**“Third Space K-Drama: Netflix, Hallyu, and the Melodramatic Mundane”**

**Response to Reviewers**

**February 2, 2023**

Dear Dr. Jin, editorial board members of *International Journal of Communication,* reviewers, and colleagues,

I am grateful for your time and effort in considering my article. I am also thankful to the two reviewers for their careful readings and helpful feedback.

“Third Space K-Drama” argues that Netflix has exerted a homogenizing influence on South Korean (hereafter Korean) television content, diluting K-drama’s potential for achieving a genuine cultural hybridity. By comparing the Netflix Original *Squid Game* with the 2014 tvN K-drama *Liar Game* and other Korean cable television shows that began to appear at around the same time, I draw attention to an ascendant mode of Korean TV that I call the “melodramatic mundane,” whose alternative structure of feeling offers the possibility of a postcolonial Third Space that can challenge American narrative modes and ideologies. My method is multi-disciplinary, integrating close-reading, sociological analysis, and a discussion of audience reception patterns to examine K-drama’s transcultural potential on the global stage.

Both reviewers have praised the innovativeness of the “melodramatic mundane” concept and its productiveness for understanding Hallyu’s global impact, while providing suggestions for improvement. Below, I provide a point-by-point response to explain how I have revised the article in light of their feedback. These changes have been highlighted in yellow on the revised submission.

Reader 1 recommends strengthening the article by tightening the connection between the first half of the paper, which focuses on the representation of the quotidian in *Squid Game* and *Liar Game,* and the second half of the paper, which considers the melodramatic mundane as exemplified in *Dear My Friends* and multiple other K-dramas.

To do so, I have significantly revised the section on the melodramatic mundane (Section III, beginning on p. 13) in order to clarify its relationship to *Liar Game.* I added sociohistorical context pertaining to the precarity of everyday life in South Korea (see especially pp. 15-18) to explain why *Liar Game* needs to be understood alongside the melodramatic mundane. *Misaeng,* the earliest K-drama exemplifying the full-fledged features of the melodramatic mundane, was released at the same time as *Liar Game* (2014)*,* and I connect this fact with broader cultural discourse to suggest that around this time, everyday life became a source of distinctive concern in South Korea. In my revised essay, I argue that while the exploration of the everyday as a redemptive space ultimately remains under-realized in *Liar Game,* the K-drama already contains the seeds of an utopic imagination that will become more fully articulated with the consolidation of the melodramatic mundane as a distinctive narrative mode. I draw on Linda Williams’ influential reading of American melodrama as “fundamental mode” and not a “specific genre” to explain how the South Korean melodramatic mundane should be understood “as a cinematic mode that receives varying articulation in shows otherwise mapping on to different genres” (pp. 15-16). Indeed, given that a surface reading of *Misaeng* and *Liar Game* would place the two shows in very different genres (melodrama for the former and battle royale for the latter), it is precisely through examining their similarities that we can understand the logic of the melodramatic mundane and its connection to a distinctive structure of feeling present in contemporary South Korea. As this structure of feeling is central to my subsequent argument about K-drama’s potential for achieving a postcolonial “Third Space,” elaborating on the relationship between *Liar Game* and the melodramatic mundane helps me explain why the disavowal of the quotidian in Korean Netflix Originals dilutes the potential of Korean cultural content for achieving genuine cultural hybridity.

Structurally, I also removed the section where I survey how K-dramas such as *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha, Our Blues,* and *When the Camellia Blooms* exemplify the mode of the melodramatic mundane, so that the discussion of the melodramatic mundane feels less like a separate argument that is only tangentially related to *Liar Game* and *Squid Game*. Instead, I use new comparative analysis between *Liar Game* and *Misaeng* (see pp. 15-16) to pave the way for my argument that shows “operating in the mode of the melodramatic mundane [suggest] that quotidian tasks done with and alongside others build communities of care that can resist oppressive economic and sociopolitical systems” (p. 17), before introducing examples from *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha, When the Camellia Blooms,* and *Be Melodramatic* as evidence for this emergent structure of feeling. Finally, I added comparative analysis between *Dear My Friends* and *Liar Game* on pp. 19-20 and page 22to further underscore their similarities and differences. All of these changes are in line with Reader 1’s suggestion that I “revise the article with a stronger analysis connecting the K-dramas mentioned in the article” (Reader 1 report).

Reader 2 suggests that I consider the differences of reception between *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* and *Squid Game,* since the former’s “world success is highly based on its high performance in Asian countries,” while the latter “was evenly distributed in the world” (Reader 2 report). To address their comment, my revised article explains how *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* outperformed *Squid Game* in Asian countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan, but failed to chart in many Western countries. However, I draw on streaming viewership data to argue that *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* “nevertheless bucked trends in conquering diverse markets typically thought of as distinct from each other” (p. 25), indicating the first signs of a global shift in taste. To strengthen this argument, I bring in the additional example of *Extraordinary Attorney Woo,* another K-drama operating in the mode of the melodramatic mundane that is much more similar to *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* than it is to *Squid Game.* As I observed in my revision,compared to *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha, Extraordinary Attorney Woo* achieved “a much wider scope of popularity across Asian, Middle-Eastern, South American, North American, and European countries,” suggesting that “a structure of feeling that might have been thought of as more congenial to regional sensibilities appears to be achieving increasing resonance across borders” (p. 25).

Reader 2 also rightly noted that my original article used “without differen[t]iation” Hallyu dramas “like *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* which have been elaborated in the tradition of Korean TV drama” and shows like *Squid Game* “which were produced as genre contents in order to please the world global OTT market” (Reader 2 report). To rectify this issue, I added the following clarification on pp. 1-2:

I distinguish between traditional K-dramas developed for local television, which have driven the popularity of Korean content overseas since Hallyu’s earliest phases, and Korean Netflix Originals, developed exclusively by Netflix for OTT streaming and targeting a global audience. For clarity, I will refer to the former as K-drama and the latter as Netflix Original.

This wording makes it clear that the melodramatic mundane emerges out of a K-drama tradition that is distinctively different from Netflix Originals, an assertion that Reader 2 makes that I am in agreement with. As I write on page 17 of my revised article, “Unlike the globally-oriented *Squid Game*, the melodramatic mundane constitutes a homegrown narrative mode that responds to the problem of everyday precarity not through nihilistic surrender but through engaging with its redemptive possibilities.”

I hope these revisions adequately address all of the comments provided in the two reader reports. I would be delighted to provide further information, clarification, and/or revision. Thank you for your time and consideration.

[Received reader reports have been reproduced below in red for easy reference.]

Reviewer 1:
Thank you for giving me an opportunity to review “Third Space K-Drama:
Netflix, Hallyu, and the Melodramatic Mundane.”

The article’s topic is a timely and relevant one that can contribute to
scholarship in Korean Studies, Communication Studies, and Media Studies, and
the author’s main argument and the idea of “melodramatic mundane” are
interesting.

However, while the common throughline of how everyday life and the
melodramatic mundane are represented in K-dramas is certainly visible in the
article, the article reads like two separate documents with a weak
connection.

The article first analyzes Squid Game, then compares/contrasts Squid Game
with Liar Game around the representation of the quotidian,
then moves on and introduces 6-7 other K-dramas (but mostly focusing on Dear
My Friends), analyzing how the melodramatic mundane is represented, and then
discusses how such dramas become a potential postcolonial Third Space
without making a strong connection with the previously analyzed Squid Game
and Liar Game.

Therefore, the article reads as if two articles (Squid Game & Liar Game’s
representation of the quotidian / Dear My Friends and 5-6 other dramas’
representation of the melodramatic mundane) are linked together and the
cohesion is not articulated strongly.

The reviewer would suggest the author to revise the article with a stronger
analysis connecting the K-dramas mentioned in the article.

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Reviewer 2:

This is an excellent article, well written and highly inspiring. The notion
of melodramatic mundane will influence the understanding on the Hallyu
drama's influence and the possibility it opened in the world.

Just 2 littles question that I think needs to be explained:

(1) <Hometown ChaCha Cha>'s world success is highly based on its high
performance in Asian countries, considered to that of <Squid Game> which was
evenly distributed in the world. In many Asian countries, <Squid Game>'s
dominance in the palmares at the moment of its airing is replaced relatively
quickly by <Hometown ChaChaCha>. This difference in structure of feeling or
what so ever difference in appreciation between the East and the West need
to take into consideration.

(2) In this article, the author is using without differenciation the K drama
as signifying the Hallyu dramas (like < Hometown ChaChaCha> which have been
elaborated in the tradition of Korean TV drama) and the K drama, like <
Squid Game> which were produced as genre contents in order to please the
world global OTT market. I think that the notion of "melodramatic mundane"
is the quality of the Hallyu drama according to my diffenciation.

I think that very significant improvement can be made Integrating (1) and
(2) into this article's final asserions. article