these dualistic questions and conclusions about the ending of the play. She is an actress-figure, a performer, whose understanding of the constructedness of both femininity and motherhood liberates her from rigid categories assigned to women, and lets her play the roles she likes.

In fact, all three plays considered in this essay can be read as political allegories. Not only do comedic elements in absurdist plays feed into the characters’ potential to be read as types, the use of absurd jokes (mockery and/or self-mockery) entails a degree of caricature in the context of characters’ power relations; in order to mock or laugh at somebody or something, some degree of exaggeration or distortion is necessary. Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Beckett’s *Endgame* can be read as different particular political allegories, but they are always already political due to the strong presence of self-mockery in the plays. Self-awareness to and self-reflection on the absurdity of one’s current (dishonest, hypocritical, inhuman, etc.) condition is a significant political move.

While all three plays are political, the scope of absurd jokes is varied in these plays. The structure of *Endgame* allows it to be read as an allegory for the human condition. The American national, academic, or middle-class family community is the more or less circumscribed topic of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Inside a large community, however, are marginalized groups of people, and that is the focus of *The Homecoming*. When an absurd joke is used by a member of a traditionally marginalized group and is aimed at another group, it signifies a more specific political allegory. Although Ruth’s subversion in *The Homecoming* appears to remain at the individual
level, she could be read as the collective identity of women. This allegorical reading is possible because absurdist plays tend to involve caricatures, clown-figures gone awry, and absurd jokes, which renders the subversion in these plays extendable to the larger collective identities often found in subversive and comedic political plays.

Likewise, absurd jokes, explained in this section, could be employed more consciously by playwrights and/or by characters for more overtly political (certain postcolonial, feminist, and other activist) themes than those in my case studies. American Indian playwright Hanay Geiogamah’s plays, such as *Foghorn* and *Body Indian*, make powerful use of “absurd jokes” in order to expose mainstream Americans’ misperceptions, as well as to inspire the American Indian community to self-examination. Unlike Freud’s jokes, which encourage conformity through laughter between the joker and the joke’s audience, absurd jokes are designed to unsettle the joke’s audience. It is, then, not surprising that we find a similar political current in both absurdist plays and more overtly political plays that employ these unsettling jokes.

2. Postcolonial Symptoms in Beckett

The general tendency in Beckett criticism is to regard Beckett’s work as universal, metaphysical, existentialist, and absurdist. These labels are often understood, if mistakenly, as indications that Beckett’s work has little to do with political concerns or that his work has *transcended* the political. Thus, many scholars, including biographer Anthony Cronin, describe Beckett and his work as apolitical. While it is true that Beckett was resistant to early twentieth-century Irish nationalism, or any type of ideology, James Knowlson’s biography of Beckett reveals a lesser known but significant political side of
Beckett, concerned more with human rights and justice than with patriotism, nationalism, or a specific political theory. Knowlson summarizes Beckett’s politics as following:

When, as an Irishman, he could have been neutral in World War II, he chose to join a Resistance cell of the British SOE and won the Croix de Guerre and the Medaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise. He was deeply committed to human rights; he firmly and totally opposed apartheid and was hostile from an early age to all forms of racism; he supported human rights movements throughout the world, including Amnesty International and Oxfam; he supported the freedom movement in Eastern Europe; and, although a foreigner living in France he was wary of having his residential permit withdrawn, he was involved in a number of specific political cases. (21)

Knowlson also maintains that, although Beckett “has often been treated as if he were a cold formalist dealing in abstractions” (21), his life material is buried in his works at a deep level and that “there is an intense concern in his writing with the physical, the concrete, the here and now” (21). Beckett once said: “[my] work does not depend on experience—[it is]—not a record of experience. Of course you use it” (qtd. in Knowlson 336). One of Beckett’s best friends, the painter Bram van Velde, also said that “Beckett never wrote anything that he had not lived” (qtd. in Knowlson 21). The point is that Beckett used his life experiences in such a way that they are artistically transformed into something larger—more universal and more metaphysical.

The universality of Beckett’s work does not mean that his work is apolitical or above and beyond political concerns. It means that, although Beckett’s plays do not specify particular political issues, his work encompasses political concerns at a deeper level. In his article, “Is Nothing to Be Done?,” Jon Erickson points out that Waiting for Godot tends to “have particular salience in war zones,” taking for examples Susan
Sontag’s production in Sarajevo or the play’s appreciation by Iraqi students (259). For the keen receptions and strong identifications in war zones, Erickson explains that “[t]he space of war as the failure of politics frames a very basic element of political hope in human relations for something to take the place of unending and arbitrary violence, to end the torturous waiting in a landscape where social meaning has been erased” (259). That *Waiting for Godot* was enthusiastically received by prisoners, and that it has been produced by prisoners, also attests to the political magnitude of Beckett’s work.

Locating the postcolonial in Beckett’s work is not too different from finding in it what Herbert Blau calls “political energies” (qtd. in Erickson 269). However, since the postcolonial is a term historically and culturally determined, it will involve looking into Beckett’s background and contextualizing his work in the culture and politics of his time and place. In this vein, some of the recent scholarly works on the Irishness of Beckett and his work will aid my postcolonial reading of Beckett and his work. In this section, I will first examine the presence of the postcolonial and the absurd and their cohesive connection in Beckett’s work from three main angles: 1) Beckett’s choice of language in life and writing, 2) diasporic/exilic dynamics in his life and writing, and 3) allegorical readings of his work.

**The Two Faces of Samuel Beckett: the Absurd and the Postcolonial**

Although Beckett’s symptoms evocative of the postcolonial might not be self-evident, one of the things that reveals a postcolonial dynamic in Beckett’s work is his choice of language. Although Beckett started learning French in kindergarten and became a French scholar at Trinity College, Dublin, he did not speak French regularly at home.
His French was an acquired second language. On his first trip to France during his Trinity College days, he was enthusiastic for “things French and enjoyment of speaking real French with the local residents in cafes and pensions” (Knowlson 78). His spoken and written French improved with the help of Alfred Peron, the new exchange lecturer from the Ecole Normale, France, to Trinity College (79). Later, Beckett made several visits to France working as a lecturer and as a writer. When he returned to France in 1937, France was to be his permanent home. Already in 1938-49, he was writing poetry in French (270), was translating Murphy into French in 1938-40, and after WW II, he wrote three novels and two plays in French.

Yet, Beckett did not just turn himself into a French writer. He remained a bilingual writer. He continued to translate (or, re-create) his French works into English himself (including En Attendant Godot and Fin de Partie); he wrote Krapp’s Last Tape and Happy Days in English and translated them into French; and he wrote his radio play All That Fall (set in Ireland) in English, which he and Robert Pignet together translated into French (Harrington 174). He worked in the two languages in writing and translating, and he directed in both languages. Anne Beer emphasizes that Beckett’s works came into being in the context of another culture (209), and argues that, for Beckett, “bilingualism functioned as a medium for artistic self-renewal, was driven by both aesthetic and personal need, and allowed Beckett, even after his fame was established, a kind of privacy” (210). Indeed, when Beckett said that he found writing in French “more exciting” and could write in French “without style” unlike in English, which for him was “overloaded with associations and allusions” (Knowlson 323), he was probably referring to the advantage of adopting a non-native language: gaining a new perspective, the
artistic freedom of defying and reinventing conventions, and the privacy and anonymity, achieved by resisting a single national, linguistic, and cultural category.\textsuperscript{21}

Although Beer argues that Beckett’s bilingualism was personally and artistically motivated and was “entirely voluntary” unlike that of “many African and Asian writers” who were “born into a minority language” and “thus led toward the use of a dominant colonial tongue” (214), Beckett’s bilingualism should be understood with more complexity, considering the cultural and political driving force behind it. Beckett’s bilingualism cannot be entirely personal and must also have been influenced by the cultural and literary hegemonic system of his time. It is true that, unlike many writers under colonialism, Beckett was not forced to adopt his foreign language, French. However, as Ireland had been turning into an English-speaking country since the British “imperialist, educational and mapping projects of the 1830s” (Murray 212), Beckett’s mother tongue, English, is already a sign of colonial hybridity in his home country, Ireland. Despite the burgeoning Celtic revival movement in the beginning of the twentieth century, Irish Gaelic was still not an easily available, and was even an unappealing, option for many of the educated class in Ireland—a country whose own history was not taught in most schools, including those Beckett attended. Although Beckett’s family was of the Anglo-Irish Protestant middle class, implying an ambivalent in-between identity similar to that of the \textit{pied noir}, the language he was born into carries Irish colonial history. In addition, educated urban dwellers in Ireland developed a strong attraction to the metropolitan cultures abroad. Anthony Cronin notes that “[s]ince the 1890s many Irish intellectuals and Irish writers, Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist, had preferred to live abroad” (264), many of them looking to England,
France, or America for better economic and cultural opportunities. Compared to these cosmopolitan cultures, Ireland seemed to many a restricted, narrow-minded, parochial, backward, and theocratic place—a place of Joycean “paralysis.” As for the cultural status of France, Cronin states that “[b]y 1928 the French capital was well established as the home of avant-garde modernism” (81). In this asymmetrical context of cultural/national symbolic capitals, it is not surprising that Beckett headed to France and there networked with Irish intellectual exiles, including James Joyce. Even Beer, who thought Beckett’s choice of French in his work was entirely voluntary, implicitly admits a larger hegemonic system governing Beckett: “Beckett was the offspring of a family for whom French was the obvious first foreign language, a civilizing European tongue” (211).

Here, one can clearly sense the dynamic of periphery versus center, which is historically often a consequence of colonialism and which brings about diasporic issues and identities. For many Irish writers, what mattered greatly was the relationship between Ireland and England; such writers as Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw lived and worked in England. They worked in the belly of their immediate parent country, became assimilated, or hybridized, while often keeping an ironic distance. Although Beckett did not participate in Irish nationalism or any kind of what he saw as a narrow ideology, he “hated London and was infuriated by the patronizing English habit of addressing him in the pubs and shops as ‘Pat’ or ‘Paddy’” (Knowlson 179). Because Beckett chose to work and live in France, as opposed to England, his relationship with the French center seems certainly less colonially implicated and more voluntary. However, Beckett and many other Irish exiles’ admiration of French culture and its language should be understood in
the complex system of cultural power that is implicated with colonial histories.

Beckett’s cousin, Morris Sinclair, supports Beckett’s sense of Ireland’s peripheral status:

Living in Ireland was confinement for Sam. He came up against the Irish censorship. He could not swim in the Irish literary scene or in Free State politics the way W. B. Yeats did….But the big city, the larger horizon, offered the freedom of comparative anonymity[...] and stimulation instead of Dublin oppression, jealousy, intrigue and gossip. (qtd. in Knowlson 253)

At the same time, Beckett’s decision to write in French could mean that, by escaping from the grip of the English language and its “overloaded associations and allusions,” he might have also been escaping from the whole weight of the immediately dominant culture’s internalized influence, and English intellectual and literary history, which may have seemed to Beckett obstacles to overcome. Beckett possibly felt freer in the language of a culture whose linguistic influences and nuances he had not absorbed and whose immediate literary weight he was not under. Beckett’s works after WW II were, as he said, written in the style of the “non-knower” (320), negating, “taking away,” and “subtracting” (qtd. in Knowlson 319). This style of subtraction and parodying, rather than working within the system of literary allusions, could be an aspect of Beckett’s “postcolonial” symptoms—his way of claiming artistic independence in a style and tradition which does not owe its heritage to English literary culture, in particular, and would allow him to carve out, as is often said, his own literary “no-man’s land.”

Beckett’s bilingualism and experiences with other foreign languages in other foreign lands are not only symptoms comparable to postcolonial dynamics, but they also generate many of the absurdist as well as postcolonial elements in his work. In addition to French, Beckett also studied Italian and German. Given Beckett’s extensive learning
experiences of different foreign languages, it is no wonder that Beckett developed an acute sense of linguistic consciousness. While these foreign languages helped Beckett gain access to the cultures of those languages, they also made him feel alienated from those places. For instance, Beckett’s diaries during his stay in Germany between 1936 and 1937 reveal that he “felt very isolated at first by the limitations of his spoken German” (qtd. in Knowlson 218). He wrote in his diary on October 18, 1936:

Even to listen is an effort, and to speak *ausgeschlossen* [impossible]. Anyway the chatter is a solid block, not a chink, interruption proof. Curse this everlasting limpness and melancholy. How absurd, the struggle to learn to be silent in another language! I am altogether absurd and inconsequential. The struggle to be master of another silence! Like a deaf man investing his substance in *Schallplatten* [gramophone records], or a blind man with a Leica. (qtd. in Knowlson 218)

As for French, although Beckett’s French was almost impeccable and highly sophisticated, James Knowlson reports that Beckett wanted “the accuracy and fluency of what he had written to be looked over by a native speaker before he was willing to send his first novel written in that language to a French publisher” (327). Beckett verified things with his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil (who later became his wife) as they came up, and discussed the details of his work with his friend Alfred Peron’s widow, Mania, who possessed an educated Frenchwoman’s French (327). Although Knowlson says that Beckett may have continued to consult Mania’s suggestions for longer than he needed “out of habit or as a mark of friendship” (328), this might also reflect a certain level of anxiety or consciousness of the foreign language user, despite his high level of fluency. The unsettling sense of alienation caused by the gap between one’s self and another’s language is likely to have contributed to the absurdist view in his work and engendered the politically and existentially alienating views in Beckett’s plays. Yet, in
Beckett’s work, this sense of the absurd, discord, and alienation becomes an artistic energy, as Beer also comments that having “two tongues, two modes of speech, two ways of responding to the world” (209) and inhabiting the threshold of the spaces unleashes the energy that “could probably not have happened in the mother tongue” (216).

The dynamic of periphery and center, one of the major concerns in Postcolonial Studies, manifests itself not only in Beckett’s linguistic consciousness but also in his use of the motif of place. In Beckett’s work, this place motif is patterned in the form of diasporic/exilic dilemma, or the antinomy of remaining at home and going abroad, as John P. Harrington puts it in The Irish Beckett. Harrington states that Beckett’s three novels (Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable) and two plays (Waiting for Godot and Endgame) written after WWII reveal abstracted versions of a “dynamics of home and away, provincialism and humanism, culture and self, and other antinomies” (148). Harrington notes the pairs of traveler-characters in Godot and Endgame, and pays attention to Mrs. Rooney’s comment in All That Fall on the dilemma of remaining at home and going away: “It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution.” Harrington also observes that, in Godot, while Pozzo and the boy are at home, Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky are strangers to their place. When the boy first appears on the stage, Vladimir does not have authority that would derive from a secure sense of place. Vladimir asks the boy, as if he is deeply unsettled and insecure: “Are you a native of these parts” (Silence.) Do you belong to these parts?” (qtd. in Harrington 150). This pattern of diasporic or exilic dilemma is an important manifestation of postcolonial symptoms in Beckett’s work. Although Beckett was not writing overtly political, thesis-driven pieces of resistance against a colonial or
totalitarian power that he would point his finger at, the undeniable sense of disorientation, dislocation, alienation, and dilemma in Beckett’s work is largely due to the gap between characters’ selves and their place. Regardless of Beckett’s deliberate authorial intention, this sense of diasporic/exilic in-betweenness is a sentiment often found in many postcolonial writers’ works.

**Waiting for Postcolonial Godot**

In addition to these postcolonial and absurdist elements in Beckett’s bilingualism and diasporic dynamics of place, one can also locate certain postcolonial symptoms in Beckett’s work through allegorical readings of his texts. *Waiting for Godot* is specified by Beckett as “a tragicomedy in two acts.” Jon Erickson aptly points out that tragedy is always already political due to its form because it concerns the question of justice. In addition, Beckett’s minimalist use of stage and props and his use of comedy (which generically portrays characters as types) make allegorical readings of his texts possible. Therefore, the combined form of tragedy and comedy in *Waiting for Godot* invites a reading of itself as a political allegory. This political and allegorical inclination, inherent in the form, explains one of the reasons why *Waiting for Godot* has universal appeal to many people in political predicaments. Further, Beckett did not make it ambiguous that the Lucky-Pozzo relationship in *Godot* is a power relation between an oppressor and an oppressed. Notice the first appearance of Pozzo and Lucky on stage:

*Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears. Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat, Pozzo a whip.* (18)
The stage direction clearly shows that Pozzo with a whip is in control of Lucky, who carries heavy burdens for Pozzo. The rope tied around Lucky’s neck demonstrates the inhuman treatment that he receives. That Beckett first gave one of his characters in this play a Jewish name, Levy, and that Beckett had witnessed the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews in France and in other parts of Europe and joined the Resistance movement in France, give a firmer ground for reading the Lucky-Pozzo relation as a political allegory.

The description of Lucky’s suffering is almost graphic. He has “a running sore” (23) because of the rope around his neck, drooping his “slavor” (23), and dozing off at any moment out of extreme exhaustion. When he is made to think aloud by Pozzo, Lucky’s monologue shows that he is so devastated mentally that he cannot think clearly. His “tirade,” composed of images about mass-death, absurd violence, hypocrisy, and existential angst and uncertainty, suggests that it is as if he has a severe post-traumatic stress disorder:

[… I resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labors abandoned left unfinished graver sill abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull […] (47)24

Although Lucky can represent the victim of the Holocaust, this character can, in fact, represent almost any victim of injustice. In the following pages I will read the play as an allegory of postcolonialism. If we read the play as “waiting for the postcolonial era,” Pozzo in Act I would represent the colonial power and Lucky the most oppressed who is deprived of his freedom and dependent on his oppressor. Lucky is so deeply
colonized that he cannot even imagine being independent. Pozzo, on the other hand, is full of himself, demanding every attention from Vladimir and Estragon. “Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me?” and “Is everybody listening?” says Pozzo (29). Pozzo, who theatrically introduced himself, saying “I present myself: Pozzo” (19), certainly knows how to manipulate the theatre of colonialism, interpellating both Vladimir and Estragon as his subjects. Although in hesitation, Vladimir and Estragon wanted to assist Lucky the first time they saw his abused situation. Vladimir in particular even explodes at the sight of injustice. “It’s a scandal,” he shouts, and continues: “Too treat a man…(gesture toward Lucky)...like that… I think that...no...a human being...no...it’s a scandal!” (25). Even, Estragon adds, “A disgrace!” (25). However, Pozzo employs the rhetoric of humanity, equality, and freedom with Vladimir and Estragon. He says to the two, “You are human being none the less. [...] of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God’s image” (19), and “The road is free to all,” while jerking the rope around Lucky and calling him, “[u]p pig!” and “[u]p hog!” (20).

Pozzo’s hypocrisy and self-contradiction is manifested in his careful construction of his image as a benevolent humanist. After greedily finishing up chicken and wine, he says: “Is there anything I can do, that’s what I ask myself, to cheer them up? I have given them bones, I have talked to them about this and that, I have explained the twilight, admittedly. But is it enough, that’s what tortures me, is it enough?” (40). In this speech, although Pozzo presents himself as a philanthropist, he is in fact strategically enumerating to Vladimir and Estragon what good works he believes he has done for them. Vladimir and Estragon soon become complicit with Pozzo’s condescending attitude to Lucky, Estragon venting his anger at Lucky by spitting on him (32) and
Vladimir shouldering him out of his way (36). Following Pozzo, they too order Lucky to dance and think aloud, and all of them become the spectators of Lucky’s misery. Lucky’s dance is an entertainment for these three characters. However, for Lucky himself, it means “The Net,” as he finds himself “entangled in a net” (42). Lucky could represent many colonial subjects who feel as if they are asked to dance an absurd dance of colonial entanglement.

In Act I, Pozzo also reveals the vampiric nature of colonialism. Pozzo admits that Lucky taught him “all these beautiful things” (32), and proudly asks Vladimir and Estragon for confirmation of his own youthful look, compared to Lucky (33). Pozzo says, “Compared to him I look like a young man, no?”, and he takes off the hat from Lucky to show Lucky’s “long white hair falling about his face” (33). Vladimir gets infuriated at Pozzo’s unashamed consumption/appropriation of Lucky, saying that “After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a … like a banana skin. Really…” (33). Pozzo’s appropriation of Lucky is analogous to the pattern of colonizing/imperial countries, throughout history, many of which took parts of rich indigenous cultures, rituals, and artifacts, and incorporated them into their own, or simply stole them to display in their museums. This often-unacknowledged appropriation through colonialism serves to renew and revitalize the dominant culture, but people of subjugated (indigenous) cultures often become weakened to the point of annihilation—culturally, politically, and physically—being unable to claim their own cultures and history.
In Act I, Pozzo, however, quickly senses that his boast of youthful looks is not helping him gain control over Vladimir and Estragon. He changes his strategy adroitly, playing the victim:

Pozzo: (groaning, clutching his head). I can’t bear it…any longer…the way he goes on…you’ve no idea…it’s terrible…he must go…(he waves his arms)…I’m going mad…(he collapses, his head in his hands.)…I can’t bear it…any longer…(34)

Then, Vladimir and Estragon’s sympathy shifts toward Pozzo, even comparing Pozzo to Jesus Christ. Vladimir says to Lucky: “How dare you! It’s abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!” (34). However, they soon find out that Pozzo’s rendition of his victimhood is all lies, which in turn infuriates them, especially Vladimir (34). As shown, Vladimir and Estragon represent the masses, who have a sense of justice, but are also susceptible to the dominant ideology embodied in a figure of power.

Some significant changes have occurred between Act I and Act II, although the two acts seem similar and repetitious. In Act II, the tree that used to be bare in Act I has “four or five leaves” (62). Significantly, Act II also begins with Vladimir’s cryptic song about the dog. Upon close analysis, this song is about a spirally progressive political desire to end the vicious cycle of an oppressive power structure. Importantly, the song does not desire a complete reversal of the existing power structure, but signifies a continual attempt at implementing more justice. The song goes as following:

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb
[ . . . . . . . . . ]
And wrote upon the tombstone
For the eyes of dogs to come: (62)

After the colon in the last line above, the same song repeats endlessly. This repetition of all the dogs coming and burying the brutally killed dog and writing the dog’s history on the tombstone mirrors the never-ending repetitious structure of the play. It is also an allegory of postcolonial desire. The song is about a constant attempt to voice for the voiceless and the “underdog;” it is an endless desire and effort to rewrite history for the powerless, fight against injustice, and thus reclaim history for future generations (“For the eyes of dogs to come:”). Also, the song is a comment on the absurdity of the shocking disparity between the Haves and Have-nots. That Act 2 begins with a song about a strong desire to redress social justice and that it features the tree with more leaves in a single night signifies that the transition from Act 1 and Act 2 stands for a historical inclination towards independence, or even a historical moment of independence. For many colonial subjects in history, also, their long-waited independence comes rather suddenly “in a single night,” more often than not entailing a sense of postcolonial disappointment because of the gap between their political ideal and their postcolonial reality.

Some other changes are also noticeable in Act II. The Lucky-Pozzo relationship has changed. It is not that their power structure is reversed, but certainly Pozzo’s power has significantly dwindled. Pozzo has gone blind and thus he now has to be led by Lucky. On the other hand, Lucky has become dumb, as if he stands for the pain and suffering of those inhumanely treated, which have now become a memory, like a discolored still photo, farther moved into the past history. Yet, a mute photo is nonetheless a strong
reminder of the past. The rope that still ties Lucky and Pozzo reminds us of the continual colonial legacy in the present. If the rope in Act 1 showed Pozzo’s full control of Lucky, the rope in Act 2 is an indication of the blind Pozzo’s dependence on Lucky as well as Lucky’s continued, if lessened, subordination. However, the long awaited Godot, postcoloniality in the true meaning of the word, has not arrived even in Act 2. Vladimir and Estragon are again left with their political hope—postcoloniality that is perpetually deferred. However, interestingly, in the midst of this postcolonial disappointment, existential angst, sense of betrayal, uncertainty for the arrival/achievement of true liberation and justice, and their inability to move, there is an unusual moment of optimistic (though still ironic) energy in this play. Towards the end of Act 2, Vladimir makes the following speech, which is certainly anomalous, given the play’s series of nothing-to-be-dones:

Vladimir: Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. […] To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! […] It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—(91)

It is important to note that, when Vladimir said “[i]t is not every day that we are needed” and “[t]o all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears!,” his will to help others is an inclusive one, encompassing all humans—the colonizer, the complicit, the colonized, the subaltern, descendants of any of the above all.
As he says “[i]t is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species,” he could have dismissed Pozzo’s suffering by remembering how Pozzo tricked him and Estragon to believe his [Pozzo’s] false victimhood and how appallingly Pozzo treated Lucky; “You’ll kill him”(48), Vladimir protested towards the end of their meeting in Act 1. Vladimir says with a surprising degree of certainty: “We have kept our appointment and that’s an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment” (91, my emphasis). Although they are disappointed again later in Act II by Mr. Godot’s postponement, and experience again the consequent angst and doubt about their raison d’être, they continue to remain on stage and wait. From this perspective, Vladimir and Estragon’s lives are, in fact, already meaningful with their constant hope, perseverance, and focus on the here and now, even if Mr. Godot might not keep his promise, because they have kept their promise. Reading Godot as an allegory of postcolonialism, thus, underscores the significance of postcolonial desire—the desire that produces suffering and disappointment but also the energy to regenerate the tree.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, both Section One and Section Two have shown the political undercurrent of absurdist theatre. Absurdist theatre’s political potential is what enables postcolonial subjects’ political interpretation or application of this form of theatre in their specific situations, as the following chapter will show. In Section One, I have theorized unsettling jokes of a political nature, or what I call “absurd jokes,” in the works of Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, and Samuel Beckett, building on but departing from Freud’s joke theory. Section Two has shown that Beckett himself, as a product of the
cultural and political context of his time (even in his denial of and move away from his Irishness), is symptomatic of postcoloniality; his works are replete with postcolonial dynamics, and *Waiting for Godot*, in particular, is a complex allegory of the significance and frustration of postcolonial desire; the understanding of Beckett as absurdist should be complemented by the understanding of the local (Irish) and political aspects of his works.
CHAPTER 2

ABSURDIST THEATRE GOES POSTCOLONIAL

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the intersection between global theatre trends and local agency, analyzing how playwrights of different postcolonial nations have engaged with the motifs of absurdist theatre. While postcolonial playwrights negotiate diverse global theatre genres and trends, their conscious or unconscious engagement with Western absurdist theatre provides particularly compelling cases for exploring postcolonial playwrights’ glocal and local artistic navigation. One of the main reasons for this investigation is the general historical convergence between absurdist theatre’s popularity and canonization in the 1950s and 60s and the emergence of postcolonial theatres around the same period. When playwrights in many of the newly independent nations in the 1950s and 1960s began to produce plays, Western absurdist theatre was a major Post-World War II avant-garde theatre genre. Further, both European absurdist playwrights and certain postcolonial playwrights engaged with similar sentiments of the period, such as a sense of alienation, displacement, or “absurdity,” largely owing to World War II and colonial legacies and trauma, respectively.
The first two sections of this chapter will discuss Korean playwright Jo-Yeol Park and Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi, respectively, examining how they use absurdist theatre (especially Beckett’s) for their local political engagement. Section Three, on the other hand, will explore how a female playwright from Ireland appropriates this traditionally male-authored genre.

1. Absurdist Theatre in Korea: Jo-Yeol Park, National Partition, and Beckett

Why is *Waiting for Godot* the most frequently staged Western play in Korean theatre history (Kim 8)? Why are the absurdists Beckett, Pinter, and Ionesco among the top twelve most staged Western playwrights in Korea (8)? Further, why is it that Korean scholar Junseo Im goes as far as to say that almost all South Korean plays in the 1960s and onwards have been more or less influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd, and that absurdist theatre can be regarded as a short cut to understanding Korean contemporary theatre (Im 3-19)? Beginning with a 1960 production of Ionesco’s *La Leçon (The Lesson)* (1951) by *Sireomgeukjang* (Experimental Theatre), numerous small Korean theatre groups staged Western existentialist and absurdist plays in the 1960s and 1970s (Suh, *Contemporary Korean Theatre* 223). Additionally, Korean director Young-Woong Lim has staged *Waiting for Godot* steadily for about forty years since 1969, and his 1988 production was lauded by Martin Esslin.

In “The Reception of the Theatre of the Absurd and Korean Theatre,” Miy-he Kim analyzes this extraordinary engagement with Western absurdist theatre in South Korea, and traces the history of its Korean reception. Kim departs from certain Korean scholars’ criticism that Korean theatre artists received Western absurdist theatre and its
aesthetics “uncritically” at a point when even Western realism was not “adequately understood” in Korean theatre, thereby “possibly shaking the foundation of realistic theatre” in Korea (qtd. in Kim 22, 29). Instead, she argues that Korean theatre’s “active” reception of absurdist theatre should be respected because it fostered the development of Korean theatre, although Korea should have approached absurdist theatre more judiciously and more systematically (22-29). I would add that there is no reason why non-realistic experimental theatre should have been explored only after Western realistic theatre had been thoroughly founded in Korea, especially given that, as this section will show, non-realistic theatre is closer to Korea’s indigenous performance aesthetics. The suggestion that Korean theatre should follow the same artistic trajectory as the West (from the achievement of realistic theatre toward anti-realistic experimental theatre) implies an uncritical privileging of Western theatre history. As it has done, Korean theatre must simultaneously negotiate the pluralities of global theatrical trends.

Kim’s essay on the significance of Korean theatre’s reception of Western absurdist theatre is my starting point. However, departing from Kim’s focus on the production of Western absurdist plays, I will concentrate on Korean plays that sometimes controversially evoked absurdist styles, and will situate a notable aesthetic shift in Korean postcolonial theatre from the 70s in its local and global contexts. Korean theatre of the post-colonial period emerged in the 50s and 60s, and thus converged with the Theatre of the Absurd. This took the form of a unique and significant global and local aesthetic interpenetration in Korean postcolonial theatre. When an aesthetic grown from one cultural location migrates to another cultural domain, it is bound to undergo adjustments and alterations, develop different emphases and unexpected additions, and/or
demonstrate resistance. In this section, I will treat Korean theatre’s active engagement with absurdist theatre in the 1960s not as a West-centered case of evaluation and imitation, but as a significant glocal aesthetic phenomenon; I will approach Jo-Yeol Park’s *A Dialogue Between Two Long-Necked People* and Taesuk Oh’s early plays from this glocal perspective. I also use this approach for Taesuk Oh’s early plays (See Chapter 3). However, when it comes to Oh’s later theatre from the 1970s and onwards, I will discuss a specific mode of glocality, which I call “glocal-locality”—that is, the intersection of the global, the local, and the restored local cultures from the past within the larger local contexts (see Chapter 3).

**Glocality: Jo-Yeol Park’s *A Dialogue Between Two Long-Necked People***

Although Kim draws attention to the need for scholarship on Korean plays that reveal absurdist elements, she does not discuss these plays in her essay because she believes that “no Korean playwrights can be called absurdist playwrights in the true sense [of the genre]” and “absurdist elements are shown fragmentarily in works by many Korean playwrights who experimented with anti-realistic techniques. [. . . ]” (9). Similarly, Yon-ho Suh writes “the creation of Theatre of the Absurd […] did not succeed in putting down its roots in Korean theatre largely because Korean theatre tended to focus obsessively on absurdist theatre’s playfulness”29 (*Contemporary Korean Theatre* 238-239). If I were to use Western absurdist theatre as the standard by which to evaluate plays written by Koreans, I would agree with Kim’s and Suh’s statements. However, given that Western absurdist theatre is a genre that specifically grew out of the European WWII geopolitical context, I believe it is culturally and historically unrealistic to expect Korean
writers to write in the same patterns as, say, Beckett, Pinter, and/or Ionesco. Further, given the short and troubled history of Korea’s reception of drama as written literature, and theatre mainly as indoor proscenium theatre, as well as the long history of censorship in Korea, it is rather unproductive to discuss South Korean plays of the 50s and 60s evaluatively by standards set by postwar Western avant-garde theatre.

While Korea has rich and diverse oral performance traditions (including but not limited to shamanist rituals, story-singing performance, and various types of mask theatre), the modern Western concept of theatre and drama, as well as Chinese and Japanese indoor theatre, was new to Korea in the late 19th century (Suh, Modern Korean Theatre 33-39). Furthermore, Western theatre was introduced in Korea during the Japanese colonial rule. Korean theatre’s interaction with Western theatre was thus part of Korea’s colonial modernity by way of Japan; it was not introduced into Korean culture by independent Koreans. The desire to prove artistic validity through evaluative comparison with the West is not unusual for a nation whose cultural identity was severely undermined by Western hegemony (by way of Japanese colonialism until 1945 and more directly afterwards); however, Korea’s historical and cultural specificities must also be considered. Furthermore, because absurdist theatre was not a conscious movement (with no artistic manifesto), and because Martin Esslin’s The Theatre of the Absurd was not prescriptive but rather an inductive theory of the global theatrical aesthetic trend, the “absurdist” label can be used to describe aspects of Korean playwrights’ works if their artistic inspiration and/or their historical and sociopolitical situation point specifically to this genre. Local playwrights can incorporate absurdist aesthetics into their own specifically local visions, thus “claiming” and transforming the nuances of the label.
Jo-Yeol Park’s *Mogigin Dusaramui Daehwa [A Dialogue Between Two Long-necked People]*, was written in 1966 and premiered in 1967 by the Theatre Company *Tal [Mask]*. The similarities between Park’s play and *Waiting for Godot* are hard not to notice, and the expression “long-necked” in the title implies earnest waiting in Korean. The playwright writes in the preface that the fundamental inspiration for this play came from a dream he had, in which he had a “symbolic conversation” (107) with two strangers, but he also acknowledges in the afterword that he was able to complete this play after reading *Waiting for Godot*, the play that gave him a “revelation” and “self-confirmation” (139). Park writes: “As soon as I began writing this play, I stopped writing because of self-doubt. At that time, I had a decisive opportunity, which rescued me; I came across Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. That was a revelation and self-confirmation. The wretched activities and waiting in *Waiting for Godot* were similar to how I wanted to dramatize my characters” (139). In this sense, *A Dialogue Between Two Long-necked People* might be called a Korean version of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, Park’s characters (named A and B) bicker, play games, and kill time while waiting. They are not waiting for Godot, but for their bosses, who are supposed to come for their “conferences.” The bosses never appear. Only Character C, doomed never to sit down because he must straddle the partitioning line on the stage, briefly appears from the back of the stage and exits.

While this much of the play follows the basic plot structure of *Waiting for Godot*, and the overall *mise-en-scene* of the play is as minimalist, Park’s play is a more specific and overtly political allegory—that of a partitioned Korea since the day of its liberation from Japan in 1945. A partitioning line, one of the few stage props in the play, signifies
the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that crosses the Korean peninsula. Further, the games that A and B play are politically significant. At the beginning, and then later in the play, A keeps moving a red strap from his right pocket to his left pocket, and B keeps putting a piece of candy in and out of different pockets. The red strap and the piece of candy might seem arbitrary, but in Korea’s political context the red strap recalls the outward signifier of North Korean communism, while the piece of candy can easily be read as a metonym for South Korean consumer capitalism. Clearly, the bosses’ failure to show up for their conferences allegorizes a continuously deferred resolution for the partitioned Korea, which remains even today in the tense truce of a war.

Beyond these easily discernable, one-to-one allegories, *A Dialogue Between Two Long-necked People* stresses scatological images of bodily abjection, frustration, and the desire for physical release. A and B giggle, addressing each other as befouled insects:

A: A wasp [referring to B] that has shit on it…laughed at… a grasshopper [referring to A himself] that has piss on it.
B: The grasshopper [referring to A] that has piss on it made the wasp [referring to B himself] that has shit on it laugh.
A: Are we then tied?
B: One to one,…again, zero. (111)

These mutual and self-deprecating images express the sense of abjection, powerlessness, and absurdity of the partitioned Korean national body, whose unambiguous desire for independence as a unified nation was crushed soon after Korea’s liberation from Japan. The national partition stems from Korea’s having been a Japanese colony at the time of the Pacific War and the Soviet Union’s last minute intervention. The 38th Parallel that initially partitioned Korea before the Korean War was another arbitrary line in world history, hastily drawn by the U.S. with no relevance to
Korea’s regional formation. Bruce Cumings writes that around August 10-11, when “the atomic bombs had been dropped, and the Soviet Red Army had entered the Pacific War […] John J. McCloy of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) directed two young colonels, Dean Rusk and Charles H. Bonesteel, […] to find a place to divide Korea,” giving them thirty minutes (187). General Douglas MacArthur’s “General Order Number One for the Japanese surrender on August 15 […] includ[ed] in it (and thus making public) the thirty-eighth parallel decision” (187). In the play, Character C recalls Korea’s liberation day as the day he lost his hometown (118). With the partition, not only Character C, but the playwright, and millions of other Koreans, lost their hometowns.

In a crude departure from Waiting for Godot, one of the main activities that A and B engage in on stage is to urinate. A and B both take turns urinating at the back of the stage, their backs turned to the audience. In a phrase resonant with the famous Beckettian “nothing to be done,” B says, “Eat and sleep and wait…all that is left here is to excrete” (114). In accordance with Fredric Jameson’s argument about third-world literature’s overt national allegories, the characters’ bodies in the play stand in for the stunted, obstructed national body, which festers and bulges with unpurged colonial and neocolonial legacies. As Cumings writes, South Korea did not have sufficient opportunities to take care of the immediate Japanese legacy—such as complaints about the “unequal land situation and the collaboration of landlords with the Japanese” (194)—because the immediate U.S. military government perpetuated the privileges of former Japanese-collaborators; the U.S. favored educated Korean conservatives, as it construed those who resisted U.S. desires in the South as pro-Soviet.34
Park’s play brings to the fore the political aspect of Beckett’s plot structure of perpetual waiting, and dramatizes national abjection, absurdity, and postcolonial hope, while his play is less concerned than Beckett’s with the ontological sense of the absurd. It further deviates from the classical European absurdist paradigm(s) because the ending of the play shows wholesome, fable-like qualities, which is likely a result of Park’s attempt to avoid South Korean censorship of the time. Park writes in the afterword that he had to write a play of “ambiguity” and “abstraction” because it was regarded as a “taboo” to write about the “re-unification issues” at that time (139). While some assess Park’s play as an “imitation” of Godot, it is crucial to note that Park’s play reveals his negotiation and identification in his particular global and local circuits. His play was more locally relevant to, more endurable in, and more symptomatic of the politically frustrated, partitioned Korea of the 1960s, a nation with the added frustration of censorship and extreme anti-communist ideology under the Bak Jeonghui (Park Chung-hee) dictatorial regime (1961-1979).

Kim and Suh both point out that absurdist theatre, the major anti-realistic theatre of the period, worked well with the experimental spirit of the emerging small theatre groups in South Korea (Kim 24; Suh, Contemporary Korean Theatre 223), and that it was particularly appealing to Koreans because the existential philosophy and absurdist outlook were well matched with a Korean psyche that had just endured a series of national traumas (Contemporary Korean Theatre 221-2). Furthermore, as Park was possibly attracted to Waiting for Godot for its capacity to camouflage political themes in allegory, Kim connects the vigor of Western absurdist theatre in the Korea of the 1960s and 1970s to absurdist plays’ latent political energy during the dictatorship in South
Korea. Kim writes that, through covertly allegorized political signifiers, absurdist plays offered a sort of “catharsis” to South Koreans who did not have enough freedom to express their thoughts on politics (25). Im lists other Korean plays of the late 1960s that show absurdist elements: Dae-seong Yun’s *Chulbal [Departure]* (1967), Taesuk Oh’s *Weding Deureseu [Wedding Dress]* (1967) and *Hwanjeolgi [Change of Season]* (1968), and Jae-hyeon Lee’s *Je Sipcheung [The 10th Floor]* (1969) (18).

2. Beckett in Nigeria: Ola Rotimi’s *Holding Talks and Post-Colonial Disillusionment*

In this section, I focus on Ola Rotimi, one of Nigeria’s (and Africa’s) most popular dramatists and theatre directors. Rotimi’s theatre has been noted for its wide reach to varied Nigerian local audiences. Rotimi, born to a Yoruba father and an Ijaw mother, said in an interview that he feels “fortunate […] to claim heritage to […] Ijaw, Yoruba, Sierra-Leone, [and] Ghana backgrounds,” which helped him to encompass in his works the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Nigeria beyond his immediate Yoruba local cultural environment. Rotimi also says that while his early plays, such as *The Gods are Not to Blame,* are based on Yoruba culture, his later plays (including *Ovonramwen, If,* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*) are set in non-Yoruba parts of Nigeria (qtd. in Coker 9). Further, Rotimi’s use of “a variety of [English] languages, from pidgin to a broken English that incorporates words from familiar local dialects, contributes […] to the comic energy and enables [him] to achieve his ambition to reach a large and varied audience” (Adedeji 267).

In his playwriting and directing, Rotimi shows a strong commitment to oral narrative tradition, Nigerian traditional performance forms, and Nigerian history (Adedeji
Born in 1938 in Sapele, a town in the delta area of Bendel State, which “at that time [...] still retained aspects of traditional African life,” Rotimi was not unfamiliar with “street parties, dancing, and masquerade theatres.” However, Rotimi received education in Western-styled and Western institutions: Methodist Boys’ High School, Lagos, from 1952 to 1957, Boston University in the United States for his B.F.A. in 1963 (with the support of a Nigerian Government Scholarship), and later the Yale School of Drama (Chinyere 1; Adedeji 265-266). Rotimi also writes that he belongs to a particular generation that “had been conditioned by Euro-Western upbringing,” although this generation was later “not only animated by the ardor of nationalism but also intensely inflamed by passions of hope” (126). After he graduated from Yale, he became a research fellow in drama at the Institute of African studies at the University of Ife in Nigeria. During this research period Rotimi interviewed traditional priests, which seems to have given him a clear dramaturgical and directorial direction. In the interview, Rotimi remarks:

I befriended priests and they took me into their confidence and answered questions, specifically regarding some of the things that, growing up under colonial rule, we had been told were evil. Our parents had been made to believe that traditional worship and culture was pagan and so we should alienate ourselves from them. It was when we came to study these things in our post-independence universities that we started looking at our past and felt we simply must redefine ourselves so we do not get merged in the general mainstream of another culture. We started looking back; taking pride and identifying ourselves more with those things we had been made to believe were to be repudiated by us. We took pride in them. More or less one can say that it was when I returned in 1966 at the age of 28 that I started fully exploring elements of our past which we had consciously ignored in our attempt to be full fledged Christians—you know baptized, confirmed, and the gamut of Christian initiation rites. I gained a lot from the research facility that [the University] provided me. (1-2, my emphases)
Clearly, his serious engagement with Nigerian traditional cultures, which he came to embrace consciously, was part of the wave of Nigeria’s post-independence efforts to redefine its own cultural identity in local terms (see Chapter 3 in particular for this type of artists’ glocal navigation).38

Given Rotimi’s general dramaturgical and theatrical tendency of incorporating facets of Nigerian traditional cultures in his oeuvre, *Holding Talks* (premiered in 1970 and published in 1979), the focus play of this section, stands out as an anomaly in its form and content. Like Rotimi’s other plays, *Holding Talks* surely engages with Nigeria’s socio-political issues. Yet it borrows Western absurdist form and content, and is devoid of the Nigerian indigenous theatrical devices and traditional oral narrative components which usually characterize Rotimi’s plays. Then, what is the relationship between *Holding Talks* and Western absurdist theatre? More specifically, what comparison points do we see between *Holding Talks* and Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot*, the play *Holding Talks* seems to evoke the most? What might have inspired Rotimi to draw on absurdist theatre motifs, and how did he interweave absurdist theatre (which came to be conceptualized in the 1960s and had certainly become globally familiar by the 1970s) with his Nigerian local contexts? Further, what are some critical responses to this play (and the aesthetic departure that Rotimi was initially thought to have made with the publication of the play), and what do Rotimi’s experiment with absurdist theatre and certain critical responses to *Holding Talks* suggest about the global circulation of absurdist theatre and its local appropriation and reception?

Rotimi summarizes the gist of the play on the back cover of the published book:

“In this play, nothing really gets done. Things get close to being done; but nothing gets
really done because there is always some justifiable rationalization for that which really needs to be done not to be done.” As the first scene of Holding Talks opens, Apprentice Barber, having “nothing to do,” is “leafing through the pages of some tattered newspapers” (1). Master Barber is also doing nothing, sleeping, “[o]r trying to sleep…” (1). Man, who is “affluently attired,” comes into the shop for a haircut. Man begins claiming that Master Barber’s hand was shaking when the barber was about to dig into Man’s hair with a comb, which Master Barber denies. Insisting on betting on the truth of this “controversial” incident for money, Man demands that Barber re-create the same pose of leaning forward to comb his hair, and freeze at a precise moment, for ten seconds, that copies Barber’s previous arm position. In this re-creation of a frozen moment of his past action, the barber’s hand shakes visibly (And whose hand might not?). After losing the ten pence he was led to put on the bet (a great sum for the impoverished Barber), Barber prepares to cut Man’s hair in a way to compensate for the money he lost. However, because Barber has been so poor, hungry, and malnourished for a long time, he suddenly “sags to the floor,” leaving the audience to question whether he is dead or not. Even after Barber’s fall, while Apprentice Barber attempts to take the collapsed barber to hospital, Man engages the apprentice in a series of arguments and talks, narrating solipsistic, sermonic, and sometimes cryptic stories. He does the same with the policewoman who arrives, towards the end of the play, to investigate the situation. After the policewoman storms out in frustration, Man and the apprentice resume talking.

Throughout, signifiers of nothingness and a series of repeated instances of unfulfilling actions dominate the play, evoking the situations of impasse in Waiting for Godot. Several main symbolic props suggest these sentiments in the play. A fan in the
hair shop is one good example. When Man came to the hair shop, the first thing he asks the apprentice barber to do is to turn on the fan. When the apprentice turns the knob to activate the fan, “everybody looks in that direction, expecting results” (2); “The vanes begin to revolve, slowly, very slowly” (2). Man asks the apprentice to put the fan on high, and “again, everybody stares in anticipation”; however, “[f]an refuses to pick up speed” (2). Man then asks the apprentice to put it on maximum, and this time, “[a] funny clanking rattle of rusty metal in harsh friction with rusty cogs issues forth from the axle of the fan”; but again, “[…] the revolution remains at the same rate: slow, defiant, indolent” (2). No matter what level of strength the apprentice puts the fan on, there is no change in the speed, only the funny noises on the maximum setting. Regarding this and other symbols in the play, the playwright’s own comments about why he wrote this play are useful. Among the reasons Rotimi revealed in LACE Occasional Publications are “to expose unfruitful talks and irrelevant debates in society,” particularly “to ridicule the moribound activities of the O.A.U. [Organization of African Unity] since its inception” (qtd. in Ebewo 156). In this light, the highly anticipated but unfulfilled “revolution” of the fan in the play resonates with the O.A.U.’s activities, which had received a lot of criticisms for not taking actions to ensure changes in Africa, but only bureaucratically “talking.” The tattered newspapers that the apprentice barber was reading at the very beginning of the play and the radio that “blares out the news” could also be read similarly. The stage direction say that the newspapers “report on TALKS—all species of TALKS: national, international, continental, intercontinental” (1). And, as for the radio, the stage direction pinpoints the signifier of nothingness in its sound: “[Announcer’s
Because Rotimi’s play shows, like many absurdist plays, relatively few details specifying the characters and their historical setting, the recurrent symbols and motives of nothingness and stalemate easily render a larger satire of Nigeria’s post-independence impasse. The playwright’s view of the state of his nation, which he expressed in his critical essay, “Conditions in the Third World: A Playwright’s Soliloquy on His Experience,” further supports this reading. While the essay’s main function was to introduce his “parable playlet” titled *How Not to Rule the Third World*, Rotimi also writes about his perception of Nigeria (and the “Third World”) from a Nigerian playwright’s perspective, discusses both postcolonial hope and post-independence disillusionment which he has personally experienced, and articulates how a playwright of the distressed “Third World” is bound to express his socio-political concerns. After discussing his generation’s hope in the era immediately following independence, he moves on to discuss a strong sense of disillusionment that is not uncommon in many formerly colonized nations in the period of post-independence:

[…] Then came the reality, like some bad dream dominated by a headless madman in an unending chase after the dreamer, like some suffocating stench from the putrescent bowels of a collapsed public cesspit. The reality in the land subdued that generation—bleary-eyed eagerness and all—just subdued it into a state of shocked disillusionment. It came directly from the least expected source: the leadership in the land. And like some insatiable curse, the disillusionment has persisted to this day, even getting worse in places like Nigeria. […] A majority of the rulers of the newly independent country—began to falter or simply to abnegate the principle of nationalist struggle outright. (127)

Rotimi also connects the sentiment of post-independence disillusionment to that of absurdist theatre:
Confusion pervaded the land as former “brothers in the struggle” against colonialism turned into conjurers of old hatreds to propel their own ambitions for power. National development fossilized and was heartily supplanted by a syndrome of rabid self-enrichment commingled with the jingoism of tribal interests. With some groups it has been a doggedness to hold on to power in perpetuity, daring the intervention of counteractions that are bound to culminate in a holocaust—as was the case in Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, and, more lately, Rwanda. The result is a classic example of Absurd Drama—a drama that reflects a world, a nation, a society that offers no sense, expects no logic, despises reason, and begrudges hope. (128, my emphasis)

There is a compelling resemblance between Nigeria’s neo-colonial reality (after independence) and the absurd and abject human conditions dramatized in Waiting for Godot (written soon after World War II). Holding Talks’s rendering of Man (an affluent and solipsistic character) in particular points to Beckett’s play because Rotimi’s Man strongly echoes Pozzo in Godot. Like Pozzo, who presents himself as a benevolent humanist and philanthropist while simultaneously abusing his servant Lucky (See Chapter 1.2. for my postcolonial reading of Waiting for Godot), Man in Holding Talks self-aggrandizes while ignoring the collapsed barber, who needs urgent attention.

Compare Pozzo and Man in the following lines, for example:

Pozzo: Is there anything I can do, that’s what I ask myself, to cheer them [Vladimir and Estragon] up? I have given them bones, I have talked to them about this and that, I have explained the twilight, admittedly. But is it enough, that’s what tortures me, is it enough? (Beckett 40)

Man: [ . . . . . . . . . . . ]
You see what I mean? I mean, I will continue to be myself. To be kind and gentle: always ready to help. You will learn a lesson, a sound lesson from this, my boy. A sound lesson.
[ . . . . . . . . . . . ]
[He comes over to the body and bends down. Apprentice misjudging his intention, also leans over Barber’s body lifting the shoulders again. But Man rises up in that instant and continues his speech.]
And why so? Because he [the collapsed barber] failed, refused—yes, refused to accept help when help was in full attendance, waiting, begging, down on its knees, begging to be accepted. He refused. He heard a voice—
the voice of salvation, of succour and assurance—a still, small voice, if you please, a still, small voice calling out from the burning bush of unfettered altruism. But he hearkened not. [ . . . ] (Rotimi 10)

Both Pozzo and Man exploit the most underprivileged while regarding themselves as ethically and intellectually superior to others. The only difference between the two would be that Pozzo seems to employ a little more sophisticated rhetoric than Man since Pozzo even makes an attempt to show “humility” through his (insincere) practice of self-reflection and self-doubts; Man is more blunt in his self-aggrandizing expressions. On the Hegelian master/slave dialectics, however, they both represent the master figure that desires to consume the other for their self-certainty.

While their rhetoric and their positions of power bind Pozzo and Man in these two different plays, Holding Talks provides somewhat more locally specific details about Man and the play’s setting than Godot’s. For example, Rotimi specifies in a footnote that several “Onboard”-style haircuts that Man desired in the play are “some of the popular styles in the range of Nigerian male coiffures” (4). Theatre scholar Patrick Ebewo also lists other valuable local references in the play:

[… ] Barber “ceremoniously whets the razor on the palm of his hand”—favourite practice of Nigerian local barbers[;] “anatomical jokes” common among Nigerian touts with “dirty minds”[;] reference to “white afara, cheap lumber stock, and involvement of street beggars and boy-guards.” (157)

However, Ebewo’s motive of listing these examples was to undercut the possible reading of Rotimi’s play as universal. He writes: “Critics may argue that Holding Talks is not a Nigerian, but a universal play. Arguments may centre on the content of the text and the names used, which are abstract (trade names). These seem not to be entirely true. There are some pointers in the play to prove it typically Nigerian—[… ]” (157). While scholars
have long used this binary logic (e.g., universalism/particularism and global/local), increasingly, scholars discuss the interconnectedness of seemingly separate dual concepts. Regarding this issue, in this section and in my dissertation as a whole, I argue that at least in the domain of art, universalism is achieved and achievable when it is rooted in, or based on, personal, local, and particular experiences. To put it another way, universalism in artwork is always already somehow entangled with, or springs from, particular local (if multi-local) specificities. Beckett’s works that are widely viewed as universal and global are in fact rooted in his particular, (multi-)local, and autobiographical experiences (See Chapter 1.2). Rotimi makes his local specificities in Holding Talks flexible enough to accommodate the play’s potential reach of wider reception loci, thus opening the play’s universal potential. For instance, when he writes the footnote on the Nigerian male hairstyle, “onboa,” he adds, “The producer may use such local substitutes as are easily recognizable by his audience” (4).

Moreover, significantly, Rotimi’s particular personal, national, and continental situations are main inspirations for writing this satirical and allegorical play. In “Conditions in the Third World,” he explains the ways in which his specific location-related (including personal) circumstances led him to make the kind of artistic choices he made in Holding Talks. He writes that “[a third world playwright would devise] ways of venting his angst through plays that employ the riddle of metaphors [because] this way he increases his chances of staying alive and out of detention so that he can continue to ‘talk’ with his people about the anguish of their common predicament” (129, my emphasis). Further, on a personal level, Rotimi commented that he wrote Holding Talks partly “in response to [his] reaction to the feeling that people might think that [his]
conscious attempt in manipulating the English language to a simpler level was a reflection of [his] inability to express [himself] decently in […] English […]” (qtd. in Ebewo 157). Ebewo specifies that Rotimi is here specifically referring to Nigerian theatre scholar Dapo Adelugba’s unfavorable comment on Rotimi’s level of language in his earlier play *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (published 1968) (157).

Despite its valuable local references and viewpoints, Ebewo’s critical response to *Holding Talks* has limitations. He compares *Holding Talks* to Western absurdist plays as if these absurdist plays constitute a consciously-created, coherent, and fixed genre, and he treats them as the unquestionable standard by which Rotimi’s play must be evaluated. Ebewo lists numerous points to show that Rotimi and his play are inadequate because they deviate from (paradigmatic) European absurdist playwrights’ works and their artistic standpoints. To give one example, Ebewo diagnoses Rotimi’s openly calling his play “an absurdist play” as “a problem” because “writers of the absurd do not agree with the label” (158). Ebewo does not take into consideration that Rotimi is applying an already circulating notion of absurdist theatre to his own play about an African issue in 1970, not inadvertently shaping a nascent theatre trend that will someday be called absurdist (Beckett’s and Ionesco’s cases in the 1950s and 1960s). A fundamental weakness in Ebewo’s criticism of Rotimi for making an absurdist theatrical move derives from his misconception that Rotimi is merely importing the European absurdist theatre trend to Nigeria. As the Korean section earlier in this chapter demonstrates, a more productive and illuminating approach to the type of cultural syncretism like Jo-Yeol Park’s and Rotimi’s is to understand the local artist’s practice as *glocal*. Clearly, Rotimi’s play,
inspired by European absurdist theatre paradigms, becomes a new creation that creates fresh ties to his personal, national, continental, and possibly other wider social sites.\textsuperscript{39}

This glocal view should not necessarily deter us from discussing the work’s successful \textit{effects}. Some practitioners of cultural syncretism are more successful and effective than others, and the variants for this difference include playwrights’ artistic originality and competency, the degree of their artistic freedom, and specific local audiences’ disposition (or, their susceptibility toward the artist’s syncretic choices). In this regard, Ebewo’s strong distaste for Rotimi’s use of absurdist techniques deserves attention. Ebewo writes: “Absurd! Why absurd on the Nigerian stage? Why absurd by a Nigerian playwright?” (157). He also writes, “In Nigeria, our audiences seek for what is popular and comprehensible, and not what is bizarre. Ours is the temperament of an action-bound society and not the whimsical” (158). Significantly, he also adds that “Our audiences come to the theatre to see and hear what is meaningful, and to achieve this, the playwright must present what the people can easily understand” (160); and that “Our theatre yearns madly for a communal experience” (160). As Part II of my dissertation shows, formerly colonized groups and Indigenous groups under dominant settler cultures (based on all my case study area groups) become more passionately concerned with recuperating and celebrating their indigenous local and national heritages in the later 20\textsuperscript{th}-century (the most notable shifting point being the 1970s). Also, in my case study groups, before (although not necessarily and not in a clear-cut way) this recuperation and celebration phase, there had been an individual and/or collective artistic tendency to write about a social, historical, cultural, and/or metaphysical sense of \textit{alienation, discord, or absurdity} that they were still experiencing in the decades immediately following
independence or WWII. Therefore, while Rotimi’s *Holding Talks* is still viewed as part of “the canon of dramatic arts in Nigeria” (qtd. in Ebewo 159), strong resistance (like Ebewo’s) to Rotimi’s incorporation of absurdist theatre motifs might be related to 1) local critics and audiences’ partial and incorrect understanding of the category of absurdist theatre as merely meaningless, boring, erudite, atheist, or bizarre, and to 2) the timing of *Holding Talks*’s local reception (premiered in 1970 and published in 1979) in Nigeria, when recuperatory, celebratory, and even triumphantal sentiments about tradition, indigeneity, and heritage were getting more in demand, globally and regionally, which converges with the increasing circulation of the discourse of postcolonialism in the 1970s and onwards.

3. Gendering Absurdist Theatre in Ireland: Subversive Maternity and Crossing Gender Boundaries in Marina Carr’s *Low in the Dark*

In the first edition (1961) of *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin grouped together four playwrights—i.e., Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet—as main practitioners of the major theatre trend in the 1950s and 1960s that he was conceptualizing, and in later editions, Esslin added Harold Pinter to this group of main “absurdist” playwrights. It should be noted that in analyzing notable theatrical patterns around World War II, Esslin was gathering data primarily from European (although different areas within Europe) male authors. Even in “Parallels and Proselytes,” a chapter featuring playwrights associated with or evoking absurdist patterns, Esslin’s long list is of *male* playwrights from different parts of Europe. Not surprisingly, two of the three case studies in my present chapter deal with the works of *male* playwrights from
formerly colonized regions. Certainly, absurdist theatre has mainly been regarded as predominantly (European and) male theatre, if not assumed to be universal. There are, however, female playwrights whose works evoke strong absurdist motifs. This section presents a case study of absurdist theatrical motifs in the works of a female playwright from a formerly colonized region.

The contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr’s earlier works are viewed as absurdist, whereas her later plays have more mythical and magically-realistic characteristics. To borrow Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan’s words, Carr’s works have, over time, “crossed genres” and “shift[ed] from the metatheatrical, absurd strategies of Low in the Dark to her more recent, strange hybrids of myth, realism and the grotesque” (xv). Carr’s first (and absurdist) play *Ullaloo* was given a reading at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1989, and premiered at The Peacock in 1991; Carr wrote this play in her final year at University College Dublin. In *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (1997), Christopher Murray states that “[t]he general rule in the Republic is that plays by women may be heard, i.e., given a reading, but not seen, i.e., staged” (236). Noting the hostile environment for female playwrights and their lack of representation in Irish Theatre, Murray states that Carr “was certainly being careful not to be pigeonholed as a feminist playwright” (236), and views *Ullaloo* as “conspicuously [taking] its stand on absurdism rather than on a feminist issue” (236). It is my regret that I cannot provide a detailed analysis of *Ullaloo* (Carr’s first but unpublished play) in this section because it is, according to the Agency of The Irish Theatre Institute, “currently held in the National Library in Dublin with a fifty-year lock on it,” and, thus, is inaccessible. However, brief summaries and reviews right after the play’s appearance
shed lights on this now veiled manuscript. Critic Charles McNulty writes that “this absurdist comedy” is “a two-character play about a man growing the longest toenails in the world and a woman trying to ‘achieve nothingness’” (106). He also mentions that “the title alone, which is Gaelic for ‘death song,’ suggests the morbid bravura of *Endgame*” (106). Murray also views the play as absurdist, but he gives it a negative review:

> The man-woman relationship was presented as played out, reduced to fetishes and absurd obsessions, offset by a dream of a unisex future. As the dramati[z]ation of an impasse it was a noted flop, and *sadly shows how Beckett can sometimes be bad for a rising young playwright.* (236, my emphasis)

Negative reviews like Murray’s might have possibly contributed to the play’s current inaccessibility from the public.

Carr’s next play (but her first play to be published and staged) is *Low in the Dark*, which premiered at the Project Arts Center, Dublin, in 1989. Critics describe *Low in the Dark* as absurdist, and their reviews of the play are generally positive. Anthony Roche comments that the influence of Beckett is “well absorbed” in this play (qtd. in Murray 236). Murray describes it as “a witty, absurdist play subverting the patriarchal view of women,” and states that in this play “[…] absurdism is given a satiric thrust, as Irish Catholic attitudes are parodied through a language recogni[z]ably traditional” (235). I would add that this play demonstrates a unique manner of interweaving gynocentric themes with absurdist theatrical conventions.

*Low in the Dark* opens with a visibly divided dual stage space. Stage left is a “bizarre bathroom,” which belongs to Bender (in her fifties) and her daughter Binder (in her mid-twenties). Stage right is described as “[t]he men’s space,” where we see “tyres,
rims, unfinished walls and blocks [...]” Baxter in his mid-thirties and Bone in his late-twenties occupy this man’s space. At the beginning of both Act I and Act II, Curtains—a character to be played by a female actor “covered from head to toe in heavy, brocaded curtains and rail” (5)—shows up center stage. During the play, Curtains comes to the stage from time to time, intermingles with other characters, and tells a story about “the man and woman.” The other characters seem familiar with this story because Curtains has told it many times before. Curtains’ stories evoke Hamm and Nagg’s story-telling in Beckett’s Endgame (for their repeated, cyclical, and cryptic qualities) as well as Lenny’s stories in Pinter’s The Homecoming (for violent and cruel components in certain parts of the stories).

Visually compelling and unambiguously recurrent in the play are the imageries of pregnancy, birthing, and babies. Bender, a single mother close to menopause, has been giving birth to babies all her life. She is also the only character who gives birth to babies several times on stage, while other characters—certainly Binder and Bone (a male character)—do get pregnant later. Arguably, the play as a whole suggests the idea that women in many male-dominated societies have taken on pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing often without men’s support and without due appreciation. Bender’s constant and rapid delivery of babies and her hectic nurturing rituals give an impression (with a sarcastic twist) that she is like a child-bearing, child-birthing, and child-rearing machine. At one point, Bender protests that her daughter came, “[s]creaming out of the womb” “ripping everything in [her]path asunder [...]” (30), while, at another point, she relies on her maternity to affirm her identity; she claims that “[she is] a bloody genius [...] artist,” because she begets “the art that is life” (52). Many parts of the play draw our attention to
maternity-as-hard-work by showing pregnant characters (both female and male) 
embodying the pains originating from changing bodies. These scenes about babies, 
birthing, and pregnancy are particularly non-naturalistic and absurdist because of their 
bizarre, metatheatrical, or surreal imageries. For example, see the following stage 
directions in Act I:

Binder goes to the shower, throws three babies on Bender and sits with two, both 
breast-feeding.
Curtains gets up and goes over to the shower. She grabs an armful of 
babies, and orchestrates the feeding of the babies. Soundtrack of babies gurgling
and crying comes over. (51)

Also, note the subsequent stage directions:

The yellow baby is swapped for the pink baby. All three of them [Curtains, 
Binder, and Bender] are involved in the throwing and the catching. (52)

These surreal, vaudevillesque, and disproportionate images as well as characters’
frequent role-playing—some of absurdist plays’ major characteristics—contribute to the 
satirical energy of the play. The satire in the play works on multiple levels. In addition to 
emphasizing maternity, the play exposes rigid and stereotypical boundaries of gender 
categories via the metatheatrical device of role-playing, while dramatizing untidy gender 
realities. As it progresses, the play deconstructs the initial binary division between male 
and female space on stage. Male and female characters play either heterosexual male or 
female gender roles in a stereotypical or highly inflated manner, often taking up the 
conventional gender role of the opposite sex; for example, their role-playing features a 
male role “building a wall” and a female role “knitting.” On the other hand, stressing 
actual untidy gender traits is Binder and Bender confusedly referring to Bender’s new-
born baby, sometimes as “he” and “his” and other times as “she” and “her,” as if they cannot clearly determine the sex of an infant. Along the same line, Binder describes that Bender’s baby-girl “sucks like a man” (9). Although the play does not engage overtly with homosexuality (featuring characters quite strongly preoccupied with their desire for the opposite sex), it still questions and disrupts the neat and dualistic gender boundaries between heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Further, Bone and Baxter (male characters)’s desire to teach their potential girl-babies to “sing and dance,” “how to put lipstick on,” “to flutter the eyelids,” “to say no, when she means yes,” and “[to say] yes, when she means no” (67) reflects a male-centered society’s construction of a certain kind of feminine gender role.

On another level, the play satirizes practices and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and its patriarchal system. One of Curtains’s stories is about the man and the woman coming to a hill where three men were nailing three women to three crosses. This story has a biblical reference to Luke’s account about Jesus and the two thieves at Cavalry (Luke 23: 39-41), but in Curtains’s version, a woman is the Christ figure. Carr’s subversion of the patriarchal tradition of the Catholic Church becomes clearer, when all three female characters recite in unison: “In the name of the mother, the daughter and the holy spirit. (Pause.) Ah! (Pause.) MEN!” (50). Bender’s referring to one of her infant sons as the Pope also enacts a symbolic subversion of the patriarchal Catholic Church by infantilizing the head of the Church as well as reminding us that all men, including those with great authority, exist via the body of a woman. Giving “reverential and preferential treatment” to her baby the Pope, Bender says:
Bender: I’ll feed him again. I want him fat and shiny. Holy Father, (bows to the baby) you’ll pull your auld mother up by the hair of her chinny chin chin, won’t you? We’ll have tea in the palace and I’ll learn Italian and the pair of us side by side, launching crusades, banning divorce, denying evolution, destroying the pill, canonizing witches. Oh, a great time we’ll have, you singing the Latin with a tower of a hat on you, the big stick in your rubbed fist and them all craw-thumping around the hem of your frock and whispering for miracles. And me sitting there as proud as punch in the middle of the incense and the choir. Oh. A great time we’ll have, the pair of us, we will surely. (She’s in the shower among the babies. She closes the shower curtains.) (55, my emphasis)

Bender’s unambiguous sarcasm above takes the traditionally male-centered Catholic Church as the butt of her absurd joke, mocking the Church’s desire to control marriages and women’s bodies, and exposing certain sectors of the Church that steadfastly holds onto the medieval view of the world (see Chapter 1.1. for “absurd jokes”).

Last but not least, the stories that Curtains tells in different parts of the play direct readers/spectators toward a more gynocentric and possibly more homosocial vision of life. Her stories, which loosely echo the other characters’ experiences of relationships, delineate a pattern of development and decline of heterosexual relationships, suggesting that “the millions of men and women” (99) are fraught with misconceptions and (initial) idealizations of the other. To reduce her enigmatic stories to a simple formula, the man and the woman both, first, have the same dream of achieving a great rapport with the other. They meet, get passionate about each other, but soon have a conflict, feel that they are trapped in a lukewarm relationship, fight, and end up finding themselves in a loveless relationship. In the end, they realize that they actually never even met in the first place. Although Curtains’ stories present neither the man nor the woman as clearly ethically or morally superior to the other sex, her narrative still suggests, if subtly, that the woman
has slightly more control and agency of the situations; the woman takes initiatives to make their relationship work (again) while the man tends to think linearly and has trouble seeing things from the woman’s viewpoint. The play ends with Curtains’ narrative, which ends with the woman’s suggestion to the man (thus, this structure keeps with the often multi-layered metatheatrical nature of absurd jokes that I have argued in Chapter 1.1.):

“If you have courage[,] get off your bicycle and come with me” (99). Curtains has told of the woman’s suggestion to the man, “come with me,” not only at the beginning but also in the middle of the play. In Act I, Scene 5, the woman says, “Come with me and I will change you beyond recognition!” (54, my emphasis). This cyclical structure allows us to expect that with the woman’s last words, “come with me,” she will change the man.

As the play progresses, the male characters change. In Act I, female characters speak their wishes; out of frustration, Binder says, “I’d love to get a man pregnant!” (46). Curtains also narrates, “One day the woman turned to the man and said, “It’s time you had a baby” (51). As if to keep with these women’s wishes, male characters in Act II do (desire to) become more “feminine” and “womanly” even to the point of getting pregnant themselves. In Act II, Scene 3, Bone comes to stage, “hugely pregnant, wearing one high-heel shoe and one man’s shoe” (67), a metaphor for his being able to take up a woman’s perspective (by literally placing half of himself in a woman’s shoe). Baxter, another male character, who envies Bone’s pregnancy, might also be potentially pregnant by the end of the play. The last scene shows that he has “a huge swelling or hump or pregnancy on his left shoulder” (96). Despite these changes in men, female characters remain with each other, partly because of their doubt about meaningful relationships with men, and partly because the aging Bender needs Binder’s support. Likewise, male characters stick
together, supporting each other during their “pregnancy.” In this way, the play as a whole moves to imagine a more gynocentrically homosocial world in which people of the same sex have a greater bond. Significantly, while men change (becoming more maternal), women continue to affirm maternity, womanhood, and “womanly emotion.” Bender even talks favorably about men with feminine qualities, saying, “Great men always sound like women” (75). Following this gynocentric transformation, Act I’s line, “women always cry when they conceive” (14), is linked to Act II’s line, “men always cry when they conceive” (60). By the final scene, all four characters are allegedly pregnant and maternal.

As already shown in my discussion, what critic Charles McNulty calls “subversive maternal sentiment” (107) is a key to Low in the Dark, and is also an ongoing thread that connects Carr’s early plays with her later plays like By the Bog of Cats... (For Carr’s later play, see Chapter 4.1.). All characters in Low in the Dark foreground and affirm maternity, even male characters are invited to it. Further, maternity works to subvert the traditionally patriarchal organizations like the Roman Catholic Church in the play. It is then not surprising at all that behind this distinctive synthesis of subversive maternity and absurdist theatrical motifs is a female playwright. Marina Carr, much like Curtains the storyteller, leads her audiences to consider shifting to less binary and more maternal and gynocentric views. Carr’s cultural location, Ireland (traditionally patriarchal and Catholic), must have undoubtedly inspired her to write about women’s issues and criticism of the Catholic Church. Earlier, I quoted Murray’s comment about the hostile environment for female playwrights in Ireland: “[t]he general rule in the Republic is that plays by women may be heard, i.e., given a reading, but not seen, i.e.,
“staged” (236). In this context, the character Curtains, whose voice is heard but whose face is not seen, could be read as Carr’s jab at this patriarchal practice in the field of theatre in Ireland. Just like her own character Curtains, in her early playwriting career, Carr might have preferred to have her gynocentric themes lurking behind the veil of traditionally masculine, absurdist, or surrealistic theatre conventions.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In Section One, I have located South Korean theatre’s active engagement in the 1960s with Western absurdist theatre within Korean theatre history, and related it to the nation’s troubled post-independence psyche. For instance, Jo-Yeol Park, who credits Beckett as a main inspiration for his play *A Dialogue Between Two Long-necked People*, adopts *Godot*-esque motifs to allegorize a continuously deferred resolution for the partitioned Korea. Similarly, in Section Two, I have situated Nigerian popular playwright Ola Rotimi’s *Holding Talks* in Nigeria’s political context, and have shown that Rotimi transformed Western absurdist theatre motifs, dramatizing Nigeria’s political impasse and postcolonial disillusionment. In the cases of both Park and Rotimi, I have also discussed local critics’ strong resistance to this conscious borrowing of Western theatre. For instance, in my analysis of Rotimi, I suggested that the publication year of his absurdist play, 1979, might have contributed to this local resistance. The late 1970s is generally a period when recuperatory and celebratory sentiments about traditional heritage were increasing nationally and globally, alongside the circulation of postcolonial discourses. The playwright’s cultural location is also important for Irish female playwright, Marina Carr. Her early play, *Low in the Dark* subverts Ireland’s traditionally Catholic, male-
centered, and conservative and repressive gender ideologies, by dramatizing the images of subversive maternity and gender transgression. These three case studies demonstrate diverse ways in which postcolonial playwrights transform the political undercurrent of absurdist motifs to address local political situations.
PART II

GLOCAL-LOCALITY
CHAPTER 3

TAESUK OH’S TURN TO KOREA’S PRE-COLONIAL MEMORY

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three will discuss a notable shift in the oeuvre of Korean playwright/director Taesuk Oh (1940-)—from his early plays (roughly from the 1960s to the early 1970s) to his later plays (roughly from the 1970s on). Taesuk Oh, a renowned Korean playwright/director, is regarded as one of the most pioneering and representative figures among those Korean theatre artists who draw on Korean traditional heritage. Oh’s later works are also known for rich intertextualities and cultural syncretism, which sometimes pose great challenges to audiences. In this chapter, I will investigate the ways in which Oh navigates multiple global and local artistic possibilities, situating my analysis within Korean history and global trends. Contextually speaking, this chapter continues my discussion of Korean theatre history, picking up where I left off in Chapter Two, Section One. Further, this chapter’s conceptualization of a particular mode of artists’ relations to globalities/localities will establish a critical framework for other comparable cases around the globe, which I will discuss with slightly different analytical focuses in the following chapters.
Taesuk Oh’s Early Plays and the “Absurdist” Controversy

The early plays of Taesuk Oh, who also directs most of his plays, have been controversially associated with absurdist aesthetics. In his interview with Oh, which is collected in Oh Taesuk Yeongeuk [Taesuk Oh’s Theatre], Yon-ho Suh mentions the following plays that he thought evoke absurdist elements: Weding Deureseu [Wedding Dress] (1967); Hwanjeolgi [Change of Season] (1968, especially evocative of Pinter’s The Birthday Party); Yeowang-gwa Giseung [The Queen and the Strange Monk] (1969); Yudayeo, Daki Ulgijeone [Judas, before the Rooster Crows] (1969); Gyohang (1969); Yukgyowie Yumocha [A Baby Buggy on the Overbridge] (1970). When Suh asks Oh about Western absurdist theatre’s influence on his theatre, listing the six plays above, Oh denies any particular relation. In the interview, Oh maintains that if his plays appear to have Western absurdist elements, it is perhaps because he has “instinctively avoided moving [his] plot in a [conventionally] expected direction” and has employed the “indirect” and “roundabout” Korean traditional mode of communication. Traditionally in Korea, Oh says, the speaker’s “omissions and leaps” are understood to be crucial unspoken pointers of meaning for the listener, although contemporary Korean audiences are not well practiced in this type of communication. When Suh encapsulates what Oh has said, saying, “So your theatre is not much related to absurdist theatre,” Oh answers, “Right, I don’t think it is, although I did have the feeling that language is misleading” (qtd. in Jang 45).

While Oh denies any direct Western absurdist influence, Oh’s comment on his sense of the limits of language and his explanation of how he came to write his debut play, Yeong-Gwang [Glory] (premiered in 1962), suggest his relationship, though
indirectly, with the global and local popularity of absurdist theatre. Saying that the thread for all his early plays is the “limits of communication,” Oh explains the main theme in his early plays: “Reaching a meeting point with another person is difficult; we are bound to be strangers to each other no matter how long we stay together; whenever we meet, we are always strangers, that is it” (qtd. in Jang 36). As for his debut play, Oh says that he wrote the play when he was in his third year of college, wanting to win the award money in a play competition by writing an eccentric play. Downplaying it as his amateur “play on words,” he says that in the play he mixed what he “perfunctorily” heard about Ionesco with his “then merely burgeoning understanding” of O’Neill and some “basic familiarity” with the Pak Cheomji version of kkokdugeuk (Korean traditional puppetry) (qtd. in Jang 34). Oh’s understanding of absurdist theatre might have been, as he said, perfunctory. When he denies Western absurdist theatrical elements in his theatre, he says:

> Because I am more familiar with Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, I have not been willing to acknowledge absurdist influence. To use the analogy of a mathematical equation, this way [referring to the three playwrights he mentioned], is at least a linear equation or a quadratic equation, isn’t it? If I fell in the direction of absurdist theatre, I wonder if things could have been precarious later on. In some sense, I am quite conservative. (qtd. in Jang 45)

The connection Oh draws between absurdist theatre and precariousness suggests that Oh, like some Western and Korean critics, may have thought of absurdist theatre as something akin to theatre of nihilism and meaninglessness—a rather reductive assessment of plays that are called absurdist; for instance, Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* (1959) is, according to Ionesco himself, an “anti-Nazi play,” and has socio-political meaning. It is clear that Oh was not directly influenced nor inspired by absurdist plays. However, his debut play’s Ionesco-evoking *non sequiturs* and his early works’ preoccupation with
signature absurdist themes of alienation, discord, and miscommunication couldn’t have been merely incidental and accidental. When Oh was working on his theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, Western absurdist plays were often staged as new and exciting theatre in Korea; and he also professed his “perfunctory” exposure to (global) Ionesco. What I suggest here is that in addition to Oh’s own personal and (non-realistic) artistic inclinations (including his use of Korean traditional modes of communication), the zeitgeist of post-colonial Korea of the 60s, which intersected with that of the post-World War II Europe, must have also contributed to Oh’s early plays on some, if limited, levels. In this regard, it is worth noting Hyun-sook Shin’s analysis that Western absurdist plays provided points of identification to South Koreans who were generally experiencing a sense of loss, anxiety, and alienation, owing to rapid industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s (288).

Glocal-locality, or Re-centering on the Restored/Being-Restored Local Cultures within the Larger Local

From the 1970s onward, Oh’s approach shifted to Korean traditional performance aesthetics, and any single stylistic category becomes insufficient for describing Oh’s theatre. The 1970s was also when some Korean theatre artists began to seek their artistic identity in traditional performance aesthetics, myths, legends, classical literature, and folklore. Hyeon-Cheol Kim points out that this effort in Korea, which is postcolonial in nature, has connections with the global discourse of postcolonialism. As Kim rightly notes, Korean theatre’s attempts to revive and incorporate its traditions are postcolonial. Since the 1905 Eulsa Treaty (a.k.a. the “Protectorate Treaty”), Japanese Resident-
Generals and later the Japanese Colonial Government’s policies promoted Japanese culture in Korea while suppressing Korean history and traditions (including Korean indigenous performances), subjecting Koreans’ artistic activities to Japanese colonial censorship. Japan’s assimilation policy was the severest during the later years of the colonial rule, banning all suspected Korean nationalist activities, forcing the Japanese religion Shinto on Koreans, and prohibiting the use of the Korean language in numerous venues, especially in school. In this context of colonial modernity, Korean indigenous performances seemed “boring” and “outdated” to many Koreans, whereas Japanese *shimpa*, *shingeki*, and Western realistic theatre were presented as “advanced.”

Japanese colonialism, in conjunction with Korea’s Confucian condescension to theatre-related activities and the continued Western hegemony in South Korean society, all contributed to many Koreans’ distance from Korean indigenous performance tradition even up to the present day. Increasingly, however, efforts are being made to redress this situation.

In the light of postcolonialism, Oh’s disavowal of Western absurdist aesthetics, claiming his relation to it as no more than perfunctory, is significant, as is his articulation of his own aesthetics as distinct from Western and Japanese aesthetics. In Western theatre, Oh says, audiences peep at the stage through the fourth wall, sitting in the “darkened” auditorium; however, in the theatre of the East, the audience is located “at the same height as the theatre stage […] placing actors and audiences on the same level in height” and “enabling them to see the other under light.” As for Japanese traditional theatre, Oh repeats what he said at the conference for Korean and Japanese directors in what he recalls to be “1992 or 1993”:
There I briefly mentioned, “When I first saw kabuki and noh in Japan, I was very surprised [because] there are theatrical grammars, standards, and something exact… When Japanese had made something excellent like this, what did our ancestors do? That’s what I thought at first. However, over the following decade, I had come to realize that it was not that [our ancestors] couldn’t; our [Koreans’] temperament by nature defies getting into exact molds. That is why they chose not to make it, it was not because they didn’t have the wisdom to make it,” this is what I said to my Japanese friends.

He goes on to explain to Suh what he believes Korean performance aesthetics are:

That is what I previously mentioned—going off the beat, not on the beat. When a leading gong-player in a folk band is expected to hit the gong, he does not. [...] But the audience can hear it. In other words, this is the same idea as omissions and leaps, which I mentioned earlier. That kind of space in the margin, that elasticity, ironically gives more persevering life force. (qtd. in Jang 9-18)

_Chunpung’s Wife_ (premiered in 1976) was one of Oh’s most tradition-inspired and successful plays to draw on various Korean traditional performance aesthetics. In what follows, I will delineate some noteworthy literary, embodied, and other cultural components in _Chunpung’s Wife_, and analyze how Oh employs them, thus providing context for my discussion of Oh’s syncretism in relation to Western avant-garde theatre styles and other types of culturally and stylistically syncretic theatre. The characters and major events in _Chunpung’s Wife_ draw on _Yi Chungpung-Jeon_, an anonymous novel of the late period of the Joseon Kingdom (1392-1897). Chunpung’s wife, in the novel, is a strong and fascinating female character, atypical of women represented in literature of the Confucian and patriarchal Joseon society. In the novel, Chunpung, who has a strong appetite for pretty women, batters and leaves his wife, only to waste all his money on a gisaeng (female entertainer) named Chuwol in Pyeongyang. Chuwol takes all Chunpung’s money and kicks him out. Without any money to live on and too ashamed to return to his wife, Chunpung begs Chuwol to use him as her servant. Hearing of this,
Chunpung’s wife disguises herself as a man, goes to Pyeongyang as an aide to Pyeongyang’s Governor, punishes Chuwol and returns the money to Chunpung. When Chunpung returns home, he then finds out that his wife was the aide to the Governor and feels remorseful.²²

Although Oh builds on the characters of Chunpung and Chunpung’s wife from the novel, he adds new characters and alters the plot of Yi Chunpung-Jeon. Significantly, Oh’s play pushes the life of Chunpung’s wife to extreme abjection, dramatizing the wife’s sense of han (Korean tragic sentiment).²³ For example, in the original novel, Chunpung’s wife becomes the aide to the Governor by gaining the favor of the noble lady in the household of Pyeongyang’s Governor. The wife works hard with her sewing skills to earn enough money to prepare nutritious food for the noble lady, who used to be sick, but recovers thanks to the care of Chunpung’s wife. In Oh’s play, however, Chunpung’s wife is not given these resources. Iji and Deokjung, two mythical reptile characters similar to the character of the Turtle in Byeoljubu-jeon,²⁴ tell the wife that the only way left for her to achieve a higher social position is to use her body to give birth to a baby for someone else.

In a performance video-recorded in August 1999,²⁵ Chunpung’s wife, recognizing this wretched situation, weeps miserably at the dilemma of having to give up her body to someone else to get to her husband and ultimately to gain his love (which, it turns out, she will never have). Prompted by Iji’s words, “Let’s live tough. Life is only once,”²⁶ the wife begins to give up her body, which is symbolically portrayed on stage. Iji and Deokjung quickly bring a small round dark metal pot to the center stage, repeatedly singing the first half of “Gujiga,”²⁷ the most ancient ritualistic, conjuring communal verse
extant in Korea. The dark round pot represents the turtle, and as they bring it in, they call out, “Turtle! Turtle!” The round hard surface of the pot evokes the dark hard shell of a turtle. With the continued traditional percussion music in the background, the wife flings herself down and lies on her back, holding the dark round pot with her feet, and thrusting it in and out between her legs, slowly but forcefully. The scene ends with her screaming, mixed with sobbing, as she laboriously collapses from her prostrated position with her raised buttocks—as if she is, in a weird logic, giving birth back to the dark pot. The first half of “Gujiga,” chanted by Iji and Deokjung, goes, “Turtle, Turtle/ stick out [your] head.” While there are different interpretations of “Gujiga,” Byeong-uk Jeong reads the head of the turtle as representing new life and as a phallic symbol (Jeong 54-59). Based on Jeong’s interpretation, it is significant that Iji and Deokjung do not sing the other half of the verse (‘If [you] don’t stick out [your head], [I/ we] will roast [with fire] and eat [you]’). Citing Sir James George Frazer’s *Myths of the Origin of Fire* and Gaston Bachelard’s *La Psychanalyse du Feu*, Jeong argues that the last line of “Gujiga” could have originated from ancient women’s burning sexual desire and thus could be a metaphor for female genitalia (Jeong 54-59). Structurally, then, the second half of the verse provides a threatening or balancing power to the first half that evokes the phallic symbol. Thus, the omission of the second half accentuates Chunpung’s wife’s abjection, her sacrifice, her life of inequity, from which she, however, has to move forward, as she ironically gives birth to the “turtle” that she initially had to let thrust upon her body.

While the 1999 production stressed the pathos of *han* (with the wife and other characters’ wailing, sobbing, and screaming protractedly), it is also strongly peppered with comedic elements drawing from various traditional performances such as *pansori*
(one-person story-singing performance), *talchum/talnori* (mask dance/mask performance), and *kkokdugeuk*. All characters exaggerate their facial expressions, and, most of the time, they deliver their lines facing the audience like actors before the camera in a film, even when they are talking to one another—a common directorial choice in Oh’s theatre. Further, the production incorporates *talchum* and *kkokdugeuk*, with characters frequently bursting into traditional-style songs and dances. These directorial and theatrical choices contribute to the impression that the characters are acting like puppets. In the inserted court scene, in which Chunpung’s wife as a newly appointed aide to the Governor plays the role of a judge, another character who is also the wife of an unfaithful husband acts coquettishly toward her husband, moving her lips in a cartoonishly exaggerated, fast-paced manner. This wife, who elicits much laughter in the auditorium, springs to sit down suddenly and shakes her body like a doll as she lies down, evoking the general images of puppets in *kkokdugeuk*.

Oh gives grotesque twists to some of the masks and puppet imageries as well. Unlike in the original novel, Chungpung’s wife in Oh’s play is characterized as ugly with “bumpy skin” and “a warped face,” and with six fingers on one of her hands. Chunpung’s wife, thirsting for her husband’s attention and love, even springs up from death to engage in a sexual dance with Chunpung, who mistakes her for Chuwol because she is covered in Chuwol’s clothes. In the video-recording of the 1999 production, the wife frantically hides behind and covers herself with Chuwol’s flower-patterned red silk skirt, so as to keep dancing orgasmically with her husband (who she knows takes her to be Chuwol), and this renders the character of Chunpung’s wife poignant and even pathological. Evoking the ending of her sexual scene with the turtle pot, Chunpung’s wife, at the end of
this dance, looks down at her husband under her body, and shouts, with a maniacal smile, that she has just given birth to a big son. Hyeon-Cheol Kim discusses a more specific puppetry reference in this piece, that characters in Oh’s play headbutt each other, which is a frequent method of solving conflicts (e.g., by punishing another person) in Korean traditional puppetry. For instance, Kim writes, when Chunpung’s wife needs to pretend to her husband that she is dead, Deokjung makes her faint by simply giving her a headbutt (222), Headbutting, drawn from kkokdugeuk, is one of the main theatrical techniques used in this play to advance the plot and give it twists. This technique exemplifies the four key concepts of Oh’s theatre, which are extracted from Korean traditional performance aesthetics: “omissions, leaps, unexpectedness, and spontaneity” (“Mokwha Repertory Company”).

Besides “Gujiga,” talchum/ talnori, pansori, kkokdugeuk, and Yi Chunpung-Jeon, Chunpung’s Wife also incorporates elements of gut (Korean shaman ritual), Korean funeral rites, and Buddhist chants. In addition, the 1999 production of Chunpung’s Wife makes a humorous reference to an aspect of Korean contemporary culture, inserting a short scene in which actors and actresses suddenly stop playing their characters and decide to take a photo at the play’s critical moment, reflecting many Koreans’ fondness for photo taking. In many of his plays, Oh addresses Korean contemporary issues overtly or covertly, sometimes incorporating actual unbelievable accounts of inhumanity from the newspaper.

Because of the use of the aforementioned four concepts (which cause narrative disruptions), combined with the twisted mask and puppet imageries, a mixture of tragicomedy and grotesquery, and traditional rituals, Chunpung’s Wife and Oh’s other
later plays, could possibly evoke to some audiences a range of Western avant-garde theatre styles—absurdist, Brechtian, Artaudian, and post-Artaudian, etc.—at different moments of the performance. It is of course clear that Oh’s theatre, centering on traditional performances, draws its main artistic energy from Korea’s indigenous repertoires; as Oh explained the logic of Korean traditional performances as “going off-beat,” Korean mask dance, puppetry, and oral literature, for instance, are non-realistic and often magical and surreal, like many other non-Western traditional performance repertoires. If theatre like Oh’s evokes Western avant-garde labels, it is fundamentally because the rigid essentialist binary of Western avant-garde/non-Western experimental theatre is inadequate. Because much Western avant-garde theatre appropriated non-Western sources especially in the first half of the 20th century, there has already been cultural syncretism between “West” and “non-West” in the theatre. If there is a tendency to resort confusedly to Western avant-garde labels for theatre primarily drawing on indigenous repertoires, it has to do with the dominance of Western theatre labels as academic categories and practices. While there could be stylistic similarities, the imposition of Western labels could potentially be colonialist or colonized practices when non-Western artists’ works have nothing much to do with the Western categories, but are reflecting local and indigenous, pre-colonial theatrical tradition. On the other hand, when used diplomatically and strategically, dominant labels, until they stay dominant, could also function as analogies to help quickly translate a lesser-known work to others, or in some cases have a certain “advertizing effect” to draw a larger number of audiences to the new work. But these labels must not be used to reduce the original to mere imitations of globally recognized and dominant theatrical styles.
*Chunpung’s Wife* as a whole defies categories, partly because of its use of indigenous repertoires but, more importantly, because of its syncretic nature, which shares its particular process of global navigation with much other postcolonial and Indigenous theatre. In the case of *Chunpung’s Wife* and much of Oh’s later theatre, neither the concepts of syncretism nor even “glocality,” as used by Eng-Beng Lim in “Glocalqueering in New Asia: The politics of Performing Gay in Singapore,” adequately describe Oh’s juxtaposition of Korean traditional performance repertoires, literary sources, contemporary cultural references and issues, as well as non-Korean references.

In his article, Lim argues that *Asian Boys Vol 1* (2000), an English-language queer play produced in the global city-state Singapore, demands an epistemic shift from the dominant Western interpretive paradigm of “global queering” to a glocal paradigm that defies the singular West/East binary. Lim points to the “conglomeration” of intra- and inter-Asian cultural references in the production, such as “Indian gods, Japanese pop icons, Chinese rickshawmen, samsui women, and Malay online chat addicts” (Lim 383-405). Oh’s use of various Korean (and sometimes non-Korean) cultural elements, while still syncretic in its own way, is distinct from the postmodern syncretism of disparate Asian local cultural references in *Asian Boys*. As Oh confesses, in order to write and direct a play like *Chunpung’s Wife*, which draws heavily on Korean performance tradition, he had to educate himself first, reading Korean classical texts and the few fortunately archived materials about Korean performance tradition (e.g., pansori, traditional puppetry, and mask dance), thereby acquiring the vocabularies and rhythms of the Korean language practiced, for example, in the Joseon Period. Oh recalls that
Shoettugi Nori (Shoettugi’s Play, premiered in 1972)—the first play/project in which he had to translate/adapt a Western play (Molière’s Les Fourberies de Scapin) into Korean performance tradition—was a significant learning experience that later enabled him to write Chunpung’s Wife. Certainly, Oh has been a pioneer in the growing movement of post-colonial Korean theatre’s re-discovery of its traditional heritage. His effort to give his theatre a distinct Korean identity through Korea’s indigenous/pre-colonial memory is postcolonial in its artistic spirit because that memory has been policed and suppressed through colonial modernization. Thematically, also, even such a covertly sociopolitical play as Chunpung’s Wife, compared to his many other plays, captures postcolonial energy because it dramatizes Chunpung’s wife transforming her most abject situation of han into (pro)creative moments. Further, the way he creates his theatre, and what he does with the various Korean cultural sources in his plays, suggest that Oh’s theatre is not merely a product of glocal circuits, but, more precisely, a result of what could be called glocal-locality for the convenience of shorthand.

By “glocal-locality,” I mean a particular glocal situation which prompts one to look further inwards into one’s local (ethnic/tribal/or national) identity, leading one to take a journey to encounter various local cultures from the past—cultures whose transmission had been obstructed through history (including colonial history and such experiences as forced migration, rapid “modernization,” and industrialization). Oh’s glocal encounter—e.g., Oh’s encounter with Molière’s play (global) as a Korean playwright (local)—led him to research, for example, Korean mask dance, pansori, and classical literature (i.e., traditional local cultures from the past which also have internal regional diversities). Of course, Oh cannot go back to B.C.E. 42 to hear “Gujiga,” the
ancient ritualistic communal verse, nor can he see *kkokdugeuk* as it was practiced exactly during the Goryeo (918-1392) and Joseon Periods. What he encounters are the *restored/being-restored* local cultures from the past, via archives, photos, reprinted lyrics collected by scholars, and restored repertoires of performances traditionally passed on through what Diana Taylor calls “embodied practice/knowledge” (19). To put it another way, glocal-locality—distinct from strict restoration or preservation of tradition—prompts one to encounter one’s own cultural heritage (which has become what Nigerian theatre scholar Awam Amkpa would describe as alienated or residual) *in the present*, and to employ it *in a contemporary (artistic) frame*—which already brings levels of hybridity to one’s work—for the *contemporary audience*. Glocal-locality requires a conscious effort to encounter one’s own heritage because that cultural memory is no longer easily accessible in everyday life and culture. Glocal-local practices are thus closely related to colonized or postcolonial cultures, or cultures whose heritage has been repressed/suppressed in other manners, although I realize that almost every culture must have something valuable to restore. Globalization that respects true diversity, it seems to me, would consider active forms of “glocalization,” or perhaps more importantly “glocal-localization,” both placing a fundamental emphasis on local specificities while having a global reach.

Oh’s glocal-local theatre, then, prompts his Korean audiences to experience glocal-local spectating, as well. They encounter Oh’s aestheticized expression of the restored local traditional cultures from the past in the glocal context. However, because Korean performance tradition has been distanced from contemporary Korean quotidian reality in varying degrees, many contemporary Korean audiences, if they want to fully
understand Oh’s theatre, will find themselves having to interact with restored Korean classical literature and embodied performance traditions through self, mentored, and/or institutional education.

The Pluralities of the Global and the Local

Glocal-locality, while it re-focuses on local cultures, is a product of navigating the pluralities of both global and local cultures. Suh’s extensive interview with Oh and Korean reception history of Western absurdist theatre provide insights into the various manners in which an individual in a local culture navigates various global trends, using: for example, 1) the “perfunctory” global (as in Oh’s relationship with Ionesco); 2) the “partial,” “fragmentary” or even “incorrect” global (e.g., fragmentary and imperfect translations of Esslin’s The Theatre of the Absurd into Korean until Miy-he Kim’s complete translation in 2005) 66; 3) the global that is to be differentiated or distanced (e.g., Western realistic theatre and Japanese traditional theatre for Oh); and 4) the global that is to be admired or is inspirational. In Oh’s case, examples for the last category would be Eastern European Theatre and possibly Shakespeare. In the interview, Oh mentions that while he was not without doubts about how best to employ Korean traditional performance aesthetics, he acquired a strong conviction of the value of his approach and a clearer vision for his future direction after spectating two Eastern European theatre pieces, which he recalls as “the best works,” during his trip to the U.S. in 1979. Oh points out Tadeusz Kantor’s Dead Class (1975), in particular, and comments: “the overall structure, form, and theatrical logic was just like talchum [Korean mask dance]” (qtd. in Jang 96). Oh has also produced Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet
and *Macbeth* in his style, while he says he has “borrowed” a little bit of Brechtian style in his play *Jine wa Jireong-i [Centipede and Earthworm]* (2001) (qtd. in Jang 176-81; 202). Oh, in fact, comments that getting inspiration from, and even “borrowing bits” from others’ works, is part of all artistic process and is thus salubrious; he says he lets these bits “ferment” (as in Korean fermentation-based food culture) and then incorporates them into his theatre (qtd. in Jang 244).

Through this glocal navigation, in all of his later work, Oh makes sure to place traditional performance aesthetics at the center. Also, he has produced and is interested in continuing to produce his plays in different regional dialects, thus reviving and in a sense re-creating them. To reiterate, various global theatre repertoires stimulated Oh to define and invent his own theatre, inspiring him to look further into diverse local cultures and languages of Korea. Further, the themes of his plays, though diverse, include historical issues related to Japanese colonialism and issues of post-colonial Korea, or colonial legacies—including national partition, the Korean War, and the extreme pro-Japan/anti-Japan or leftist/rightist internal division among contemporary Koreans, which he views as self-destructive.  

### Shifting South Korean Theatre

While some Korean theatre artists and playwrights began to seek their traditional heritage in the 1970s and more actively in the 1980s, Korean plays showing absurdist elements persisted in the 1970s. According to Im, Korean plays in the 1970s that show absurdist elements are: Jo-byeong Yun’s *Gunneolmoksappa [A Tale of a Railroad Crossing]* (1970), Yong-rak Kim’s *Bujeongbyeongdong [Non-virtuous Hospital Ward]*
(1971) and Dwajideului Sanchaek [Pigs’ Stroll] (1972), Jae-hyeon Lee’s Elibiteo [Elevator] (1972), and Hyeon-hwa Lee’s Nuguseyo? [Who’s There?] (1974) and Swi-Swi-Swiit [Sh-Sh-Shush] (1976). Im writes, however, that since the late 1970s, Korean absurdist plays seem to have “withered” because of new types of avant-garde theatre, musicals, and playwrights’ experiments with traditional performance aesthetics, although some absurdist elements can still be detected in the works of several playwrights in the 1980s (Im 18-19).

My examination of Park’s play (see Chapter 2.1.) and the trajectory of Oh’s theatre, with a close analysis of Chunpung’s Wife, illuminate the pluralities of both the global and the local as well as the interaction of Korean theatre with shifting global theatrical trends. Roughly speaking, this was a shift from the concentrated popularity of Western absurdist theatre in the 1960s and 1970s to a more creative attention to traditional heritage from the 1970s and onwards, although there were also new interests in musicals and other avant-garde theatre. Of course, the addition of different stylistic focuses and consideration of other playwrights would certainly reveal more dynamics and diversity in the theatre of post-colonial Korea, and this section shows only part of the whole picture. However, I have limited my analysis to Korean playwrights who I see as best representing two of the notable trends in Korean postcolonial theatre: 1) localization of absurdist theatre, the type of Western theatre that South Korean theatre engaged actively, if controversially, and 2) a shift to a creative attention to Korean indigenous/pre-colonial memory.

My research and analysis suggest that Korean post-colonial sociopolitical reality—including, national partition (1945), the U.S.-military government (1945-1948),
the Korean War (1950-1953), rapid industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s, and a series of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes (up to 1987)—and Koreans’ certain predisposition for tragicomedy (or, traditional inclination for using humor to compensate for han) as indicated in some scholarly writings,\(^7\) as well as Koreans’ desire and predisposition for non-realistic (experimental) theatre, contributed to an environment congenial to absurdist aesthetics. Park’s play and, arguably, Oh’s early plays are creative examples. On the other hand, Oh’s later theatre shows that his interaction with multiple global theatres inspired him to search restored/being-restored local cultures and dialects in Korea. To varying degrees, Korean theatre artists have always localized non-indigenous cultures—whether it be Japanese shimpa as Korean sinpajo,\(^7\) Japanese shingeki as Korean singeuk, or Western realist theatre and absurdist aesthetics as Korean versions. These forms surely departed from their “original” forms, but they better suited Koreans in their troubled sociopolitical circumstances, and thus they were culturally and aesthetically unique. If any of these forms seem “distorted,” it was mainly because their reality was distorted. Various types of playwrights’ navigation and engagement with global and local artistic modes contribute to the diversity of Korean theatre. However, in the spirit of postcolonialism, the notable move from glocality to glocal-locality indicates a new era in which Korea’s indigenous/pre-colonial memories, or the restored local cultures from the past, are finally in the spotlight.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Chapter Three has traced Korean playwright/director Taesuk Oh’s move from his early plays that controversially evoked “absurdist” theatre to his later plays that center on
Korean traditional heritage. To demonstrate this shift, I have analyzed Oh’s arguably most tradition-inspired play, *Chunpung’s Wife* (1976), a recording of its 1999 production, Oh’s comments in interviews, as well as literary sources to which his play alludes. From this analysis, I have extrapolated a specific mode of glocality, or what I call “glocal-locality,” which is distinct from Singaporean scholar Eng-Beng Lim’s postmodernist use of the term glocality. Oh’s syncretism is centered on, or rooted in, indigenous local memories that had been suppressed via colonial history and Western hegemonic values. Many other postcolonial and Indigenous artists share this global navigation that is fundamentally inspired by cultural self-apprehension. The following two chapters will discuss comparable cases in Irish drama, with a focus on myth, and American Indian drama and performance, with a focus on performance media, respectively.
CHAPTER 4

ENGAGING IRISH MYTH: MARINA CARR’S CELTIC ROOTS

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed Korean playwright/director Taesuk Oh’s move from his early plays that evoked “absurdist” theatre to his later plays that center on pre-colonial/indigenous memory. The trajectory of Irish playwright Marina Carr’s oeuvre is similar to Oh’s in that critics describe her early plays as “absurdist” and her later plays as mythical and classical. Despite critics’ observations, however, both playwrights, also, do not acknowledge any direct influence from absurdist theatrical tradition. Then, do we also see certain parallels in these two playwrights’ aesthetic shifts in their later careers? Could Carr’s aesthetic shift also be described as glocal-local? What is her relationship with residual mythical memories in her later works? Is she as conscious about her aesthetic choices as Oh was with his later plays? Oh’s aesthetic shift in the 1970s, as well as Korean theatre’s creative attention to traditional heritage from that decade onward in general, correspond to the global emergence of postcolonial discourse in the 1970s. Carr, born in 1964, is a much younger writer than Oh or Nigerian playwright Rotimi; hence, she is not part of the 1970s’ emergent postcolonial trend. And yet, she goes through a similar shift during her career. Chapter Four will investigate Carr’s relationship with
mythical memories by situating her most mythically resonant play *By the Bog of Cats*… in its cultural contexts.

*By the Bog of Cats… and Greek Mythology?*

Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan state that plays by Marina Carr (1964--) have “crossed genres” and “shift[ed] from the metatheatrical, absurd strategies of *Low in the Dark* to her more recent, strange hybrids of myth, realism and the grotesque” (xv). However, in fact, avant-gardian non-naturalistic dramaturgy and “subversive maternal sentiment[s]” (McNulty 107) constitute on-going threads in Carr’s oeuvre from her early plays to more recent plays. Yet, as Leeney and McMullan note, Carr’s writing has certainly shifted more toward mythical dramaturgy, starting with *The Mai* (premiered in 1994) and followed by *Portia Coughlan* (premiered in 1996) and *By the Bog of Cats*… (premiered in 1998). The characters in her later plays are also more realistic than those in her early plays; for example, *Low in the Dark* features pregnant male characters (See Chapter 2.3.). And yet, like her early absurdist plays featuring larger-than-life characters, her later plays present archetypal and allegorical characters because these plays are constructed on the plane of myth.

Thus far, most scholars and critics have interpreted Carr’s later plays as evocative of Greek mythology. Irish playwright Frank McGuinness, for instance, writes in the program note for the 1998 premiere of *By the Bog of Cats*… at the Abbey Theatre:

> I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I think it might be the Greek gods—Zeus and Hera, Pallas Athena. She knows what the Greeks know. […] Her brave women look into the face of those that have gone before them—Medea, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie […] I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I can’t say for certain, but I am certain in this play she writes in Greek. (87-88)
Carr herself acknowledges her reference to the Greek tragedy *Medea*, which might have fueled the commonly held view that her plays are primarily Greek influenced. In his interview with Carr, Irish broadcaster Mike Murphy asks, particularly in reference to *By the Bog of Cats*... and *Portia Coughlan*: “Did you use classical references, Medea or anything like that?” Carr responds, agreeing first with Murphy’s suggestion:

The plot is completely *Medea*. It was surprising how few people picked up on that initially. It was quite well disguised, but I was amazed that it took awhile before people realized. The character of Portia Coughlan just came to me. It was the name that came to me, that’s all I had, and I thought it would be lovely to write a play about a woman called Portia Coughlan. (5)

Notice here that while Carr acknowledges the *Medea* reference, she does not elaborate on it at length. Instead, she, soon, moves on to talk about how inspirational the name Portia was. Carr continues to explain further how she came up with the ideas for *Portia Coughlan*:

You know the famous passage in *The Merchant of Venice*? “In Belmont is a lady richly left, / and she is fair, and, fairer than that word, Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes / I did receive fair speechless messages: / Her name is Portia; nothing undervalued/ To Cato’s daughter, Brutus’s Portia: / Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth, / For the four winds blow in from every coast / Renowned suitors…” In a sense, Portia Coughlan is based on that speech because I’ve always loved it. She lives by the Belmont River. She has suitors. She has everything a woman could desire. (6)

Here, Carr seems most interested in discussing how she loved the lines from *The Merchant of Venice* (from which she got the name Portia) to the point of memorizing them. Carr’s multi-faceted and drifting response here indicates that her inspirations for playwriting come from multiple sources (including Shakespeare), which leads us to consider the *Medea* reference only as one aspect of *By the Bog of Cats*... Further, Carr’s use of a singular noun, “the plot,” and her continued focus only on *Portia Coughlan* (only
one of the two plays Murphy asked about) suggests that Carr’s acknowledgement of the
*Medea* reference might possibly be somewhat limited either to *Portia Coughlan* or
*Medea*, both featuring a dangerous mother.

Certainly, basic motifs of Euripides’s Greek tragedy *Medea*, which is based on the
Greek myth of Jason and Medea, are present even in *By the Bog of Cats*…. However, I
argue that the general and prevalent Greek interpretation of *By the Bog of Cats*...
obscures other (perhaps more important) sources of inspiration for Carr’s playwriting,
including those that might be even relatively unconscious for the playwright herself.
Significantly, in the same interview during which Carr acknowledged her play’s
resemblance to *Medea*, the majority of her comments are about her Irish background,
particularly the culture and environment of Ireland’s midlands (where she lived as a child
and teenager) and her fascination with the swan (which she connects to Irish mythology
and the Irish canon). Particularly given how her biography informs her writing, situating
the works of Marina Carr, an Irish playwright, in her Irish-specific contexts (particularly
in relation to her Celtic cultural heritage) seems long overdue. In this chapter, I will
demonstrate the Irishness of Carr’s most mythically full-blooded play *By the Bog of
Cats*..., and explicate the significance of the local terms (particularly local mythologies
and folktales) embedded in her play.

*By the Bog of Cats*... opens with a visually striking scene. Hester, the female
protagonist, is pulling the corpse of a black swan behind her, trailing the dead swan’s
blood in the snow. The Ghost Fancier, a supernatural character, makes the mistake of
appearing to Hester half a day earlier, intimating to Hester that she would die at dusk on
that day. Hester’s neighbor Monica enters, and reminds Hester that she [Hester] is
supposed to leave town that day. Apparently, Hester (forty) signed a contract with her rich neighbor Xavia (sixties), which, in exchange for a sum of money, binds her to leave her town by the day of the marriage between her long-term partner Carthage (thirty) and Xavia’s daughter Caroline (twenty). Catwoman, another supernatural character, also tells Hester that Hester’s mother foretold that Hester’s life span would equal that of the black swan, which Hester had grown up playing with. Catwoman emphasizes that if Hester leaves town today, she will be able to circumvent the “curse” and avoid death. However, Hester refuses to leave her native place, protests that she was coerced to sign the contract, and wants her partner Carthage back. She creates turmoil at Carthage’s wedding that day by showing up in a white wedding gown. Later, instead of leaving, she sets her house and livestock on fire, and takes her daughter’s and her own life.

Similar to Euripides’s Medea (a “barbarian” woman who married Jason, a Greek), Hester is described to have the blood of a “tinker,” which refers to a gypsy in Scotland and the north of Ireland, or generally an “itinerant beggar, trader, performer, vagabond, tramp or reputed thief” (OED). Like Medea, Hester, betrayed by her lover, kills her own child. However, beyond these basic points, Euripides’s Medea neither fully corresponds to, nor explains, By the Bog of Cats…. In Euripides’s Medea, Jason deserts Medea for Glauce, the daughter of King Creon. In revenge, Medea kills the king and his daughter by sending a poisoned robe as a gift. On the other hand, Hester in By the Bog of Cats... does not kill Caroline, the “second woman,” and her father, Xavier. In fact, Hester and Caroline even have some moments of mutual sympathy and understanding towards the end of the play. Medea also kills her own two children by Jason, with a knife, specifically because it will gravely hurt Jason. She savors Jason’s pain at not being able to hold his
children again, and flees to Athens with the dead bodies of her children. On the other hand, Hester does not kill Josie to take revenge on her partner, and, unlike Medea, Hester kills herself, as well. It is important to note that Hester is prompted to end her daughter’s life, suddenly realizing how strongly she wants to prevent her daughter from undergoing the same type of trauma that she herself has suffered all her life—i.e., waiting for a mother who never returns. In other words, Hester’s murder of Josie was motivated by her love of her daughter at least in her logic, which is drastically different from Medea’s revenge-driven murder of her own children.

Marina Carr’s Irishness

Upon closer inspection, By the Bog of Cats... is replete with Irish-specific geographical and linguistic references (particularly those of the Irish midlands), traditional Celtic cultural motifs, and Celtic archetypes preserved in Irish mythological and folkloric stories. First of all, the central site of this play, the bog, is particularly Irish. The Irish countryside has large areas of wet muddy bogs. Not only have Ireland’s bogs been important sites for the discovery of precious ancient articles (tracing back as far as 3300 and 3600 BCE), but the bogs, with natural misty and mystic environments, also inspired many Irish folk legends (“The Bogwood Story”). Irish writer Seamus Heaney (1939-), for instance, has shown “a preoccupation with the bog in his writing,” “see[ing] [Irish] past, […] history, and myth in the things and the people who are preserved in the bogs” (Murphy). In Carr’s play, Hester’s attachment to the Bog of Cats is symbolic of the pre-Christian Celtic worship of water which is itself a deity with a cleansing power and has generated many mythological stories.73 Irish bogs, characteristics of the western and
middle parts of Ireland, make up a significant part of Carr’s homeland and her memory of youth. Carr comments that “where [she] grew up was quite beautiful, and has filtered into [her] writing” (3), and describes her childhood environment as follows:

I grew up in the midlands seven miles outside Tullamore in a place called Gortnamona, which means “Field of the Bog.” […] After about ten years we moved to Pallas Lake. My first seven or eight summers were spent running around the fields, eating grass, chasing tractors, picking mushrooms, blackberries, all that stuff. It was quite idyllic for a child. It’s a beautiful part of the country and still not very well known. […] It was a close-knit community and we knew everyone. […] We weren’t farmers, but most of our neighbours were and we’d be on their farms helping out with the cows and going to the bog and doing the turf. (Murphy 2)

*By the Bog of Cats*…’s environment reflects these rural midlands with bogs, lakes, and swans (which Carr mentions at length later in the interview), and a small, close-knit community like that from Carr’s childhood.

In addition, in both *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats*..., Carr employs the Midland’s vernacular. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., for instance, she gives specific directions for the language of the play under the category, “Accent”: “Midland. I’ve given a flavour in the text, but the Midland accent is more rebellious than the written word permits” (191). Carr comments on the language of her play as follows:

It’s very specific to the place where I grew up and it’s probably not even spoken there that much any more. I spoke like that as a child, before I went into secondary school in town. When you’re surrounded by town girls, your English becomes more standardized, and then you come to Dublin and it becomes more standardized again, but if left to my own devices, I’d still be talking like a midlander. It’s a very rich language. It’s a language of metaphor and a lot of story-telling. People think you’re straining for effect sometimes when you’re just reporting what you’ve heard. The best lines I’ve ever written are things I’ve heard and I’ve just written them down. (Murphy 3)
Carr stresses the importance of the Midland vernacular in her play, and comments that actors for her play “go down to the midlands” to learn the accents, and receive instructions from voice coaches (Murphy 6).

Combined with this local setting and language, a significant connection between Carr’s plays and her Midland background is Carr’s sensitivity to the spiritual dimension of life. In response to Murphy’s question, “Where do all the references to bleakness come from in relation to your own background?,” Carr first says, “I don’t know,” and then moves on to explain the culture of Ireland’s countryside:

The culture believes in ghosts, certainly in the country. The banshee was a huge thing. I never saw the banshee, but my best friend in national school, Jacqueline Mitchell, was always trying to terrify me about her. She saw the banshee and her father saw and heard her when his mother died. In the city everything is forgotten now, everything is homogenized […] but to me it’s not remote—it’s entirely natural. I’m a great believer in the whole angel thing, I don’t know what I believe in, but I do believe in something. (3)

The banshee that Carr mentions above originates in Irish legends, and it refers to “a female spirit whose wailing warns of an impending death in a house” (Oxford American Dictionary). In response to Murphy’s questions, Carr confirms that she believes in ghosts, angels, and life before birth and after death. She even relates that she “had a fist-fight with a ghost one time,” and that, one night, she “had an argument” with a certain “presence” that just “engulfed [her]” (4). Carr disagrees with Murphy that having this spiritual or so-called supernatural view means there is something “unusual” about her. She comments:

People say that [I am] off with the fairies, which I’m not at all. I’m very practical. I think that side [spiritual] of your life has to be acknowledged at some point, or you’re just living in one dimension. It’s a way of seeing the world. (4)
Reflecting the playwright’s ability to embrace life in both worldly and otherworldly dimensions, *By the Bog of Cats*... features supernatural characters—Catwoman, Ghost Joseph (Hester’s dead brother), and Ghost Fancier—as well as characters who are attuned to these ghostly dimensions of life—Hester and Hester’s mother. Further, in Carr’s play, even the “worldly” characters show their deep embeddedness in a culture that believes in ghosts and spirits.

Growing up in the midlands did not only influence Carr’s sensitivity to the spiritual realm of life, but it also affected her imaginative understanding about animals. Particularly, observing swans in the midlands made a great impression on her. She recalls that when her mother passed away, a massive flock of swans returned to the lake area. Carr explains that swans as territorial creatures do not stop by a place unless they have a certain relation to that place, and she interprets that the swans must have returned to say goodbye to her mother who always loved the swans. Further, Carr specifically connects the swan to Irish mythology and the Irish canon:

> The swan is huge in Irish mythology, from the Children of Lir, through to Yeats. I’m drawing on that motif in the Irish canon. I grew up by a lake from ten years of age on, so I had a good seven years looking out and watching swans. They say the swan is the soul bird. [...] (Murphy 5)

“They” in Carr’s phrase above (“They say the swan is the soul bird”) and the countryside’s culture that Carr says believes in ghosts and otherworldliness is Celtic culture that embraces the spiritual dimension of life, including strong spiritual ties between humans and animals.

**Celtic Cultural Motifs**
By the Bog of Cats... begins and ends with the image of the dead black swan. At the beginning of the play, Hester trails the swan’s corpse, and at the end, Monica describes how Hester cut out her own heart, which then lies on top of her chest “like some dark feathered bird” (341). Traditional Celtic epistemology illuminates the mysterious connection between Hester’s and the black swan’s fate. From a traditional Celtic perspective, the black swan can be seen as a personal totem animal for Hester. For the Celts, “the great chain of life stretched back beyond humanity to animals, birds, fish, trees and rocks long before modern theories of evolution were voiced” (Matthews 108), and the “inter-species dependency was quite clear” to them (108). While Celtic races had tribal totems, they also believed in people’s individual totems, that is, “the guardian spirit whose life is contiguous with theirs” (108). For instance, the well-known Irish mythic hero CuChulaind’s fame was joined to his totem, the dog. Similarly, according to Catwoman in Carr’s play, on the day Hester was born, Hester’s mother said: “That child [Hester] […] will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less” (275).

Hester’s relationship with the black swan as her personal totem animal signifies that Hester has shamanic qualities. In The Way of the Shaman, Michael Harner explains that “power animals,” or personal totem animals, “can be said to ‘inhabit’ the shaman and act as his guardian spirits” (qtd. in Rutherford 101). The last scene of the play (briefly described at the beginning of the preceding paragraph) dramatizes Hester’s death, through verbal and visual association, as if her death exposes the black swan inhabiting her heart. In addition, at the end of the play, Hester commits suicide by way of a ritual trance. The “gift of inducing trances in which he [or she] can leave his mortal body” is an important self-defining capacity of the shaman (Rutherford 100). Although Hester’s
trance here is not exactly the same as the temporary departure of a shaman’s spirit from
his or her body, Hester’s ability to commune with Ghost Fancier, a spirit, still suggests
her shamanic qualities. Further, Hester declares that she will continue to roam around the
Bog of Cats as a ghost even after her death. The following is Hester’s last moments,
entering a “death dance” with Ghost Fancier:

Hester: Ya won’t forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half
remembered and you think you’ve almost forgotten me again, take a walk
along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin’ wind through your hair or a
soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That’ll be me and Josie
ghostin’ ya. *(She walks towards the Ghost Fancier.)* Take me away, take
me away from here.

Ghost Fancier: Alright, my lovely.

*They go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into
Hester’s heart. She falls into the ground. Exit Ghost Fancier with knife.*

Hester’s suicide through a ritualistic death dance, and her self-assurance in her capacity
to wander around the Bog as a ghost after her death show the extent to which Hester is
otherworldly receptive and responsive.

Within Celtic traditional contexts, these shamanic qualities would translate Hester
into a druid figure. According to Caitlin Matthews, the druid is “a seer of great
knowledge, whose closeness to the natural world put him or her in the position of a
walker between the worlds of humankind and the unseen worlds” *(qtd in Matthews 35).*

Matthews further explains the druid’s role in Celtic tradition:

The druids were distinct from other people of the tribe by reason of their gifts.
[…] The function of the druid was to maintain what we would now call a
shamanic role within the tribe. […] He or she […] was the mediator, the knower,
the repository of wisdom. […] We do better to think of the druid in terms of the
Jewish rabbi during the diaspora: a man or woman of wisdom whose advice was
sought on all matters of daily life […] [T]he druid was a person of unusual skills. […] In the druid we see the earliest form of tribal leadership—which was spiritual rather than temporal. The distinctions between king and druid are sometimes blurred in Celtic tradition. […] (35-37, my emphasis)

In By the Bog of Cats…, Hester is distinguished from other characters in her rapport with nature and otherworldliness. She is also the only human character who can communicate with ghostly characters, namely Ghost Fancier and the ghost of her dead brother. Hester’s druidic or shamanic qualities appear to have been inherited from her mother, who, according to Xavier, used to “[croon] towards Orion in a language [he] never heard before or since” (294). Just as her mother did, Hester roams around the Bog of Cats, spending a great deal of time out in nature. Catwoman also recognizes Hester’s unusual otherworldly gifts, saying, “You’re my match in witchery, Hester, same as your mother was, it may even be ya surpass us both and the way ya go on as if God only gave ya a little frog of a brain instead of the gift of seein’ things as they are, not as they should be, but exactly as they are” (274).

Although at the beginning of the play she dismisses Ghost Fancier’s warning, calling it “[o]nly an auld superstition to keep people afraid” (266), deep down Hester understands that she has certain unexplainable energies and abilities that others do not have. Protesting Carthage’s demand that she depart, she says:

I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I’ll end me days. I’ve as much right to this place as any of yees, more, for it [the Bog] holds me to it in ways it has never held yees. And as for me tinker blood, I’m proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yees round here, allows me see yees for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yees are. […] (289, my emphases)

In addition, in protest to Xavier’s demand that she leave, she shouts: “I was made somethin’ different than these butchery lives yees all lead here on the Bog of Cats. Me
mother taught me that” (294). Similarly, in response to Monica’s comment that Hester might have picked up “a black art,” Hester answers: “And, yes, there’s things about me yees never understood and makes yees afraid and yees are right for other things goes through my veins besides blood that I’ve fought so hard to keep wraps on” (325). Ward Rutherford writes that, to define broadly, the shaman is “one who, as the result of a personal crisis, often self-induced, but which included his own symbolic death and resurrection, acquired an extraordinary rapport with and a mastery over the environment in its natural and especially its supernatural aspects” (100). Hester’s shamanic qualities can be traced back to her painful personal wound of having been abandoned by her mother at the age of seven.

The Celtic Archetype of “the Daughters of Branwen”: a Political Allegory

While Hester possesses qualities that a druid in Celtic tradition has (being close to the natural world and being “in the position of a walker between the worlds of humankind and the unseen worlds” (Matthews 35)), she does not receive the respect that a druid in a traditional Celtic community used to enjoy. Traditionally, druids hold leadership in their communities thanks to their unusual otherworldly ability; however, in By the Bog of Cats..., Hester is ostracized precisely because of her otherworldly sensitivity, and is pressured to leave her native place immediately. According to Xavier, she is “beyond reasoning with” (332). According to Monica, Hester’s sanity is questionable (321). Ultimately, Hester is labeled as “a savage” by Carthage (340). To read the play literally from a practical view, these characters’ descriptions of Hester make
sense. Hester ignores the written contract she signed with Xavier, burns her house and livestock, and cuts her own daughter’s throat with a knife.

On a metaphorical level, however, Hester echoes the Celtic archetype of “the Daughters of Branwen,” and her existential crisis in her native community is politically significant. The basic story of “the Daughters of Branwen” is as follows:

She [Branwen, a great ancestress of Britain] is wed to the King of Ireland, Matholwch, by her brothers, led by Bran. One brother, Efniissen, is not consulted and causes much enmity between Ireland and Britain by his hostility to his sister’s husband. Branwen, as a result of Efniissen’s insulting behavior to the Irish, suffers in Ireland. She is cast off and made into a kitchen drudge, although she has borne a son, Gwern. Bran hears of her disgrace and spearheads a mighty army to defeat Matholwch. Due to the intervention of Efniissen once more, Gwern is slain and the British are overcome. Bran is mortally wounded and Branwen dies of grief. (Matthews 23)

Although specific details might differ, Matthews explains that the “Daughters of Branwen” archetype lies at the root of all the stories pertaining to the daughters of Lir. This archetype has contributed to such Irish traditional stories as “The Children of Lir,” and “Fionnula and her brothers,” as well as to Shakespeare’s dramatization of Cordelia in King Lear. Despite variations in plots and characters, Matthews illustrates basic recurring motifs in the stories based on this archetype:

The daughters of Branwen exemplify the many disinherited queens of Celtic tradition, of whom we can cite Boudicca as the prime example. […] The myth of the daughters of Branwen embodies the enduring nature of the land itself, frequently invaded and overcome, yet abiding patiently until the time of release and vindication. For such a thing to come about the ancestress of the land awaits the rightful king destined to avenge wrongs and recognizes the features of the Goddess in the rugged face of the wasted land. (24, my emphases)

In other words, Branwen, the archetypical woman, “exemplifies the land as the representative of the Goddess of Sovereignty, and […] is sacrificed or dies of grief [for
the sake of the land]” (Matthews 23, my emphases). Hester, as a woman who is deprived of her land (or the Bog of Cats), echoes the Branwen archetype, although her response to her tragedy is much more actively and vehemently resistant than the passive and patient Branwen’s.

A primary threat to Hester, the Branwen figure deprived of her land and sovereignty, is Xavier, a rich landowner, who functions, in many ways, as an antithesis to Hester. He is responsible for arranging Carthage’s marriage to his daughter, Caroline. He is also fundamentally responsible for Hester’s removal from the Bog of Cats. In the last act, he not only threatens Hester with a gun and the written contract, but he also attempts to rewrite Hester’s memory of her mother with his negative version. Xavier describes to Hester that her mother was an uncaring mother, a loose woman, and a violent and cruel person:

Aye, Christian compassion, a thing that was never bet into you. Ya say ya remember lots of things, then maybe ya remember that that food and money I used lave was left so ya wouldn’t starve. Times I’d walk by that caravan and there’d be ne’er a sign of this mother of yours. She’d go off for days with anywan who’d buy her a drink. She’d be off in the bars of Pullagh ad Mucklagh getting’ into fights. Wance she bit the nose off a woman who dared to look at her man, bit the nose clean off her face. And you, you’d be chained to the door of the caravan with maybe a dirty nappy on ya if ya were lucky. Often times -- (294)

As suggested by the above quotation and throughout the play, Xavier (a self-described “Christian”) and Hester’s mother (a “tinker”) stand for a set of competing binary values that become political within the dynamics of the play: e.g., Christianity/ Paganism, Written culture/ Oral culture, Gun/ knife, Reason/ Emotion, and Worldliness/ Otherworldliness. Xavier’s use of a gun to threaten Hester, his capacity to enforce law on Hester’s physical presence through his written contract, and his attempt to rewrite
Hester’s memory of her mother with his version all demonstrate that he is in the position of power. These instances also illuminate the power relations in the above binary sets. Whereas Xavier is associated with “Christianity,” “worldly advantages,” and “reason,” Hester and her mother represent pre-Christian “pagan” Celtic culture because they show druidic qualities, “irrationality,” communion with nature, and otherworldly sensibilities. Given these metaphorical signifiers, I argue that Hester is a symbol of Celtic culture (particularly pre-Christian “pagan” Celtic culture) alienated and suppressed under Christianized Ireland. Those who read this play from the perspective of Greek mythology might say that Greek culture was also “pagan,” and thus Hester could symbolize Greek culture or any non-Christian mythological culture. However, if we consider the history of Ireland, the “pagan” culture that Christianity had to face was Celtic. Further, the rural culture with beliefs in ghosts, in which the playwright grew up, refers to residual Celtic culture, Halloween (or Samhain) being its most-well known modern day legacy.

While the time and place for the origin of the Celts is still controversial, “[t]he Celts clearly had emerged […] by the beginning or the early part of the first millennium BCE […] as a discrete Indo-European ethnic and cultural group” (Gantz 4); “[f]rom their homeland (probably in Bohemia), they expanded westward into France and Spain and, eventually, Britain and Ireland; southward into Italy; and eastward into Turkey, where they became the Galatians of St Paul” (4). Ireland, not having been part of the Roman Empire, has preserved Celtic tradition most. However, the large-scale spread of Christianity (in the fifth century) and Romanized British culture suppressed Celtic culture. Mirroring this historical trajectory, Hester’s existential crisis in her community
allegorizes the challenged status of Celtic culture, undermined as demonic, pagan, irrational, and unorthodox with the arrival of Christianity in Ireland.

*By the Bog of Cats...* dramatizes pre-Christian Celtic culture’s predicament in Ireland, but it also simultaneously demonstrates that culture’s perseverance. The whole community in general shows contradictory attitudes toward non-Christian, “pagan,” or superstitious beliefs. While characters try to dissociate themselves from a “black art,” “superstition,” and “tinkers,” they intermingle quite naturally with Catwoman, a supernatural character that can tell the future and eats mice. Also, the community people make sure to invite Catwoman to their important events for reasons that go against orthodox Christian views. For instance, even Xavier, the self-proclaimed Christian character, explains that he had no choice but to invite Catwoman to his daughter’s wedding because “it’s bad luck not to invite the Catwoman” (307). It seems as if pre-Christian Celtic beliefs are so deeply ingrained in the community’s unconscious that they are not fully self-aware even while practicing them in reality.

If Hester symbolizes Celtic culture, Xavier and Caroline represent new and dominant Christian cultural forces that attempt to overwrite pre-Christian Celtic “pagan” culture (or Hester) on the Bog that, being an Irish-specific site, stands for Ireland. They can also represent colonial power in Ireland, in general. Yet, unlike Xavier, Caroline seems to sense a level of violence involved in a newly-arrived and dominant culture’s suppression of pre-existing culture. She says to Carthage that, despite his denial, Carthage is “still very tangled up with Hester” (302). She goes on to say, “You and Hester has a whole history together, stretchin’ back years that connects yees and that seems more important and real than anythin’ we have. And I wonder have we done the
wrong thing” (303). Further, by commenting that “I feel like I’m walkin’ on somewan’s grave,” (303) Caroline suggests that marrying Carthage and ousting Hester feels like an act of desecration. Arguably, Caroline’s sense of guilt originates in her recognition (though still vague) that pre-existing culture needs to be respected, and its entire existence should not be threatened just because it appears inferior by the standards of a new and foreign culture that has grown in a different context.

Caroline’s understanding of Carthage’s long history with Hester suggests metaphorically that Ireland is deeply rooted in pre-Christian Celtic culture. From a slightly different angle, it can also be said that pre-Christian Celtic culture was not simply absorbed into the new dominant Christian culture, but contributed to the make up of Catholic Ireland. Like Carr’s early play *Low in the Dark, By the Bog of Cats*... represents Roman Catholicism hilariously, exposing its self-contradictions and inconsistencies. In this play, Father Willow is described as having “his hat on all durin’ the mass, the vestments inside out, and his pyjamas[sic] peeping’ out from under his trousers,” and even “keeping’ a gun in the tabernacle” during the mass (305). Furthermore, the play shows curiously intimate interactions between Father Willow and Catwoman. Notice the way these two characters enter together Carthage and Caroline’s wedding place, “linking arms”:

*The Catwoman and Father Willow have entered, linking arms, both with their sticks. Father Willow has his snuff on hand, pyjamas showing from under his shirt and trousers, hat on, adores the Catwoman.* (306)

Soon after, Catwoman suggests that they “go on a holiday” together, and Father Willow responds positively, suggesting that he could book tickets in the morning. Father Willow’s adoration of Catwoman, their linked arms, and their mutual interest in going on
a romantic trip speaks to the cultural syncretism between Celtic and Christian cultures in Ireland. It is said that the similarities between stories in Christianity and in Celtic culture contributed to the Irish adoption of Christianity, and that Celtic tradition was highly formative to Catholic imagination—the concept and symbol of Trinity being the primary example.⁷⁶

Celtic culture persists and perseveres in Ireland, contributing to, or in spite of, different forms of cultural superstructures. Yet, this cultural persistence is not necessarily inherent in Celtic culture, but is rather due to individuals’ collective efforts to remember and reclaim particular cultural memories. Hester in *By the Bog of Cats*... responds defiantly and vehemently to Xavier, who represents the force that attempts to eradicate her heritage.

If you’re trying to destroy some high idea I have of her you’re wasting your time. I’ve spent long hours of all the long years thinkin’ about her. I’ve lived through every mood there is to live concernin’ her. *Sure there was a time I hated her and wished the worst for her, but I’ve taught meself to rise above all that is cruel and unworthy in me thinkin’ about her.* So don’t you think your five shillin’ hoor stories will ever change me opinion of her. *I have memories your cheap talk can never alter.* (329-30, my emphases)

Throughout the play, Hester, or pre-Christian Celtic culture, is not represented as Edenic or pristine. If anything, that culture’s bloody and violent aspect is suggested and dramatized through Hester’s murder of her brother and her daughter, respectively. However, again, on a metaphorical level, Hester’s reclaiming of her memories of her mother (who used to create and sing songs) is politically significant because this mode of remembering makes the recuperation of an undermined culture and its transmission possible. While Hester echoes the Branwen archetype, the dispossessed Goddess of
Sovereignty, she responds to the same fate differently from the archetypal Branwen who
dies “patiently” out of grief. Hester challenges the legitimacy of the written contract
with Xavier, and shouts, “I wasn’t thinkin’ right then, was bein’ coerced and bullied from
all sides, but I have regained me pride and it tells me I’m stayin’” (293). As she was
determined to, Hester stays on the Bog of Cats, as a ghost that roams around, especially
in the Irish countryside.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In response to the prevalent reading that Carr’s plays evoke Greek mythology, in
this chapter I situated By the Bog of Cats... in Irish contexts—inspirational Irish
geographical, linguistic, and cultural loci for the playwright, the traditional Celtic cultural
belief system, and Celtic archetypal motifs preserved in Irish mythological and folkloric
stories. This approach led me to read By the Bog of Cats... as an allegory of the
suppression of Celtic culture and that culture’s perseverance nonetheless. Furthermore,
this Celtic interpretive paradigm has other larger epistemological implications.

Greek mythology is predominantly understood as the foundation of Western
intellectual and philosophical culture, and has enjoyed classical status in the West. On the
other hand, Irish or Celtic mythology is more local and lesser known, even to the Irish
themselves, which leads many Irish writers and scholars to associate By the Bog of
Cats... with the Greek tragedy Medea first, rather than the Celtic mythological archetype
of “the Daughters of the Branwen,” for instance. In this chapter, my interpretive
methodology of drawing on lesser-known local traditions and myths that originate from
the culture of the given artwork stresses the idea that a local contextual reading for an
artwork should take precedence over the often uncritical application of a globally dominant interpretive paradigm. Particularly, when the dominant interpretive paradigm has been imposed on the artwork’s local culture from without, that dominant interpretive move can potentially miss or obscure vital aspects of the local artwork. Even for an artwork with cross-cultural references, a dominant interpretive paradigm should be accompanied by substantial local contextual readings in order to bring out productive comparative understandings of the given artwork. *Medea* does have points of connections with Carr’s play. However, Carr’s comments in the interview reveal that her Irish background—particularly her lived experience of growing up in rural Ireland—constitute a significant part of her dramatic imagination. Therefore, the interpretive methodology based on local epistemology enables a more historically and culturally sensitive understanding of the given artwork.

Despite its residual cultural status, pre-Christian Celtic tradition in Ireland has always been an important reservoir for bestowing distinct Irish identities. Although Celtic culture is not technically indigenous to Ireland, its distinct cultural memory has been best conserved in Ireland because Ireland’s geographical position preserved it, to a great extent, from the widespread cultural and political dominance of the Roman Empire. Because of its power to shape distinct cultural identities, Celtic cultural revival was an important part of the Irish independence movement from the late 19th-century on, which always stressed a return to Celtic culture and strove to reinstitute Gaelic as a national language. Many Anglo-Irish dramatists, such as W. B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and Augusta Gregory, were influenced by the Celtic Revival and incorporated Irish/Celtic mythology in their works.
Although in the interview Carr initially indicates that she is not exactly sure where the bleakness in her writing comes from, she soon attributes it to the culture of the Irish countryside. She also addresses specifically that the swan motifs in her plays are drawn from Irish mythology and the Irish literary canon. Even if Carr might not have consciously thought of Celtic references, her plays still refer to them because residual Celtic culture makes up a vital part of her imaginary world, particularly her childhood and adolescent memory. Even if it might not have occurred exactly at the level of conscious deliberation, Carr, like her Irish literary predecessors and many postcolonial and Indigenous artists, makes the glocal-local move by placing residual and relatively indigenous (in relation to Christianity) memory at the heart of her works. In doing so, Carr contributes to re-emergent Celtic cultural memory for Ireland in the twenty-first century.
CHAPTER 5

SOUND AND MOVEMENT: AMERICAN INDIAN MEMORY AND
TWENTIETH-CENTURY TECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Both Chapters 3 and 4 discussed Korean and Irish playwrights’ turn to the use of their residual, local, and pre-colonial cultures. The current chapter will continue the discussion of what I have come to call glocal-locality. However, this chapter on American Indian playwrights and performers is distinct from the previous chapters for two main reasons: First, while Americans Indians’ works certainly invite a postcolonial perspective in a broad and significant way because of their colonial history and their creative responses to colonialism, which have a lot in common with other postcolonial artists’, Americans Indians’ current residency within the nation-state of the United States and their experiences of on-going colonial practices set them apart from the other groups with territorial independence. Therefore, following Indigenous studies scholar Chadwick Allen’s example, I will consider American Indians’ works as “(post)colonial” cases, with parentheses to acknowledge “the irony of an often-asserted post-colonial situation (where the hyphenated “post-” implies “beyond”) that is never quite one for indigenous minorities” (8). In my analyses, I will thus prioritize specific Indigenous perspectives and
scholarly discourse over broader and less fitting orthodox postcolonial views and terms. Second, in its focus, this chapter will more specifically engage the relationship between performance media and (post)colonial artists’ agency in their use of restored/being-restored local memories, using “voice” as an organizing focus.

**Contemporary American Indian Voices**

All artistic works have voices. The question is whose voices and which voices the works entail and in what fashion (e.g., how multiple/what layers/what arrangement of voices). The frequent use of the term voice in the fields of drama, theatre, and performance suggests that the term voice has roughly three usages: 1) a metaphorical voice (sometimes metonymic) referring to the expression of the subjectivity or perspective of a character, a self, or a group, 2) a voice that is physically audible, or textual signs for the way the voice can be physically enacted, and 3) voice referring to a distinct artistic style. While this chapter will naturally deal with all three of these interrelated categories, at a macro level my engagement with contemporary American Indian theatre/performance artists is concerned mostly with the first category, voice-as-expression-of-subjectivity. Not many groups have endured the ontological and political silencing of individual and collective subjecthood as much and as long as American Indians. For almost five centuries, in most of Euro- and U.S.-centric dominant discourses, American Indian cultures have been deprived of Indigenous perspectives in colonial and touristic discourses and earlier studies in such disciplines as anthropology and folklore.
The late 1960s and early 1970s, however, a period labeled by Kenneth Lincoln and subsequent scholars as a “Native American Renaissance,” marks the beginning of a major new wave of American Indian writers’ voices. While scholarly discussion on this “Native American Renaissance” has focused mostly on novels and poetry, American Indian Theatre also saw a series of watersheds in the 1970s, with the formation of the American Indian Theater Ensemble (later renamed the Native American Theater Ensemble) in 1972, which sparked the foundation of other American Indian theatre companies, such as the Navajo-Land Outdoor Theatre in 1973, Spiderwoman Theatre in 1975, and the Red Earth Performing Arts Company in 1974 (Geiogamah 161).

American Indian playwright and theatre scholar Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa / Delaware) situates these achievements in a larger historical context that includes the previous decades’ American Indian “cultural revitalization” efforts. Geiogamah writes that while American Indian tribes’ daily performances such as “music, dance, religious ceremonies, tribal commemorations, [and] seasonal observances” were in a “deep [… ] hibernation,” having been “banned and outlawed along with tribal languages near the end of the nineteenth century,” there have been efforts to “reawaken” tribal voices from the late 1940s, as exemplified in cultural activities such as the contemporary powwow movement. Such efforts were further fueled by the “strong move towards pan-Indianism” in the late 1960s (159-164), a period that marked notable American Indian political activist events—e.g., the pan-tribal American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in 1968, the occupation of Alcatraz Island by the Indians of All Tribes (1969), the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. (1972), and the occupation of Wounded Knee (1973) (Chadwick Allen 108-126; Smith 31-32).
These and many other incidents of pan-Indian activism show American Indians’ strong desire for self-determination—the desire to take control of their own history, traditional cultures, and their past, present, and future collective realities. American Indian theatre and performance artists from the 1970s and onwards (like many of their counterparts working on poetry and prose literature) began to bring their histories and traditional Indian cultures into contemporary artistic frames more actively, taking control of their new medium not only thematically but also stylistically. While most of these artists reconstruct historical memories and re-center tribal and/or pan-Indian cultures in their works, the use of diverse contemporary media has also stimulated diverse contemporary Indigenous voices.

This chapter is concerned with how American Indian theatre/performance artists make use of different performance media to express and enact their agency. With particular attention to the use of the voice in relation to its speaker and audience, I will closely examine two notable but still under-analyzed theatre/performance artists’ works—the radio play *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* by Monique Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock), first broadcasted in 1991, and the rehearsal performance of *Emendatio* by James Luna (Luiseño) for the 2005 Venice Biennale. While examining these two artists’ modes of expressions for their chosen performance media and audience, I will also reflect on how the dynamics of technology and imagination might affect the audience, how traditional American Indian beliefs and cultural practices might become re-embodied in and through contemporary American Indians’ works, and how collective memory or “cultural essence” is expressed and explored. The aforementioned works of Mojica and Luna offer insights into the various uses of the voice as and in distinctive
media: a) radio drama (both as a dramatic text and as broadcast) and b) DVD featuring a rehearsal performance and the artist’s (voice-over) commentary, which is enclosed in a book with related essays and photos (both the DVD archival traces of the rehearsal performance and commentary and a book’s performance), respectively.

The Birdwoman in Monique Mojica’s radio drama/broadcast

Monique Mojica, perhaps best known for her play Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots (fully premiered in 1990), which deconstructs and connects the stories of Indigenous women in the Americas, is an actress and playwright with dual Indigenous heritages—Rappahannock (North American Indian) and Kuna (Central American Aboriginal). Mojica’s artistic inspirations include her mother, Gloria Ida Miguel, who, together with her sisters, founded Spiderwoman Theatre in 1975 (described as “the most influential Native women’s theatre company on the continent”), and American Indian activist movements of the 1960s. She has been actively engaged with several Indigenous theatre companies, founding (and later performing with) Indian Time Theatre in Niagara Falls with Bruce King (Oneida) in 1981; serving in 1983 as an artistic director of Native Earth (with which she previously performed and which was renamed Native Earth Performing Arts) in Canada; and founding Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble in 1999 (Knowles).

As in her earlier play Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, Mojica re-centers Indigenous women’s voices in her radio play Birdwoman and the Suffragettes. In it, she rewrites the existing versions of the story of Sacagawea, a Shoshone Indian woman mainly known as the Native guide in the Lewis and Clark expedition of the American
West (1804-1806). The historical figure Sacagawea, also known as “the birdwoman” (which is surmised to be a possible meaning of her name), has gone through numerous—mostly idealistic, romantic, and “patriotic”—translations in American mainstream, feminist, and popular cultures. She has been idolatrized in Eva Emery Dye’s novel The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark (1902) as the “Madonna of her race,” who “open[ed] her country,” and has been mythologized as a national heroine with an “unspoken commitment to manifest destiny” (qtd. in Clark and Edmonds 1). Sacagawea has continued to be romanticized in such recent novels as Anna Lee Waldo’s bestseller Sacajawea (1984). Nationally and regionally, Sacagawea has also been translated into the United States’ landscape and commodities—sculptures, parks, spoons, buttons, and even American currency.

Mojica’s radio play responds to these numerous translations of Sacagawea that reflect the dominant culture’s perspective. Not surprisingly, many other American Indian writers have also responded to the dominant representations of Sacagawea, including Laguna poet, novelist, and scholar Paula Gunn Allen in a poem titled “The One Who Skins Cats,” and the Cherokee writer Diane Glancy in her novel Stone Heart: A Novel of Sacagawea. Sherman Alexie (Spokane/ Cour D’Alene) wrote a personal essay for Time magazine titled “What Sacagawea Means to Me” for the Lewis and Clark Centennial. However, Mojica’s writing demands particular attention because of the compelling connection her work makes between her chosen medium, radio (an exclusively aural medium), and her privileging oral history over the “hard evidence” in Lewis and Clark’s journals. Mojica’s work raises critical questions about cultural translation, agency, and voice as/in a medium, especially when its dramatic text is considered along with what
Dermot Rattigan calls its “performance text” (9) (i.e., the recording or broadcast of the play for the listener). How would an Indigenous female playwright re-translate existing voices about the historical figure, Sacagawea, through her playwriting for the radio medium, and her own vocal acting as the character of Sacagawea for the broadcast? Further, in Mojica’s voicing of Sacagawea, what particular dramatic and sonic strategies are used in the play and in the production process for the broadcast?

One of the most distinctive features of Mojica’s radio drama, when I first listened to a CD recording of the play’s broadcast (which I acquired from CBC Radio), was the over-the-top, carefree, and oh-so-optimistic quality of the Suffragettes, the characters representing white American feminists at the beginning of the 20th-century:

\[(sung)\] Far away o’er the mountains
lived a brave Indian maid—
so that her name n’ere be forgotten,
and her mem’ry never fade:

\[(spoken)\] Now remember:
\[(sung)\] there’s Sacajawea Creek in Montana
Sacajawea Lake in Washington
Sacajawea Lake in North Dakota
and Sacajawea Spring in Idaho

[ . . . . . . . . ] (67)

Their cheerful, bouncy, and super-soprano singing of the catchy and repetitive song about Sacagawea, partly quoted above, rendered the suffragettes unmistakably hilarious and light-hearted. Contrasted with their happy-go-lucky high-pitched singing was the much calmer, recollective, and lower-pitched voice of Sacagawea (Mojica’s voice in the broadcast), who spoke in pain, suffering, and defiance, and later with full strength. In the early 20th-century, American suffragettes actively contributed to the construction of the teenaged Shoshone girl out of what Eva Emory Dye called the “few dry bones […] in the
old tales of the trip” (qtd. in Clark and Edmonds 93) into the “Madonna of her race” and an inspiration and model for the women’s suffrage movement. Soon after the publication of her book *The Conquest*, Dye was elected president of the Sacajawea Statue Association, and asked “women’s organizations throughout the United States to contribute to the cost of making another statue of Sacagawea for the Portland Lewis and Clark Exposition” (Clark and Edmonds 94). When considering the power and age dynamics between middle-aged and literate suffragettes in the early 20th century and the images of the teenaged Shoshone girl gleaned only from fragmentary traces in some old documents, the aforementioned contrast of maturity level, signified in their voice qualities and deliveries in the broadcast, seems quite reversed.

However, if we consider Sacagawea’s fuller life and the ideology behind those women who idealized Sacagawea (feminist, but still committed to the United States’ nation building project at the expense of many American Indian nations’ sovereignty), the sonic presentation of the shallow suffragettes and the mature Sacagawea has a ring of truth. While Dye’s novel, like most popular American imaginations, focuses almost exclusively on Sacagawea as the heroic Native guide in the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the actual person Sacagawea, who lived to an old age, is remembered differently by Shoshone, Comanche, and Hidatsa Indians and by non-Indians who interacted with her.

Here, it should be noted that there have been controversies over Sacagawea’s year of death and consequently her identity. “*Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, published in 1962,” contains “a very brief record[,] […] written by William Clark between 1825-1828,” which says “Dead” beside the name “Se car ja we uh” (112). Also, previous to this record, in 1920, the journal of John Luttig,
who is likely to have informed Clark of Sacagawea’s death, was published. His journal entry written on December 20, 1812, says, “this evening the Wife of Charbonneau a Snake Squaw, died of a putrid fever she was a good and the best woman in the fort, aged abt 25 years she left a fine infant girl” (qtd. in Clark and Edmonds 106). Clark and Edmonds note that Luttig uses “the wife” not “a wife,” which indicates that he probably did not know that Charbonneau had many wives. In 1924, Charles Eastman (Sioux) investigated the life and death of Sacagawea at the request of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Most of Part II of Clark and Edmond’s writing is based on Eastman’s recorded testimonies. Clark and Edmond support the validity of Eastman’s reports in the following:

Eastman knew that a tribal historian was carefully trained by his elders. […] One who wished to become the tribal historian heard the factual traditions related over and over by the tribal historian, and then the youth himself related the historic traditions in the presence of his elders, evening after evening, until they were correct. As the Indians had no written language, they preserved their history and their literature by storytelling. Both the factual stories and the imaginative tales made good entertainment around the winter fires. (110)

Eastman’s separate interviews with Indians from different tribes, although with some variants in details, corroborate that they had known the same woman named Sacagawea and that she died at Fort Washakie, Wyoming. He testifies:

I report that Sacajawea, after sixty years of wandering from her own tribe, returned to her people at Fort Bridger and lived the remainder of her life with her sons in peace until she died April 9, 1884, at Fort Washakie, Wyoming. That is her final resting place. (129)

Valuing the oral history, based on the testimonies Eastman collected, I support Mojica’s reliance on the oral testimonies for her dramaturgy, over the “hard” but brief and suspicious evidence in Lewis’s record.

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Unlike America’s popular (relatively monolithic) discourse about Sacagawea, Mojica’s radio play presents a multi-vocal montage of dominant and popular discourses, oral testimonies, and the 19th-century Sacagawea’s voice, yet all are significantly filtered through a contemporary American Indian perspective. Mojica’s play is not meant to be a documentary. Mojica dedicates her radio play to Sacagawea, and writes, “whoever she [Sacagawea] may have been; and to all the unnamed women who share her story” (65). In this dedication, Mojica acknowledges the impossibility of capturing the full personhood of the 19th-century Sacagawea, and the play illuminates contemporary American Indians’ vision of Sacagawea and its relation to their collective future. Nonetheless, Mojica’s rendition of Sacagawea, based on oral history, is truer to the historical figure than the U.S. mainstream dominant representations. Understanding radio drama (voices) as a medium for collective contemporary American Indians, I will, in the following, further analyze Mojica and the production’s sound montage (disembodied voice in a (radio) medium) and its possible effects on the listener (voice embodied in the listener). I will consult Ella E. Clark and Margot Edmonds’ *Sacagawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, one of Mojica’s self-identified sources for writing this play, for historical accounts and excerpts of the certified oral testimonies, and will borrow analytical language and insights from Dermot Rattigan’s *Theatre of Sound: Radio and the Dramatic Imagination*.

In her review of Rattigan’s book, Mary Louise Hill writes that “Rattigan’s judgments are colored […] by the text,” and suggests that “an analysis that seeks to redefine radio as a unique mode of performance might be better off discarding models based upon traditional, text-based theatre” (339). Unlike Hill, I see great value in
considering both the dramatic text and the performance text for the analysis of radio drama because most radio drama broadcast does start with the text of a playwright’s radio play. I find the whole process involved in the shaping of radio drama—playwriting, studio production, broadcast, and various types of reception (e.g., listening to the actual broadcast, an archival recording, or a commercially released CD)—important, including but not only focusing on the first time listening experience of the broadcast-event. Despite the somewhat misleadingly broad title Theatre of Sound: Radio and the Dramatic Imagination, the book’s main focus is clearly limited to radio drama, its production and broadcast, and its reception (as Rattigan clarifies in the introduction). While Rattigan does discuss the uniqueness of the radio medium, his book is not concerned with redefining radio (which would also include such other genres as news, live talk shows, music stations, avant-garde radio art, etc.) as a unique mode of performance, but with taking the first step in providing an analytical language for radio drama, the lack of which, he says, led previous scholars to borrow languages originally made for other media, such as cinema, theatre, and literature. Although it is true that Rattigan’s model is particularly useful for the radio broadcast that also comes with a published play in print, I disagree with Hill that his book might “only serve to reconfirm the primacy of certain established stage dramatists [whose texts are available].” Lesser-known playwrights frequently begin to write for radio, and it is not impossible to request archived scripts if the plays have not been published. Further, one can also substitute archived scripts with one’s own transcriptions of the broadcast, indicating noteworthy sonic qualities and characteristics.
Birdwoman and the Suffragettes consists of fourteen short scenes achronologically weaved together. These are scenes of the early 20th-century suffragettes in such gathering places as the street and at a tea party; the 19th-century Sacagawea in places like the Plains and at a river; Grannies and Grandpas (who represent Sacagawea’s descendents) on the reservation in the early 20th century; and Lewis, Clark, and Charbonneau (Sacagawea’s French-Canadian husband) in a 19th-century living room. The characters of Grannies and Grandpas play important roles, offsetting the suffragettes’ voices and singing and Lewis and Clark’s words. Significantly, the Grannies and Grandpas are characters that literally (in the dramatic text) and physically (in the broadcast) laugh at the American characters, particularly in a sequence of Scene 8. Inspired by Rattigan’s analytical method, in this section, I write the elapsed time of the recording in the left margin, and indicate additional effects from the production in brackets and with underlining, adding them to the dramatic text:

[16:12] GRANNIE # 2: See, look here, these—women for suffering came and gave us these little spoons, eh? [at “eh?,” the other Grannies start laughing, “heh-heh-heh-he”] That woman on the spoon there, it’s supposed to be Sacajawea. (laughs) [as Grannie #2 finishes her speech the other Grannies have another burst of laughter, this time longer and louder, “he-ha-ha-ha-ha!”] ALL GRANNIES: Giggle. (77)
[16:27]

Although the readers of the play might miss the weight and catchiness of the Grannies’ laughter, the listeners of the broadcast/recording cannot escape their laughter—the laughter that invites listeners to view the suffragettes from a laughing distance. In 1905, women in Oregon, indeed, contributed to the cost of making the now well-known statue
of Sacagawea in Portland, Oregon by “selling ‘Sacagawea buttons’ and ‘Sacagawea
spoons’” (Clark and Edmonds 94). While these concocted Sacagawea faces on
fundraising goods can be funny, the laughter of the Grannies (being the contemporaries
of the suffragettes) here and at other places in the play/broadcast, are, more importantly,
aimed at the larger ideology of the suffragettes’ culture, of which those buttons and
spoons are only symptoms. The 1905 address of Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of
the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association (the NAWSA), is a typical
example of the suffragettes’ attitude toward Sacagawea in the 20th century:

[...] May we the daughters of an alien race...learn the lessons of calm endurance,
of patient persistence and unfaltering courage exemplified in your [Sacagawea’s]
life, in our efforts to lead men through the Pass of justice, which goes over the
mountains of prejudice and conservatism to the broad land of the perfect freedom
of a true republic; one in which men and women together shall in perfect equality
solve the problems of a nation that knows no caste, no race, no sex in opportunity,
in responsibility or in justice! May ‘the eternal womanly’ ever lead us on!... (qtd.
in Clark and Edmonds 96, my emphasis)

It is clear that Shaw interprets and appropriates pieces of information about Sacagawea
from her “feminist” perspective, likening the suffragettes’ pursuit to Sacagawea’s
mountain-climbing, and projecting onto Sacagawea their desire to lead men by molding
her into the principal “leader” of the Expedition. Although Sacagawea confirmed and
pointed out the right direction at several points for the explorers, and helped them as an
interpreter and as an embodied sign of peace (with her presence as a woman with a baby
in the group of men) for Indian tribes in America’s West, she was in no way the principal
guide/leader of the Expedition (Clark and Edmonds). More problematic than these
exaggerations is what lies at the ultimate end of Shaw’s feminist pursuit of an equal
society: a true republic, a nation. Given the U.S. history of breaking treaties (which were
originally signed “on a nation-to-nation basis” (Allen 111) with Indian Nations, the
Grannies might well be laughing at the suffragettes’ complicity in contributing to
deleigitimizing Indian nations’ sovereignty (which predated that of the U.S.), with their
universal “Eternal Womanly” vision, and the vision of the U.S. as the only true republic
and nation.

Unlike the popular Sacagawea discourse, the Grannies and Grandpas’
conversations, many of which Mojica quoted directly from American Indians’ oral
testimonies, stress lesser-known aspects of Sacagawea. For instance, Grandpa #2 brings
to the fore Sacagawea’s contribution to the spiritual dimension of the Shoshones. He
recalls that Sacagawea was the first person to introduce the Sun Dance to the Shoshones
(80-81). The Sun Dance is a sacred ceremony of the Plains Indians, which Sacagawea
“learned while living with the Minnetarees [when she was their captive]” (Clark and
Edmonds 126). In oral testimonies, Shoshone Chief Washakie’s daughter and son affirm
that the Sun Dance “has become permanently established” in the Shoshone tribe since
then (124). Further, the Grannies focus on Sacagawea’s leadership, diplomacy, and her
commitment to the well being of the Shoshones, which are also based on oral testimonies.
In Scene 4, they recall that Sacagawea “was always looked upon by the women of the
band [the Eastern Shoshones] as the leader” (70), and that she “spoke five different
languages: Shoshone, Comanche, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, and French” (71).

In Scene 9, Granny # 2, in particular, sheds light on an important contribution
Sacagawea made for her people: “I remember very distinctly that she was very much
interested in the treaty that Washakie was making with the whites at Fort Bridger, and I
also remember that she was the only woman that spoke at the councils making the treaty.
I was there and saw her speak” (77). Here, Granny # 2 is referring to the Fort Bridger Treaty Council of 1868, through which Chief Washakie negotiated a safer reservation for his people. In his oral testimony, Andrew Bazil (Sacagawea’s grandson) confirms that both Sacagawea and his father, Bazil (Sacagawea’s adopted son), participated in the council, and that the almost eighty-year-old Sacagawea, at that time, inadvertently made a lasting impression on the Shoshone children present at the council by speaking up, when Shoshone Indian women were generally kept silent in councils (Clark and Edmonds 122-145). In addition to the frequent use of the pronoun “we,” in the broadcasted scenes of Grannies and Grandpas, the series of additional “umms,” “emms,” and “ahs” (along with occasional “yes”s) creates a strong impression of a cohesive community. As Rattigan writes, these kinds of non-narrative utterances, “having a close affinity to the ear of a listener [in their] audible inhales and exhales of breath,” function as “sonic affirmation[s] of an instantaneous emotional reaction or response” (163).

Not only does Mojica’s radio play re-center the communal voice of Sacagawea’s descendents, it also shows direct interventions into the male explorers’ voices. In his journal and his letter to Charbonneau, Clark used to call Sacagawea’s infant son, Baptiste, “my boy Pomp.” And, after the Expedition, he offered to take Baptise so as to give him a Western education. As soon as the character of Clark in Scene 11 says, “My boy Pomp!”, Sacagawea (Mojica’s voice) quickly catches him up, saying, “…MY child, MY child” (78) in an up-close and resounding voice with strong reverberation. In real life, whenever Sacagawea talked about “one of the ‘Big Soldiers’ [who] wanted to take Baptiste and educate him as his ward,” James McAdams (great-grandson of Sacagawea) testifies, “she would throw out her arms and then clasp them to her breast, saying ‘I
wanted to hold my baby right here,’ [in the way] as if to surround him and hold him closely so that he could not be taken away…” (qtd in Clark and Edmonds 130). It seems that Clark, in his preoccupation with his “civilizing” mission, ironically, failed to understand a fundamental aspect of mother’s feelings.

Mojica’s reclaiming of an American Indian future (symbolized as Sacagawea’s son), by giving the character of Sacagawea a definite voice of ownership (“MY child”), and other following examples, does reveal important facets of the 19th-century Sacagawea. However, the more important significance is that they demonstrate Mojica’s and contemporary American Indians’ active intervention and self-determinism in the politics of memory that is integral to their collective identities. In the play, Sacagawea is decisive in likening her abusive French-Canadian husband to “a dog,” while calling Ben York (Clark’s black servant) “[m]y friend, Ben York” (74). Given the limitation of sources regarding Sacagawea’s personal thoughts about the members of the Expedition, including Ben York, Sacagawea’s calling York “my friend” in the play has, arguably, more significance as a contemporary alliance between American Indians and African Americans in their common history of oppression and exploitation in the United States.

The last scene shows the suffragettes celebrating the unveiling of the new Sacagawea statue in Portland, Oregon, in 1905. Juxtaposed with the suffragettes’ exhilarated voices is the voice of Sacagawea who is metaphorically captured in the statue. In a “hollow and encased” voice (82), which is produced with metallic reverberation and Mojica’s harsh breathing in the broadcast, Sacagawea speaks slowly, with American Indian percussion and vocal music in the background: “I feel the flag being pulled from/ my bronze face/ pulled from/ my bronze arm pointing westward—[deep gasping as in
but I only wanted to go back home! / I see a small Indian boy, / as the flag floats / above my head. [American Indian music in the background stops] / I hear him sing: The Star-Spangled Banner” (82). As in the actual case of the statue unveiling ceremony in 1905, an Indian boy, in this scene, starts to sing the national anthem of the United States. Although it is not indicated in the text, when the boy in the broadcast reaches the word “proudly” in “what so proudly we hailed,” his singing suddenly shifts from interior (reverb) to exterior (no reverb, distanced sound), clearly marking the shift from private to public. This shift seems particularly symbolic of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (which first began as Thomas Jefferson’s private dream of the Western exploration) (Clark and Edmonds 7-13) and Sacagawea’s “patriotic” contribution (idealized in Dye’s private research and writing) that were both soon incorporated into the “Manifest Destiny” that went “proudly” public. Further, from “we hailed” onward, the boy’s singing and the following speech by the character Suffragette #1 become simultaneous. The boy’s singing then fades into the background of the Suffragettes’ speeches. Through this sonic strategy, the CBC radio drama production accentuates that, by molding Sacagawea into “the national heroine who willingly opened her country,” the suffragettes were also attempting to turn the future Indian subjectivity into the U.S. national soundscape/background which, then, could potentially fade out of aural consciousness.

Although the suffragettes’ catchy Sacagawea-theme-song repeatedly comes back, Mojica offsets the suffragettes’ statue unveiling ceremony with her own dramatic/sonic ceremony of freeing Sacagawea from U.S. national appropriation:

[26:15]
SACAJAWEA: *Breathing with difficulty.*

SACAJAWEA (INT.): Captured again! Frozen! Cast in bronze, this hollow form with my name—

Tsakakawea!

[Sacajawea’s breathing and moaning in pain is heard throughout Sacajawea’s internal monologue until “Now, the Birdwoman’s name—,” creating dual voices. These dual voices are both reverberated. Metallic sounding music is played throughout.]

Who are these strange sisters? and what mountains are they climbing? [“umm” as in moaning]

If you remember me,

remember a child fighting to stay alive
remember a slave girl gambled away
remember a mother protecting her child
remember a wife defying the whip
remember an old one who loved her people

[26:49] remember I died at home on my land. [Sacagawea’s moaning stops here.]

Now, the Birdwoman’s name—

Tsakakawea

Is caged in statues, paintings,
lakes and rivers
mountains, peaks and ridges
poems made of fog and lies

and, …and a flying machine.

“The Spirit of Sacajawea”—Oh!

*(low laughter)*
cannot contain the spirit

so, high above the clouds,

*Hawk’s screech.*

the Birdwoman beats her wings,
sounds her voice,
soars, *[Hawk’s screech, one more time.]*

and is free.

*Suffragette’s theme song returns full force.*

[27:38]

As indicated in my transcription (the dramatic text + the performance text) above,

Sacagawea’s non-narrative voice (breathing and moaning in pain) is simultaneous with Sacagawea’s defiant and commanding internal monologue for about thirty-five seconds (from [26:15] to [26:49]), creating dual voices of Sacagawea. If the suffering non-
narrative voice represents the silenced and objectified Sacagawea in dominant and popular discourse, the latter voice represents the Sacagawea reconstructed by Mojica, i.e., a contemporary American Indian woman’s voice that is confident, forward-looking, and calling for Indigenous-female-centered memory. During this critical moment, the broadcast production turns the 19th-century Sacagawea (whose complexity—as a person who had to negotiate diverse American Indian cultures and dominant French and U.S. cultures in extremely asymmetrical cultural zones—is hard to translate into words) into a hawk’s screech, a non-representational, electronically made, “pure” sound that is, although associative, independent even from a natural bird’s sound, and thus sonically frees her into the air.

Although the authorial voice ordinarily should not be conflated with the main character’s voice, this radio play invites an intimate author-character perspective. Because the historical figure Sacagawea’s own voice cannot be heard except through the mediation of journal entries, articles, letters, and oral testimonies, any portrayal of Sacagawea is always already susceptible to a cultural translation from a subject position at a given historical point. Mojica breathes in a contemporary Indigenous woman’s perspective to her Indigenous female character, thereby, metaphorically, returning the memory of Sacagawea to her descendents. Further, in this particular radio play, any gap between the playwright and her main character is significantly reduced because the playwright is also the vocal actress for her main character. By reconstructing Sacagawea-discourse on the page and Sacagawea’s physical voice on the air, Mojica ensures an Indigenous-centered polyphony of Sacagawea that would serve to counter the thus-far
prevailing monophony of Sacagawea as mythologized and appropriated for the dominant U.S. culture.

Drawing on Hegel’s theory on sound and the works of musicologists like Carl Dahlhaus, Rattigan discusses the particular invasiveness of sound. He writes that the human auditory system is particularly susceptible to sensory impacts. Unlike other human sensory systems that have their built-in block-out mechanism as part of the systems (e.g., closing eyes to block out sight, refusing to touch to avoid a sense of touch, and holding one’s breath to prevent a sense of smell) (184), he says that “[s]ound, once heard, is absorbed through the human body, its tissues, central nervous system, neurological system etc” (14). At the risk of going overboard, I would add that even with the after-thought behavior of blocking the ears with one’s hands, sound, composed of vibrations, always reaches the human body, and is quite physically palpable in the case of loud sound, either live or recorded. On the other hand, one is no longer affected by the sight if one closes one’s eyes or turns away. Added to this invasiveness of sound, radio broadcasting’s invisible pervasiveness (with its availability to a large number of people for free, as pointed out by many radio scholars) had historically made the radio medium susceptible to dominant ideologies and the shaping of a national unconsciousness, especially before television eclipsed radio’s popularity. For instance, the classic Western radio series The Lone Ranger (nationally aired three times a week from 1933-1955), which featured the Lone Ranger fighting for justice, and his resourceful but quiet American Indian sidekick Tonto, invited its listeners to construct “a particular version of U.S. national identity and a particular model of heroic US citizenship” (Allen 117-140).
If popular radio series like *The Lone Ranger* promoted a U.S. national sense from the dominant culture’s “heroic” perspective, Mojica’s radio play uses the same medium to help spread American Indian views. In spite of the still existing cultural perception that radio drama is “un-confrontational and unchallenging entertainment […] for the status quo” (Rattigan 106), Mojica’s radio play opens up an alternative space via the network of CBC, which has a reputation as a progressive radio broadcasting system in Canada. Aired as part of a CBC Radio Drama series called “Vanishing Point—Adventure Stories for Big Girls,” *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes*’s alternative voice montage is likely to have attracted (female) adults who are open to unofficial and revisionist historical narratives. While the broadcast of Mojica’s radio play was neither as long-running nor targeted at as large an audience as such radio series as *The Lone Ranger*, this play/broadcast carves out an Indigenous aural space. Mojica encourages her listeners’ empathy with her protagonist, performing Sacagawea’s voice always at microphone positions # 1 or # 2 (the two closest positions to the listener’s ears). Particularly, in the last scene, Sacagawea’s voice is so close and so strongly reverberated that I, hearing Sacagawea’s painful breathing as well as her defiant calls, almost felt as if they are inside my mind. Mojica, using both written text and physical voice, reconstructs the 19th-century Sacagawea and American Indian memory, updating the oral story-telling and listening tradition, this time electronically.

**James Luna’s Rehearsal Performance of *Emendatio***

Whereas Mojica’s radio play relies exclusively on what can be physically heard (e.g., spoken words, non-narrative utterances, songs, and other sonic elements),
performance and installation artist James Luna perhaps makes the most use of physical embodiment. Luna is well known for his installation-performance piece *The Artifact Piece*, first shown at the San Diego Museum of Man in 1987. In the piece, he lay still for many hours “on a bed of sand in a museum display case” (Lowe 13). The two photos of this piece (shown in *James Luna: Emendatio*) show Luna lying down on his back with his eyes closed, arms loosely placed by his torso, and wearing only a cotton loincloth. Placed to the left of his body on the sand bed were six labels “identifying his tribal affiliations, official documents such as his college diploma and divorce papers, and other personal effects—arranged like an anthropological exhibit of pottery or spear points—surround[ed] him” (Lowe 13). In the top photo, about six visitors (who appear to be Americans of European descent) at the museum are observing James Luna, “the Artifact Piece,” with a curious gaze. One woman in particular is pointing a finger at one of the labels placed next to Luna, drawing the attention of the woman next to her to the label. The two visitors closest from the viewer’s perspective are bending over to see Luna more closely, and the closest man seems to be either reading a label attentively or examining Luna’s body as if to see if he is actually alive. W. Richard West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho) reports in his forward to *James Luna: Emendatio* that some visitors were “baffled” by, “indifferent” to, or “unseeing” of Luna (1). Truman T. Lowe (Ho-Chunk) writes that “Luna’s mute presence in this fierce, ingenious work powerfully challenged the dominant Euro-American worldview, and, in particular, the standard Western museum representation of the American Indian” (13, my emphasis).

In Luna’s work, silence is loud. The pictures in his exhibitions speak. And Luna’s body tells stories. While silence of Luna’s kind is not physically audible, this type of
pregnant silence is another type of voice (voice as expression of subjectivity), as opposed to no voice (as in a “silenced” or marginalized voice) or a vacuum. Although Luna did not verbally speak in his multi-piece work *Emendatio* (meaning “correction” in Italian) for the 2005 Venice Biennale, which consisted of two installations and a performance (a rehearsal performance of which is my focus here), he created his voice for self and collective subjectivity and his artistic voice as a distinct style by other means; as Luna comments, “In Venice, I am not going to be doing any talking. They won’t understand me. So, I’m going to let my motion, my body, and my objects speak for me.” In addition, the book *James Luna: Emendatio*, which was published in conjunction with the exhibition *James Luna: Emendatio* at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and Luna’s work at the Biennale, provides archival traces of, and additional voices about, Luna’s *Emendatio*. These additional voices come in the form of the published essays and enclosed DVD featuring rehearsal footage (my main analysis) and Luna’s conversation (also featured in the form of the voice-over to the rehearsal) with the two *Emendatio* curators at NMAI.

Luna is described as a new and pioneering type of American Indian artist. West, Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho) writes that “Luna invented a new way of presenting the meaning of ‘Indianness’ to the world” (11) and Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) writes that “Luna’s first masterpiece [The Artifact Piece] raised the stakes so high that the air that previously enveloped Indian contemporary art, for so long stifling and self-satisfied, turned thin and bracing” (35). Lowe (Ho-Chunk) also introduces Luna as “one of the most compelling and provocative performance and installation artists today” (13). These comments suggest that American Indian artists have not always been free from existing types of
“American Indianness,” projected and encouraged by the dominant culture. Smith spells out the cultural climate in which contemporary American Indians often find themselves: “Indians are okay, as long as the Indians are “traditional” in a nonthreatening (peaceful) way, as long as they meet non-Indian expectations about Indian religious and political beliefs. And what it really comes down to is that Indians are okay as long as we don’t change too much” (29-30).

The rehearsal footage shows Luna performing six American Indian characters in different costumes in a circle created by light. The first character at the rehearsal is “a common kind of Indian,” performed by Luna wearing jeans and a white shirt that says, “YOU DON’T KNOW ME.” He takes off his shoes and socks and enters the circle barefoot (adding traditional symbolism). He also bangs two rocks together four times ritualistically, creating loud noises. He then places many rocks on the rim of the light circle, adding a circle of rocks. He also pours acorns into a woven basket as “kind of […] an offering, […] speak[ing] to [his] California Native heritage” (Luna). However, departing from common expectation about traditional American Indian cultural identity, he also holds cans of Spam up and down ceremoniously, and places them at four points of the circle. He does the same with a diabetes syringe and an insulin bottle, later spreading diabetes treatment kits in an elaborate triangle shape at four points of the circle. In this manner, he embodies a “common kind of Indian,” who has a heritage of cultures rich in ceremonies, but who also lives on low-income food and with the unfortunate health consequence of “the disease the Western world has brought [to the American Indians] by the change in [the] diets” (Luna).
Based on his costumes, props, and his bodily performance, the second Indian character appears to be a “traditional Indian in a basic version”; Luna, only in a cotton loincloth and a white bead necklace, enters the circle and shakes a gourd rattle. The third Indian character seems to be a more elaborate or possibly “kitschy” version of a “traditional Indian”; Luna is dressed in a knee-length red skirt with colorful stripes on the bottom, wearing an ornate necklace made of many layers of white beads with leather fringes at the two opposite ends, and a headpiece made of a huge feather and fur. Luna, ceremoniously, shakes a colorful cylindrical rattle, rhythmically bouncing from the knees, with a somewhat blank gaze.

From the fourth character onward, Luna gradually turns into a “tough-guy.” The fourth character combines the previous character’s red skirt with buckskin, and carries a new gourd rattle and several large feathers. At the rehearsal, performing this character, Luna puts on sunglasses and walks around the circle in a more relaxed and detached manner. Luna’s fifth Indian character keeps the second character’s cotton loincloth and the third character’s sunglasses, but adds a red bandana and a black leather jacket, clearly projecting an “attitude.” Often, this character keeps his mouth a little open as if he is sizing up the others/the audience, and gives a sort of humorously impudent look at the audience/camera right before he exits. With overlapping cultural facets and identities (suggested by his overlapping costumes and objects), Luna explores diverse and unexpected facets of contemporary American Indians. His characters address poignant realities about American Indians, gaze back at dominant perceptions (thereby leading the dominant culture to see itself), embody foundational and/or residual traditional cultures,
and explore the potentials and/or limits of American Indian identity in a humorous and unflinching manner.

Luna calls his sixth character, the last character at the rehearsal, his “alter ego, Lounge Luna.” He appears in a shiny, burgundy-colored lounge suit with black pipings, a fancy red fedora with a feather, and the necessary identity-mystifying prop—sunglasses. Unbuttoning his one button jacket, the “Lounge Luna” enters the circle; he is also wearing ivory and yellow patent leather shoes and holding a metallic-colored rattle. At one point, during his cool dance moves, the camera zooms in on the back of his lounge jacket, showing an embossed design (the back cover of the book also emphasizes this moment, showing a photo shot of Luna’s profile and the back of his jacket). The design shows the image of the black-silhouetted, hunched over American Indian on a horse. This shadowy image of the American Indian—whose head is drooping and whose spear is pointing to the ground—is of the well-known statue called “The End of the Trail” by the American sculptor James Earle Fraser. In this way, Luna plays with a popularized stereotypical image of the “vanishing Indian,” which is particularly evocative with the orange background to the silhouette (suggestive of sunset). Provocatively and symbolically contrasted to this image of dejection are Luna’s bold dance moves and his face hidden from the camera’s gaze at that very moment. After his dance move, Luna buttons his jacket and steps over to the outside of the circle, ready to exit. Before he exits, he turns to the left and right several times in stylistically (and almost robotically) exact moves, each time gazing back at the camera like a tough guy, or Lounge Luna—like someone who would carry a cool persona in seedy bars, always having the upper hand.
“It’s about essence,” says Luna about his performance before the rehearsal. Given that he is known as “a jail breaker” of any static notion of traditional American Indianness, this self-description about his performance art might appear somewhat ironic, at least at first glance. However, later, he addresses another important aspect of his work, saying that his piece “is progressing.” These two words, “essence” and “progressing,” illuminate Luna’s approach to his work and his culture. Luna’s work is rooted in specific local memories, as demonstrated in the two exhibitions at the Biennale about his Luiseño heritage. In the performance portion of _Emendatio_, also, we can see that his understanding of his Californian Indian heritage and American Indian collective experience play important roles. However, at the same time his work is also “humanist” (Lowe 16), addressing and intent on affecting both an American Indian and a global audience.94 Luna’s performance of diverse and gradually changing American Indian characters certainly accentuates American Indians’ agency about their identities. And it also sheds light on the complexity of “cultural essence.” Although essence is usually thought of as something fixed and unchanging, Luna’s “progressing” work illuminates how “cultural essence” is formed through repeated cultural values, traits, beliefs, and practices over history, and this historically constituted essence allows multiple self and communal expressions that are firmly rooted in historical (including oral, mythological, and archival), collective, and local memories. In other words, Luna’s work does posit cultural “essence,” distinct from other cultures, but also shows that essence, as a cultural concept, is open to gradual change or expansion over history, rather than restricting present and future identities. Keeping with this notion of historically constituted cultural essence, the cultural syncretism shown in Luna’s work—e.g., past and present, and what
is considered traditionally Indian or not—is there, as Luna says, “out of necessity.”

American Indians’ cultures, having survived over the long history of highly asymmetrical political and cultural zones, have been in essence *forced/conditioned* to be “intercultural,” and American Indians’ contemporary reality is not an exception because they are still part of the nation-state of the United States.

As Luna says, he “manage[s] to mix” all these different cultural facets that make up contemporary American Indian reality, and he feels that his chosen medium is particularly well suited to his artistic voice. Luna says that he feels “[the] artwork in the media of performance and installation offers an opportunity like no other for Indian people to express themselves without compromise in traditional art forms of ceremony, dance, oral traditions, and contemporary thought” (qtd. in Lowe 16). In a situation in which contemporary American Indians often feel the need to assert that “We’re still here” (West), the immediacy of Luna’s chosen medium, Lowe writes, serves as a particularly potent “Native presence” (14) against the perception of the “vanishing race,” “animat[ing] a contemporary Native perspective” (16). The front cover of the book that encloses the DVD literally animates the multiplicity of American Indian identity. When one holds the book at different angles, the lenticular printing on the cover makes Luna’s second character (“traditional American Indian in a basic version”) shift to the sixth character (“the Lounge Luna”), and vice versa.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Contemporary American Indian artists stress Indigenous perspectives, exercising agency in using different media to express and explore their identities. Mojica’s radio
play asserts Indigenous (women’s) presence, using physically audible vocal polyphony written for the invisible but pervasive radio air. Her radio play carves out an aural space in which both Indigenous characters and actresses can come together and make their points verbally in the dominant language (English), and approach the dominant cultural perception with a sense of humor, laughing at it literally and physically. The disembodied voices in the broadcast of Mojica’s play become embodied in the listeners’ body both physically (through sound vibrations) and cognitively (through their imagination). On the other hand, in a medium that does not depend on spoken words, Luna opposes the long silencing of American Indian subjectivity by mimicking/mocking that very silence, and debunking it through his bold and confident embodiment. While their performance languages and styles differ, Mojica’s *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes* and Luna’s *Emendatio*, at the macro level, both speak in the same voice. They share the desire to restore the full subjectivity of American Indians by healing the communal wounds through their artistic expressions, and enacting American Indian self-determinism.

Mojica’s glocal-local practice involved her conducting research on the representations and historical accounts of Sacagawea, particularly the oral history about the historical figure, as the bibliography at the end of her play indicates (See Chapter 3 for the general pattern of glocal-locality). Luna also makes references to collective and local memories—e.g., traditional heritage (including Californian Indian heritage), colonial legacies, and contemporary cultures, in his performance portion of *Emendatio* at the 2005 Biennale. Although not included in my analysis, Luna’s other creative works also include his research. For instance, for his installation piece, *Chapel for Pablo Tac*, at the 2005 Biennale, he researched Pablo Tac, a Luiseño Indian missionary scholar, who
contributed to Indigenous views and expressions even under Western (Catholic) education. Both Mojica and Luna look inwards to their local (tribal and pan-Indian) identities, and place local memories in different contemporary art media, reaching a wide (in Luna’s case, clearly, global) audience. In relation to traditional American Indian cultural practices, Mojica’s radio play and Luna’s performance art update oral storytelling tradition and embodied tradition in twentieth-century technology-infused contemporary artistic frames, respectively.
PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION

“Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack, a crack in everything.

That’s how the light gets in…”

- Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*

The chapters in Part I and Part II have discussed drama and performance in four regions representative of distinct (former) colonial relations—Ireland, Nigeria, Native North America, and Korea—*before* the paradigm shift and *after* the shift. The shifts I observed in these case studies are toward writers and performers’ re-centering their own local heritages and histories within highly syncretic contemporary artistic frames. Before the shift, quite a few artists (consciously or unconsciously) appropriated or evoked dominant global (Western) themes and/or theatre conventions in addressing local political concerns. Here, I will briefly explain this mode of transition within each region and during individual artists’ careers.

**Shift within Each Region**

As Indonesian postcolonial theatre scholar Evan Winet writes, “in the 1970s […] complex postcolonial theatres emerged in the booming megacities of the global South
Based on my investigations, the 1970s was certainly a significant period of transitions and watersheds for postcolonial and Indigenous drama and performance. Korean theatre scholars Yon-ho Suh and Sang-ho Lee state that while Korea began to make efforts to preserve and restore traditional performance repertoires in the 1960s, Korean theatre artists began to seek their artistic identity in traditional performance aesthetics, myths, legends, classical literature, and folklore in the 1970s (see Chapter 3).

In Native North America, the late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of what Kenneth Lincoln and subsequent scholars call a “Native American Renaissance,” marking the beginning of a major new wave of American Indian literary voices. Significantly, for American Indian theatre, also, the entire 1970s witnessed a series of groundbreaking events. It began with the formation of the American Indian Theater Ensemble (later renamed the Native American Theater Ensemble) in 1972, which sparked the foundation of other American Indian theatre companies, such as the Navajo-Land Outdoor Theatre in 1973, Spiderwoman Theatre in 1975, and the Red Earth Performing Arts Company in 1974 (Geiogamah 161). These theatre companies were created to stage plays and performances mainly for American Indians, by American Indians, and about American Indians.

Although I need more research for more exact data in the case of Nigerian theatre, Nigerian playwright/director Ola Rotimi recalls that he began to “fully explore elements of our [his culture’s] past […] when [he] returned in 1966 [to Nigeria]” after finishing his doctoral education at Yale (1-2, my emphasis). Rotimi also explains the shift in Nigerians’ attitude toward their heritage in general:
Our parents had been made to believe that traditional worship and culture was pagan and so we should alienate ourselves from them. It was when we came to study these things in our post-independence universities that we started looking at our past and felt we simply must redefine ourselves so we do not get merged in the general mainstream of another culture. We started looking back; taking pride and identifying ourselves more with those things we had been made to believe were to be repudiated by us. (1-2, my emphasis) (see fuller quotations in Chapter 2.2)

Nigeria gained its national independence from the United Kingdom on October 1, 1960, so Nigeria’s post-independence turn to its heritages would have begun in the 1960s and become more active from the 1970s onward. Wole Soyinka, probably the most well-known Nigerian and African playwright, was prolific during and after the 1960s and 70s, with his best-known play, Death and the King’s Horseman, first published in 1975.

Of the four regions that I compare, Ireland might possibly be aberrant from this 1970s shift model, because Ireland had shown its turn to Celtic heritage early on. England’s colonization of Ireland goes back to the late 1500s with the English plantation settlement in the south of Ireland. England considered the possibility of granting Ireland “Home Rule” from the early twentieth century, but the decision was deferred because of the outbreak of the First World War. The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty recognized Ireland and England as two-separate states, but it led Northern Ireland (with its majority Anglo-protestant population) to opt out of the “home rule” state and join the UK. Despite the partition, Ireland became an independent state on December 6, 1922, which was many decades earlier than the independence of most African and Asian colonies; after the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), the Irish Free State came into being, and Ireland declared itself a republic in 1949. Ireland’s attention to its distinct pre-colonial heritage, or Celtic Revivalism, was already an important part of the national Independence movement from
the late 19th century. Contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr’s career, however, shows the shift from absurdist dramaturgy to mythical and classical dramaturgy, a shift similar to some other playwrights’ in postcolonial and Indigenous regions under my investigation.96

I suggest that many postcolonial and Indigenous theatres turned to their (pre-colonial) cultural memories, histories, and heritages, almost concurrently, because artists in these cultures wanted to assert distinct cultural identities of their own by drawing on their heritages, desired and experienced cultural self-apprehension, and gained distance from colonial trauma. It is also possible that many of these regions gained relatively more economic means for creating artworks distinctive of their own communities from the mid-twentieth century on. Further, globally, from the 1970s on, the discourse of postcolonialism and diversity began to circulate more, alongside the establishments of such academic disciplines as postcolonial studies and ethnic studies.

**Shifts within Individual Playwrights’ Careers Across the Globe**

One of the most surprising patterns I discovered in my study is the similar type of shift found within individual playwrights’ careers in different postcolonial and Indigenous regions across the globe. Some playwrights’ transitions are representative of their areas’ 1970s turn to the use of histories and traditional heritages fueled by their interest in cultural self-apprehension. Some playwrights, especially those whose careers began much later, such as Carr, show this mode of transition at a later time than the 1970s. On the other hand, some artists found their inspiration in their heritages without any early association with absurdist theatre. These playwrights and artists include those
whose works I have read or come across but could not analyze in the chapters because of the time limit.

Taesuk Oh’s turn to Korea’s pre-colonial memory is representative of Korea’s creative attention to traditional literary and performance heritages and histories in the 1970s. However, his early plays in the 1960s were controversially associated with absurdist theatre (see Chapter 3). I have come across many other Korean playwrights whose works evoke absurdist theatre. For instance, scholars note that Korean female playwright Hyeonhwa Lee’s dramatic use of domestic appliances and gadgets as surprisingly gruesome and threatening weapons evokes Harold Pinter’s dramaturgy.

Similarly, some of the early plays by Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa), such as Body Indian (1972) and Foghorn (1973), dramatize certain American Indian realities of injustice, discord, alienation, and hypocrisy in ways analogous to the dramatic methods of satire, tragicomedy, and “absurd jokes” in absurdist plays (see the conclusion of Chapter 1.1). In “The Theatre of Hanay Geiogamah,” published in an anthology he co-edited, Geiogamah himself expressed his predilection for absurdist playwrights, such as Pirandello, Beckett, Genet, and Weiss. On the other hand, his relatively later play 49 (1975) draws greatly on American Indian tribal music, chants, ceremonies, and shamanic culture, as well as contemporary American Indian youth culture, such as powwow and 49 celebrations. In the preface to this play, the playwright expresses his strong wish for young American Indians’ comprehension of and engagement with their heritages and their cohesion as a community.

Nigerian playwright/director Rotimi also turned to his multi-tribal heritages after having returned to Nigeria with his doctoral degree from the United States. Explaining
that he “had been conditioned by Euro-Western upbringing,” he describes that his research project at the Institute of African studies at the University of Ife in Nigeria was an important turning point when he seriously listened to traditional priests (see Chapter 2.2). However, Rotimi’s case is somewhat different from others’ transitions. Rotimi did not begin writing plays evocative of absurdist theatre as in the cases of Oh or Geiogamah; rather, he seems to have visited absurdist theatre briefly. His self-described “absurdist play,” *Holding Talks*, premiered in 1970 and was published in 1979. In this play, he consciously borrows Western absurdist form and content to express disillusionment and frustration at Nigerian and African post-independence realities. Interestingly, Rotimi does not seem to use absurdist conventions again after *Holding Talks*, and instead moves on to write plays drawing on Nigerian history and historical figures. Rotimi clarified that he wrote his absurdist play to “ridicule the moribound activities of the O.A.U. [Organization of African Unity] since its inception” for doing nothing but only talking. In a similar vein, his absurdist play could be read as a response to political realities in and out of Nigeria—not only the inefficiency of the O.A.U., but also the deferral of democracy in Nigeria with military rule, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), and particularly the military government’s non-distribution to its people of the profits from the 1970s oil boom.

Marina Carr (1964-), a much younger playwright than others under my investigation, wrote her two absurdist plays *Ullaloo* (first reading in 1989) and *Low in the Dark* (premiered in 1989) during her early career. However, her later plays, such as *The Mai* (premiered in 1994), *Portia Coughlan* (premiered in 1996), and *By the Bog of Cats*... (premiered in 1998), are characterized as mythical and classical. Although Carr does not
represent the 1970s shift paradigm, she still shows the similar type of transition that many other playwrights in my study made—from styles evocative of absurdist theatre to the mythical motifs that I specified as Celtic culture (see Chapter 4).

Given absurdist theatre’s political appeal and its conventions having now become part of mainstream theatre, there could be a range of other playwrights, in other ethnic or national area studies, whose works could be investigated in similar ways. When I attended the 2008 conference of The American Society of Theatre Research, a professor specializing in Dominican theatre told me that she also knows some playwrights whose works (written in Spanish) are evocative of absurdist theatre.

American Indian playwright/actor Monique Mojica and performance artist James Luna represent those who do not have any early association with absurdist motifs, but nonetheless exemplify postcolonial and Indigenous artists making the “glocal-local” navigation to restore and re-center their cultural memory. Their works also exemplify contemporary postcolonial and Indigenous artists’ desire and innovation to re-create their cultural memory within highly syncretic artistic frames using different performance media.

The shifts and navigations shown in these individual artists’ careers across the globe and their similar patterns confirm the general Marxist aesthetic view that art derives from historical circumstances. Both absurdist theatre and postcolonial theatre did not start out as conscious movements. However, European avant-garde plays after the Second World War, labeled as “absurdist theatre,” have a lot in common stylistically and thematically. Similarly, writers and performers in postcolonial and Indigenous regions make similar and concurrent global navigations of shifting historical contexts. While
some playwrights in (post)colonial regions consciously appropriated absurdist theatre, some (such as Oh and Carr) deny any direct influence. I suggest that their (glocal) historical and political realities are one of the main reasons for this aesthetic “coincidence.” Some other factors also explain why some of these writers’ works evoke absurdist theatre motifs: non-realistic dramaturgy found both in Western avant-garde theatre and traditional/indigenous performance, absurdist theatre’s cultural cachet at least until the early 1970s, and individual writers’ aesthetic preferences for non-realistic, non-linear, and experimental theatre, etc. I also suggest that one of the reasons why some playwrights (such as Oh and Carr) were able to glide easily from absurdist theatre to mythically evocative theatre has to do with the fact that both theatres, which are anti-realistic, work on certain allegorical levels, combine both tragic and comic sentiments, and contain some elements of the grotesque.

Most of all, in addition to the converging historical periods between the popularity and canonization of absurdist theatre in the 1950s and 60s and the beginning careers of many postcolonial and Indigenous artists in the 60s and 70s, I argue that the unavoidable interconnection between the sentiments of alienation and the desire for dis-alienation explain these transitions. The notion of the absurd used in Martin Esslin’s label “The Theatre of the Absurd” originates in Albert Camus’ use of the term in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus writes:

> A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (Camus, 1975: 13)
While absurdist plays tend to depict a world that strikes the characters as “meaningless,”
the characters go on with their life, or hang on, with their desire for meanings, or desire
for dis-alienation. The quintessential postcolonial play, *Death and the King’s Horseman*,
by Wole Soyinka also features the theme of alienation at its heart. In the following
speech, Iyaloja, the market woman, who functions as the spokesperson for the Yoruba
community, admonishes Elesin, the King’s horseman, for failing to commit ritual suicide
to accompany the dead king as he was prescribed to according to Yoruba tradition:

You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited
you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world’s left-overs. We said
you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital
portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter’s dog and I shall eat the
entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter
returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said
wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes. [...] We said, the dew on
earth’s surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said
No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them
for the left-overs of the world. (56)

Iyaloja’s criticism above emphasizes metaphorically that Elesin (“you”) is alienated from
the belief system of the traditional Yoruba universe (“us”). When he was supposed to
play the role of “the hunter” or “the leader,” he ended up playing the role of “the hunter’s
dog” eating “the left-overs of the world.” Although in different contexts, Elesin, here,
similar to Camus’s description of absurdity (an actor alienated from his setting), is an
actor alienated from his familiar traditional universe, owing to his encounter with a
different belief system, namely that of the British Empire. Soyinka’s play, however, ends
with a strong desire for the community’s restoration. The play ends with Iyaloya’s advice
to Elesin’s young bride who is possibly impregnated: “Now forget the dead, forget even
the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn” (76). A lot of postcolonial drama and
performance produced especially during the later phase (roughly from the 1970s on) are characterized by the strong wish for restoration and healing, or even the celebration of cultural roots. While both absurdist theatre and postcolonial theatre tend to engage the theme of alienation and the desire for dis-alienation, each theatre tends to develop a different emphasis.

** Appropriation/Evocation and Intertextuality/Trans-Contextuality**

Related to postcolonial playwrights’ use of absurdist motifs, discussed mainly in Part I, is the issue of appropriation. Julie Sanders distinguishes adaptation from appropriation, explaining that adaptation is “frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext,” which is “achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original,’ adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (19). Appropriation, on the other hand, “does not always make its founding relationships and interrelationships as clear […] with named, embedded texts” (32). Therefore, in this case, the “gesture towards the source text(s) can be wholly more shadowy […] and this brings into play, sometimes in controversial ways, questions of intellectual property, proper acknowledgement, and, at its worse, the charge of plagiarism” (32). Based on Sanders’s distinction, two of the three plays discussed in Chapter Two—Jo-Yeol Park’s *A Dialogue Between Two Long-necked People* and Ola Rotimi’s *Holding Talks*—are, clearly, closer to appropriations because the playwrights’ intent was not to give commentary on the “source text,” but to engage their specific (local) issues.

However, Carr’s *Low in the Dark* (Chapter 2.3) and Oh’s early plays (Chapter 3.1) can be neither adaptations nor appropriations. These plays are certainly not
adaptations because Carr and Oh do not make any commentaries on the “source texts.”
Not only is it impossible to pinpoint the exact source texts for Carr’s and Oh’s early plays, but it is also not correct to say that they “appropriate” absurdist motifs (such as Ionesco’s and Pinter’s) because they deny any direct influence of absurdist theatre. As Sanders suggests, “adaptations and appropriations are [frequently] impacted upon by movements in, and readings produced by, the theoretical and intellectual arena as much as by their so-called sources” (13). By this logic, one could possibly say that Carr’s and Oh’s early plays are appropriations of certain absurdist motifs like Ionesco’s or Pinter’s through an indirect intellectual arena. However, since the word appropriation connotes a certain degree of consciousness, “evocation” might be more appropriate for the works by those playwrights who (adamantly) dissociate themselves from a specific genre. In the case of those who disavow any direct influence, the word “appropriation” could potentially be an unnecessary and invasive imposition of an existing dominant generic label on the local playwrights’ works. Yet, either in “appropriation” or “evocation,” these playwrights consciously or unconsciously transform absurdist motifs into their own versions.

Carr’s and Oh’s cases show that (what appear to be) intertextualities are formed not necessarily through the direct transfer from one author’s source text to another’s hypertext, but significantly through a) inter- or trans-contextualities (e.g., the comparable contexts of Korea of the 1960s and post-World War II Europe both contributing to absurdist sentiments), b) the unconscious or “perfunctory” catch of globally and locally available artistic options, and c) accidental, coincidental, or trans-contextually inspired affinities among authors’ styles. In other words, various global and local contextual
factors, including, but not necessarily limited to, source texts, contribute to complex intertextualities in postcolonial and Indigenous drama and performance.

To Resist or Embrace: Glocalizing Beckett

Part I also shows that glocalizing absurdist theatre deviates from postcolonial theatre scholarship’s predominant focus on local artists’ resistance to the Western literary canon (Shakespeare in particular). While certain local scholars criticize local playwrights’ use of absurdist motifs because absurdist theatre is “Western,” absurdist playwrights’ relative marginal cultural origin within Western culture makes some difference. As Dennis Kennedy writes, playwrights grouped under the category of the theatre of the absurd include a “group of exiles in Paris, among them Samuel Beckett from Ireland, Eugene Ionesco from Romania, the Russian-Armenian Arthur Adamov, as well as a self-exile, Jean Genet, who, though French, had spent most of his early life as an itinerant criminal” (4). Among these, “the first three were not writing in their native languages and brought to the fore an outsider’s view of language as constructed and arbitrary, and thus ultimately absurd” (4). As Chapter 1.2 shows, Beckett’s Irish background contributes to cosmopolitan and exilic motifs in his works that are comparable to certain diasporic postcolonial symptoms. Further, Beckett’s dramatization of impasse, suffering, frustration, and failure create connections with many in political predicaments, not excluding postcolonial subjects. However, it should be clear that once these absurdist playwrights’ works are canonized and become part of the mainstream theatre conventions, they begin to carry (Western) cultural capital, which plays into postcolonial or Indigenous artists’ negotiation and artistic power relations.
Colonized-to-Colonized Connections

If Part I connected postcolonial playwrights in different regions transforming absurdist motifs into unique dramaturgy attending to local contexts (but not without a global appeal), Part II connects different (formerly) colonized cultures in their creative turn to their own (pre-colonial) cultural memories. While further connections can be made, I would like to address several key aspects here. Numerous postcolonial and Indigenous artists’ turns to pre-colonial memory and history fundamentally point to the artists’ desire to have their artworks centered on, or rooted in, their distinct cultures. After all, colonialism, forcibly or ideologically, took the colonial subjects out of their own traditional/indigenous cultural centers. Naturally, these cultures need to be re-centered to develop their self-determined postcolonial collective identities. African and African American studies scholar Biodun Jeyifo remarked on the delicate balance between centering and decentering for the oppressed, claiming that the oppressed need to be centered; however, a center could potentially become oppressive while decentering is endless. He says that the oppressed “need to constantly be centering and de-centering” (Keynote address at “The Wole Soyinka Symposium”100).

Not surprisingly, alongside postcolonial and Indigenous desire for re-centering heritages are debates and discussions on cultural essentialism. Soyinka is well known for his criticism of the essentialist and romanticist Negritude movement, asserting that “The tiger does not boast of his Tigritude.” Yet, importantly, his works are still centered in the Yoruba tradition. My research suggests that whereas Nigerian scholars tend to be more wary of the danger of essentialism (possibly because they tend to be more diasporic?),
essentialist rhetoric is relatively more pronounced in American Indian studies, where indigenous minority subjects, as Chadwick Allen writes, “[require] a level of essentialism, [or] a clear border […] so long as [they] insist on fighting not only for ‘civil’ or ‘equal’ rights within multicultural First World settler nations but also for the re-recognition of political identities based on a treaty paradigm of nation-to-nation status” (220). Yet, none of my case study groups are completely distanced from a certain level of essentialism on which they claim distinct cultural identities. Furthermore, a cultural essence or center, as a historically constituted concept, does not necessarily have to be fixed, “museum-style,” or unchanging. Mojica’s radio play/broadcast and Luna’s performance art (Chapter 5) exemplify how a “cultural center” or heritage can be reclaimed in a fashion evolving along with new technology in new times. In addition to postcolonial and Indigenous regions’ creative turn to their (evolving) roots, artists and scholars in these colonized or formerly colonized regions have begun to rely on, if emergently, local non-Western epistemologies (mythological views in particular) to offset hegemonic Western knowledge systems.

Glocality, Glocal-locality, and Political Realities

In the introduction, I suggested that although the discourse of glocality attends to spatial relations more effectively than that of globality, it has weaknesses in addressing temporal and political aspects of cultures. My concept of “glocal-locality”—produced by my desire to note residual cultural memory originating from the (pre-colonial) past—is an attempt to respond to these temporal and political issues more sufficiently than glocality. It should be noted that I began to use the glocal perspective, and consequently
conceptualized *glocal-locality*, drawing on Evan Winet’s explanation of the term for the working group on glocal dramatic theories at the 2008 conference of the American Society of Theatre Research, and on Singaporean theatre scholar Eng-Beng Lim’s use of it; they both stress the adaptations of the global *for and by* the local. Going back to the article by Roland Robertson, who first used and popularized the term *glocal* in academia, however, it is clear that these terms alone are politically neutral and insensitive, and could even be used to obscure a level of violence and invasion by the dominant culture, encouraged precisely via these global or glocal discourses.

Borrowing from the Japanese marketing term, Robertson suggests the word “glocal” to reconcile the polarizing views of the global and the local as opposing concepts. He writes that the global and the local are simultaneous and “interpenetrative.” According to this perception, first of all, it follows that *everything is always already glocal*. Further, Robertson’s suggestion of the term, glocal, stems from his *dissatisfaction* with the view that “globalizing trends are […] in tension with ‘local’ assertions of identity and culture” (33). He writes: “There is no good reason, other than recently established convention in some quarters, to define globalization largely in terms of homogenization” (34). He goes on to say: “Indeed, while each of the imperatives of Barber’s McWorld appear superficially to suggest homogenization, when one considers them more closely, they each have a local, diversifying aspect” (34). Robertson continues to assert that globalization, rather than to homogenize local cultures, promotes locality through institutions, organizations, and nation-states. His other examples include CNN and Hollywood’s “tailor[ing] their products to a differentiated global market (which they partly construct),” the UN’s recognition of indigenous peoples, and the local
interpretations and staging of Shakespeare. To support this view further, he quotes Sartre’s phrase that local cultures are condemned to freedom (39). It is from these views that he suggests the term “glocalization,” instead of “globalization,” which he thinks has become generalized to mean homogenization.

Unlike Robertson, I maintain that certain global cultures’ homogenizing forces are a reality. Also unlike Robertson, I maintain that globalizing trends do come into tension with ‘local’ assertions of identity and culture. I wholly accept that the global and the local are not necessarily polarizing, but are closely interconnected. Yet, I have to question his description of the global and the local as “interpenetrative” (3). Picking up from the ASTR conference occasion, I myself made the mistake of using this unnecessarily masculinist word in Chapter Three and in my article on South Korean Theatre. The bigger problem lies in the prefix, “inter-.” In reality, who/what is penetrating whom/what more? Is it the global or the local, or both in the same degree? This word obscures the global and local power differential. Alternative words for my study could/should be “intersecting,” or “influential.”

Robertson is right that no globalizing culture will ever make all local cultures exactly the same, which can never be possible. However, that is not the point. What is at stake is the degree of globalizing influences, the direction and mode of the global culture(s), and the agent and audience involved in the process. Robertson’s examples of local diversity through globalization, or glocalization, are problematic and limited. It cannot be denied that McDonald’s, Hollywood, CNN, and Shakespeare’s local adaptation/tailoring and diversification re-energize and confirm the dominant center(s). Further, Robertson focuses on local diversity through top-down models, looking not at
people’s but at institutions’, organizations’, and nation-states’ power to promote locality. I, on the other hand, use the glocal lens to examine local *individual artists’ agency* in the midst of global and local intersecting influences.

The difference between Robertson’s emphasis and mine shows that the discourse of glocality alone is politically neutral or indifferent. Glocality and glocal-locality could have different meanings, depending on who/what (agent) is enacting them for whom/what (purpose). Glocalization by a minority individual (e.g., Jo-yeol Park’s use of Beckett to address allegorically a Korean political issue under censorship) has a different connotation from glocalization by a dominant culture (e.g., McDonald’s tailoring local food items for better marketing). American Indian artists’ glocal-local move to restore their suppressed cultural memory has a different connotation from the culturally chauvinistic return to a mythological nostalgic past, as in the lingering popularity of xenophobic, semi-fascist movements in Western Europe. I suggest that glocal and glocal-local perspectives can be productive and illuminating if they are accompanied by attention to political realities.

In a similar vein, the attention to spatio-temporal and political realities should also accompany the discussion of cultural and artistic syncretism. For example, cultural syncretism in works by an artist under severe censorship or strong imperial/colonial legacies in a region with a fledgling history of western-style theatre should be discussed differently from artistic syncretism in the works by an artist with sufficient artistic freedom in a region that has matured both in Western and non-Western theatre modes. These different and shifting contexts lead me to discuss postcolonial and Indigenous artworks under the two different perspectives of glocality and glocal-locality.
Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Robert Robertson point out the weakness of the binary thinking among what they call the first-generation thinkers on globalization debates: “homogenizers,” those who “subscribe to some sort of notion of world system, looking primarily at the presence of the universal in the particular,” and “heterogenizers,” those who “disclaim the distinction of universal and particular, and the see the dominance of the West over “the rest” as that of simply one particular over others” (4). I maintain that it is crucial to pay attention to the degree and the direction of “global” and “globalizing” cultures as well as to the agents and their purposes. And I suggest that we can calibrate these views in a non-binary and non-polarizing way.

Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet, for instance, identify two extreme paradigms of transnationalism, and propose a third. On one end is “the so-called transnationalism from above, the transnationalism of the multinational corporate sector, of finance capital, of global media, and other elite-controlled macrostructural processes (Mahler)” (6). This “transnationalism from above,” Shih and Lionnet explains, “is associated with the utopic views of globalization, which celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of a liberal global market, the hybridization of cultures, and the expansion of democracies and universal human rights” (6). On the other end, “the transnationalism from below” with the “dystopic visions of globalization” focuses on “such negative consequences as environmental and health hazards, ‘McDonaldization’ of cultures, the exasperated disparity between the rich and the poor, and the increased exploitation of Third World labor contributing to the financial wealth of the North at the expanse of the South” (6). If I have to pick between these two paradigms, my dissertation’s approach is closer to the second. However, my project’s
methodology is in the spirit of “minor transnationalism,” lateral international minority alliances, that Shih and Lionnet propose. Shih and Lionnet note that the “transnationalism from below” paradigm focuses on “the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state, including ‘everyday practices of ordinary people’ (Mahler)” (6), and, in this model, the local tends to be “romanticize[d] […] as not necessarily pure but stubbornly the site of resistance” (6). Unlike this “transnationalism from below,” my dissertation approaches the local more as the agent of negotiation and navigation than as the site of resistance.

I have suggested in the chapters that the “cultural centers” for postcolonial and Indigenous regions contain regional, tribal, and linguistic multitudes. I also suggested that these cultures’ centers are evolving, rather than fixed. Rooted in local cultural memories, postcolonial and Indigenous dramatic and performance artworks, increasingly, envision global stages, which encourage pluralistic centers around the world.
NOTES

1 Gilbert and Tompkins “do not consider the United States, also once a British colony, as post-colonial because the political and military might that the United States wields in its role as global ‘superpower’ has long since severed its connections with the historical and cultural marginality that the other former colonies share” (7).


3 See Martin Esslin’s The Theatre of the Absurd for more details about the theatrical, literary, and artistic tradition of the absurd.

4 Theatricality, edited by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, inspired me to examine and clarify my use of these terms in this essay.

5 See the editor’s preface in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious for discussion on the meaning of witz and the difficulty of translating the word into English. James Strachey, the editor and translator, went with the word joke because the English usage of wit and witty is too restricted (xxx).

6 From this point on, I will just use joke or jokes, following Strachey’s decision to translate witz as joke.


8 Like Henri Bergson, who states that “the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human” (62, original italics), Freud also makes the same point about the non-human object of our laughter. We laugh at inanimate things “on account of a kind of personification which is not of rare occurrence in our ideational life” (Freud 176). As for absurd jokes, I would add that one can take an intangible and abstract occurrence (e.g., a gesture, an attempt, a feeling, etc.) and/or a state (e.g., a human condition) as the butt of the joke.

9 Coppa borrows this term from G. K. Chesterton, who says in Bernard Shaw’s Plays that “amid the blinding jewelry of a million jokes” one could generally “discover the grave, solemn and sacred joke for which the play was written” (qtd. in Coppa 46).
According to Freud, the success of a joke is completed and manifested by the third person’s laughter, which means that successful jokes are based on the joker’s control over his/her audience member(s) for his/her desired effect (i.e., laughter). Freud’s explanation of tendentious jokes, therefore, simply accentuates the inherent power structure that is necessary for jokes to be successful.

By ordinary jokes, I mean jokes that are intended to make others laugh, which are jokes taken as examples in Freud’s theory.

Although Freud’s joke theory is limited to verbal jokes only, I include body language in my theorization of absurd jokes.

I write the word revenge in quotation marks here because it is hard to see this game as George’s genuine revenge on her. Martha does not show a sign of being threatened at his suggestion and there is even a hint that Martha is amused by the suggestion. When George suggests this game, gazing at Nick, it makes Nick “a little frightened” (139) while it makes Martha “gigg[e] quietly” (139).

Tragicomic laughter as a response to an absurd joke will be explained when I discuss the conflation of all three Freudian components of the joke-work.


“When one is in shit up to the neck, there remains nothing but to sing” (my translation, accuracy confirmed by Philippe Coulon).

According to James Knowlson’s biography, Beckett, who “listened to anti-Jewish sentiments with acute distaste,” perceived the absurdity of the Nazis. His diaries revealed “an amused disdain for what he almost invariably mocked as the ‘interminable harangues’ of Hitler, Goring, and Goebbels; he found it comical to see how, during one of Hitler’s speeches on the radio, one after another member of the listening group in his pension gradually drifted off to bed while the Fuhrer was still in full flow” (222).

These definitions indicate the active performative role of the agent of joking, the joker. Of course, the audience for the joke and the audience for the play have their own agency in how they take absurd jokes. However, absurd jokes start with the joker’s desire to influence his/her audience in a certain way.

Erickson provides definitions of four types of repetitive human behavior, which demonstrate the varying degrees of self-consciousness, among others, and whose “scale runs from ritual to routine to habit to addiction” (68). Ritual is the most self-conscious behavior, usually including an understanding of the larger symbolic meaning of the repetition; routine is half-conscious behavior; habit is unself-conscious and instinctive; and addiction is unconscious behavior that is “self-consuming as well as substance consuming” (68-9).

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If the absurd joke technique is used in the opposite way—by a dominant group against a minority group—in a work which does not seriously concern humanity, those are not *absurd jokes* consistent with Camus’s humanist notion of the absurd. In other words, some jokes are absurd jokes only technically, while others are absurd jokes both technically and thematically.

This statement is based on Beer’s article “Beckett’s Bilingualism.” I agree with this aspect of her argument, based on my own experience with bilingualism.

The possible parallel between Beckett’s and other Irish intellectuals’ attraction to France and a large number of Korean intellectuals’ attraction to the U.S. during Japanese colonialism is revealing. Although, under Japanese colonialism (1910-45), many Korean intellectuals and writers studied abroad in Japan and brought “modern” ideas to Korea, a growing number of Korean intellectuals went to the U.S. instead. For this group of intellectuals, the U.S. was an alternative metropolitan space to Japan, a country to which they felt more forcibly tied.

Many absurdist playwrights were in (self-)exile and wrote in non-native languages.

I discuss the connection between this quotation from Lucky’s speech and Martin McDonagh’s appropriation of it in the second part of this chapter.

In Korean sections, all translations from articles, plays, performances, and books produced in Korea are mine.

There is inconsistency in the Romanization of Korean. Throughout the sections about Korean theatre, I followed the latest Romanization System of Korean, released in 2000. However, for personal names, I first tried to respect individual Koreans’ preference, via email, phone calls, personal conversation, previous publications in English, or public information on the Internet. When this was difficult or impossible, I followed the Romanization System of Korean. For example, as for “Junseo Im,” I followed the Romanization System. However, as for “Taesuk Oh,” I followed what his theatre company told me is the playwright’s preferred name in English.

In my dissertation, the word “realistic” refers to the concept of realism that emerged in European theatre in the late 19th century.

In this essay, when I want to stress the temporal meaning of its prefix “post” as in the post-liberation period, I use “post-colonial” with a hyphen. In most cases, however, I use “postcolonial” without a hyphen, indicating the dual meaning of its prefix “post,” i.e., the temporal “post” and the “post” referring to the consequent legacies of colonialism.

Imperial Japan’s unequal relationship with Korea goes back to the 1876 Ganghwa Treaty. Korea was officially a colony of Japan from 1910 to 1945.


“이 작품을 쓰기 시작하자마자 자기회의 때문에 망어졌었다. 그런 때에 결정적인 구원의 기회를 가질 수 있었다. 우연하게 베킹의 <고도를 기다리며>를 읽게 되었던 것이다. 그것은 게시이며 자기 확인이었다. <고도를……>의 처량한 수작들과, 기다랗이야말로 내가 등장인물들에게 부여코저했던 바와相符했던 것이다” (Park 139).


Park writes: “이 작품의 내용과 형식은 통일문제가 극도로 타무시되었던 시기에 그 밑을 둘은 방법을 모색한 결과임을 이제와서 밝혀야겠다. 따라서 그 모호성이나 추상성은 의도적이었고 불가피하였다” [“I must now reveal that the content and form of this play is a result of my finding a solution for writing a play about re-unification issues when it was an extreme taboo. Therefore, the ambiguity and abstraction in the play were both intentional and unavoidable”] (139).


This play is described as a “reworking […] of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex […] in terms of Yoruba culture.” See Adedeji, 266.


For more discussion on the topic of originality, authenticity, and creativity in practices of appropriation and adaptation, see Julie Sanders’ Adaptation and Appropriation. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
I am not sure if there has been any change in male-dominated practices in the past decade. Murray explains that Marina Carr is one of the exceptions to this general rule (236).

Part of the email reply that I received on November 5, 2007 from the agency of The Irish Theatre Institute.

I use “gynocentric” or “natural feminist” for Carr’s plays because in an interview Carr made a distinction between her characters (“natural feminists”) and “feminists” as academia would use the word. Carr said: “Most of the women I write about would be natural feminists, but they would never have read a book on feminism. They would feel their worth, and know their rights, and naturally have a sense of themselves. Women in the country are like that as well. They don't have the polemical dictionary or the related vocabulary, but they have a certain strength and sense of themselves” (Murphy’s Interview).


I surmise that Oh uses a “linear equation” and a “quadratic equation” as mathematical metaphors for works in which the audience can figure out the meaning of the (artistic) unknown, as opposed to a “cubic equation” in which it is harder to or almost impossible to get to a meaning.


With this unequal treaty, Japan obtained the right over Korea’s diplomatic affairs, but in effect controlled Korea’s internal administration as well. See Ki-baik Lee 309-11.


This concept reflects, for example, Korean madang-geuk. Madang-geuk refers to a yard theatre, in which the stage, traditionally outdoors, is widely open to the audience. Chunpung’s Wife was performed on a stage that resembles the structure of madang-geuk.

I would explain it as “a pent-up tragic sentiment of a complex nature, owing to unresolved grievances and trauma.” Han is described as “the most Korean tragic sentiment,” and is often essentialized as a sentiment that belongs almost only to Koreans. Based on Seong-cheol Jo’s explanation of the historical and social background of this term in Korea, han appears in the political and social underdogs who do not have resources to undo their grievances. Traditionally, Koreans tended to deal with han not by despair, not by revenge, but by sublimating it through religious activities (e.g., shamanism, folk beliefs, and Buddhism) and artistic activities (e.g., folk songs, pansori, mask dance, and literature). Traditionally, Koreans used comic sentiments or humor, called haehak and iksal to sublimate han in these activities. See Korea-World Encyclopedia vol. 29. Dongseo P, 1999.

Hyeon-Cheol Kim 222. Kim states that these two characters resonate with the character of the Turtle in Byeoljubu-jeon, a Joseon period novelized version of Pansori Sugung-ga, the pansori performance of the same story.

It is well known that Oh changes his scripts for performance constantly. There is in fact no fixed play for him, as Suh and Jang say, “[Oh’s] plays are revised everyday, and are revised for every re-staging of the plays.” Because there are many versions of a given play, Suh and Jang write that they as the editors needed to find what they consider to be “the best version.” As Suh and Jang explain, Oh writes scripts for performances, rather than for drama as written literature. See Suh and Jang, 오태석공연대본집집 4 [Collection of Taesuk Oh’s Performance Scripts Vol. 4] (Seoul: Yeongeuk-gwa Ingan, 2003) 3-4.

Chunpung’s Wife, dir. Taesuk Oh. Video Recording, August 1999.

“Gujiga,” which Gi-ok Seong speculates to have existed as early as B.C.E. 7-8 centuries (see “<구지가>의 작품적 성격과 그 해석 (1) [The Characteristics and Interpretation of ‘Gujiga’ (1)].” Ulsan-eomunnonjib Vol. 3. No.76 [울산어문논집 제 3 집 76], is recorded in the second volume of 삼국유사 [Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms] as a part of the mythological story about the birth of Kaya (B.C.E. 42-562), an ancient kingdom in the Korean peninsula.
This Korean verse is recorded in Chinese letters. The first half of the verse goes, “竜何竜何 / 首其現也 (거북아 거북아 / 머리를 내어라).” Gujiga,” December 27, 2008 <http://www.art.go.kr>.

Ji-hong Bak reads the turtle in this verse as a knife or God for the purpose of driving away evil spirits; Yeol-gyu Kim reads the turtle as a symbol of sacrifice; and some interpret it as the process of selecting the head among chiefs given its inclusion for the story of the birth of Kaya. Quoted in Byeong-uk Jeong 한국고전시가론 [Korean Classical Poetry]. Seoul: Singu Munhwasa, 2003. 55-56; “Gujiga,” December 27, 2008 <http://www.art.go.kr>.


As Richard Schechner reminds us, most forms of contemporary local performances have been altered over history from original events that cannot be determined. See Richard Schechner, “Restoration of Behavior” Between Theatre and Anthropology (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985) 35-116. I would add that for nations that went through tumultuous colonialism, the cases are much more severe. For example, the transmission of the repertoires of Korean traditional puppetry was severely obstructed by Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, and national partition. Korean traditional puppetry, designated as Korea’s “Important Intangible Cultural Property # 3” in 1964, is still being restored and being put into contemporary artistic frames simultaneously in different venues in Korea (Phone interview with In-Bae Bahg, artistic director of Anseong Namsadang, a representative Korean traditional puppetry group, December 26, 2008).

In keeping with Diana Taylor, Korean glocal-local acts are possible through the use of both (restored) archival memory and (restored) repertoires. For more discussion on the relation of cultural memory to the archive and the repertoire, see Diana Taylor’s The
Although Western absurdist plays had been popular among theatre groups and companies especially in the 1960s and absurdist theatre has been familiar in Korean theatre scholarship, the complete Korean translation of Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd* did not come out until 2005. The translator Miy-he Kim implies that until the 2005 translation, the few books on absurdist theatre had only partially represented the genre and contained many errors. See Kim 28.

67 See Jang, ed. 203-208.

68 See Im 18.

69 See Shin 284.

70 See the earlier endnote about *han*; see Miy-he Kim 25; also, see Sang-Cheol Han, 외서의 시양 연극 [Western Theatre in Korea], ed. Hyun-sook Shin, et al. Seoul: Sohwa, 1999. 26.

71 Suh, *History of Modern Korean Theatre* 79-122. Yon-ho Suh argues that because the Korean version is quite different in content and style from Japanese *shimpa*, the Korean version should be distinguished from *shimpa* and be called *sinpajo*.

72 Carr’s vibrant dramatic portrayal here, using three vivid colors—white, black, and red—resonates with the beginning of a representative early Irish tale called “The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu.” Here is an excerpt of the tale:

One day, in winter, Derdriu’s foster-father was outside, in the snow, flaying a weaned calf for her. Derdriu saw a raven drinking the blood on the snow, and she said to Lebarcham ‘I could love a man with those three colours: hair like a raven, cheeks like blood and body like snow.’ (Gantz 1)


75 According to Matthews, the word druid is derived from the Sanskrit, *veda*—to see or know, or, possibly, from the word for oak (35). Matthews explains that the words for wood and wisdom are very close (e.g., Irish *fid* and *fios* mean *trees* and *knowledge*), and “this close connection suggests that we should think of the druid as “a knower of the woods” or “the wood-sage” (35).

Other stories based on the archetype of the “Daughters of Branwen” also show variations in the Branwen figure’s responses to her fate. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Cordelia is not a passive figure. She accompanies the French army to restore her father’s dignity.

Although in Canada the term “First Nations” is used for Indigenous people, and the phrase “Native American” is mainly used in legal and academic documents, I use “American Indian” (except when I directly quote other terms) in this chapter because scholars in the field recommend this term when referring to Indigenous people in the U.S. and Canada in general, given that it is a favored term by American Indians themselves. See the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, eds. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

In this chapter, I use “Indigenous” with a capital I to distinguish indigenous minorities in First-World settler nations from indigenous people who are the majority in their native land.


There are currently inconsistent spelling practices for the Shoshone woman’s name, and I decided to follow Clark and Edmonds’s choice, with the exception of direct quotations from Mojica’s play and other sources. According to Clark and Edmonds, the Bureau of American Ethnology decided that the previously prevalent spelling *Sacagawea* should be *Sacajawea* because Lewis and Clark’s actual journals do not show “j” in any of the spellings for the Shoshone girl’s name, and *Sah-cah-gah-weep*-ah is the accepted pronunciation; there is no “j” in the language of the Hidatsa (Minnetarees) who gave, it is assumed, the name to Sacagawea, meaning bird (Sacaga) woman (wea), when she was a captive (Clark and Edmonds 147). While Mojica used the popular spelling “Sacajawea” for the character’s name, she also associates “Sa-ca-JAR-we-a” with the Suffragettes’ funny pronunciation (Mojica 76).

I am grateful to Barbara Brown in Radio Licensing and Ken Puley in Radio Archives at CBC for allowing me the access to the broadcast of Mojica’s play on CD.

For this different spelling, see my explanation in the above endnote # 4.
85 The later part of Mary Louise Hill’s article “Developing A Blind Understanding,” where she, drawing on Marguerite Duras, discusses the listener’s embodiment, was inspirational for this view. See Mary Louise Hill, “Developing A Blind Understanding: A Feminist Revision of Radio Semiotics.” *The Drama Review*. 40. 3. (Fall 1996): 112-120.

86 Part of this address is delivered by Suffragette #2 in the last scene.


88 Some records show that, for many American Indians, York was the first black person they had ever seen. American Indians “were fascinated by York,” and “examined him from head to foot,” a few “even rub[bing] his skin to see if the color would come off.” “Pleased with the attention, York told Indians he was a wild animal, and that Clark had captured and tamed him” (Clark and Edmonds 12).

89 Barbara Brown in the Radio Licensing Department at CBC informed me that “Big Girls” refers to adults not teenagers.

90 This insight came from reading Walter J. Ong’s comment in *Orality & Literacy* about the contemporary era having the “secondary orality” via technology (e.g., telephone conversation). See Walter J. Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. (London: Routledge, 1982) 5-15. Rattigan’s book in general has inspired me to think about the listener’s capacity to imagine.

91 On the enclosed DVD, Luna mentions that he came up with a sketch of the 8 characters for the rehearsal that morning.

92 Number four is a sacred number in many American Indian cultures, as it stands for the four quarters of the earth (Paula Gunn Allen 64; Lowe 22). Lowe says, “when something is repeated four times, it carries with it a statement about permanence” (22).

93 Luna comments on the performance portion of *Emendatio*: “It’s about character, but it’s also about emotion. You know, this is going to be funny. This is going to be very sad. This is going to piss you off. Now we are going to come back with funny. You know, it’s kind of a rollercoaster. I don’t feel content with staying at one place. So, there’ll be kind of kitschy moments in this, beautiful moments, and um, questionable moments, you know” (my transcription). I wonder if the third character might represent “kitschy” moments or “questionable moments.”
The essays in *James Luna: Emendatio* emphasize that the scope of Luna’s work is human and global, and that Luna’s audience includes both American Indians and a global audience. Luna’s work at the 2005 Biennale was aimed at a mostly European audience. *James Luna: Emendatio*’s second half is the first half translated into Italian, clearly showing that Luna’s audience includes Italian speakers. Luna himself comments: “My work has never just been about Indians” (qtd. in Lowe 17).


The military rule in Nigeria lasted from 1966 till 1999.

I am inspired to use this verb by Christina S. McMahan, who uses this word in “From Adaptation to Transformation: Shakespeare Creolized on Cape Verde’s Festival Stage.” *Theatre Survey.* 50:1 (May 2009) 35-66.

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