

Ok-Lee Maria: A One-Act Play
A Student-Written, Task-Based Drama
at Duksung Women's University

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Abstract

Ok-Lee Maria: A One-Act Play is an allegorical melodrama originally written and performed by fifteen task-based English-language students in September and October 2008 at Duksung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. Combining comedy and tragedy, the plot centers on the difficulties of a young woman, a television show "food model," who is emotionally and socially mistreated in her romantic and professional life. This publication of the short play comes with a foreword by the task-based students' language instructor and a personal reflection by the starring actor.

Keywords : acting, allegory, EFL, scriptwriting, student-centered learning, task-based learning

Foreword

Ok-Lee Maria: A One-Act Play is a student-written drama I supervised in fall 2008 at Duksung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. At the time, I was in my second year at the Duksung International Language Center (DILC) and one of thirteen native English-speaking instructors in the Duksung Dynamic English 2 (DDE2) program.

DDE2 was designed by Dr. Punahm Park, program director of the DILC, as a twelve-week, student-centered, intensive-immersion English credit course divided into four sessions. Students were placed in different language-proficiency levels, and they took task-based classes, integrated-skills classes, and activity classes with a rotation of instructors five days a week from 6:40 to 9:30 pm. *Ok-Lee Maria* was a product of the first session, when enrollees

had to write and perform a sitcom/drama. I was assigned to teach Class 4, an advanced-level group of fifteen students composed of freshman to seniors.

Since I had taught the same session in fall 2007, I was able to draw on my previous related experience, and the class took a number of preliminary steps toward drafting their playscript. Notably, I illustrated Freytag's pyramid on the classroom whiteboard in order to guide the students with plot structure, and I verbally summarized Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* per the diagram sections (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution). Since there was a performance time limit, I also advised the class to confine their work to one act.

The students sat in small groups of three to four people; they were responsible for different plot sections and scenes of the play; and they discussed character and story ideas within and between their groups. When I later asked what the title of their drama would be, one student said, "Ugly Maria." Artistically, however, this felt too blunt, and I suggested that "Ugly" be modified to "Ok-Lee" (옥리), which I said with the Korean pronunciation and wrote in transliteration and Korean letters on the whiteboard. The idea excited the students, and they adopted it as the name of the play and the main character.

Other characters the groups conceived also had allegorical names. For example, Ba-ram, the protagonist's boyfriend came from *param* (바람; wind); Jung-han Jin, a non-romantic male friend, came from *chinjŏnghan* (진정한; truthful); Miss Sa-gi Ju, a plastic surgeon's assistant, came from *chusagi* (주사기; syringe); Keun-yook Jan, a physical trainer, came from *changŭnyuk* (잔근육; lean muscle); and Jook-jook and Bbang-bbang, two attractive television models, came from the informal *tchuktchuk-ppangppang* (쭈쭈빵빵; leggy busty). Similarly, there was wordplay with "Oh, shopping!" which became Sho-ping Oh, a television show host who sells Chinese food and cutlery imports.

The groups finished drafting their sections around mid-September, and they designated acting roles among themselves. Third-year student SeungJung Jo would play the starring role (Fig. 1). On the story, it was a melodrama about an overweight "food model" (she poses with food on television) who learns

that her boyfriend is a deceiver and a womanizer. After he spurns her, she is driven to revenge and undergoes a drastic physical transformation; yet things go awry in an accident with a friend who has affections for her. Basically, the premise here used the romantic comedy film *A Beautiful Woman Suffers* (미녀는 괴로워, *Minyŏ-nŭn koerowŏ*, 2006), better known as *200 Pounds Beauty*, as an exemplar. *Ok-Lee Maria*, however, was different and its tragic-pathos element stronger.



Fig. 1. Alzo David-West with fourteen of the fifteen student writers and cast of *Ok-Lee Maria* in fall 2008. Starring actor SeungJung Jo is second from right, front row.

My assistance with the students' writing consisted of editing, formatting, stage directions, and content modifications for unity of effect. After I gave the class the final version of their playscript, I essentially became an acting coach and a director. We did "ball" voice-throwing with diaphragmatic breathing, emotion-mirroring exercises, and several in-class rehearsals. All these techniques helped the students accentuate vocal power, express a range of feelings with the whole body, and achieve stage confidence.

Altogether, the fifteen students were driven and cooperative. Their high

self-motivation and impressive group dynamic also allowed them to practice regularly after class and to design (completely on their own) costumes and props for the play. *Ok-Lee Maria* was finally performed in the evening of October 1, 2008, at the Duksung Women's University art building auditorium. I was the performance-day master of ceremonies; the other instructors were judges; and some two-hundred DDE2 students were in attendance.

While there were many enjoyable performances that evening, *Ok-Lee Maria* had a distinctive effect. I observed that the allegorical names were a great source of amusement to the viewers, while the acting and unfoldment commanded extraordinary collective reactions: chuckles and laughs, gasps and cowering, rapture and speechlessness, and monumental applause.

After all the plays were finished, I gathered judging-tallies for the program director and the secretaries who were present. Somewhat surprisingly, one instructor confided to me that he disliked the appearance of swearwords in the melodrama and thus gave it 1 out of 4 points in all categories (articulation/clarity, coherence/creativity, and preparation/props). Apparently for this reason, Class 4 took the third-place prize, to the dismay of the group.

Ok-Lee Maria was nevertheless a personally rewarding experience for the students. They were assured by the enthusiasm of the audience, and they were proud to have written and performed an English-language play.

Alzo David-West

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Personal Reflection

One of my favorite experiences in the DDE2 program in fall 2008 was acting in *Ok-Lee Maria*. I am so pleased to recall the good memories of conceiving the play, writing the script with my classmates, and practicing intensely until the performance day. I also remember that my classmates and I tried hard to include everybody's ideas and touches into every detail of the characters' lines and the actors' parts. The first rough idea to make the play came from a very popular comedy movie at the time called *200 Pounds*

Beauty. Everyone in our class had seen the movie and was in love with it, so we were all happy to create our own play inspired by the movie.

The process of writing the playscript was smooth and fun. Most of us were fond of the movie synopsis, and as Koreans, we love making melodramatic stories. I remember that when we were drafting the script, we giggled a lot and were so happy to put everybody's creative and brilliant ideas into it. For instance, the name of the main character "Ok-lee" was because her peculiarity was a hideous physical appearance. Every other character's name was also based on their personalities and distinctive features, such as "Baram" (a casual Korean word for a womanizer) and "Jung-han Jin" (which is an adaptation of *truthful, veracious* in Korean).

Giving typical qualities to each character was so much fun. We wanted Ok-lee to look like an "ugly fat girl" in people's eyes, but to have a very beautiful mind as well as naiveté. We also tried to reflect on the side of Korean society in which a young woman like Ok-lee would tend to suffer many life challenges because of people's preconceptions and discrimination. For example, at her job as a food model for a TV shopping show, Ok-lee was treated discriminatively by her boss, who favored the other female models who were gorgeous and pretty looking. Thus, I would say our play worked as a satire on that part of Korean society where "lookism" (with its belief that pretty and handsome people should get more benefits) is prevalent.

After we received the finalized version of the playscript from our instructor Alzo David-West, we started practicing for about two weeks before the performance day. Three days before the show, we spent about two or three hours every night practicing in our classroom at the university language center, because we wanted to win the first-place prize. Although everybody was busy with their schoolwork, we found ways for everyone to be together at the same time and practice the play. On the anticipated performance day, we put our best effort into acting and tried to show what we had worked so hard on, even though we were terribly nervous and felt intimidated backstage, hearing the all-student audience's approving reactions to the other plays.

I recall that when we were performing our play, we had so many laughs and so much attention from the audience. When Ok-lee's monolog came in

the last part of the final scene, I heard nothing but silence from the audience and felt their careful attention to the denouement of the play. As I, Ok-lee, wailed over her loss of love and her empty feelings, I noticed that some of the audience members sympathized with the character and were even shocked to see her crying.

That evening, even though many people liked our play, we won the third-place prize somehow for some reason. Still, we were so happy with our hard work and the great audience response to our dramatic creation. I recall *Ok-Lee Maria* as one of the most thrilling times in my life and the first time for me to act in a play in front of many people. I believe our accomplishment was possible because we had good chemistry and everybody was passionate about creating a play.

SeungJung Jo

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Ok-Lee Maria
A One-Act Play

Characters

OK-LEE MARIA, *television show food model*
JUNG-HAN JIN, *friend of Ok-lee*
BA-RAM, *boyfriend of Ok-lee*
JIL-JIL, *friend of Ba-ram*
BOKA, *friend of Ba-ram*
KI-BA YEO, *director and cameraman*
PA-RA MAK, *sound assistant of Ki-ba*
SHO-PING OH, *television show host*
JOOK-JOOK, *television show model*
BBANG-BBANG, *television show model*
SHI-GI, *friend of Jook-jook and Bbang-bbang*
JIL-TU, *friend of Jook-jook and Bbang-bbang*
DR. IN-JO KIM, *plastic surgeon*

Actors

Seungjung Jo
Jina Seok
Goeun Choi
Jieun Kim
Bosung Jun
Ahyoung Lee
Saetbyul Kim
Heesook Yun
Minjung Woo
Soyoung Lee
Juri Park
Jongha Lee
Kyunghee Park

MISS SA-GI JU, *assistant of Dr. Kim*
KEUN-YOOK JAN, *physical trainer*

Eunjin Kwon
Seunglee Im

Time: Now

Place: South Korea

SCENE 1 PART 1

[OK-LEE is on the subway on her way to work. She calls her boyfriend BA-RAM on her cellphone.]

Ok-lee Maria

Ba-ram, baby, what are you doing now?

Ba-ram

I'm really angry, Ok-lee.

Ok-lee Maria

Why? What happened?

Ba-ram

I lost my wallet—my money, credit cards, driver's license—everything!
[*He grumbles.*]

[OK-LEE and BA-RAM continue talking. They finish, and she arrives worriedly on the set of the film studio where she works.]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Thinking aloud.*] That's it! I'll get him another wallet!

Ki-ba Yeo

Ok-lee, get on set! [OK-LEE *positions herself in front of the camera.*]
Hey, hey, hey! Let's try this again. Go back a little. I can't fit you in the shot. [*He says frustratedly.*] Oh, this is useless. Get out of the shot. [*He remarks cynically.*]

Ok-lee Maria

Sorry, Ki-ba. I will do better in the next one. [*She goes to a corner of the*

set.]

[SHO-PING OH *and models* JOOK-JOOK *and* BBANG-BBANG *enter.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

Sho-ping, Jook-jook, Bbang-bbang. Come on. It's your cue. [*He calls to the sound assistant.*] Pa-ra, I need sound.

Pa-ra Mak

I'm on it, Ki-ba. [*PA-RA positions the sound equipment.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

3, 2, 1, action!

Sho-ping Oh

Hello, everyone, and welcome to “Oh, Shopping!” [*The models pose.*]
I am your host, Sho-ping. Our special sale today is mouth-watering Beijing duck—imported directly from China! [*She speaks Chinese.*]

[*KI-BA turns the camera to OK-LEE, and she eats the Beijing duck instantly.*]

[*JOOK-JOOK and BBANG-BBANG grab a pair of duck legs and act prettily.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

Okay, cut. [*Turning smilingly to the models.*] Here you are, girls. A little incentive. [*He gives them some money and winks.*]

Jook-jook and Bbang-bbang

Thank you, Mr. Yeo! [*They blow a kiss.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

Ok-lee. [*Irritatedly.*] This is for—[*OK-LEE grabs the money.*]

Ok-lee Maria

Oh, thank you, Ki-ba! [*She smiles and blows a kiss. He makes a vomiting gesture.*]

SCENE 1 PART 2

[OK-LEE is at a café in a shopping mall. Her friend JUNG-HAN JIN appears.]

Jung-han Jin

Hi, Ok-lee. What a surprise to see you here. Hey, do you have time tonight? Let's go see a movie together.

Ok-lee Maria

Sorry, Jung-han, but I'm waiting for my boyfriend. He lost his wallet today, and I bought him a new one. What do you think?

Jung-han Jin

What?! Didn't you buy him a million-won suit the day before yesterday?

Ok-lee Maria

[*Nervously.*] Umm ... but I already bought the wallet.

Jung-han Jin

I don't know. I don't know, Ok-lee.

Ok-lee Maria

Oh, look! Ba-ram is coming. Sorry, Jung-han. Let's talk again later.

Jung-han Jin

Uh, sure. See you later.

[JUNG-HAN exits. BA-RAM enters.]

Ok-lee Maria

Hi, Ba-ram. ... You look so tired.

Ba-ram

Yeah, I'm really tired.

Ok-lee Maria

This is for you! [*She gives him a gift box.*]

Ba-ram

What is this?

Ok-lee Maria

Well, you said you lost your wallet today.

[BA-RAM *opens the gift box.*]

Ba-ram

Wow!

Ok-lee Maria

It's the latest Armani wallet. I bought it for you. [*Smilingly.*]

Ba-ram

Wow! I heard it's very expensive. Thanks a lot, baby. You're the love of my life.

[OK-LEE *hugs and kisses* BA-RAM.]

Ba-ram

Hey, I have to go to the men's room. Give me a second, okay?

[OK-LEE *waits for half an hour. She calls* BA-RAM's *cellphone continuously, but he does not answer.*]

Ok-lee Maria

What's going on? Why isn't he answering? I hate it when he doesn't pick up my calls. Did something happen to him?

[*She goes to the men's room and calls for* BA-RAM. *He is not there. She turns a corner and is startled to see* BA-RAM *with* BBANG-BBANG.]

Ba-ram

Baby, you look perfect.

Bbang-bbang

Oh, honey. You're my sunshine. I'll love you forever. [*They kiss.*]

[OK-LEE *pushes them apart angrily.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Shouting at BBANG-BBANG.*] That's bull! You're trying to take him away from me? Well, he loves me! He loves me!—

Ba-ram

[*Arrogantly.*] Hey, you're a pig, Ok-lee. Asinine and stupid. Go eat some more Beijing duck.

[OK-LEE *freezes in disbelief.* BA-RAM and BBANG-BBANG *walk off mockingly.* OK-LEE *sobs.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Sobbing.*] I believed in him. How could he do this to me?! I'll show that shit. I'll show him.

SCENE 2 PART 1

[OK-LEE *enters a small plastic surgery clinic. She meets the surgeon DR. IN-JO KIM and the nurse MISS SA-GI JU.*]

Dr. In-jo Kim

Hello, how can I help you?

Ok-lee Maria

Are you the plastic surgeon?

Dr. In-jo Kim

Yes, I am Dr. In-jo Kim. This is my assistant, Miss Sa-gi Ju.

Ok-lee Maria

I want to be more beautiful.

Dr. In-jo Kim

Hmm ... [*Studying her face.*] Just a moment. [*He goes through papers and brings out some pictures.*] Now, there are so many things about your face to fix that I don't know where to begin. But you should get a nose

job, round your jawline down a bit, and get double-eyelid surgery.

Ok-lee Maria

Should I do all that?

Dr. In-jo Kim

You'll be born again. [*Said with an expressionless face.*]

Ok-lee Maria

How much money will it take?

Dr. In-jo Kim

A lot, but it's worth it. [*Said expressionlessly.*]

[*OK-LEE steps back to think.*]

Miss Sa-gi Ju

[*Speaking privately to DR. KIM.*] Can you handle it, doctor? She's the ugliest thing I've ever seen.

Dr. In-jo Kim

I can do it. I can do it.—We can do it!

[*OK-LEE steps forward.*]

Ok-lee Maria

Dr. Kim, I am ready.

[*DR. KIM and MISS JU escort OK-LEE to the operating room.*]

SCENE 2 PART 2

[*OK-LEE is at a gym, running on a treadmill after her surgery. Her face is bandaged. Physical trainer KEUN-YOOK JAN enters. Workout music starts.*]

Keun-yook Jan

[*Observing OK-LEE and speaking to himself.*] She'll need a lot of work.

But she is running again. She never gives up. [*Noticing some frustration, he motivates her.*] Go for it, Ok-lee Maria. Go! Go! Go!

[OK-LEE *runs faster and faster. Her cellphone rings.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Breathless.*] Jung-han ... What do you want?

Jung-han Jin

Hello, Ok-lee. Your phone has been disconnected lately. I was worried about you. What are you doing now? Where are you?

Ok-lee Maria

[*Breathless and annoyed.*] I'm busy. ... Call me back later! [*She hangs up.*]

[OK-LEE *continues running. SHI-GI and JIL-TU enter with JOOK-JOOK and BBANG-BBANG.*]

Shi-gi

[*Pointing.*] Jil-tu, look at that!

Jil-tu

[*Shaking her head.*] Tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk. She'd better give up.

Jook-jook

[*Laughing.*] The poor thing!

Bbang-bbang

[*Swaggeringly.*] Whatever.

SCENE 2 PART 3

[OK-LEE *returns to the plastic surgery clinic. She has lost a lot of weight. DR. KIM and MISS JU take off her bandages.*]

Miss Sa-gi Ju

She's so beautiful! She looks like Tae-hee Kim.

Dr. In-Jo Kim

Yes! I did it.—There’s nothing we can’t do.

[JUNG-HAN *passes by the clinic.*]

SCENE 2 PART 4

[OK-LEE *visits a dance club. No one recognizes her. BA-RAM’s friends JIL-JIL and BO-KA lounge around.*]

Jil-jil

Hey, beautiful, wanna get freaky tonight?

Bo-ka

Yeah, how about a lap dance?

[JOOK-JOOK, BBANG-BBANG, SHI-GI, *and* JIL-TU *dance near them.*]

Jil-jil

Hey, girls? Wanna play with us?

Jook-jook, Bbang-bbang, Shi-gi, and Jil-tu

Yeah! [*They all dance.*]

[BO-KA *looks aside and notices an incredibly beautiful woman.*]

Bo-ka

Hey, hey, hey. Check *that* out!

Jil-jil

Where? Where? [*Looking around.*]

Bo-ka

Man, Ba-ram’s gonna like that!

[*They walk up to OK-LEE.*]

Bo-ka

What's up, baby?

Jil-jil

You are gorgeous!

Ok-lee Maria

[Conceitedly.] I know. I know.

[OK-LEE, BO-KA, and JIL-JIL dance.]

[SHI-GI and JIL-TU grow jealous. They approach OK-LEE. SHI-GI shoves her.]

Shi-gi

Just who do you think you are, sister?

Jil-tu

You tell her, Shi-gi. That's right. You can't take away our boys like that.

Ok-lee Maria

Oh, these guys? You can have them. I don't need them anymore. *[She walks away with her nose in the air.]*

[BA-RAM enters.]

Jil-jil

Ba-ram, Ba-ram, you have to see this!

Bo-ka

Yeah, this girl is hot!

[They take BA-RAM to OK-LEE. He fails to recognize her.]

Ba-ram

Baby, you're the love of my life.

Ok-lee Maria

Tell me about it.

Ba-ram

How about a dance? [OK-LEE *obliges, and they dance.*]

[OK-LEE and BA-RAM *leave the club. Someone crashes into her.*]

Ok-lee Maria

Shit! Where'd you leave your eyes, asshole? Did you leave them at home or work or something?

Jung-han Jin

Ok-lee, what's wrong with you? Why have you changed?

Ba-ram

[*Aghast.*] Ok-lee? Ok-lee Maria?

Ok-lee Maria

You ruined everything, Jung-han! You ruined everything!

[BA-RAM, JIL-JIL, BO-KA, JOOK-JOOK, BBANG-BBANG, SHI-GI, and JIL-TU *exit in disbelief.*]

[OK-LEE *storms off in anger. JUNG-HAN is left alone outside the club.*]

SCENE 3 PART 1

[*At the set of the film studio. KI-BA, PA-RA, SHO-PING, JOOK-JOOK, and BBANG-BBANG are waiting.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

[*Shouting.*] Ok-lee's late again! [*Turning to the cast.*] Where is she?
Where the fuck is she?

[OK-LEE *arrives. She has regained all her weight.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Breathless.*] Ki-ba ... sorry.

Ki-ba Yeo

[*Turning around.*] Hey, hey, hey! We have a schedule, Ok-lee. You think you're special? Get on set!

[OK-LEE *positions herself on set.* SHO-PING, JOOK-JOOK, and BBANG-BBANG *get ready for the camera.*]

Jook-jook

[*Speaking to* BBANG-BBANG.] Look at her. How could she gain it back so quickly?

Bbang-bbang

She's pathetic.

[OK-LEE *overhears them, makes a sorrowful face, and casts her head down.*]

SCENE 3 PART 2

[*Another day and* OK-LEE *is at her apartment.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Sobbingly.*] Why, Ba-ram? ... Why? [*Her cellphone rings. She hesitates but picks it up.*] Hello?

Sho-ping Oh

[*Angrily.*] Ok-lee, what are you doing? Why aren't you on set today? Don't you need a job? Get over here!

Ok-lee Maria

I can't, Sho-ping. I can't come today.

Sho-ping Oh

Are you kidding me? There are so many others who can do this job besides you. Ki-ba's losing his patience. It's your last chance. Come here this minute!

Ok-lee Maria

Okay ... okay. I'll be there soon. [*She hangs up.*]

[OK-LEE *takes the subway to the film studio. DR. KIM, MISS JU, KEUN-YOOK, SHI-GI, and JIL-TU are sitting in the same car. OK-LEE turns to look at them. They do not notice, and they stare blankly.*]

SCENE 3 PART 3

[OK-LEE *arrives at the film studio. KI-BA is filming the show. JUNG-HAN is hanging around.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

3, 2, 1, action!

Sho-ping Oh

Hello, everyone, and welcome to “Oh, Shopping!” [JOOK-JOOK *and* BBANG-BBANG *pose.*] I am your host, Sho-ping. Our special sale today is sparkling stainless steel cutlery—imported directly from China! [*She speaks Chinese.*]

[KI-BA *turns the camera to JOOK-JOOK and BBANG-BBANG. They hold the cutlery and act prettily.*]

[OK-LEE *dashes forward and grabs a knife set from BBANG-BBANG. Everyone gasps in fright. KI-BA keeps the camera rolling, with PA-RA holding the sound equipment.*]

Ok-lee Maria

[*Crying.*] I’m all alone. ... It’s so hard. ... Nobody wants me. Nobody wants me. ... I really hate it. I really hate the way I am. [*She puts the knives to her throat, arms forming an X.*]

[JUNG-HAN *lunges in and wrests the knives out of OK-LEE’s hands. She falls to her knees.*]

Jung-han Jin

[*Shouting.*] What the hell are you doing? ... I love you, Ok-lee. [*He embraces her.*] I love you, Ok-lee Maria.

[*Pause.*]

Ki-ba Yeo

Cut.

[*Lights fade.*]

END