

**TRANSCULTURAL SCREENWRITING: WRITING A DUAL-
LANGUAGE SCREENPLAY FOR SOUTH KOREAN AUDIENCES AS
A NON-KOREAN SCREENWRITER**

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral research explores the complexities of transcultural screenwriting by developing a feature-length screenplay, *Into Dust*, conceptualised for Korean audiences by a non-Korean anglophone screenwriter residing in Korea. My creative practice, ingrained in writing screen narratives set within my adopted nation, seeks to integrate a domestic appeal with my transcultural perspective as a culturally fluent, albeit non-native, inhabitant of Korea. This research addresses screenwriting in my specific transcultural context, highlighting the challenges and concerns encountered when representing a cultural group as an outsider and crafting a narrative in a bilingual framework.

This inquiry was achieved using both practice-based and critical research methodologies to chart the evolution of *Into Dust*, an apocalyptic family drama featuring a Korean family endeavouring to complete a road trip across Korea, accompanied by a British hitchhiker, against the background of an imminent asteroid collision. The accompanying critical commentary contextualises the screenplay's developmental trajectory within an academic framework, analysing various iterations of *Into Dust* to underscore the foundational role of research in its evolution to become an academic screenplay and research artefact.

The critical commentary explores various issues arising for a non-Korean, anglophone screenwriter when scripting for a targeted Korean audience. A significant issue entailed the negotiation of permission within transcultural screenwriting and the creative strategies needed to navigate the internalised and externalised notions of permission when representing Korea and its people as a cultural outsider. The insights derived from this research avenue underscore how the cultivation and refinement of transcultural competence emerge as pivotal in fashioning a screenplay that resonates with my target audience. Moreover, the research validates that thorough engagement with Korea's contemporary

socio-cultural landscape is productive in mitigating internalised and externalised notions of permission when portraying a specific cultural group as a cultural outsider, facilitating exploration into transcultural themes that echo the intrinsic tensions surfacing in societies undergoing globalisation.

The critical commentary further interrogates the challenges of scripting dialogue for a dual-language narrative, examining strategies for creating bilingual characters and overcoming language barriers between Korean and English-speaking characters within a narrative. The research substantiates that scrutinising the effects of bilingualism on personality and the nature of ritualistic activities in communication can substantially enhance character development in transcultural screenwriting, enriching the narrative world by infusing it with dramatic conflicts and presenting a more authentic and nuanced depiction of cross-cultural communication dynamics.

Within the frame of a non-Korean anglophone screenwriter scripting for a Korean audience, this thesis highlights strategies pertinent to the burgeoning field of transcultural screenwriting research. In an era where cultural transformation and the ardent preservation of cultural uniqueness can clash, transcultural scenarios are becoming more frequent and are poised to persist. Consequently, globalisation precipitates new scenarios, prompting screenwriters to embrace a transcultural view in their practice. While this research is embedded in the specific transcultural context of a non-Korean screenwriter writing in Korea, it touches upon a universal inquiry, reverberating with all screenwriters working beyond their cultural boundaries or engaging with narratives divergent from their personal cultural experiences. The devised strategies offer scholarly value and extend their applicability to screenwriters navigating similar creative hurdles.

Keywords: South Korea, transcultural screenwriting, practice-based research, academic screenplay, screenplay development, cultural representation, permission, creative anxieties, Orientalism, bilingualism, cross-cultural communication, transcultural competence

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‘Transcultural Screenwriting: Writing a Dual-language Screenplay for Korean Audiences.’ A presentation delivered at the *Screenwriting Research Network: Symposium*, Online, 2021.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work of this thesis has been composed by the author alone and has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. Except where reference of due acknowledgement is made, the content presented is entirely my own and is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

A NOTE ON KOREAN REVISED ROMANTICISM

Throughout this PhD thesis are numerous examples of the Korean language. When it does appear, Korean words and sentences are distinguished with italics and romanticised according to the RRA (Revised Romanticisation of Korean) system, which was developed by the National Academy of the Korean Language and released to the public in 2000. The RRA system represents Korean words in Latin script and is used ubiquitously throughout South Korea to make the Korean language easier to pronounce for non-native speakers. As such, I use it in place of *hangeul*, the actual Korean writing system, to present the Korean language in a more pronounceable way for English-speaking readers. A few basic pointers for those not acquainted with Korean pronunciation are as follows:

- The simple singular vowels of Korean are long. For example, *Hanguk* is pronounced as “Han-gook”; the name *Jun-ho* is “Joon-ho”; and *bulgogi* is “bool-goh-gee.”
- The simple vowel *eo* is pronounced “uh” as in “run.”
- The simple vowel *eu* is pronounced “oo” as in “took.”
- The simple vowel *ae* is pronounced “ay” as in “day.”
- The simple vowel *oe* is pronounced “weh” as in “wait.”
- The simple vowel *wi* is pronounced “wee” as in “week.”

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

We live in a time of global interconnectedness, where cultural borders blur, and people from all walks of life are culturally mobile. As Slimbach asserts, ‘a “transcultural” era is upon us’ (2005: 205), marked by accelerating global modernity, fueled by ‘the dramatic expansion of airline travel and telecommunications technologies, tourism and student exchanges, immigration policies and trade agreements [that] have served to connect vastly different peoples and places into increasingly complex relationships’ (Slimbach 2005: 205) that are felt at a local level. The processes of globalisation have created new scenarios and opportunities for independent screenwriters to embrace a more transcultural view of screenwriting, that is, to adopt a more flexible approach to storytelling, to write screenplay narratives that transcend cultural boundaries and engage with transcultural characteristics that reflect the scenarios of this global time.

As a British screenwriter residing in South Korea¹, I often consider how to write stories set in my adopted home that could be produced locally and resonate with local audiences. I am acutely aware of my position as a ‘cultural outsider’ in this context, a term defined by Miller as someone who does not share the intrinsic cultural traits, such as ethnicity, national identity, or social customs, of the group they engage with (2014: 298). The perspective developed in the cultural context of my upbringing gives me distinct values and beliefs from those of the group in which I am immersed, differences that can potentially lead to misrepresentations and misunderstandings (Banks 1998:1-2). I aim not to write as a Korean screenwriter but to develop narratives that reflect my transcultural scenario and are grounded in local authenticity while maintaining my cultural distinctiveness.

Screenwriting in a transcultural context creates topics for consideration, such as, but not limited to, how to develop characters from a different culture to one’s own, how to engage with intercultural relationships, local history, and socio-cultural concerns as a

¹ South Koreans use the name ‘Korea’ when referring to their country and ‘Korean’ when referring to anything that derives from it. I will do the same throughout this critical commentary.

cultural outsider, how to construct relationship dynamics between characters from different cultural backgrounds, and how to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication when writing dialogue. However, existing research provides no insight into the specific challenges a non-Korean screenwriter faces in Korea. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of individual case studies that delve into transcultural screenwriting, a practice that integrates elements from multiple cultures during the creative process.

This thesis seeks to bridge this gap by examining the endeavours of a British screenwriter residing in Korea. Specifically, it will analyse the screenwriter's journey in crafting a screenplay set in Korea aimed at Korean audiences, as a non-Korean. This research aims to present a nuanced case study of screenwriting practice, illuminating the intricate dynamics of composing a transcultural screenplay that engages with the specificity of its creation context. Through this focus, the thesis will provide unique insights into the creative strategies and challenges involved in transcultural narrative development.

The notion of international screenwriting has been firm in the discourse of screenwriting literature since Ken Dancyger's formative text, *Global Screenwriting* (2001), theorised strategies to write stories with global appeal. An international view of screenwriting is not innovative, but in the academic arena, adopting a transcultural lens for screenwriting—to zoom in, focus on and scrutinise the specifics of screenwriting practice in terms of transcending cultural boundaries—is still relatively new.

Recent studies have engaged with screenwriting in the mechanisms of globalisation and examined how engagement with transcultural studies may enlighten practice. Predominantly, the edited collection of essays, *Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World* (Brenes, Cattrysse and McVeigh 2017), adopts a transcultural lens to examine the working conditions of international co-productions, the processes of writing stories that reach wider, multicultural audiences, and the values that are communicated through global storytelling. The emerging field of transcultural screenwriting has been illuminated by various case studies that, while innovative, present certain limitations which this thesis seeks to address.

Within *Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World*, Shuchi Kothari presents a case study, '(Re)Making Murphy: The Development of a Transcultural Animated Feature Screenplay' (2017), that examines the creative development process of a

transcultural screenplay that attempts to mesh five different national styles of animation, their narrative themes, conventions, and structures. Through her case study, Kothari's *Making Murphy* provides an industrial perspective on the creative process, focusing on the challenges of pitching and funding within animation rather than the intricacies of crafting a transcultural narrative. Although Kothari's intention to infuse her narrative with 'Japaneseness'—signified by her two research trips to Japan and study of Hayao Miyazaki's works—adds value, it falls short of offering a comprehensive understanding of how these experiences transform her screenwriting practice or perspective. While significant in its ambition to include female protagonists in animation, her work inadvertently overlooks a more profound cultural portrayal, often defaulting to Europeanized representations rather than authentically Japanese ones.

A research project that more succinctly aligns with my research aims is Alex McAulay's 'The Western Screenwriter in Japan: Screenwriting Considerations in Transnational Cinema' (2017). McAulay explores the implications of writing a screenplay in a specific transcultural context, taking the reflexive position of a researcher-practitioner to examine the development of a romantic-comedy screenplay, reflecting on the challenges faced by a Western (British) screenwriter writing a screenplay for Japanese cinema. McAulay states his transcultural position as 'both insider and outsider with regard to Japan' (2017: 119) and uses this position to examine, among other topics, the challenges of negotiating the desire to write authentically when representing Japan and Japanese people, with the knowledge that creative output can be critiqued in terms of Orientalist discourse. McAulay's introspective approach also contends with the concept of 'becoming Japanese'—an ongoing, dialogic process without a fixed endpoint—highlighting the continuous nature of cultural adaptation within transcultural creative practice (2017: 190).

In contrast to Kothari's case study, McAulay provides a more thorough exploration of Japanese national and transnational cinema, framing his screenwriting within the context of Orientalism and its implications for Western screenwriters. However, this area of research resides more within film studies discourse than screenwriting practice, something that I will avoid in my thesis as I intend to focus succinctly on representation in script development and not cinematic representation. McAulay skilfully grapples with the spectre of Orientalism in representation, highlighting moments when, in the search for heightened

comedy or drama, he had to consider whether he was tipping scenes towards an Orientalist interpretation (2017: 178-179). There is an opportunity to refine this discussion by offering concrete creative strategies for transcultural screenwriting that evade stereotypical portrayals.

The research projects mentioned above by Kothari and Macauley highlight the research value of case studies centred around the experiences of individual researcher-practitioners or practitioner-researchers who engage with transcultural scenarios, whether that be within the narratives they create or the displacement and ‘in-betweenness’ of their existences. However, there are few individual and specific case studies of transcultural screenwriting. As McVeigh notes, ‘[i]n screenwriting theory [...] there is little written in the field of transcultural screenwriting from the writer’s perspective’ (McVeigh 2017: 64). Therefore, the insights of the writers mentioned are only the start of research in transcultural screenwriting.

This thesis sets out to carve a distinct path from the abovementioned studies. It will focus exclusively on the screenwriting process, eschewing the broader film studies debate to centre on narrative development within a specific transcultural context, that of a non-Korean screenwriter representing Korea and its people. As I will address later, Korea, unlike Japan, has not been extensively represented by Western screenwriters, presenting a unique challenge and an opportunity to forge new ground. This research will examine the development of a dual-language screenplay crafted by an anglophone writer aimed at Korean audiences. The endeavour is not to ‘become Korean’ or write ‘as a Korean’ but to navigate the liminal space between cultures, seeking a balanced insider-outsider perspective. The thesis will critically engage with and propose strategies to counteract Orientalist anxieties, offering insights into my evolving relationship with Korean culture throughout the screenwriting journey. Through this lens, the thesis will expand on McAulay’s discussion of cultural assimilation and address the gaps left by Kothari, particularly in providing a detailed account of how cultural immersion and personal transformation inform the creative process. It will document the unique challenges of writing in Korea as an anglophone screenwriter and aim to contribute novel creative strategies to screenwriting research.

My aim with this PhD research project is to bring into being a screenplay artefact, *Into Dust*, an apocalyptic family drama set on the road in Korea that features Korean and British characters and is intended to become a Korean and English-language film. My position as a non-Korean screenwriter in Korea and my creative intentions invite practice-based research considerations. Crossing cultural boundaries—physically to write in a cultural environment different to that of my birth and creatively within the space of a screenplay narrative—provides a research context that supports critical reflection as I navigate the challenges and tensions that arise while writing a transcultural screenplay.

Against this background, the question that stimulated my research enquiry is:

What considerations come into play when writing a dual-language screen story for Korean audiences as a non-Korean, anglophone screenwriter?

As this question is all-encompassing, I will approach the research with two focused questions to facilitate the interrogation and provide a more nuanced response:

- a. *What permission do I have to write a Korean screenplay as a non-Korean screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to navigate internalised and externalised notions of permission when writing about a cultural group as an outsider?*
- b. *What are the language challenges of writing a screenplay intended for dual-language performance as an anglophone screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to overcome a language barrier between Korean-speaking and English-speaking characters?*

These research questions focus on the development of character and dialogue, two interlinked elements crucial in screenwriting for effectively conveying narrative representation. Character and dialogue are fundamental tools in a screenwriter's arsenal and pivotal to writing narratives that reflect human behaviour (Egri 2004: 33-128).

Furthermore, Kozloff highlights their role in delivering thematic messages and influencing

spectator evaluation and emotions (2000: 33-63), making them essential to examining transcultural screenwriting where the nuances of character and dialogue play a vital role in bridging cultural divides and enriching narratives.

This PhD thesis embraced transcultural studies as a framework for my practice-based research to tackle these inquiries. Drawing from the foundational work of Brenes, Cattrysse, and McVeigh (2017), it acknowledges the emerging yet vital incorporation of transcultural perspectives in screenwriting. This PhD employs the transcultural lens to critically analyse the practice of screenwriting in a manner that both embraces and extends beyond cultural boundaries.

Central to this inquiry is the concept of transculturality, as defined by Ortiz (1995), which underpins the fluidity and dynamism inherent in cultures, especially under the forces of colonialism and migration. Ortiz's conceptualisation does not merely describe the exchange of cultural elements; it implicates the profound, intricate, and often asymmetrical power relations that shape cultural negotiations and exchanges (1995: 3-93). Contemporary critiques, such as those presented by Santos (2014), advocate for a deeper examination of these power structures within Ortiz's framework or transculturality. Santos calls for an intensified scrutiny of how power differentials are addressed within transcultural theory. This critique is a valuable pivot for this research, as it echoes the need for a more profound engagement with the conflicts and hierarchies underlying cultural interchanges. However, it is essential to acknowledge that such critiques may inadvertently overlook the extent to which Ortiz's original concept of transculturality inherently recognises and grapples with these complex hierarchies.

The legacy of Ortiz's transculturalism is enriched by the notion of 'contact zones' described by Pratt (2008: 7), where cultural exchanges are inherently sites of collaboration and contention. This notion is complemented by Slimbach's (2005) advocacy for a transcultural consciousness among global citizens, essential for meaningful engagement in these intercultural spaces where tensions can be rampant. König and Rakow (2016: 93-94) further refine this approach by demanding a more sophisticated grasp of transculturalism—one that captures the nuances of individual experiences within larger transcultural frameworks. Aligning with Pratt, Slimbach, König and Rakow, this thesis posits that transcultural narratives flourish in the liminal spaces where cultures intersect. It thus

necessitates an analytical approach attuned to the nuances of character interactions, the processes of cultural mediation and translation, and the role of cultural brokers in cross-cultural dialogues (König and Rakow 2016: 94). In doing so, it reaffirms the relevance of Ortiz's transcultural framework while also extending its critical capacity to interrogate and illuminate the nuances of power within transcultural storytelling.

In film and media studies, a transcultural approach introduces many analytical perspectives for practitioner-researchers to produce and examine narratives that traverse cultural boundaries and resonate with transcultural awareness. This lens illuminates the interplay of internal and external cultural negotiations, challenges the use of cultural stereotypes, and scrutinises the dynamics of history, tradition, and societal constructs. It also critically examines the influence of intercultural communication on character development and dialogue, particularly in depicting power relations and conflicts in transcultural interactions.

This thesis advocates for adopting a transcultural lens in screenwriting practice, offering a unique vantage point to interrogate the screenwriting process. This framework facilitates a detailed analysis of narratives within a transcultural context, thereby deepening our comprehension of the interrelations among narrative, culture, and representation. The analytical categories underscored within this framework underscore the transformative potential of transculturalism in broadening and enriching the discourse within academic screenwriting.

The distinctiveness of this PhD and its declaration of new knowledge is supported by the scarcity of written artefacts by non-Korean, Western screenwriters representing Korea in screenwriting. Korea has not undergone the same degree of Western representation as neighbouring Japan and China, other East-Asian nations that have suffered frequent depictions through the prism of Western filmmakers, with negative Orientalist stereotyping or more romantic cultural fetishisations being documented and well-researched issues (Bernstein and Studlar 1997; King 2010; Rosen 2000).

I am aware of other forms of transcultural exchange but choose not to incorporate them into my research framework. For example, there are notable Korean American screenwriters whose narratives could be relevant to this discussion, such as Lee Isaac Chung with *Minari* (Chung 2020), Benson Lee with *Seoul Searching* (Netflix 2017), and

Soo Hugh with *Pachinko* (Apple TV 2022). These writer-directors, either born or raised in the United States from childhood, offer unique insights through their screen stories, reflecting transcultural themes and dual-language elements. However, their hybrid cultural perspective in writing Korean characters and Korean-language dialogue is shaped by their experiences as members of the Korean diaspora. I feel it inappropriate to align my experience as a Western writer with the privilege of mobility with their distinct perspective, which is why I will not engage with their work during this study.

The presence of non-Korean screenwriters in the Korean film industry is exceptionally uncommon. A survey of the top 100 films in Korean cinema, as listed by IMDb¹, underscores this rarity: the sole instances of international writers' involvement are limited to specific tasks, such as crafting dialogue for English-speaking roles. For example, Cory Gustke was enlisted for *The Battle of Jangsari* (Kim and Kwak 2019) to formulate authentic dialogue for US military characters. Renowned director Bong Joon-ho's collaborations with English-speaking co-writers further highlight this pattern. While he partnered with Kelly Masterson for *Snowpiercer* (Bong 2013) and Jon Ronson for *Okja* (Bong 2017), these co-writers were meticulously chosen by Bong for the specific purpose of enhancing the English-speaking characters he had already conceptualized (Gingold 2017; Ronson 2017). Given these circumstances, truly independent screen narratives crafted by non-Korean, anglophone writers targeting Korean audiences remain notably absent, making them unavailable for comprehensive analysis.

I maintain the belief that this situation will change in the future as Korea continues to flourish as a global cultural force. The rise of Korean soft power is fueled by the international success of various forms of popular culture, particularly K-pop musical acts, K-dramas, films, and video games. In *Birth of Korean Cool* (2014), Euny Hong suggests that it is not an exaggeration to recognize the Korean wave of popular culture as 'the world's biggest, fastest cultural paradigm shift in modern history' (Hong 2014: 4). As a non-Korean, anglophone screenwriter residing in Korea and writing for Korean audiences, I occupy a unique position. By utilizing this distinct position, my work, *Into Dust*, presents a rare and relevant scenario for interrogation. Furthermore, this research project anticipates

¹ The Internet Movie Database

the potential emergence of more non-Korean practitioners who are determined to represent Korea through their chosen creativity mode.

1.2 Methodology

This research aims to explore transcultural screenwriting through the development of a dual-language screenplay for Korean audiences by a non-Korean screenwriter. It was essential to conduct this investigation in a practice-based setting to answer the research questions from the perspective of a practitioner-researcher. I foreground Candy's definition of practice-based research as:

[A]n original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. In a doctoral thesis, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes (2006: 1).

The 'practice' of this practice-based research is screenwriting. As a research mode, screenwriting is 'a way of generating and disseminating new knowledge; and, crucially, a way of generating new ways of practising, usually evidenced by reflections on the process of writing the screenplay and/or by the screenplay itself' (Batty and McAulay 2016). Screenwriting practice possesses a critical research focus as it 'often reflects the distinct vision of a single writer-researcher' (Baker 2013: 4) and, when considered academically, the process of screenplay development can be 'informed by more discipline-specific knowledge than by commercial demands or the expectations of wider audiences or readerships' (Baker 2013: 4).

Commercial screenplays derive significant benefits from diligent research at various stages of their development. Parker emphasises the fundamental role of research in crafting a well-rounded screenplay, underscoring the necessity of comprehending the subject matter before delving into the writing process (1998: 62-68). In the case of *Into Dust*, attention was given to developing knowledge about Korean socio-cultural history and contemporary

Korean screen productions, which played a pivotal role in narrative development. In the context of academic screenwriting, the screenplay's evolution 'relies on and foregrounds academic research at every stage of the process [and] is aimed at producing new knowledge on every level' (Batty and Baker 2018: 71). This deliberate incorporation of academic research and scholarly investigation distinguishes academic screenwriting from the standard research practices expected of screenwriters. Consequently, the resulting academic screenplay not only serves as a creative endeavour but also advances the art form.

Into Dust emerges from the intellectual space offered by the academy as an academic screenplay and exists independently of any commercial context. This distinction is articulated by Batty and Baker, who assert that '[s]creenwriting in the academy offers the pursuit of ideas and practices based on personal, philosophical and/or practical research interests, which may or may not be related to the industry' (2018: 74). This academic project, much like others of its kind, commenced without any arrangements in place for production or obligation to be produced. However, even within an academic setting, considerations of the screenplay's industrial context and anticipation of its potential film remained ever-present throughout the process. The screenplay is targeted at a Korean audience, and the critical commentary engages with the anticipated reactions of spectators towards its characters and story. Careful attention was given to industry-recognised formatting, rendering the prospect of *Into Dust* being produced in the future entirely plausible. Consequently, the screenplay, alongside other academic counterparts, exhibits a dual nature that warrants recognition. While it emerges from the academic context, it remains imbued with the potential for real-world cinematic materialisation.

To answer the research questions—to gain knowledge about *how* to write a screenplay for Korean audiences as a non-Korean—*Into Dust* was formed through my existing understanding of screenwriting form and technique and a process of creative experimentation that engaged with the transcultural subjects raised in the previous section. A principle of the theory of transculturality is 'that a 'culture' is constituted by processes of interaction, circulation, and reconfiguration [and] from this perspective, culture is constantly changing, moving, adapting—and is doing this through contact and exchange beyond real or perceived borders' (Abu-Er-Rub et al., 2019). Topics such as stereotypical representations, permission and self-censorship, bilingualism and translanguaging, were

used to frame and substantiate the power dynamics, cross-cultural conflicts, intracultural communications, and cultural exchanges that exist in the narrative world of *Into Dust*.

As a practitioner-researcher, I was required to take a dual role, with the ‘practitioner self’ performing the subjective act of creativity and the ‘researcher self’ analysing practice from an exterior standpoint. In practice-based research, merging these split perspectives must occur ‘to build creatively transformative bridges between the so-called two worlds of practice and theory’ (Yeates 2009: 139). By describing my experience as a practitioner-researcher through the critical commentary component of this research, I focus on both the profoundly subjective experience of developing a screenplay, problematising the process with the challenges and concerns that come into play, while also attempting to bring academic depth to that experience. ‘The practice-based model of PhD research [...] is characterized by a high level of personal engagement [and a practitioner-researcher] aiming to explore and enhance their practice’ (Candy 2009: 6). The emphasis here is on reflexively thinking about motives, decisions, and results, to reveal the experience for the benefit of the wider research community.

The creative component of this practice-based research, *Into Dust*, is a feature-length screenplay that came into being as the direct result of the research performed, making it the basis of my PhD project. Screenplays as research artefacts thus contribute knowledge in their very fabric and, although accompanying dissertations, exegeses or research statements explicate this research, they do so in conversation with the screenplay itself’ (Baker and Batty 2018: 75). The knowledge I gained from research is embedded in the screenplay I produced. However, as Batty and McAulay state, a historical issue for the academy has been how the implicit research findings and knowledge embodied in an academic screenplay become self-evident for the wider community of scholars and practitioners (2016: 2). Therefore, the critical commentary component of this thesis plays an essential role as a space where the worlds of practice and theory can be aligned, to reflect on the act of writing, contextualise the research performed and explicate the contribution to knowledge. It does not ‘validate the practice as knowledge’ but reasonably ‘explicates how the practice is knowledge for both the academy and practitioner’ (Arnold 2012: 21).

Screenwriting as a research mode inherently possesses certain limitations. Developing a screenplay within an academic setting reflects the unique vision of an individual practitioner-researcher, rendering any self-evaluation of the work inherently solipsistic. This process stands in contrast to commercial screenwriting, where scripts are typically shaped through collaborative dialogue with script readers, script doctors, producers, directors, and historical or cultural advisors in an industrial context.

For the screenplay *Into Dust*, the aim is to transcend the confines of a solitary academic exercise by initiating a dialogue with individuals capable of providing more objective opinions and insights on the content, thus gauging the effectiveness of the work. To facilitate this aim, ten Korean nationals were presented with the complete English-language version of *Into Dust* (version four) and a series of questions for discussion during in-person interviews. These participants were informally recruited through professional and personal networks to represent a range of ages that mirrors both the characters in the screenplay and the target audience demographic, specifically from late teens to early fifties. The sole requirement for these participants is proficiency in English sufficient to read *Into Dust* and engage with the interview questions. Their self-assessed confidence and capability in English was the deciding factor for their participation.

The intention was not to solicit participants with expertise in film production or screenwriting, as the focus was not on receiving feedback about technical aspects such as concept, structure, pacing, or format. Instead, the participants are expected to act as cultural commentators, offering their perspectives on how the screenplay reflects Korean society and its people, providing valuable insights to creative writers in similar transcultural contexts.

Participants were initially prompted with a general question about the representation of Korea and Koreans in my screenplay: *How do you think Into Dust represents Korea and Korean people?* Subsequent interviews employed pre-prepared questions designed to elicit opinions on specific concerns that have emerged during the screenplay's development. The transcriptions of these interviews are included verbatim in Appendix A and transcribed personally.²

² Although written consent was gained and recorded, participants are anonymous as some answers contain sensitive details. Their signed and dated consent forms are omitted from the appendices of this PhD. I retain the original copies for reference.

It is important to note that this approach to the interview process is markedly different from that used in social science research, where such methods are often applied early in the research process to gather broad viewpoints to inform more extensive studies (Smithson 2007: 357-358). Since the informal interviews took place only after the screenplay has reached what I consider to be its final form, they do not constitute a core component of the research methodology but are intended to contribute to a more holistic evaluation of the content concerning the research questions. Thus, the interviews inform a reflective assessment of the writing process, allowing for an appraisal of the challenges, successes and, or problems of the work I create.

Creating a screenplay in an academic environment enlightens screenwriting practice outside of the professional industry and screenwriting as a research mode, allowing me to take the position of practitioner-researcher to explore creative practice through personal experience. As with any other created in a similar creative practice research setting, the screenplay artefact of this PhD research project was visualised, developed, and examined under research conditions. Such scholarly investigations help develop critical knowledge of screenwriting practice. As a reflexive practitioner-researcher, I aimed to add knowledge to the craft of screenwriting by making explicit the research that informed how I developed a screenplay for Korean audiences as a non-Korean screenwriter. This takes place not by detailing every decision made, but by examining different theories and concepts and reflecting on how they developed my understanding of transcultural screenwriting and how they influenced the writing of *Into Dust* at critical junctures. *Into Dust* is imbued with the research performed, using narrative elements, such as story, character, and dialogue, along with others, to show the research. *Into Dust* serves as a research artefact, and a complete understanding of the significance and context of the research can only be obtained by experiencing the work created. The critical commentary provides a space to examine the creative outcomes and form a conclusion with direct reference to the entire process, but the screenplay artefact is centred and performs the research findings.

1.3 Structure of Critical Commentary

The accompanying critical commentary consists of two chapters. The first, ‘Permissions, Anxieties and Strategies of Writing for Korean Audiences as a Non-Korean Screenwriter’, delves deeply into the complexities associated with permission in the realm of transcultural screenwriting. This exploration foregrounds the requisite creative strategies essential for navigating the internalised and externalised notions of permission that frame my practice as a non-Korean screenwriter writing a Korean screenplay. This chapter explores how Korean and non-Korean characters are represented in the narrative of *Into Dust*, underscoring my aim to harness current Korean socio-cultural discourses as a mechanism to anchor characters, whilst avoiding cultural stereotypes. I then examine non-Korean narratives within Korean media and posit that the incorporation of a Caucasian, Western character within a Korean screenplay may offer a nuanced approach to authenticity. This approach not only facilitates the infusion of my experiential insights and perspective as a non-Korean residing in Korea, but also engenders a discourse surrounding the cross-cultural tensions often inherent in transcultural scenarios. To culminate this chapter, I investigate how the union of belittlement and assertiveness in character development has the potential to challenge and possibly subvert the entrenched Orientalist power dynamic and offer a counterpoint to prevailing xenophobic sentiments, thereby addressing the reservations that emanate from internalized and externalized notions of permission.

The subsequent chapter of the critical commentary, titled ‘Language, Dialogue and Strategies of Writing a Screenplay Intended for Dual-language Performance as an Anglophone Screenwriter’, delves into the language and dialogue dimensions of writing a dual-language screenplay: a narrative framework wherein characters speak different languages or are endowed with bilingual proficiency. Drawing upon theories of emotional development and bilingualism, the chapter probes the relationship between language and identity, elucidating how the amalgamation of both can foster distinct language-based identities that enhance the development of bilingual characters. Furthermore, this chapter defines the pivotal role of the ‘interpreter character’ within a dual-language narrative. It illuminates the strategic employment of intentional and inadvertent mistranslations as tools for engendering dramatic tension and comedic elements. The discourse also considers ‘translanguaging’ as a strategy that infuses dialogue with layers of nuance, particularly in

cross-cultural communicative contexts. The chapter then addresses the communication challenges between characters separated by language differences. To enrich this exploration, the chapter juxtaposes two screen stories—*Lost in Translation* (Coppola: 2003) and *The Ramen Girl* (Ackerman: 2008)—to dissect how non-verbal communication and ritualistic practices are harnessed to bridge linguistic divides between characters. This chapter culminates with an analysis of selected scenes from *Into Dust*, underscoring the value of ritualistic activity to transcend language barriers that separate characters of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The critical commentary of this PhD relies on extracts from different stages of my screenplay's development. By contrasting different versions of *Into Dust* created within this practice-based research setting, I reflect on how research informed the creative process to show how *Into Dust* was imbued with research at each step of its creation. Furthermore, I use extracts from produced screenplays to complement my work. It should be noted that produced screenplays were not always available for analysis due to the lacking catalogue of published texts. Therefore, when needed, I refer to the film in place of the screenplay.

PART 2: CREATIVE SUBMISSION: INTO DUST

2.1 Summary of Creative Submission

Title: *Into Dust*

Logline: In the face of an impending apocalyptic event, a desperate father tries to protect his family on a road trip across South Korea, while grappling with internal conflicts and the challenge of delivering a British hitchhiker to his last chance at redemption.

Format: Feature film, approx. 120 minutes.

Genre: Apocalyptic-Family Drama

This hybrid genre combines elements of apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic scenarios with a strong focus on familial relationships and interpersonal dynamics. Examples of films belonging to this hybrid drama are *Panic in Year Zero!* (Milland 1962), *These Final Hours* (Hilditch 2013) and *Melancholia* (von Trier 2011). *Into Dust* is also comparable to *Parasite* (Bong 2019) in its use of a contemporary Korean family dynamic to provide social commentary, to *Little Miss Sunshine* (Dayton and Faris 2006) in its use of the road trip story structure for a family drama, and to *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (Scafaria 2012) in its use of a looming apocalyptic scenario as a plot catalyst. Furthermore, *Into Dust* is comparable to the three previously mentioned films by having a basis in realism but blurring the lines of the comic and tragic.

Target Audience: Throughout this critical commentary, I reference the audience at which *Into Dust* is targeted. Although I believe the story of *Into Dust* has transnational appeal, much of the focus of my writing was on trying to make the narrative relatable to Korean audiences. Thus, my target audience when writing *Into Dust* was made of Korean nationals. *Into Dust* contains some strong language but no explicit violence. However, the theme of death is prominent, and although the seriousness is punctured with moments of comic

relief, the overall dark undertones make it unsuitable for young children. Overall, the characters and story of *Into Dust* make it appropriate for spectators aged sixteen and over.

Short Synopsis: In a world teetering on the brink of apocalypse, Dong-wan is a father driven by a singular mission: to safeguard his family. With the weight of impending doom looming, Dong-wan's resolve to maintain control and affirm his role as protector is put to the test. His partner, Mi-sook, grapples with her own turmoil, torn between the desire to uphold the unity of her family and regretting their decision not to remain in the safety of their home. Their teenage son, Jun-ho, wrestles with feelings of betrayal, his youthful dreams shattered by the grim reality surrounding them, leading him to embrace a bleak, nihilistic view of the world. Meanwhile, Ji-hyun, their daughter, is haunted by memories of a time before the chaos, her communication with the outside world dwindling to almost nothing, even as Robin, a British traveller desperate to reach Incheon Airport for a flight that could reunite him with his estranged father, joins their perilous journey. As this unlikely group navigates across a country preparing for ruin, their journey becomes a fight for survival, a quest for redemption, and the rekindling of hope in the face of despair.

***Into Dust* in a Research Context:** In an industry context, a screenplay is written in anticipation of the film it will become should it reach the production stage. The hypothetical development process for *Into Dust* can be defined as writing in English, re-writing in English, third-party translation into Korean, finalising two versions (English and Korean), examination by third-party readers, pre-production development, production, and exhibition. This project aims to investigate the initial writing and re-writing phases of the process and theorise how the screenplay may be received should it reach the next stages of development. Translation is a crucial part of the outlined process, and while a comprehensive examination of the translation phase would undoubtedly be fruitful, it is outside the scope of this project.

I am an anglophone writer at a British university; therefore, *Into Dust* was written in English and is presented so for academic consideration. A consequence of presenting *Into Dust* in English is that the Korean characters do not employ the correct formalities when addressing each other, which would render the dialogue more authentic. For example, when

addressed by their children, Mi-sook should be referred to as *eomma* (mother) and Dongwan *appa* (father). Similarly, Ji-hyun would refer to Jun-ho as *namdongsaeng* (younger brother) and in return, Jun-ho would refer to her as *eonni* (older sister). I am well-acquainted with Korean language formalities when addressing family members and the hierarchal system that provides labels to distinguish age. Introducing Korean language formalities would unduly complicate the narrative for English-speaking readers within a research context, and I am satisfied with how the screenplay language is presented. Moreover, this specific language-related issue would be rectified if *Into Dust* were to undergo translation from English into Korean.

I refer to *Into Dust* as a dual-language screenplay throughout this thesis, as dialogue is intended to be spoken in Korean and English. I also refer to *Into Dust* as a Korean screenplay, as it was written for Korean-speaking audiences and intended for production and exhibition in Korea. Against this, I reason that Korean is the primary language of *Into Dust*, and any dialogue intended to be spoken in Korean is presented standardly. English is the ‘foreign language’ of *Into Dust*, and therefore, dialogue intended for spoken English is distinguished within square brackets.

What follows is the complete and final draft of *Into Dust* created for this PhD. Please note that *Into Dust* retains its original page numbers, aligned at the top right of the document, which should be used when referring to the screenplay.

"INTO DUST"

Written by

Thomas Carter

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
a Doctor of Philosophy.

Lancaster University

School of English and Creative Writing

February 2024

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTH KOREA - EXPRESSWAY - DAY

The expressway cuts through a picturesque Korean panorama -- agricultural fields, forest covered hills, tower blocks and mountains fight for supremacy in the distance.

The relentless late summer sun beats down. Heat waves hover above the dry asphalt.

Cars zoom past a family saloon pulled over in the --

BREAKDOWN LANE

We hear the CLUNK CLUNK of metal on metal.

The KIM FAMILY sits side-by-side on the steel crash barrier --

DONG-WAN, 55, sits with a frown and crossed arms. His stern demeanor just about hides his insecurity.

At his side, MI-SOOK, 54, a dedicated mother hen, shades her face with a hand fan. She squints at a patch of trees in the distance.

All dialogue in plain text is spoken in Korean.

All dialogue in [brackets] is spoken in English.

MI-SOOK

Are they persimmon trees? I can't see that far without my glasses.

Dong-wan glances.

She looks to see if her children are paying attention --

JI-HYUN, 26, is lost in the pages of an old notebook. She is plain looking, in loose clothes and no make-up.

To her side, JUN-HO, 18, scrawny, awkward, angry at the world, blocks out reality with earphones.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

Persimmon season is still a month away. I might never eat one again.

DONG-WAN

Eat what?

MI-SOOK
A persimmon! Am I talking to
myself?

Dong-wan burps and rubs his chest with an uncomfortable
grimace.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
Calm down. You don't have any
reflux medicine.

DONG-WAN
I'm fine.

MI-SOOK
Good. I don't want you to be sick
in front of the foreigner.

They both look down at the source of the CLUNKING --

Now we see ROBIN, 28, on his knees, struggling to work a car
jack. Shaggy hair, sweat soaked shirt, pink and flustered --
his Anglo-Saxon ancestry fails him in the heat and humidity
of a Korean summer.

DONG-WAN
I want to get there before dark. We
still need to find a gas station.

MI-SOOK
We will.

DONG-WAN
Not at this speed. Why did you let
him help?

MI-SOOK
He wants to contribute. Anyway, you
don't know how to change a tire.

They watch as Robin pumps the jack handle. The rear wheel
rises.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
Look how sweaty he is. He's going
to smell bad.

She looks to Ji-hyun for a response, receives nothing.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
I said, he's going to smell bad.

JI-HYUN

...

MI-SOOK
 You haven't said a word since we
 left home. What can be so
 interesting about that old book.

Mi-sook leans to peek at the pages.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
 I can't understand the English
 writing.

Ji-hyun closes the notebook. Mi-sook cools her with the fan.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
 You didn't eat much breakfast
 before we left. Are you hungry?

JI-HYUN
 No.

A beat.

MI-SOOK
 I hope we switched off all the
 lights... I can't remember... Dong-
 wan, can you--

DONG-WAN
 You did.

MI-SOOK
 Are you sure?

DONG-WAN
 Yes. It's not like you to forget.

MI-SOOK
 I really can't remember. Jun-ho...
 Jun-ho...

Jun-ho is either oblivious or trying his best to ignore her.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
 Kim Jun-ho!

Ji-hyun nudges her brother. He pulls the earphones from his
 ears, sulky because of the disturbance.

JUN-HO
 What?

MI-SOOK
 Did you switch off your bedroom
 light?

JUN-HO

Yes.

MI-SOOK

You're sure?

JUN-HO

Yes.

MI-SOOK

What about your computer? Did you turn it off?

JUN-HO

Why do you care about that? It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now.

DONG-WAN

Hey! Stop that talk. Don't upset your mother.

JUN-HO

Whatever. I don't care anymore. The world's about to end and we're going on a trip. This is so stupid...

Dong-wan stands to scowl at Jun-ho.

MI-SOOK

That's enough now. Calm down Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN

You don't speak to your parents that way. It doesn't matter what is happening. Are you listening to me?

Jun-ho pushes the earphones back into his ears. He shuffles along the barrier to put distance between himself and the rest of them.

MI-SOOK

Leave him be.

DONG-WAN

Sulking won't help. Not now. He has to grow up.

Dong-wan sits and focuses his attention back on Robin.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Ji-hyun, tell the foreigner to work faster.

Ji-hyun sighs unenthusiastically. We will be impressed by her English.

JI-HYUN

[My father asks you to please be faster.]

ROBIN

[Have you seen what I'm working with here? This thing belongs in a bloody museum. Look at my hand...]

He displays his red hand, sore from the jack handle.

JI-HYUN

[He wants you to hurry. We have no time to wait.]

ROBIN

[I'm going as fast as I can. Tell him to calm down.]

He takes a tire iron from the ground and begins to remove the tight nuts from the wheel.

DONG-WAN

What did he say?

JI-HYUN

He is working fast.

DONG-WAN

Is it a joke? Shit.
(claps mockingly)
Wow, so fast. His hands are a blur.
Tell him to stop. I will do it myself.

JI-HYUN

Must I keep translating?

DONG-WAN

Speaking English is the only thing you can do to help.

JI-HYUN

But... I don't want to be involved.

DONG-WAN

You don't get to choose. Let me get some benefit from the education I paid for.

MI-SOOK

Not now, Dong-wan...

Dong-wan jumps off the barrier and snatches the tire iron from Robin.

DONG-WAN

Let me do it.

ROBIN

[You don't need to be--
(to Ji-hyun)
Tell him to stop being so pushy.]

JI-HYUN

[Bushee?]

Dong-wan tries to twist the tire iron with all his strength. The nut doesn't budge.

ROBIN

[You're doing it wrong. You have to turn anti-clockwise.]

DONG-WAN

What's he talking about now?

JI-HYUN

I don't know. He speaks too quickly.

ROBIN

[Turn it this way. Erm...
Oreunjjok.]

His Korean pronunciation is clumsy but understandable.

JI-HYUN

[*Oreunjjok* meaning is right.]

ROBIN

[Obviously I mean left.]

JI-HYUN

[Why is it obvious?]

ROBIN

[Because I'm pointing left.]

He gesticulates wildly to turn the jack to the left. Dong-wan figures it out, tries to turn the final nut. The iron slips from his hand.

DONG-WAN

Shit. It's fixed hard. He had to loosen the nuts before he raised the wheel. Ah, fuck. This son of a bitch really made a mistake...

ROBIN

[Is he talking about me?]

JI-HYUN

[Yes. He said... He said thank you for helping.]

ROBIN

[No he didn't! Tell him I was doing fine until he tried to help. And tell him I understand bad words. I'm not stupid.]

Dong-wan looks to Ji-hyun for a translation. She sighs.

JI-HYUN

He said he isn't stupid.

DONG-WAN

He looks stupid. Look at him. He has a dumb face. Tell him that.

MI-SOOK

That's not his fault. He was born with that face. It doesn't make him stupid.

Robin looks to Ji-hyun for translation.

JI-HYUN

[My mother thinks you have a kind face.]

ROBIN

[Oh. Thank you. *Gamsahabninda...*]
(bows slightly to Mi-sook)
[But he called me stupid. I heard him.]

JI-HYUN

[If you know everything, why do I need to translate?]

Robin tries to take the tire iron back from Dong-wan.

ROBIN

[If you're so smart, why can't you change the tire yourself? Huh?]

Dong-wan refuses to let go.

DONG-WAN

What the hell is he doing? Let go--

ROBIN

[Give it to me--]

They pull the tire iron back and forth like squabbling toddlers.

MI-SOOK

Stop it Dong-wan. You're acting like a child.

Dong-wan relinquishes. Robin takes control, strains, and removes the last nut.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

He did it.

DONG-WAN

I loosened it for him.

Robin removes the flat tire. He takes the spare and struggles to fit it onto the exposed bolts.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

No, not like that. Give it to me...

He grabs hold of the tire.

ROBIN

[I can do it! *Naegga halkke!*]

DONG-WAN

Did you hear how he speaks to me!?

JI-HYUN

[My father is older than you.]

ROBIN

[So what?]

JI-HYUN

[It sounds rude to speak to him that way.]

Robin lets go of the tire and stands.

ROBIN
 [I'm not the rude one here. You
 Koreans are always too impatient.]

Dong-wan pushes himself up to confront Robin. Ji-hyun stands
 between them like a boxing referee.

DONG-WAN
 Is he talking about me? What did he
 say?

MI-SOOK
 Calm down.

JI-HYUN
 He didn't say anything. He wants to
 help you.

DONG-WAN
 He's lucky I allow him in my car.
 He needs to show more respect!

ROBIN
 [Stop shouting at me.]

DONG-WAN
 He is in Korea. He should speak
 Korean!

JI-HYUN
 He wants you to stop shouting at
 him.

MI-SOOK
 Stop shouting at him, Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN
 I'm not shouting!
 (to Mi-sook)
 This is your fault! You wanted to
 take him to the airport, not me.

MI-SOOK
 You were quick enough to take his
 money.

Dong-wan rubs his chest.

DONG-WAN
 The acid is trying to escape. He's
 making me sick.

MI-SOOK
 That's it--

She thrusts the fan into Dong-wan's hand as she pushes past him and Robin. She crouches to fit the tire with the speed and dexterity of a formula-one pit crew.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

Now I know the problem is men.
Whatever country they are from...

Dong-wan and Robin watch sheepishly as she tightens the nuts.

INT. CAR - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Dong-wan drives. Mi-sook is in the passenger seat. Ji-hyun reads her diary, sandwiched between Robin and Jun-ho in the back. It's cramped with bags and boxes of belongings. They packed for a long trip.

DONG-WAN

(singing)

*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come into full
bloom..."*

MI-SOOK

Don't sing.

DONG-WAN

Why?

MI-SOOK

Ji-hyun has a headache.

JI-HYUN

I'm fine.

Robin looks close to melting. He wipes the sweat from his forehead.

ROBIN

[It's so hot in here. Can we turn
on the AC?]

JI-HYUN

[No. My father says it will waste
the gas.]

Robin opens his window fully. He lets the air blast his face.

DONG-WAN

(singing)

*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories..."*

MI-SOOK

Stop singing, Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN

She doesn't have a headache.

MI-SOOK

Well, stop anyway.

Dong-wan stays quiet for a beat, obviously hurt.

DONG-WAN

There was a time when you loved to
hear me sing.

MI-SOOK

I was young and easily impressed.
Actually, Jun-ho was always your
biggest fan...

(turns to see Jun-ho)

Do you remember?

Jun-ho is oblivious.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

He cried if you forgot to sing him
a lullaby before bed.

DONG-WAN

Don't remind him of that. It's
embarrassing.

MI-SOOK

There's nothing embarrassing about
a father caring for his son.

In the back, Robin plays with the window absent-mindedly. Ji-hyun stares at her notebook pages. Her eyes flicker as Robin moves the window up-and-down.

JI-HYUN

[Must you play with the window?]

He stops. Ji-hyun returns to her notebook.

ROBIN

[What are you reading?]

She ignores him. Robin sneaks a look.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[You write in English?]

She slams the notebook shut.

JI-HYUN
[Please don't read my diary.]

ROBIN
[Oh.]

He begins to play with the window again.

JI-HYUN
[We need to change seats.]

ROBIN
[Why?]

JI-HYUN
[Because.]

ROBIN
[Because what?]

JI-HYUN
[Because I say.]

Robin shuffles to the middle as Ji-hyun awkwardly scrambles over his legs with her rear in his face. They change seats.

ROBIN
[There's no seatbelt here...]

He wriggles around, looking for a seatbelt.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I don't feel comfortable without one.]

JI-HYUN
[Stop moving. You don't need a seatbelt.]

ROBIN
[You're too relaxed about safety in this country. I'll be the one going through the windscreen if we crash.]

MI-SOOK
What's wrong with him?

JI-HYUN

He's wet. I need a tissue.

Mi-sook takes a packet a wet wipes from her handbag and passes one to Ji-hyun.

Ji-hyun wipes her arm.

MI-SOOK

He has that foreigner smell. My nose is very sensitive to it.

DONG-WAN

I can stop the car if you want to kick him out.

MI-SOOK

No. Be nice to him. He's our guest.

Mi-sook smiles at Robin. He mimes the missing seatbelt.

ROBIN

[No seatbelt.]

MI-SOOK

[Yes. Thank you.]

JI-HYUN

[She doesn't understand.]

Dong-wan notices the fuel gage creeping closer to empty.

DONG-WAN

Shit. We need a gas station.

MI-SOOK

I told you to fill the tank in Busan.

DONG-WAN

But I didn't.

MI-SOOK

Will a full tank get us to the airport and to Donghae?

DONG-WAN

The airport... I've been thinking... Incheon is the opposite direction of where we need to go.

MI-SOOK

He paid you. You must take him.

DONG-WAN

For what he paid, we can take him
most of the way.

Robin listens to their conversation.

ROBIN

[Are they talking about me again?]

JI-HYUN

[Yes.]

ROBIN

[What are they saying?]

JI-HYUN

[I'm not a translator.]

DONG-WAN

The sooner we lose him the better.
We can't trust him.

MI-SOOK

Why?

DONG-WAN

Foreigners act unthreatening, but
they can be dangerous.

MI-SOOK

You don't know any foreigners. You
never left Korea.

DONG-WAN

I know history. He's British, and
they colonized half the world. You
don't do that without spilling
blood.

MI-SOOK

You can't blame him for that.

DONG-WAN

The British are polite but ruthless
people. Did you ever watch zero
zero seven?

MI-SOOK

Zero zero seven?

DONG-WAN

Jameseu Bondeu.

ROBIN

[Why are they talking about James Bond?]

MI-SOOK

Jameseu Bondeu is a gentleman, not a villain.

Dong-wan narrows his eyes to study Robin in the rearview mirror.

DONG-WAN

We don't know what he's planning. He might try to steal the car.

MI-SOOK

I don't think he's one of the bad foreigners. He looks harmless.

DONG-WAN

That's what he wants you to think.

Mi-sook turns to study Robin. He smiles awkwardly back at her.

MI-SOOK

(to Ji-hyun)

Do you think he's handsome?

JI-HYUN

Why do you ask me?

MI-SOOK

I just wondered. I never know what to think about foreigner guys. He's not ugly. But, I can't decide if he is handsome.

JI-HYUN

I don't know. I barely looked at him.

Ji-hyun seems suddenly aware of her closeness to Robin. She shuffles away to put space between them.

DONG-WAN

He needs a hair cut.

JI-HYUN

All I know is he's very sweaty.

MI-SOOK

This weather is too hot for him.
Can't you put the AC on for a
while?

DONG-WAN

No way.

Mi-sook takes another wet wipe, passes it to Robin.

ROBIN

[Thanks.]

He wipes his face.

MI-SOOK

Tell him to wipe his armpits.

JI-HYUN

No!

MI-SOOK

It must be terrible for him, being
so far away from loved ones at a
time like this. Ask him about his
family.

Ji-hyun sighs.

JI-HYUN

[My mother wants to know about your
family.]

ROBIN

[There's not much to say. My mum
died when I was young. She had
cancer.]

JI-HYUN

[And your father?]

ROBIN

[He's in England... We don't really
speak.]

JI-HYUN

[You don't speak to your father?]

ROBIN

[Not anymore. It's complicated. We
don't have a good relationship.]

MI-SOOK

What did he say?

JI-HYUN

His mother is dead and... I think
he hates his father.

MI-SOOK

Why? His father killed his mother!?

JI-HYUN

What..!? No! His mother was sick.

DONG-WAN

He should be ashamed to talk about
his father like that. He has no
respect for family or his elders.

MI-SOOK

You don't know that.

DONG-WAN

Did you hear how he spoke to me
before? My children would never
speak to me that way.

MI-SOOK

When do you ever speak to your
children about anything?

ROBIN

[You know, your dad reminds me of
him... Angry and shouting all the
time for no reason.]

JI-HYUN

[He thinks you are rude. In Korea--
]

ROBIN

[You respect older people,
regardless of how they treat you. I
know.]

JI-HYUN

[Not exactly.]

ROBIN

[He shouts at me, then expects
respect? I don't think so. Respect
is earned where I come from.]

DONG-WAN

What did he say?

JI-HYUN

He apologizes for being rude. He will try to be more respectful.

MI-SOOK

See, he's a gentleman. I knew it.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY SERVICE STOP - REFUELING STATION - DAY

The refueling station is separate from the main service stop area. It's small, unmanned, with two sets of pumps.

Mi-sook stretches her legs on the forecourt. Jun-ho sits on a wall.

The Kim's car is parked near a pump. Dong-wan removes the gas tank cap.

DONG-WAN

Ten more kilometers and we would have been empty...

He presses the self-service screen. An error message shows --
"OUT OF ORDER"

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Shit.

He tries the next pump. Same message. And the third. Same again.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

No gas. Fuck. We're screwed.

MI-SOOK

What about those ones?

She points at a separate set of pumps.

DONG-WAN

They're LPG pumps. We need petrol.

He sits on the wall next to Jun-ho, defeated, head in hands. Mi-sook sits with him.

MI-SOOK

What now?

DONG-WAN

Nothing. We're stuck here.

MI-SOOK
We should have found gas in Busan.

DONG-WAN
Goddam it.

INT. EXPRESSWAY SERVICE STOP - CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

The store has been ransacked. Shelves are mostly bare but for the odd item deemed unessential enough to be scavenged.

Ji-hyun kicks through the trampled packaging that litters the floor.

Robin looks in a drink refrigerator.

ROBIN
[There's nothing here.]

JI-HYUN
[We're too late.]

Ji-hyun continues to look around the store.

ROBIN
[So, did you study abroad?]

JI-HYUN
[No. Why do you ask?]

ROBIN
[I just wondered. You're English is great.]

JI-HYUN
[I'm just Korean. I studied a lot.]

ROBIN
[No doubt.]

JI-HYUN
[Are you a teacher?]

ROBIN
[Yeah. I was working in an elementary school before all this happened. What about you?]

JI-HYUN
[In a coffee shop.]

ROBIN
[Really?]

JI-HYUN
[You don't believe me?]

ROBIN
[I believe you. I just figured
you'd have a government job or work
in a bank, you know, seeing as you
speak English so well.]

JI-HYUN
[You sound like my father.]

She bends to pick something up.

ROBIN
What is it?

JI-HYUN
A *gimbap*.

She shows him the *gimbap*, still wrapped, but flat as a
pancake.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY SERVICE STOP - REFUELING STATION - DAY

Dong-wan and Mi-sook sit on the wall, sandwiching Jun-ho
between them.

MI-SOOK
Dong-wan. Look...

She points to a TAXI driving through the service station car
park toward them. It gets closer, drives onto the forecourt,
parks at the LPG pumps. The DRIVER, about 50, jumps out to
fill up.

DONG-WAN
(shouts to the driver)
You're out of luck. The pumps are
off.

DRIVER
This one is working fine.

DONG-WAN
(to himself)
Lucky bastard.

Dong-wan watches curiously as the driver struggles to open
the taxi's fuel door.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Is it locked?

DRIVER

What?

Dong-wan walks over.

DONG-WAN

It won't open if you locked the car.

The driver pulls out the smart key and unlocks the taxi. He tries and fails to open the fuel door again.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

No. Like this...

Dong-wan pushes the fuel door on the correct spot -- It springs open.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

How long have you had it?

DRIVER

What? Why?

DONG-WAN

You're acting like you never filled up before.

The driver grabs the LPG pump and starts to fill up.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Where are you heading?

DRIVER

None of your business.

DONG-WAN

We need your help.

DRIVER

No.

DONG-WAN

Come on... We're stuck here with no gas. You can help us if--

DRIVER

I don't have time to help you.

DONG-WAN

All you need to do is drive me to another gas station. Please.

DRIVER

I said no you son of a bitch. Get away from me.

Dong-wan is startled into silence, not sure how to respond.

He takes a few steps back. Something catches his eye --

The taxi driver's IDENTIFICATION CARD, clearly displayed on the dashboard. The PHOTO is of a thin, bald man with glasses, nothing like the man filling up.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY SERVICE STOP - CAR PARK - DAY

Robin and Ji-hyun walk through the empty car park. He peels opens the flat *gimbap* wrapper.

ROBIN

[What's so special about the place you're heading to?]

JI-HYUN

[It's a cave.]

ROBIN

[A cave? How big?]

JI-HYUN

[I have no idea. It's under the ground. My father thinks we can survive in there.]

ROBIN

[Why not go to the subway stations in Busan?]

JI-HYUN

[Did you see how many people were trying to get in? My father says they will be dangerous.]

ROBIN

[He's probably right. Still, you left it late to travel.]

JI-HYUN

[So did you.]

ROBIN

[Yeah... I didn't know what to do.]

Robin offers her the flat *gimbap*. She shakes her head -- "No". He notices the notebook diary, rolled-up in Ji-hyun's hand.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[I used to have a girlfriend who was secretive about her diary.]

JI-HYUN

[So?]

ROBIN

[She was Korean, too.]

JI-HYUN

[What are you trying to say?]

ROBIN

[Huh?]

JI-HYUN

[We are not all the same.]

ROBIN

[I never said that.]

JI-HYUN

[But you think it. Earlier, you said all Koreans are rude.]

ROBIN

[I said Koreans are impatient, not rude. Anyway, it's not my opinion. Everyone knows it. Being impatient is part of your cultural identity.]

JI-HYUN

[You would not like if I say all British people are...]

She pauses to think.

ROBIN

[Go on.]

JI-HYUN

[I thought polite, until I met you.]

ROBIN

[I know exactly what girls like you are like.]

JI-HYUN
[Girls like me?]

ROBIN
[Korean girls have bad tempers.]

JI-HYUN
[What are you talking about?]

ROBIN
[I mean it. Kimchi temper is real.]

JI-HYUN
[Kimchi temper!?!]

ROBIN
[I've experienced it. Fighting with a Korean girl is traumatic. My girlfriend used to shout and scream at me for the smallest things.]

JI-HYUN
[Maybe you deserved to be shouted at. You are annoying.]

ROBIN
[I never did anything wrong. I don't understand Korean girls.]

JI-HYUN
[I think you don't understand girls from any country.]

They stop dead in their tracks. Jun-ho is running towards them.

JUN-HO
Hurry. Dad has gone crazy!

EXT. EXPRESSWAY SERVICE STOP - REFUELING STATION - DAY

Dong-wan and the driver are fighting for control of the taxi's smart key. They are of similar age and build. It's a fair fight. Mi-sook watches anxiously.

DONG-WAN
Give it to me!

Dong-wan slams the driver against the taxi, trapping him.

DRIVER
No! Let me go you son of a bitch--

The driver has the smart key gripped tightly. Dong-wan tries to pry his hand open, finger by finger. The taxi locks and unlocks repeatedly as they squeeze the key.

MI-SOOK

Let go of him Dong-wan!

Robin, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho rush onto the forecourt.

JI-HYUN

Father!? What are you doing?

MI-SOOK

He's acting like a crazy person.

DONG-WAN

This isn't his taxi...! He stole it!

DRIVER

What are you talking about!?

Robin tries to intervene.

ROBIN

[You don't need to fight. *Hajima--*]

In one movement -- Dong-wan finally rips the smart key from the driver's hand, smacks Robin in the face with his wild elbow, drops the key.

Robin recoils, holding his nose.

Dong-wan dives for the key, gets a hand on it --

The driver stamps on Dong-wan's hand. He drops the smart key, recoils with pain.

DONG-WAN

Ah! You bastard!

The driver moves for the smart key. Jun-ho reaches it first.

JUN-HO

Stop it! It's over. Don't you all get it? It's all fucking over. There's nothing left to fight for.

Dong-wan and the driver stare at Jun-ho. They puff and pant, too old for such exertion.

MI-SOOK

Kim Jun-ho! Don't use that language.

The driver scrambles to his feet.

DRIVER
Give me that goddam key.

Jun-ho turns and launches the smart key into the air. It disappears over a fence and into the wilderness beyond.

JUN-HO
If you want it, you'll have to find it.

DRIVER
Fuck! You stupid kid. I ought to smack you...

He clenches his fists, steps toward Jun-ho with menace. Mi-sook blocks his path.

MI-SOOK
Touch my son and I'll kill you.

They all stare at the driver.

Robin looks at the blood that has pooled in his hand.

ROBIN
[I think my nose is broken.]

JI-HYUN
Shhh...

The driver knows that he's defeated. He turns, boots the taxi, and storms away in the direction of the smart key.

Mi-sook turns to face Dong-wan, her temper still primed for conflict.

MI-SOOK
What the hell are you doing!? That was your plan!? Huh? After all that, we're still stuck here without gas. And what now, Dong-wan?

Dong-wan and Mi-sook glare at each other.

JUN-HO
I have this...

Jun-ho reveals the smart key from his pocket.

DONG-WAN
What...? I saw you throw it...

JUN-HO

It was my earphone case.

The others stare at him with a mix of shock and awe.

DONG-WAN

My son is a goddam genius.

He takes the smart key.

MI-SOOK

Your son is sneaky. Where did you learn how to do that?

Jun-ho shrugs.

LATER --

Mi-sook, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho watch as Dong-wan ferries their belongings from their car to the taxi.

Robin presses a kitchen towel to his nose to stem the bleeding.

DONG-WAN

Shit. My hand is killing me... Jun-ho, help me. We have to be quick.

MI-SOOK

This is wrong, Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN

The taxi has a full tank. Taking it is our only option.

MI-SOOK

So, that's it? We steal the taxi and leave that man stranded here, looking for a key that he'll never find?

DONG-WAN

He stole it first. Screw him.

Dong-wan moves another box. The bottom of the box opens -- a rice cooker falls out.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

You packed the rice cooker? Are you crazy?

MI-SOOK

It's my good rice cooker. I don't want to be left without it.

DONG-WAN

I told you to bring essentials.
There's no electricity where we're
going. We won't need it.

She picks up the rice cooker carefully, loads it into the
taxi.

MI-SOOK

No electricity... We should have
stayed home.

Dong-wan loads the last of their belongings into the taxi,
slams the trunk closed.

DONG-WAN

Don't start with that now.

He BURPS and rubs his chest.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Shit. I need medicine for this
acid.

MI-SOOK

You don't know that he stole the
taxi. Perhaps he borrowed it from a
friend.

DONG-WAN

Forget about him. It's time to go.

Jun-ho gets into the taxi first.

JI-HYUN

(to Robin)
[We're leaving.]

Robin removes the towel to reveal his red, bloody nose.

ROBIN

[Is it bad?]

JI-HYUN

[Don't get blood on me.]

She gets into the taxi. Robin follows.

Mi-sook closes the back door so she can speak to Dong-wan in
private.

MI-SOOK

I don't like this. That man is trying to get somewhere, same as us. He could have loved ones waiting for him... Stealing will bring us bad luck.

DONG-WAN

We're not stealing.

MI-SOOK

Not us. You! You're acting like a criminal.

DONG-WAN

I'm the head of this family. I have to protect my wife and children.

MI-SOOK

This is protection? Taking us away from our home to fight and steal? We didn't need protecting from anyone in our apartment.

DONG-WAN

Do you want me to give up!? Is that it!? Give up and crawl under the nearest rock to wait for the end!?

MI-SOOK

I want you to realize that you don't have anything to prove!? We can turn back right now and go home. Being together is all that matters.

He stares at their old car and considers her words for a moment.

DONG-WAN

No. We're not turning back.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Dong-wan familiarizes himself with the taxi controls.

DONG-WAN

I can't remember the last time I drove a new car like this.

He pushes the ignition button and tries to pull away.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Ah, shit.

The taxi stalls.

MI-SOOK

You stole this car and can't even drive it--

DONG-WAN

Of course I can drive it. That son of a bitch stamped on my hand.

He tries again but struggles to grip the steering wheel.

ROBIN

[I can drive.]

JI-HYUN

Robin can drive.

DONG-WAN

No way. He's useless.

MI-SOOK

He tried to help you back there.

DONG-WAN

And a fat lot of help he was. There's no way I'm letting him sit behind this wheel.

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Back on the highway. Robin drives. He has two pieces of tissue stuck in his nostrils.

Dong-wan is in the passenger seat, nursing his hand. Mi-sook has moved to the back. Jun-ho now sits grumpily between her and Ji-hyun.

ROBIN

[Ah... That AC feels good.]

He smiles mockingly at Dong-wan.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Technically, you should give me my money back, seeing as I can drive myself to the airport. But I'll let you keep it.]

DONG-WAN

Tell him to shut up and pull over.
My hand is fine now. I can drive.

MI-SOOK

You need to be nice to him. He has
the key.

DONG-WAN

I knew this would happen.
(BURPS)
Ah, shit. This acid is trying to
kill me.

MI-SOOK

I never stole a single thing in my
life. I was never even tempted.

DONG-WAN

Forget about it. What's done is
done.

MI-SOOK

I can't forget about it. What we
did was wrong. This taxi isn't
ours. We broke the law.

DONG-WAN

Laws are meaningless now.

A car BEEPS as it passes them.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

He drives like an old woman. We
won't get there before midnight at
this speed.

(to Robin)

Faster. This is the fast lane.

ROBIN

[Aneyo. I can't go faster than
this.]

Another car BEEPS as it passes.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[It's not safe.]

JI-HYUN

He's scared to drive fast.

ROBIN

[Did you say scared? I'm not
scared.]

Dong-wan points at the speedometer -- It hovers around 60KM per hour.

DONG-WAN

[Slow.]

ROBIN

[I'm within the speed limit.
Koreans always drive too fast.]

JI-HYUN

[Stop saying all Koreans are the
same.]

Dong-wan taps the speedometer.

DONG-WAN

[Slow.]

ROBIN

[Too slow for you? Fine. You've got
it...]

He slams his foot down and changes gear. Speed increases --
70KM... 80KM... 90KM... 100KM...

MI-SOOK

Now he has to prove himself to you.
You created a maniac.

EXT. HIGHWAY EXIT - NIGHT

The taxi speeds along the exit road, past agricultural fields with greenhouses and long rows of grow tents.

They pass under a sign for "JEOMCHON". Street lamps light the way to the city.

INT./EXT. TAXI/JEOMCHON STREETS - NIGHT

The urbanized center of the city -- Dense with apartment blocks, restaurants, shops.

Glowing windows show signs of life. Businesses are closed and streets are empty.

DONG-WAN

There's nothing open here.

They reach a T-junction and stop.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Tell him to go back to the highway.

MI-SOOK

Look... There are lights...

Sure enough, they see a glowing store front along the dark street.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

A well-stocked store. An OLD COUPLE, about 70, are sat behind the counter. The OLD MAN reads a newspaper with the headline -

"Global Coalition Admit Failure".

They hear a KNOCK. The OLD MAN shuffles from the counter to peer through the glass. He unlocks and opens the door.

OLD MAN

Come in.

Mi-sook enters first, followed by the others. The old man locks the door behind them, leaves the key in the lock.

The OLD WOMAN stands and watches them suspiciously. Her eyes magnified behind thick glasses.

MI-SOOK

Every store we passed was closed.
I'm surprised you're still open.

OLD WOMAN

They'll have to carry my dead body
out of here before I close my
doors.

MI-SOOK

We saw looting in Busan before we
left. I'm glad to see it hasn't
spread to here.

OLD MAN

Locals know better than to steal
from me.

LATER --

Ji-hyun browses the fresh fruit. Robin clutches bags of potato chips and a can of whipped cream.

JI-HYUN
[You need healthy food.]

ROBIN
(shakes the whipped cream
can)
[I'm gonna squirt this straight
into my mouth, like when I was a
kid.]

JI-HYUN
[It has so much sugar.]

ROBIN
[Yeah. But it's delicious. I'm not
worried about being healthy
anymore.]

Nearby, Dong-wan and Mi-sook browse the shelves, occasionally adding an item to their basket.

Jun-ho selects a packet of dried squid.

JUN-HO
I want to eat dried squid with a
beer.

MI-SOOK
You're too young to drink beer.

They leave the aisle to meet up with Robin and Ji-hyun.

The old woman stands behind the counter to get a good look at them.

OLD WOMAN
You have a lot already. I hope you
have money to pay.

MI-SOOK
Of course we do. We're honest
people. We wouldn't think of
stealing...
(under her breath)
I can't speak for my husband
though.

Dong-wan opens his wallet and pulls out some cash. The old woman eyes it greedily.

OLD WOMAN
I didn't tell you yet that prices
have been increased.

DONG-WAN

Increased?

Jun-ho checks the dried squid packet for a price.

JUN-HO

It says five thousand.

OLD WOMAN

That's the old price. Now... Thirty thousand.

DONG-WAN

Thirty thousand won for a packet of dried squid?

MI-SOOK

You're money grabbing in a time of crisis. You should be ashamed.

OLD WOMAN

This is my store. I make the prices. If you don't like them, you can leave.

The Kims and Robin huddle together.

ROBIN

[What's happening?]

JI-HYUN

(to Robin)

Shhh.

(to Dong-wan)

What can we do?

DONG-WAN

The foreigner is bringing us bad luck.

OLD WOMAN

Hurry now! Buy or leave.

DONG-WAN

We're deciding what to buy. Give us a minute.

The old woman sits, whispers something to her husband.

JUN-HO

(whispers)

Can't we just take what we want? They're too old to stop us.

DONG-WAN
No, we can't do that.

JUN-HO
Why not?
(whispers)
We stole a car.

DONG-WAN
That was different. Your mother
wants us to stay honorable.

MI-SOOK
No.

DONG-WAN
No?

MI-SOOK
There's nowhere else open. We have
to eat...

She stares daggers at the old couple.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
They are wrong, not us.

DONG-WAN
The one time I try--

MI-SOOK
They pushed us to this. We're not
the bad guys in this situation.

She begins to grab whatever is nearest to fill the basket.

ROBIN
[I wish I knew what was going on.
You have an unpredictable family.]

The others follow her lead. They begin to fill their arms
with groceries.

OLD WOMAN
Hey! I told you--

MI-SOOK
We'll pay a fair price or pay you
nothing at all!

The old woman smiles menacingly. She taps her husband. He
reaches under the counter and pulls out a rifle.

ROBIN
[They have a gun!]

The all stop dead and turn to see --

The old woman stands with the rifle aimed at them.

OLD WOMAN
Drop everything and get out.

She steps out from behind the counter with the rifle.

ROBIN
[Shit.]

DONG-WAN
Okay, okay... Let's all calm down.
You're not going to shoot us over a
few groceries--

Dong-wan takes a step forward and BANG --

Ji-hyun jumps behind Robin, who turns instinctively and YELPS with pain. He drops the groceries to clutch his rear.

MI-SOOK
She killed him!

ROBIN
[Ah! She shot me in the arse!]

He removes his hand to reveal a pea-sized hole in his seat of his pants.

MI-SOOK
Oh. It's so small.

JUN-HO
It's just an air rifle.

DONG-WAN
You old witch. You could have
seriously hurt one of us.

JI-HYUN
She shot Robin.

DONG-WAN
I mean one of us.

The old woman cocks the rifle to reload. The old man opens a box of pellets.

Dong-wan rushes the counter to pull the rifle from her hands.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Give me that...!

The old woman is surprisingly strong. The old man joins in to help her -- The three of them pull the rifle back and forth.

JUN-HO

This is the gas station all over again. I'm sick of watching old people fight.

The old woman kicks at Dong-wan's shins. He hops about to avoid her feet.

DONG-WAN

She's crazy! Somebody open the door so we can get out of here!

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

The door flies open --

Jun-ho runs out first. He looks toward the car parked further down the street, then turns, runs in the opposite direction.

Next, Mi-sook runs out, still carrying the basket of groceries. Robin and Ji-hyun follow closely behind. Dong-wan is last out.

DONG-WAN

Get to the car. Hurry!

Robin takes the shopping basket from Mi-sook --

ROBIN

[Let me help you.]

The old woman steps out of the door with the rifle.

OLD WOMAN

Come back here you thieving bastards!

She takes aim. BANG --

Robin jumps and YELPS with pain. The basket falls, the groceries spill onto the road.

ROBIN

[She shot me in the arse again!]

Mi-sook stops to salvage some of the groceries. Dong-wan pulls her up to keep running.

MI-SOOK
But, the food--

DONG-WAN
Leave the food!

They keep running towards the taxi -- Robin with one hand clutching his rear.

OLD WOMAN
You stay away from here!

She goes back inside the store and slams the door closed. The "Everybody Welcome" sign swings from side-to-side.

INT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

They dive into the taxi and slam the doors closed. Robin can barely sit.

JI-HYUN
Jun-ho isn't here!

MI-SOOK
What!? Where did he go!?

JI-HYUN
I don't know! I didn't see him!

MI-SOOK
He must have got confused. I knew something bad would happen. This is all your fault Dong-wan!

DONG-WAN
You're the one who decided to steal from the store--

MI-SOOK
Our son is missing!

JI-HYUN
Stop fighting! He can't have gone far. Let me call him.

She takes out her cellphone and makes the call.

MI-SOOK
Oh, my poor baby boy. He must be so scared.

JI-HYUN
It's ringing.

Jun-ho's cellphone vibrates and flashes on the back seat, still connected to his earphones.

EXT. JEOMCHON STREETS - NIGHT

Robin and Ji-hyun walk through the downtown area --

The streets are quiet. Stores, restaurants and bars are all closed.

Robin winces with every step.

ROBIN

[I always knew not to mess with old *ajummas*. I never thought one would try to kill me.]

They walk in silence for a beat.

JI-HYUN

[Thank you for protecting me.]

ROBIN

[I didn't have a choice. You used me as a human shield!]

She laughs. It's the first time we have seen her smile.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[I'm glad my pain amuses you.]

They walk on for a beat.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Are you worried about your brother?]

JI-HYUN

[We will find him. He's angry, but he would never leave my parents.]

ROBIN

[Nobody can blame him for feeling angry. I mean, the world's probably going to end. Right?]

She looks at him, surprised at his bluntness. He shrugs.

JI-HYUN

[I think it's harder for him. He's young. He didn't get to experience anything yet. All he knows is being a student.]

ROBIN
[And school is the worst time.]

JI-HYUN
[Is it?]

ROBIN
[I hated school. But, I was bullied a lot. The other kids thought I was strange.]

JI-HYUN
[Yes, I understand.]

ROBIN
[You understand?]

JI-HYUN
[You seem strange to me.]

ROBIN
[Wow. You're worse than the bullies.]

Robin stops to look at a store front -- A PHARMACY.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I need something to break the window.]

JI-HYUN
[What?]

He finds an empty beer bottle in a pile of garbage.

ROBIN
[Step back.]

JI-HYUN
[No, you can't--]

He throws the bottle. It bounces off the glass fronted door and smashes on the street.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
[Why did you do that?] You are so stupid.

ROBIN
[I need medicine. For my wounds...]

He points to his rear.

JI-HYUN
[Now you have to clean up the
glass.]

Robin sheepishly collects pieces of broken bottle.

ROBIN
[Ah. I cut myself.]

He shows her a small, deep cut on his finger. Blood trickles down his palm.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I've had nothing but bad luck
since I met you.]

He sucks the wound.

Ji-hyun pushes the pharmacy door button -- The door slides open.

JI-HYUN
Stupidity isn't bad luck.

INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT

Robin lies on his stomach, on the floor. Ji-hyun stares at his rear.

JI-HYUN
[I don't want to.]

ROBIN
[Please. It hurts.]

JI-HYUN
[You can take pain medicine.]

ROBIN
[I don't want the wounds to get
infected.]

Ji-hyun sighs.

JI-HYUN
[Okay. Let me see...]

Robin slides his pants and underwear down slightly until his pale buttocks are on show. He has a red welt on each cheek from the air rifle pellets.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

Really? I have to touch this thing with my bare hands? Shit. I really am being punished for something...

ROBIN

[What did you say? Is there blood?]

JI-HYUN

[It is nothing. The skin isn't broken.]

She wipes the wounds with an antiseptic wipe. Robin winces.

ROBIN

[It doesn't feel like nothing.]

JI-HYUN

[Don't be a baby.]

ROBIN

[I'm fine.]

JI-HYUN

(fake English accent)

[I'm so brave. I'm not crying. I just have something in my eye.]

ROBIN

[Suddenly you're a comedian.]

JI-HYUN

[Put your butt away. I don't want to look at it anymore.]

She wipes her hands clean with another antiseptic wipe.

Robin pulls up his pants, sits up to face her.

ROBIN

[My arse hasn't hurt this much since I was little and my dad used to spank me.]

JI-HYUN

[Is that why you hate him?]

ROBIN

[I don't hate him.]

Ji-hyun tears open another antiseptic wipe packet. He edges forward so that they are intimately close. She begins to softly clean the cut on his hand.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[He has a special way of making me feel bad about myself.]

JI-HYUN

[I understand. My father can be the same.]

ROBIN

[He seems to be an angry man.]

JI-HYUN

[He can be. Sometimes. But he doesn't shout at me anymore. He just waits for me to marry and leave home.]

She discards the bloody wipe. Opens another, begins to wipe the dried blood from his face

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

[You can forgive your father, before it's too late.]

ROBIN

[The past is hard to forget. You know that.]

JI-HYUN

[I know?]

ROBIN

[You carry the past with you.]

He nods to diary poking out from her handbag.

JI-HYUN

[Oh.]

ROBIN

[Anyway, I never hated him. But, hate and love aren't opposites, you know? It's possible to feel both.]

She finishes cleaning his nose.

JI-HYUN

[Love is not easy to understand.]
That's why it makes people crazy.

ROBIN

[I think it is. If you love someone, show it through your actions.]

(MORE)

ROBIN (CONT'D)

Love isn't something that just happens with no effort. People say they fall in love all the time, but they don't do anything to prove it.]

JI-HYUN

[You can love at first sight.]

ROBIN

[No. That's a stupid thing to believe.]

JI-HYUN

[Then you are not a romantic person.]

ROBIN

[Saying you love someone without knowing them is ridiculous.]

JI-HYUN

[You can't say that. What people feel is real to them.]

ROBIN

[I don't doubt it, but it's just attraction. You look at someone, feel some spark of connection...]

They stare at each other for a beat. She seems on the verge of saying something.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[What?]

She sneezes and sprays his face with saliva.

Ji-hyun

[I'm so sorry. The dust...]

She covers her mouth and laughs uncontrollably.

EXT. JEOMCHON STREETS - NIGHT

Robin and Ji-hyun walk along a long downtown street.

ROBIN

[There's something open...]

At the end of street, fifty meters or so ahead of them, a glowing inflatable beer bottle stands like a sentry outside a bar.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[He must be in there. Right?]

A drunk couple stumbles out onto the street. The WOMAN trips, falls, laughs on the ground. The MAN helps her up, laughing with her. They stumble away.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A typical Korean self-service beer bar -- Tables and booths for seating, glowing refrigerators stocked with bottled beers and chilled glasses.

Two DRUNK MEN (40s) drink and smoke as they play on an electronic darts machine.

Another MAN is passed out, slumped and drooling in a corner.

The electric door opens with a BEEP. Robin and Ji-hyun enter.

ROBIN
[I can't believe this place is
still open.]

JI-HYUN
[Look...]

Jun-ho is sat at the rear of the bar.

DRUNK MAN 1
What do you want?

JI-HYUN
I'm here for my brother.

The men laugh knowingly.

DRUNK MAN 2
You shouldn't disturb him. He's
preparing himself.

JI-HYUN
He's only eighteen. He shouldn't
even be here.

DRUNK MAN 1
Fuck, who cares about his age. Let
him do what he wants.

DRUNK MAN 2
Who will stop him? The owner?

He gestures towards the sleeping man in the corner.

Ji-hyun pulls Robin to follow her --

They walk through the bar to where Jun-ho sits nursing a beer bottle. He doesn't look up.

JUN-HO
I was going to come back.

JI-HYUN
Everyone is worried sick about you.
I don't need to tell you how mom
reacted.

Ji-hyun sits next to him. Robin pulls over a chair to sit.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
So, you ran away to drink beer? Is
that it?

JUN-HO
I don't understand why it's so
popular. It tastes like shit.

JI-HYUN
You'll grow into it.

JUN-HO
No, I won't.

He puts the bottle down, pushes it away.

JUN-HO (CONT'D)
I won't do anything.

A beat.

JI-HYUN
I know how you must be feeling--

JUN-HO
Do you?

He stares at her, waits for an answer.

JI-HYUN
I guess I don't. I should have
asked you.

Jun-ho shrugs.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
We can talk about it. Let's get out
of here.

JUN-HO
No. I can't go.

JI-HYUN
It won't help to sit here and
drink.

JUN-HO
It's not that... You won't
understand.

JI-HYUN
I'm not leaving without you.

Jun-ho takes a small card from his pocket and places it on
the table.

Ji-hyun and Robin lean to get a good look at the card --

A scantily clad woman with a phone number. A CALLING CARD.

She stares at Jun-ho, horrified. He avoids her eye contact.
He begins to nervously peel the label from the beer bottle.

ROBIN
[What? He called a hooker?]

Robin takes the card for a closer look.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[*"Call Coco"*... I haven't seen
these cards outside of Seoul.]

Ji-hyun changes her gaze. She stares at Robin with suspicion.

JI-HYUN
[You know these cards?]

ROBIN
[Yes. I mean -- No -- I never --
I've seen them on the ground,
that's all.]

Jun-ho snatches the card from Robin and stuffs it back into
his pocket.

JUN-HO
I don't want to talk to you about
it.

JI-HYUN
No way! I'm not going to let my
little brother--

JUN-HO
You can't stop me. It's my life.

JI-HYUN
[He thinks he can do anything he wants in his life.]
(to Jun-ho)
That's not how life works!
(to Robin)
[Say something!]

ROBIN
[What can I say? I can't tell him what to do.]

JI-HYUN
[Because you are a man, and men don't feel bad about using women.]
(to Jun-ho)
Women aren't disposable. You can't use a woman this way because you feel like it.

No response. Jun-ho focuses on peeling his bottle label.

ROBIN
[I know it's wrong. What I'm trying to say is, don't judge him too harshly. He's young but he's not a baby. He has the right to make his own mistakes. You can't tell him what to do with the rest of his life.]

JI-HYUN
[That's all?] I ask for help and that's all you can say? [You are not helping.]

ROBIN
[Tell him that he might catch something. She might have an STD.]

JI-HYUN
[What is it? STD?]

ROBIN
[Sexually transmitted disease.]

JUN-HO
[Why worry about disease? Soon everyone will die.]

Robin is stunned to hear Jun-ho speak English.

ROBIN

[You speak...? Wait-- I spoke to you earlier and you couldn't understand me?]

JUN-HO

[I did not want to talk.]

They hear the door BEEP and turn to see --

COCO, about 30, walking through the bar towards them. She is glamorous, made-up, in a tight dress. Her heels click-clack on the hard floor.

Jun-ho nervously styles his hair with his fingers. He jumps up when Coco reaches the table, almost knocks his chair over.

COCO

(to Robin)

Are you the one that called?

JUN-HO

No, it was me.

He bows respectfully to her.

The drunk men watch from the other end of the bar. They burst out in laughter.

DRUNK MAN 1

(loudly)

He bows to the whore like she's his mother!

Jun-ho stands rigidly to attention, cheeks flushed pink. Coco looks him up and down.

COCO

You're younger than I expected.

JI-HYUN

Too young for you.

COCO

(to Ji-hyun)

Are you his friends?

JUN-HO

No. They're leaving--

JI-HYUN

Actually, I'm his sister. And I'm not going anywhere.

COCO
The foreigner?

ROBIN
[I'm Robin. Erm... *Je ireuneun*
Robin imnida. Nice to meet you.]

Ji-hyun can't believe her ears.

JI-HYUN
[Now you want to speak Korean?]

ROBIN
[Sorry for being polite. What else
am I supposed to say?]

Ji-hyun stands to face Coco directly.

JI-HYUN
You can leave. My brother wasted
your time.

JUN-HO
Don't listen to her. She doesn't
control me.

COCO
I'm not here for family drama.

JI-HYUN
Why are you here at all? Surely you
have more important things to be
doing at this time.

COCO
What I do is none of your business--
(to Jun-ho)
Where are you taking me?

Jun-ho stares at her blankly.

INT. BAR BATHROOM - NIGHT

A dingy bathroom with a single toilet and piss blocked
urinal.

Coco leads Jun-ho inside by the hand and locks the door.

She checks her appearance in the mirror as Jun-ho stands by,
eyes wandering, unsure if he is allowed to look at her.

COCO

This isn't normal for me. I'm usually taken to a motel... Not that they're open. And your sister being here is...

She turns to face Jun-ho.

COCO (CONT'D)

I need payment before anything happens.

JUN-HO

I have this.

Jun-ho removes a thin chain from his neck. A gold ring hangs from it. He slips the ring off the chain and offers it to Coco.

JUN-HO (CONT'D)

It's eighteen carat.

She examines the ring.

COCO

Where did you get it?

JUN-HO

It belonged to my grandpa. My grandma gave it to me after he died. She told me to sell it if I ever needed money.

COCO

Money for an emergency. I doubt she meant this.

JUN-HO

Money is of no use to me.

Coco puts the ring into her handbag.

COCO

I won't take my dress off. There's nowhere to hang it in here.

JUN-HO

Should I?

COCO

What?

JUN-HO

Take my clothes off.

COCO

You can do whatever you want.

She rips off a piece of toilet paper to protect her fingers as she closes the toilet lid. She sits on the closed toilet.

Jun-ho's hands tremble as he removes his t-shirt to reveal his thin, hairless torso.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Robin and Ji-hyun sit at the table. Robin finishes Jun-ho's beer. Ji-hyun stares into space.

ROBIN

[I know it's weird, but he has to do whatever helps him feel better about all this.]

JI-HYUN

[You did nothing to help.]

ROBIN

[What was I supposed to do?]

JI-HYUN

[Tell him it is wrong.]

ROBIN

[I'm not sure it is.]

JI-HYUN

[Using a woman this way is wrong. There's no argument.]

ROBIN

[Sex is a big thing for boys his age. Especially the first time.]

He sips the beer.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[What I'm trying to say is... What your brother is doing, it's natural. He just doesn't have any other choice.]

JI-HYUN

[It won't make him feel better.]

ROBIN

[You're right. It'll be awkward,
but the first time is always
awkward.]

JI-HYUN

[It should be special for him. With
a person he likes. Not this way.]

ROBIN

[I don't remember any time being
that special for me. I'm the worst
person to give your brother
advice.]

She takes the bottle from him, wipes the top, then drains it.

INT. BAR BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jun-ho stands before Coco, stripped down to his socks and
superhero briefs.

COCO

My nephew loves Spiderman.

He covers his crotch with his hands.

COCO (CONT'D)

Where do you want to do it? The
floor is dirty.

JUN-HO

Can we-- Do we kiss first?

COCO

Not usually. But we can, if you
need to...

She stands.

COCO (CONT'D)

No tongue.

He turns his head different ways, unsure of how to maneuver
to reach her deep red lips.

JUN-HO

Where do the noses go?

She kisses him. His eyes remain wide open. The kiss lasts
seconds. It's cold and mechanical. Coco wipes her mouth.

COCO
What's wrong with you?

JUN-HO
I'm sorry. It's my first time.

COCO
First and last.

She seems wounded by her own words. Reality hits her like a sledgehammer.

COCO (CONT'D)
The last time. I never thought
about it that way.

She notices his shaking legs.

COCO (CONT'D)
You're nervous.

JUN-HO
I didn't expect you to answer when
I called.

COCO
I almost didn't. But I'm here
now...

She slides her panties down from beneath her skirt and puts them into her handbag. She passes him a condom.

COCO (CONT'D)
Pull my skirt up when you're ready.

She bends over and rest her hands on the toilet system. Jun-ho stares at her rear end.

JUN-HO
Have you ever been in love?

COCO
Don't talk about love. This is a
transaction. You're making it too
personal.

JUN-HO
Sorry. I wondered if it feels
different.

He stares at the condom in his hand.

JUN-HO (CONT'D)
I don't know how to put it on.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Robin and Ji-hyun sit at the table.

JI-HYUN
[I want to drink more.]

They walk over to the beer-filled refrigerators.

The drunk men now sit at a nearby table, drinking and smoking. They watch Ji-hyun hungrily.

DRUNK MAN 2
You're an attractive woman. Why no wedding ring?

JI-HYUN
I'm not married.

DRUNK MAN 2
You would make a good wife.

She ignores them, opens the refrigerator, takes a bottle.

DRUNK MAN 2 (CONT'D)
Sit with us. We want some female company.

JI-HYUN
No.

DRUNK MAN 1
Why are you here with him? Only sluts disrespect themselves with foreigners. Have some respect for your body.

Ji-hyun slams the refrigerator door closed. She turns to confront the drunk men. They are stunned by her reaction.

JI-HYUN
You think I have no respect for myself? That I will stand here and let you speak to me however you want?

ROBIN
[They're drunk. Don't waste your energy talking to them.]

DRUNK MAN 1
Watch your mouth you stupid bitch.

JI-HYUN

Look at you-- Alone with no family
at your side, nothing left to do
but drink and beg strangers for
company. You sad, pathetic old men.

She points to Robin.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

He's an idiot, and I would take him
over men like you without question.

Before the men can respond, the bathroom door bursts open and Jun-ho rushes out in his briefs and socks, clothes in his arms.

DRUNK MAN 2

Look at that body. I've seen more
meat on a pig knuckle.

Jun-ho rushes past them and out of the bar without a word.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Robin and Ji-hyun leave the bar to catch up with Jun-ho.

JI-HYUN

Jun-ho, stop! Put your clothes on.

Jun-ho stops to dress. Pulls on his jeans and t-shirt.

ROBIN

[Your shirt is inside-out.]

Jun-ho takes the t-shirt off, turns it out, pulls it on again.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Now it's back-to-front.]

JUN-HO

What the hell is he talking about?

JI-HYUN

(to Robin)

[Stop talking now.]

She helps Jun-ho to fix his t-shirt.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

Did she do something to you?

JUN-HO
I couldn't do it. Okay? Is that
what you want to hear? I couldn't
do it.

JI-HYUN
It's okay--

JUN-HO
It's not okay. Don't you
understand? It's not okay.

He struggles to fight back tears.

JUN-HO (CONT'D)
I didn't know what to do. My
experience is nothing. I never even
held hands with a girl before...
It's not fair. How can I fit a
lifetime into a few days? Ji-hyun,
please tell me!

JI-HYUN
I'm sorry. You can't.

The bar door opens -- Coco walks over to them and passes the
gold ring to Jun-ho.

COCO
Your sister was right.

She smiles warmly at Jun-ho, then turns to head back to the
bar.

JI-HYUN
You should go home. Those men are
awful.

COCO
Anything is better than sitting at
home, waiting for the end.

They watch as she disappears back into the bar.

EXT. JEOMCHON STREET - NIGHT

The taxi is parked in the same spot. Dong-wan leans on the
hood, rubbing his stomach. Mi-sook paces back and forth.

DONG-WAN

Sometimes I wish I'd never stopped smoking. A cigarette would calm me down right now.

MI-SOOK

What will we do if they don't come back?

DONG-WAN

They will come back.

MI-SOOK

We don't know what dangers are in this town. We got attacked trying to buy groceries!

DONG-WAN

Worrying won't help.

MI-SOOK

We should be at home.

DONG-WAN

We left for a reason. I made the decision to protect--

MI-SOOK

To protect your family. Yes. No matter how many times you say it, it doesn't become any more comforting. You make the decisions and we follow, as we always do.

DONG-WAN

You make me sound like a tyrant. I never made you do anything you didn't want.

MI-SOOK

You have a short memory, Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN

What the hell does that mean?

MI-SOOK

You know exactly what it means.

DONG-WAN

Our apartment won't be safe. If we're underground--

MI-SOOK

Nowhere is safe. At least at home
we had a roof over our heads, food,
warm beds--

They hear a noise --

A young boy, Seung-min (6), kicks a plastic bottle along the sidewalk opposite them. He stops kicking the bottle when he sees Dong-wan and Mi-sook. He sits on the curb.

DONG-WAN

(to Seung-min)

It's late. You shouldn't be outside
alone.

SEUNG-MIN

I'm bored.

MI-SOOK

Where are your parents?

SEUNG-MIN

My mom is sleeping at home.

DONG-WAN

Your father?

SEUNG-MIN

He works in China.

DONG-WAN

Well, you still need to go home.
They won't want you out here in the
dark.

SEUNG-MIN

Why are you here?

DONG-WAN

We're waiting for our children.

SEUNG-MIN

Is that them?

Dong-wan and Min-Sook turn to see Robin, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho appear from the darkness.

DONG-WAN

I told you they would find him.

Robin, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho reach the taxi. Jun-ho stares at the floor sheepishly, waiting to be scolded.

MI-SOOK

Where have you been!? How could you run off and leave us like that!?

JUN-HO

I'm sorry.

Mi-sook hugs him tightly. He rests his head on her shoulder and absorbs her love.

MI-SOOK

Don't ever do that to me again.

She releases him from the hug but continues to hold his arm tightly, scared she will lose him again.

Jun-ho bows to Dong-wan.

JUN-HO

I'm sorry father.

DONG-WAN

We have enough to worry about without you disappearing. You're mother has been worried sick. Where the hell have you been?

JI-HYUN

It's not his fault. We found him walking the streets, looking for us. It's easy to get lost here.

DONG-WAN

I know this is hard, Jun-ho, but you have to grow up now. We don't have time to run around looking for you. Do you understand?

Jun-ho nods.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Good. Then we don't need to mention it again. Let's get out of this damn place.

MI-SOOK

We still have nothing to eat.

SEUNG-MIN

My home has food.

They'd forgotten about Seung-min, who has left the curb to stand with them.

ROBIN
[Who's this?]

SEUNG-MIN
(in well-rehearsed
English)
[My name is Choi Seung-min. I'm six
years old.]

JI-HYUN
Where did he come from?

MI-SOOK
I forgot he was here.

SEUNG-MIN
My mommy made food. We can share.

DONG-WAN
That's a kind offer, but we have to
go now. We're in a hurry.

MI-SOOK
We can't leave him out here alone.
(to Seung-min)
You can take us to your home. I
need to speak with you mother.

Still holding onto Jun-ho, she takes Seung-min's hand and
allows him to lead the way.

JI-HYUN
(to Dong-wan)
Father, here...

She hands him a box of medicine.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
For you reflux... Robin found it
for you.

Dong-wan looks to Robin, who teases him with a smile.

ROBIN
You're welcome *ajeossi*.

He slaps Dong-wan on the back, walks off in pursuit of Mi-
sook.

DONG-WAN
Son of a bitch.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK ELEVATOR - NIGHT

The ground floor of an apartment block. Seung-min presses the elevator button -- The door slides open.

They squeeze into the brightly lit elevator. Seung-min selects the tenth floor. The elevator ascends.

ROBIN

[I would do anything for a cup of
tea. Milk. Two sugars...
(closes his eyes)
I can almost taste it.]

Mi-sook strokes the top of Seung-min's head.

MI-SOOK

(covers her mouth)
I want to give his mother a piece
of my mind. Allowing such a young
boy to roam the streets at night.
It's irresponsible.

DONG-WAN

No, we don't need drama. He isn't
our problem. Just take him to the
door and make sure he goes inside.
That's all we need to do.

INT. SEUNG-MIN'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway light is on. The door opens and Seung-min enters, followed by the others. They all remove their shoes before following Seung-min into the --

LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN

The apartment is modern and spacious. A comfortable sofa is directed at a 75" flatscreen TV. The kitchen space is roomy, with marble countertops and a huge refrigerator.

ROBIN

[My place is a shoebox compared to
this.]

DONG-WAN

Okay. He's home safely. We can go.

Mi-sook looks at the messy floor, littered with toys and candy wrappers.

MI-SOOK
 Something isn't right.
 (to Seung-min)
 How long has your mother been
 sleeping?

SEUNG-MIN
 All day.

MI-SOOK
 You didn't wake her?

SEUNG-MIN
 She told me not to go into her
 room.

Mi-sook walks into the --

KITCHEN AREA

Where a large pot sits on the worktop. She removes the lid to
 look inside.

MI-SOOK
 That's a lot of *kimchi-jjigae* for
 two people.

She wanders back into the --

LIVING ROOM

Where she notices picture frames on the sideboard have been
 placed face down. She stands them. They're all family
 portraits -- Seung-min with his attractive, smiling parents.

Jun-ho sits on the sofa.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
 Stand up. This isn't our home.
 Don't touch anything.

He stands and steps on a plastic block.

JUN-HO
 Ah, shit. It's dangerous here.

MI-SOOK
 Don't curse in front of the boy.
 (to Seung-min)
 Clean away your toys before your
 mother wakes up.

Seung-min nods obediently. He begins to clean.

INT. SEUNG-MIN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark. Light creeps in as the door opens slowly and Mi-sook peeks into the room.

MI-SOOK

Hello?

No answer.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

Hello... You must wake up now.

No answer.

INT. SEUNG-MIN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN AREA - NIGHT

In the LIVING ROOM --

Robin and the rest of the Kims stand like statues around Seung-min, watching him throw toys into a large box.

Dong-wan spots a cigarette packet on the bookshelf. He checks inside, sees a few cigarettes left, pockets the packet.

Mi-sook leaves the bedroom and closes the door firmly behind her. Seung-min looks up expectedly.

MI-SOOK

She's still sleeping.

DONG-WAN

So, wake her up.

She casts Dong-wan a look of concern, but he doesn't notice.

MI-SOOK

Seung-min, you said that your father works in China. When did you last speak to him?

SEUNG-MIN

I don't remember. My mommy called many times, but he didn't answer.

MI-SOOK

Let me try. Do you know his number?

Seung-min nods. He takes Mi-sook's cellphone and types in the number. She makes the call but quickly hangs-up.

DONG-WAN
Did it ring?

MI-SOOK
Nothing. Maybe there's no network
where his father is.
(to Seung-min)
What about your grandparents? Do
you know their numbers?

Seung-min shakes his head -- "No." He yawns.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
You need to sleep.

SEUNG-MIN
I'm hungry.

MI-SOOK
Then let me make you some food. I'm
sure your mother won't mind. Sit
and play for a while.

Mi-sook walks into the --

KITCHEN AREA

And leans on the counter to compose herself. The others --
without Seung-min -- follow her.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
I'll heat the *kimchi-jjigae*. We
need some rice.

She opens a cupboard and looks inside.

DONG-WAN
What's wrong?

MI-SOOK
There's hardly anything here...

DONG-WAN
What's wrong with his mother? You
would never start cooking without
asking permission.

MI-SOOK
(whispers)
She's dead.

DONG-WAN
What?

She closes the cupboard and turns to face them.

MI-SOOK
(whispers)
Be quiet. Don't let him hear you.

ROBIN
[Did she say what I think she
said?]

Ji-hyun is too shocked to respond.

DONG-WAN
You're being dramatic again. She's
sleeping.

MI-SOOK
(whispers)
She isn't breathing and her skin is
ice cold. I found this in her
hand...

She shows them a pill bottle. Robin squints at the label.

ROBIN
[What are they?]

JI-HYUN
[Sleeping pills.]

She shakes the bottle -- It's empty.

JUN-HO
Why would she kill herself? She has
a son.

MI-SOOK
Shhh! Speak quietly. It could have
been an accident.

DONG-WAN
Let me go and see.

He tries to walk away. Mi-sook stops him.

MI-SOOK
(whispers)
Don't go in there. We have to keep
him away from that room.

They look over at Seung-min -- He sits on the floor, playing
with toy dinosaurs.

JUN-HO
I'll sit with him.

MI-SOOK
Good idea. Keep him company.

Jun-ho is in total shock. He returns to the LIVING ROOM and sits with Seung-min.

ROBIN
[You're telling me she's dead in there...]

Ji-hyun hits his arm.

JI-HYUN
[The boy speaks English. He can understand you!]

DONG-WAN
This idiot has a big mouth.

MI-SOOK
Leave him alone. This is all your fault Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN
My fault!? How am I getting the blame for this?

MI-SOOK
You stole that car and brought us bad luck.

DONG-WAN
You are the one who wanted to stop for food!

Their talking attracts Seung-min's attention. He looks over at them curiously.

JI-HYUN
Stop fighting.

MI-SOOK
Oh, I feel sick. That poor boy.

ROBIN
[We have to do something. We're just standing here doing nothing.]

JI-HYUN
He says we need to do something.

DONG-WAN

No. We need to get the hell out of here.

MI-SOOK

The foreigner is right, Dong-wan. We have to help the boy.

DONG-WAN

Why are you both so quick to side with the foreigner? Does my opinion mean nothing anymore?

ROBIN

[Oh, shut up.]

DONG-WAN

What!?

ROBIN

[I said shut up! I get it, okay. I'm foreign. You don't like me. You're just another racist old man. Guess what... Nobody cares.]

DONG-WAN

What did he say?

JI-HYUN

He called you racist.

DONG-WAN

Racist?

JI-HYUN

You don't like him because he's foreign.

DONG-WAN

Bullshit. I don't like him because he's *him*.

Robin gives Dong-wan the finger, walks back to the living room area and sits with Seung-min.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Bastard.

Mi-sook looks inside another cupboard and pulls out a bag of rice.

MI-SOOK

Someone needs to get my rice cooker from the car.

JI-HYUN

You can't seriously want to stay here and eat?

MI-SOOK

We can't go anywhere until we know what to do with the boy. We're responsible for him now. I won't leave him alone.

LATER --

In the LIVING ROOM --

Dong-wan and Jun-ho are slumped together on the sofa.

Robin and Seung-min play with toy dinosaurs on the floor.

In the KITCHEN AREA --

Ji-hyun helps Mi-sook to prepare food. The pot of kimchi-jjigae bubbles and steams on the hob. Mi-sook stares lovingly at her rice cooker.

MI-SOOK

Imagine not having a good rice cooker. I'm not surprised that woman ended up in this situation.

JI-HYUN

I don't think it was lack of perfectly cooked rice that killed her.

Mi-sook opens the refrigerator. She takes out a bag of green peppers, opens it, sniffs at the contents.

MI-SOOK

Do you think the foreigner will eat kimchi-jjigae?

JI-HYUN

His name is *Robin*.

MI-SOOK

Robin. Ah, yes. Like *Batman and Robin*. You two seem to be friendly now.

JI-HYUN
He's okay, I guess.

Ji-hyun watches Robin animate a plastic T-Rex and pretend to bite Seung-min. Seung-min giggles. Ji-hyun smiles.

MI-SOOK
Here, cut the peppers. Make small pieces.

Ji-hyun begins cutting the peppers with a pair of kitchen scissors. Mi-sook watches, sighs loudly.

JI-HYUN
What's wrong?

MI-SOOK
Oh, nothing really... You would have made someone a good wife.

In the LIVING ROOM --

Dong-wan takes the remote control and turns on the TV. A government advice message appears --

ON THE SCREEN

"The asteroid Goliath remains on a course for Earth. The South Korean Government advises that citizens avoid from travel and remain in their homes for shelter. Further instructions will be provided after impact."

Dong-wan flicks through channels -- Each one displays the same message.

Jun-ho stares hypnotically at the screen as the channels change.

DONG-WAN
They ask people to stay home but show nothing. No movies, not even repeats...

Jun-ho is unresponsive.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
They could show baseball, soccer... They could show the 2002 World Cup games. What a time that was...

He looks to Jun-ho for a response. Nothing.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
 Further instructions will be
 provided after impact. After
 impact! What useless information.

He turns off the TV and throws the remote down.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
 We should be there by now.

JUN-HO
 I don't think it makes a difference
 where we are, if the world is going
 to end.

DONG-WAN
 There's a big difference between
 the end of the world and the end as
 we know it. People will survive and
 the world will be rebuilt. We can
 be part of it.

JUN-HO
 Do you really think we can survive
 in a cave?

Mi-sook carries the steaming pot from the KITCHEN AREA and
 sets it down on the coffee table.

DONG-WAN
 We don't have to talk about that
 now. It's time to eat.

Ji-hyun follows with a tray of rice bowls, chopsticks,
 glasses, bottles of alcohol.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
 You found soju?

JI-HYUN
 A whole box of soju.

MI-SOOK
 I cooked a lot of rice. You can eat
 as much as you want.

Seung-min jumps up.

SEUNG-MIN
 Kimchi-jjigae is my favorite.

MI-SOOK

It smells delicious. Your mother is a good cook. Go and wash your hands.

Seung-min darts off to the bathroom. Robin throws the T-Rex into the toy box. He shuffles over to the coffee table.

ROBIN

[Need some help? I feel bad that you and your mom are working while we sit here.]

JI-HYUN

[We're used to it. Look what I found...]

She passes him a small packet.

ROBIN

[English Breakfast Tea.]

He beams at her.

JI-HYUN

[Your wish came true.]

She neatly arranges rice bowls and chopsticks around the coffee table.

Mi-sook stares at Dong-wan and Jun-ho with her hands on her hips.

DONG-WAN

What?

MI-SOOK

I said wash your hands. The foreigner-- *Robin* too.

LATER --

They all sit around the coffee table, cross-legged, cramped, eating ravenously. Robin fidgets about to get comfortable.

JI-HYUN

[Do you want a cushion?]

ROBIN

[No, I'm okay. I'll take some soju though. It'll help to numb the pain.]

She opens a bottle of soju.

DONG-WAN
I'll pour.

He takes the bottle and fills all the empty glasses but his own. He places the bottle before Jun-ho.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Pour for me.

Jun-ho fills Dong-wan's glass.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
You can drink with me.

Jun-ho shakes his head morosely.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Have a drink with your father.

Jun-ho takes a full glass.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Let us drink to survival.

MI-SOOK
You shouldn't tempt fate.

DONG-WAN
They say the asteroid will hit South America. That's a long way from here.

JUN-HO
It doesn't make a difference. The dust cloud will--

DONG-WAN
We are Korean. We survived colonization, war, and still we are here. Mark my words -- Koreans are survivors.

They all look at Robin. He smiles back, clueless.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
He will have to wish for good luck.

Robin lifts his glass.

ROBIN
[Cheers.]

Robin follows Korean etiquette correctly -- Turns away from the table to shield the glass with his free hand as he drinks.

MI-SOOK

He knows how to drink like a Korean.

JUN-HO

Do I have to do that?

DONG-WAN

You should. Traditions are important.

The Kims all chink their glasses and drink. Ji-hyun and Jun-ho follow the same routine as Robin. Jun-ho grimaces at the taste.

JI-HYUN

What about North Koreans? Are they survivors?

DONG-WAN

Of course they are. The North has been building tunnels and bunkers underground for decades. Nobody knows what they're hiding. I wouldn't be surprised if they all survive.

Dong-wan pours another drink for Jun-ho.

MI-SOOK

No more for him. End of the world or not, he is underage.

DONG-WAN

My son can drink if he wants to.

MI-SOOK

Until he vomits everywhere and I have to clean up.

DONG-WAN

He's only had one drink.

MI-SOOK

You're setting a bad example.

Mi-sook and Dong-wan eye each other across the table. He re-fills all their glasses.

LATER --

Empty bowls and empty soju bottles cover the coffee table.

Jun-ho and Seung-min snooze on the sofa. Dong-wan lies prostrate on the floor. Ji-hyun reads her diary.

Mi-sook watches Robin with amusement as he scrapes the last remnants of food from the pot.

MI-SOOK
[You like?]

ROBIN
[Yes. Delicious. *Mashisoyo.*]

She smiles, satisfied, slightly drunk, her face flushed red.

Dong-wan belches. He checks his watch.

DONG-WAN
Eleven o'clock.

He sits up to see Jun-ho and Seung-min out cold.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
This was supposed to be a quick stop. Now we're here for the night.

MI-SOOK
We have to make a plan. That poor woman.

DONG-WAN
You don't want to leave him here, so he has to come with us. There's no other option.

MI-SOOK
He won't leave without his mother. Someone has to tell him the truth.

DONG-WAN
We will. For now, keep the door closed. What he doesn't know can't hurt him.

Dong-wan fills his glass and drains it in one gulp.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

(singing)

*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come into full
bloom..."*

MI-SOOK

Stop. Let the boys sleep.

Dong-wan dismisses her with a wave, tired of being nagged.

Robin takes the soju bottle, fills his glass, then Ji-hyun's.
Dong-wan watches him like a hawk.

DONG-WAN

I don't want him sleeping anywhere
near you. You tell him to keep his
distance.

MI-SOOK

She's a grown woman. She doesn't
need your permission.

Dong-wan glares at Mi-sook. She ignores him.

JI-HYUN

(to Robin)

[Do you want some water?]

ROBIN

[Yes. Thanks.]

Ji-hyun heads to the KITCHEN, leaving her diary open and
facedown on the floor. Robin can't help but peek at the pages
of careful handwriting.

DONG-WAN

This place reminds me of our first
apartment.

MI-SOOK

I loved it there. I hated leaving.

DONG-WAN

We left for a reason.

MI-SOOK

Yes, we did... Because of you.

Ji-hyun returns with two glasses of water. She notices Robin
with the open diary.

JI-HYUN
[Don't read it.]

ROBIN
[Why do you write in English?]

Ji-hyun sits again. She pulls the diary away from him but doesn't close it. Her guard is down.

JI-HYUN
[Why do you think?] Come on stupid.
Use your brain.

Dong-wan pours another drink. We return to him and Mi-sook --

DONG-WAN
You've never appreciated the
sacrifices I made to provide for
you all.

MI-SOOK
Sacrifices you made!? We were
happy, and then you took us away
from our home without a second
thought for what we wanted.

DONG-WAN
Ah, don't be so dramatic. It wasn't
like that all.

Back to Ji-hyun and Robin --

ROBIN
[I was admiring your handwriting.
You were one of those students who
had to be perfect. Right?]

JI-HYUN
[I was a good student. Yes.]

Back to Dong-wan and Mi-sook --

MI-SOOK
Either you don't remember what
happened or you're choosing to
ignore the truth.

DONG-WAN
Why bring this up now? Are you
really so bitter?

They drain their glasses in unison and slam them down.

Dong-wan rubs his stomach. He pops two reflux pills from the packet and swallows them with a swig of soju.

Back to Robin and Ji-hyun --

She edges closer to the table to pour more drinks.

He takes the diary again and flicks through pages to reveal a SKETCH of a man surrounded by hearts. It's childish but cute.

ROBIN

[Your drawings are good, too. Look at this... So sweet.]

He displays the page with a cheeky grin. She doesn't smile.

JI-HYUN

[Give it to me.]

He squints at the handwriting.

ROBIN

(reading from diary)
[*I think I will love him forever.*
He is perfect in every--]

JI-HYUN

[I said give it to me! Why won't you listen!?!]

She snatches the diary from his hand. The panic in her voice surprises them all.

ROBIN

[Calm down.]

JI-HYUN

[Don't tell me to be calm.]

She is flustered, on the verge of tears.

DONG-WAN

What did he say to you?

JI-HYUN

It's nothing.

ROBIN

[I'm sorry. I was just playing around.]

JI-HYUN

[This is not a game for me.]

DONG-WAN
Give that book to me if it's going
to be a problem.

JI-HYUN
No.

DONG-WAN
Why not? What's in there?

JI-HYUN
This is my diary. Why doesn't
anyone understand that it's
private? I don't want him to read
it. I don't want you to read it.

DONG-WAN
Then why carry it with you!?

JI-HYUN
Because I want to! Why must I
explain myself to you!?

Dong-wan is shocked at her tone.

MI-SOOK
You don't have to do anything you
don't want to do. Come, sit by me.

Ji-hyun sits close to Mi-sook, the diary tight in her hand.

Dong-wan fills his glass again.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
You've already finished two
bottles. You need to stop drinking.

DONG-WAN
Why?

MI-SOOK
Because you're argumentative when
you're drunk.

DONG-WAN
I still speak rationally. I can
handle my alcohol.

Dong-wan fills his glass. Robin sits quiet, still in shock.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
All anyone has done since we left
home is complain.

MI-SOOK

What do you expect? We're all here because of you.

JI-HYUN

She's right. You never think about how your decisions affect us.

DONG-WAN

The idea that I only think about myself is ridiculous. Why can't you all understand that I--

MI-SOOK

Want the best for your family. Yes. We get it Dong-wan. Shit. You sound like a broken record.

JI-HYUN

If you want the best for us, why don't you ask what we want?

DONG-WAN

Is this a joke? I gave my children everything. Who was it who worked day and night to pay for your education?

JI-HYUN

Of course I know it was you. You never let me forget!

DONG-WAN

How could I forget that you wasted my money!? Huh?

Their voices have woken Jun-ho. He sits up, rubbing his eyes.

JUN-HO

What's wrong?

MI-SOOK

Go back to sleep.

DONG-WAN

No, don't sleep son. Stay awake and listen to how worthless your father is.

JUN-HO

What did you do?

DONG-WAN

That's a good question. I worked my entire life to put food on our table and clothes on your back, and this is the gratitude I receive.

MI-SOOK

You also moved us to Busan without a word of discussion. Remember that? You took a job and decided to move to a new city without even asking my opinion.

Ji-hyun and Jun-ho look at each other, puzzled. This is new information.

ROBIN

[Is this my fault? Did I start an argument?]

JI-HYUN

[No.]

Robin shuffles away to sit with his back against the wall. He has nowhere to go. He sits uncomfortably as the drama unfolds before him.

JUN-HO

(to Mi-sook)

What are you talking about?

MI-SOOK

Another of your father's famous decisions, made for the good of his family.

Dong-wan drains his glass. He tries to remain stoic but her words have touched a nerve.

DONG-WAN

I took the job because of the salary. It didn't matter where we lived.

MI-SOOK

I had to leave behind my friends, my job, the kids had to change schools--

DONG-WAN

I put a roof over your heads. I went without luxuries so we could raise a family--

MI-SOOK

Went without luxuries!? I was miserable Dong-wan. Sat at home every night, waiting for you to fall through the door stinking of cigarettes and soju. You talk about sacrifices like you're a saint, but you never cared about what we wanted.

DONG-WAN

Do you really think that?

A line has been crossed. Dong-wan is hurt. Mi-sook seems to regret her words.

MI-SOOK

Look... This isn't the time to talk about the past. I've had too much to drink. We need to rest.

DONG-WAN

No, don't stop now. Tell me how I ruined your lives. This could be your last chance.

Uncomfortable silence for a beat.

JI-HYUN

You did the same to me.

DONG-WAN

What?

JI-HYUN

I wanted to go to a university close to home. You didn't listen to me.

DONG-WAN

I wanted you to attend a good university. I'm no different to any other father in Korea.

JI-HYUN

You didn't care about where I went to study. All you cared about was impressing your friends.

DONG-WAN

I cared about your education. Do you know how expensive it was?

JI-HYUN

I didn't want to leave home. I begged you, but you ignored me.

DONG-WAN

Next you'll blame me for your poor grades. Imagine how I feel-- All that money spent, and for what? To pour coffee all day long.

Ji-hyun begins to cry. Mi-sook shuffles closer to comfort her.

MI-SOOK

You finished your studies, that's more than some people achieve.

JI-HYUN

He has no idea what it was like for me at that place.

Dong-wan fills his glass again. He looks away from his sobbing daughter and catches Robin's eye. They both remain quiet in their shame.

LATER --

Dong-wan sleeps on his side with an empty soju bottle near his head. Robin sleeps on the floor against the wall. Jun-ho and Seung-min sleep on the sofa.

Ji-hyun and Mi-sook are awake. They sit side-by-side.

MI-SOOK

(re: Robin)

He looked miserable tonight. He must wish a different family helped him.

JI-HYUN

I scared him.

She squeezes the rolled diary tightly.

MI-SOOK

Seeing you together makes me feel sad. I watched all my friend's children get married and start families. I wanted you to meet a nice boy and settle down.

JI-HYUN

I couldn't force myself into a relationship to make you happy.

MI-SOOK

I know. It just hurts to know that you're lonely.

JI-HYUN

I'm not lonely.

MI-SOOK

You can't hide anything from me. I'm your mother. I know you.

JI-HYUN

No. You don't know everything. There are things... I never told anyone.

Ji-hyun looks over at Dong-wan.

MI-SOOK

He's asleep.

JI-HYUN

It doesn't matter. There's no reason to talk about secrets now.

MI-SOOK

We all have secrets.
(rubs Ji-hyun's hand)
But you can talk to me about anything. If ever there was a time to unburden yourself, this is it.

Ji-hyun takes a moment to find her voice.

JI-HYUN

I had a boyfriend... once. I never told you about him.

MI-SOOK

The man from the diary?

JI-HYUN

You know?

MI-SOOK

Why else would you be reading an old diary?

Ji-hyun nods.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

So you had a boyfriend at university that we never met. It's not unusual. Parents don't need to know about every brief relationship.

JI-HYUN

It was serious. He was my professor.

MI-SOOK

Professor!?

Ji-hyun pulls her hand away.

JI-HYUN

Now you know why I never told you.

Ji-hyun takes a bottle of soju, swigs from the bottle.

MI-SOOK

How old was he?

JI-HYUN

Fifteen years older...

(pause)

And married.

Mi-sook nods robotically, fighting her shock. She glances over at Dong-wan to make sure he is still asleep.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

He didn't tell me about his wife when we met. By the time I found out, it was too late.

MI-SOOK

Too late?

JI-HYUN

I was in love.

MI-SOOK

People make mistakes. You were young--

JI-HYUN

It wasn't a mistake. I was selfish. I knew he was married and didn't do anything to stop it.

MI-SOOK

Married or not, a professor should not be dating his students.

JI-HYUN

He used me like I was something disposable. Used me, then dumped me.

MI-SOOK

That bastard--excuse my language--that son of a bitch.

Mi-sook takes the soju bottle, takes a swig.

JI-HYUN

I was so stupid. I thought he loved me.

MI-SOOK

There is nothing stupid about a young girl falling in love.

A beat passes as Ji-hyun tries to compose herself.

JI-HYUN

I wanted to forget about him. I really did. It was impossible.

MI-SOOK

Because you were pregnant.

Ji-hyun looks up, shocked and silent.

JI-HYUN

I... What...

MI-SOOK

It's true, isn't it?

Ji-hyun nods, tearful.

JI-HYUN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Mi-sook leans back, silent, contemplates the information.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

How did you know?

MI-SOOK

The girl who went away to university was not the same one who came home. Something changed. You were quieter, more distant.

JI-HYUN

I couldn't tell anyone.

MI-SOOK

He didn't know?

JI-HYUN

No. He had already dumped me when I found out.

MI-SOOK

Did you... You lost the baby?

Ji-hyun shakes her head -- "No." She avoids eye contact.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

Oh.

JI-HYUN

That's it. Now you know.

MI-SOOK

You should have told us. We would have made him support you. He had to pay for his actions.

JI-HYUN

I didn't want his support. I wanted nothing to do with him. It was my choice, not his. A baby would have ruined my life.

MI-SOOK

That's not true.

JI-HYUN

You know it is.

MI-SOOK

I would have helped. You didn't have to--

JI-HYUN

I had to. Father would have disowned me.

Mi-sook is stunned. She considers the words, then pulls Ji-hyun in for a deep, motherly hug.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)

Don't tell him. Please. I don't
want him to ever find out.

Dong-wan still faces away from them. He is awake. His eyes
are open and tearful.

LATER --

Jun-ho and Seung-min still sleep on the sofa. Mi-sook sleeps
with her arms wrapped protectively around Ji-hyun on the
floor.

Robin and Dong-wan are awake, sat opposite each other at the
table.

ROBIN

[Can I use your phone?]

DONG-WAN

Huh?

ROBIN

[Your phone. Can I use it?]

He mimes making a call with his hand. Dong-wan pushes his
cell phone across the table.

Robin types a number and hold the phone to his ear. We hear
the ring, then the muffled sound of a voice mail message in
English --

*["We are unable to connect your call. Please leave you
message after the tone... BEEP"]*

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[It's me. Again. I thought we
should speak before, well, you
know... Anyway, you aren't
answering. I don't know if this is
still your number. So... Call me
back if you get this message. If
you want to.]

He hangs up and passes the phone back to Dong-wan.

DONG-WAN

Father?

Robin nods. The digital wall clock BEEPS -- "2:00 AM."

Seung-min stirs.

ROBIN

[Soon that kid's going to wake up and want to see his mum. How can we let him do that, knowing what we know? Huh?

(points to Seung-min)

The kid. The boy. We have to do something.]

Dong-wan looks over to Seung-min.

DONG-WAN

Shit. The boy's father should be here. This isn't my job.

Robin looks about, finds a pen and scrap of paper. He sits again and begins to draw.

ROBIN

[We need to bury her. Look--]

On the paper is a sketch of a gravestone. He taps the paper.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Bury her. You understand? Take her out and bury her properly before the kid realizes she's dead.]

He points to himself, then Dong-wan, then mimes digging. Dong-wan waves him away.

DONG-WAN

Ah, don't be so stupid. We can't dig a grave by hand.

He pushes himself up.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

I need to piss.

He staggers to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Dong-wan zips up his trousers. He exits the bathroom back into the --

LIVING ROOM

To find Robin creeping from the bedroom with Seung-min's mother wrapped neatly in her bedsheet.

DONG-WAN
What the hell are you doing?

ROBIN
[Shhhh! Don't wake them up.]

DONG-WAN
You're crazy--

ROBIN
[Be quiet.]

Dong-wan opens the bedroom door.

DONG-WAN
Put her back and close the door you
crazy bastard. Show some respect
for her body.

ROBIN
[We can't let him see her this way.
Trust me, he doesn't need that
memory.]

DONG-WAN
I knew there was something wrong
with you. You're disturbed.

ROBIN
[We have to do something. You can
help or move out of my way. I'll do
it myself.]

The stare at each other for a beat.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Robin rushes along the street to the taxi, still holding the
body, nervously glancing around to make sure the coast is
clear. Dong-wan follows.

ROBIN
[Quickly. Open the door.]

DONG-WAN
Be careful with her.

ROBIN
[Hurry up! I'm holding a dead body
in my arms. If anyone sees us,
they'll think we killed her.
Ppalri, ppalri.]

DONG-WAN

Who the hell so you think you're talking to? You need to hold your tongue.

ROBIN

[Open the fucking door. *Please*.
Hurry up.]

Dong-wan unlocks the taxi, opens the rear door.

Robin hastily guides the body into the taxi, bumps the head on the doorframe.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Shit. I'm sorry.]

DONG-WAN

Idiot.

With the body inside, they close the door.

ROBIN

[Give me the key.]

Dong-wan is lost in thought.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Come on. We have to go.]

Dong-wan pockets the smart key.

DONG-WAN

We need the boy. He has to be part of this.

He walks back toward the apartment, leaves Robin confused.

ROBIN

[What? Where are you going?]

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - NIGHT

Dong-wan is sat with Seung-min in the passenger seat. Robin drives.

Seung-min rubs his eyes, half asleep. He holds a framed photo of his mother and an unopened bottle of soju.

ROBIN

[This is so messed up...]

Seung-min glances over his shoulder at the backseat.

SEUNG-MIN
Is she in the blanket?

DONG-WAN
Yes.

ROBIN
[He shouldn't be here...]

SEUNG-MIN
Do I have to look at her?

DONG-WAN
Only if you want to.

SEUNG-MIN
I don't want to.

DONG-WAN
I know this isn't easy. But, you're
her only son. You need to be a man
now. Okay? Be brave.
(to Robin)
Let's go. Hurry.

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD OUT OF TOWN - NIGHT

Robin drives along the road that leads back to the highway.

Dong-wan peers through the window at the agricultural fields
that they passed on the way into town.

DONG-WAN
Here. Stop.

Robin pulls over to stop at the roadside.

EXT. ROAD SIDE - NIGHT

Seung-min, still holding the photo, watches as Dong-wan and
Robin carry the body from the car, over the crash barrier and
into the --

ALLOTMENT

They set the body down.

ROBIN
[What now? Don't tell me your going
to make him dig.]

Dong-wan kneels to feel the earth.

DONG-WAN
It's dry but loose. We need a shovel.

ROBIN
[What?]

Dong-wan mimes digging, then point to a long grow tent. Robin disappears inside.

Dong-wan dusts off his hands. He stares up at the full moon.

DONG-WAN
This is a good location. We can make sure she is buried correctly. Have you ever been to a funeral?

SEUNG-MIN
My grandma.

DONG-WAN
Was she buried?

SEUNG-MIN
No. They put her into the fire.

DONG-WAN
Ah. I see. Well, the first thing to do is wrap her tightly. Come on, help me.

Seung-min crouches with Dong-wan and they begin to tuck the sheet tightly around the body.

LATER --

The body lies, neatly wrapped like a mummy.

Seung-min watches Robin and Dong-wan dig the ground with shovels. The trench is a foot deep. Dong-wan stops to shake and flex his injured hand.

DONG-WAN
This will have to do. The ground is too hard now. We need machinery to dig deeper.

He drops his shovel.

ROBIN
[You need to rest your hand. Don't worry, I can keep digging.]

Dong-wan takes Robin's shovel and throws it down.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I guess we're stopping.]

Dong-wan and Robin carefully move the body into the shallow trench.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I told you it's not deep enough.]

Dong-wan pulls a bag of planting soil the side of a grow-tent. He opens it, takes a handful of soil and tips it into Seung-min's hands.

DONG-WAN
(to Seung-min)
You first. You are her family.

Seung-min does as he's told and drops the soil onto the body.

LATER --

The sky gradually lightens. It will be dawn soon.

The body has been buried under a mound of soil. They work together on their knees, patting the soil into shape.

DONG-WAN
Seung-min, you can stand on the mound now. Use your feet.

Seung-min stands on the mound and stomps the soil to make it firm.

ROBIN
[Is it normal to stomp on her grave like that?]

Dong-wan places the framed photo and unopened soju bottle on the mound. Seung-min steps off. It's done.

DONG-WAN
We did the best we could in the situation.

They stare at the mound in silence. Dong-wan places a hand on Seung-min's head.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
You did well. I'm proud of you.

SEUNG-MIN
When will she go to the sky?

DONG-WAN
She's already there.

SEUNG-MIN
Can I go?

DONG-WAN
No. Not now.

SEUNG-MIN
Why?

DONG-WAN
You're mother wouldn't want you to go to the sky yet. She'd want you to come with us.

ROBIN
[We should say something.]

He takes a step forward.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[Into the freedom of wind and sunshine, we let you go. Into the dance of the stars and the planets, we let you go. Into the wind's breath and the hands of the star maker, we let you go. We love you, we miss you, we want you to be happy. Go safely, go dancing, go running home.]

Dong-wan looks at Seung-min and shrugs.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I had to read it at my mum's funeral. I still remember.]

Dong-wan nods, understanding the sentiment if not the words. He pushes Seung-min forward.

DONG-WAN
You know how to make a big bow?

SEUNG-MIN
Yes.

DONG-WAN
Good. Bow to your mother.

Seung-min follows his orders, kneels, bows to the mound.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Well done. Now do it again with me.

Seung-min kneels with Dong-wan. Robin copies their actions. All three perform a long, respectful bow to the mound. They stand.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Come now, it's time to go.

Seung-min stares at his mother's photo. Robin takes his hand. They walk through the allotment back to the taxi.

INT. SEUNG-MIN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Early morning sunlight streams through the gaps in the venetian blinds. Seung-min sleeps on the sofa.

In the KITCHEN --

Mi-sook washes dishes. Dong-wan, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho slurp from piping hot bowls of seaweed soup.

MI-SOOK

You should have woken us.

DONG-WAN

What good would it have done to include everyone? Anyhow, it wasn't my idea. You can ask the foreigner.

MI-SOOK

Why is he waiting outside?

DONG-WAN

Don't ask me. I can't understand a word he says.

Mi-sook takes a towel and wipes the kitchen surfaces.

MI-SOOK

(to Ji-hyun)

How is it? Do you want some more?

Ji-HYUN

It's good. Thank you.

Mi-sook rubs Ji-hyun's shoulders. Dong-wan watches the tender exchange but looks away when Ji-hyun catches his eye.

MI-SOOK
We have to wake him.

DONG-WAN
It will be easier to carry him
while he sleeps. There's no reason
to wake him for the drive to
Incheon.

JI-HYUN
You want to go to the airport?

DONG-WAN
The foreigner needs to get there.
We promised to take him.

MI-SOOK
Yesterday you wanted to abandon
him.

DONG-WAN
I changed my mind.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE APARTMENT - DAY

Robin leans on the taxi hood. He arranges a small bunch of
freshly picked wild cosmos flowers.

He notices Ji-hyun exit the apartment block, hides the
flowers behind his back.

ROBIN
[You took long enough. I was ready
to drive off and leave you here.]

JI-HYUN
[You wouldn't do that.]

ROBIN
[Wouldn't I?]

JI-HYUN
[No. You don't have the key.]

She looks him up and down. She can't help but grin at his
disheveled appearance -- Bruises, cuts, dust and sweat. The
last twenty-four hours have taken their toll.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
[You're so dirty.]

He shrugs.

ROBIN

[I honestly don't care what I look like anymore. It's liberating. Did your dad tell you what we did?]

JI-HYUN

[He won't look at me today. I think he is angry about last night.]

ROBIN

[Oh.]

JI-HYUN

[But I heard. It was a kind thing to do.]

ROBIN

[How's the boy doing?]

JI-HYUN

[He's sleeping.]

She leans on the hood next to him.

ROBIN

[I'm glad you came out. I want to apologize to you properly. Last night, I was an idiot. Reading your diary like that was wrong.]

He reveals the bunch of cosmos flowers.

JI-HYUN

[Is that your apology?]

ROBIN

[I know, they're nothing special.]

JI-HYUN

[Do you know this flower?]

ROBIN

[No. I thought they looked nice.]

She takes the flowers and looks at them affectionately.

JI-HYUN

[Nobody gave me flowers before.]

INT. SEUNG-MIN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Seung-min sits on the floor with an open school backpack. He has toys lined up, trying to decide between them.

Dong-wan, Mi-sook and Jun-ho hover nearby.

MI-SOOK

You should eat some soup before we leave. It could be our last hot meal for a while.

SEUNG-MIN

No thanks. I don't like it. How many toys can I bring?

DONG-WAN

As many as you can fit in your bag. Hurry now. We need to leave.

Jun-ho sits with Seung-min.

JUN-HO

It's a difficult choice.

SEUNG-MIN

I used to like the T-Rex most. Now I like the triceratops. But they are both my favorites.

JUN-HO

Triceratops has always been my favorite. The three horns look so cool.

SEUNG-MIN

T-Rex was the best predator. They had the most powerful bite.

Seung-min contemplates. It's a big decision for a young boy.

JUN-HO

I never had this many toys when I was your age. You're lucky.

SEUNG-MIN

I have toys but no one to play with. My mommy never plays. She only wants me to study.

JUN-HO

I know how you feel. I always have to study.

SEUNG-MIN

I want my mommy to come back.

JUN-HO

I know...

(pause)

Is there a picture of you and her together?

SEUNG-MIN

Why?

JUN-HO

Because you might not come back here for a long time. Do you have a picture?

SEUNG-MIN

Yes. Many.

Jun-ho stuffs both the T-Rex and triceratops into the backpack.

JUN-HO

I've always been the youngest in my family. Now you're with us, you're the baby.

SEUNG-MIN

I'm not a baby.

JUN-HO

Then, you can be my little brother. Is that okay? I always wanted a little brother.

They stand. Seung-min takes one of the framed photos of him with his parents, passes it to Jun-ho.

MI-SOOK

(to Seung-min)

Go and brush your teeth before we leave.

Seung-min heads into the bathroom.

Jun-ho takes the photo from the frame and passes it to Dong-wan.

JUN-HO

You can write down the location where his mother is buried, so he can come back and visit... if he survives.

Dong-wan takes the photo.

DONG-WAN
Our boy has grown up.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The taxi hurtles along the highway. It passes under road signs for --

"SEOUL" and "INCHEON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT."

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Dong-wan drives. Seung-min is sat on Mi-sook's lap in the passenger seat, pretending to drive with an imaginary steering wheel.

MI-SOOK
How's your hand?

DONG-WAN
It still hurts. You don't have to keep asking.

MI-SOOK
About last night--

DONG-WAN
Forget it. We don't need to bring it up again.

In the back -- Robin sits between Ji-hyun and Jun-ho.

Ji-hyun stares glumly at her wilting cosmos flowers.

MI-SOOK
(to Ji-hyun)
Does he know the meaning of those flowers?

JI-HYUN
I don't think so. How can he?

JUN-HO
What do they mean?

MI-SOOK
Cosmos flowers mean pure love. You give them to someone who you care for deeply.

JI-HYUN
He doesn't know that.

Seung-min begins to fidget.

SEUNG-MIN
I need the bathroom.

DONG-WAN
Can you hold it?

SEUNG-MIN
No. I need to go now.

JUN-HO
I need to go, too.

EXT. HIGHWAY HARD SHOULDER - DAY

Seung-min and Jun-ho relieve themselves behind the parked taxi. The others stretch their legs.

We hear a synchronized BEEPING -- Ji-hyun, Dong-wan and Mi-sook check their phones and see identical GOVERNMENT ALERTS.

MI-SOOK
Oh no.

They stare at Robin. He watches the passing cars, oblivious to the change in mood.

ROBIN
[I never thought of it until now, but there aren't many cars on the road. I guess most people have done their traveling already... I wonder what the roads are like at home.]

MI-SOOK
You have to tell him.

JI-HYUN
What can I say?

Jun-ho and Seung-min return from behind the taxi.

DONG-WAN
Tell him the truth. Lying won't help.

JI-HYUN
I know that.

MI-SOOK
Be gentle. Try not to upset him.

DONG-WAN
He's not a baby.

Robin yawns, still oblivious. He finally notices that they are all staring at him.

ROBIN
[What?]

MI-SOOK
He needs to know.

JI-HYUN
I know! I'm going to tell him!

ROBIN
[What is it?]

JI-HYUN
[A government message.]

She holds up her phone. He squints at the small box of text on the screen.

ROBIN
[About the asteroid?]

JI-HYUN
[No. Can you read it?]

ROBIN
[*Pilsu... yo... yeoha-eng...*]

JI-HYUN
[All airports are closed. No more flights.]

Robin stares blankly at her for a moment as he processes the news.

MI-SOOK
Did you tell him?

JI-HYUN
Yes.

MI-SOOK
Why isn't he speaking?

They watch him and wait for a reaction. He stares out at the road ahead, not a flicker of emotion.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
He has to call his father.

Mi-sook tries to pass her phone to Robin.

JI-HYUN
[She wants you to call.]

ROBIN
[Call?]

JI-HYUN
[Your father.]

ROBIN
[No.]

MI-SOOK
Tell him he must call.

ROBIN
[It's the middle of the night in
England.]

Mi-sook waves the phone before him.

JI-HYUN
[She won't leave you alone until
you do it.]

ROBIN
[Really, I don't want to.]

Mi-sook forces her phone into Robin's hand.

JI-HYUN
He doesn't want to call.

DONG-WAN
Drop it. You can't force him.

MI-SOOK
How would you feel if Jun-ho was on
the other side of the world right
now? You would do anything to hear
his voice.

JI-HYUN
[Why won't you call him?]

ROBIN
[I already have. I called him, left
messages, more than I can count.
Why do I have to keep trying?]

Robin passes the phone back to Mi-sook.

MI-SOOK

But--

ROBIN

[You need to go. Don't worry about me.]

JI-HYUN

[You don't want to come with us?]

ROBIN

[You don't need me with you. The universe wants me to be alone. Tell your parents I appreciate everything.]

JI-HYUN

He thinks we don't want him.

Dong-wan sighs. He opens the taxi door and turns to Robin.

DONG-WAN

Robin...

They all stare at Dong-wan, surprised to hear him use Robin's name.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Get in. You're with us now.

Robin looks to Ji-hyun for help.

JI-HYUN

[He said don't be so stupid. Get in the car.]

She hits him, then pushes him toward the open door.

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Dong-wan drives. Everyone but Seung-min is asleep -- Ji-hyun with her head on Robin's shoulder. Jun-ho with his headphones on. Mi-sook with her head on the window and mouth wide open. Seung-min is sat on her lap.

SEUNG-MIN

Where are we going?

DONG-WAN

A place called Cheongok Cave. Have you heard of it?

SEUNG-MIN

No.

DONG-WAN

It's near Donghae on the coast. My grandparents took me exploring there when I was about your age. It's a big, underground cave.

SEUNG-MIN

A cave?

DONG-WAN

My grandpa always said that he would take me there if the bombs started to fall again. It's safe under the ground.

He notices Seung-min's worried expression.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

SEUNG-MIN

I'm scared of the dark.

DONG-WAN

I was too, back then. Don't worry. You'll be with us.

SEUNG-MIN

And I'm scared of the ocean.

DONG-WAN

You can't swim?

SEUNG-MIN

Because of sharks.

DONG-WAN

There are no sharks in Korean waters. You have nothing to worry about.

SEUNG-MIN

My mommy saw one in Hawaii.

DONG-WAN

You went to Hawaii on vacation?

SEUNG-MIN

Yes.

DONG-WAN

Your father must earn good money. I could never afford to take my family somewhere so expensive.

SEUNG-MIN

My daddy didn't go. He was in China.

Dong-wan looks over and sees the misery on Seung-min's face.

DONG-WAN

Try not to blame your father for being absent. Phone networks were never created to handle situations like this. Millions of people will be making calls.

He watches sleeping Ji-hyun in the rearview mirror.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

I'm lucky that my family is here with me.

Dong-wan turns on the dashboard satellite navigator.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

Can you write hangul?

SEUNG-MIN

Yes.

DONG-WAN

You're a smart boy. I will give you a name to search for...

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - LATER

Seung-min sits on Dong-wan's lap with his hands on the steering wheel. He can barely contain his excitement as he concentrates to keep the taxi steady. Dong-wan controls the pedals.

DONG-WAN

That's it. Keep it straight-- You're doing a good job.

SEUNG-MIN

Can I use the horn?

DONG-WAN

If you want.

Seung-min hits the horn -- *BEEP BEEP BEEEEEEEEEEEP.*

The snoozing passengers wake at the sound. Mi-sook rubs her eyes, sees Seung-min behind the wheel.

MI-SOOK

What the-- What are you doing!?

DONG-WAN

Don't worry. The road is empty here.

SEUNG-MIN

Look at me. I can drive.

MI-SOOK

I don't want to see. Dong-wan, how can you be so irresponsible?

DONG-WAN

Let the boy have some fun. I did the same with Jun-ho when he was young.

MI-SOOK

You did what?

Jun-ho laughs.

DONG-WAN

Only on quiet roads.

JUN-HO

I had to promise not to say anything to you.

Mi-sook shakes her head disappointedly.

MI-SOOK

I hate to think what went on behind by back.

Ji-hyun yawns and closes her eyes again.

Robin stares out at the distant, luscious green mountain range that dominates the landscape.

The road takes them past a large lake, calm and glimmering in the midday sun.

EXT. WONJU ROAD - DAY

The taxi drives slowly along a residential road flanked on each side by tall, yellow-leaved ginkgo trees.

EXT./INT. YONSEI UNIVERSITY MIRAE CAMPUS - CAR PARK/TAXI - DAY

The taxi pulls to a stop in the empty car park, a short walk from the main building.

Dong-wan turns off the engine.

SEUNG-MIN
Are we at the cave?

MI-SOOK
There's no cave here.

Ji-hyun stirs and opens her eyes. Realization dawns on her face. She sits bolt upright.

JI-HYUN
Why did you bring me here?

DONG-WAN
Let me explain--

Ji-hyun opens the door and walks away.

MI-SOOK
Why Dong-wan? You don't know what memories she has of this place.

DONG-WAN
Let me talk to her.

EXT. YONSEI UNIVERSITY MIRAE CAMPUS - MAIN BUILDING - DAY

An incredibly scenic campus -- Decorative trees, perfectly manicured foliage, architecture modeled on American Ivy League colleges to give a feeling of historical significance.

Ji-hyun stands before the university's main building, dwarfed by a row of decorative columns that stand tall and imposing before the entrance.

Dong-wan approaches and stands by her side.

JI-HYUN
I never wanted to come back. Why did you bring me here?

DONG-WAN

I thought confronting the past
would be helpful. But now, I don't
know what to say...

He looks up at the steps to the entrance.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

It seems like yesterday I watched
you walk through those doors. I
felt so proud.

JI-HYUN

Your feelings changed when I
failed. I know how disappointed you
were.

Dong-wan takes a moment to compose himself. He fights his
emotions.

DONG-WAN

I can't change how I acted in the
past... What you said last night
was right. I didn't listen to you
back then.

He shakes his head, clearly ashamed at the memory.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

It seems I have always been deaf
when it comes to the people I care
about.

JI-HYUN

You don't have to talk about it.

DONG-WAN

No. I do. I have to say... Anything
that happened to you here... I'm
sorry.

She is surprised. He looks at his feet, noticeably
uncomfortable as he searches for his next words.

JI-HYUN

Now I don't know what to say.

DONG-WAN

That's okay. I don't need to know
everything. You are allowed your
secrets.

JI-HYUN

What now?

DONG-WAN

I don't know. It was a mistake bringing you here. I thought it would help.

JI-HYUN

We don't have time for me to confront the past.

DONG-WAN

We have as much time as you need.

EXT. YONSEI UNIVERSITY MIRAE CAMPUS - LAWN - DAY

A patch of well-tended grass between the car park and the main building.

Jun-ho and Seung-min sit and play *gonggi* with five small stones that have been scavenged from the car park. Mi-sook watches them.

Robin is stretched out on the grass, staring at the clouds, lost in thought.

Dong-wan sits slightly away from them all, rubbing his hand.

MI-SOOK

She's been gone for a long time. One of us should go look for her.

DONG-WAN

I told her to take as long as she wants.

Mi-sook squints from the sun.

MI-SOOK

My face is going to burn. If we're going to be here for a while, I want my fan from the car.

DONG-WAN

Perhaps we should just stay here.

MI-SOOK

What are you talking about?

DONG-WAN

We can break in. Nobody is here to stop us.

MI-SOOK

What good will it do us to be in there?

DONG-WAN

A big building with thick walls--
It's a good place to give up and wait.

Jun-ho stops playing *gonggi* for a moment.

JUN-HO

We're so close. We can't stop now.

Mi-sook takes Dong-wan's hand, begins to massage it.

MI-SOOK

You're many things, but you're not a quitter.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - LAKE SIDE TRAIL - DAY

A walking trail follows the edge of the lake. It's shaded by tall trees. Leaves glow in the afternoon sun.

Ji-hyun sits alone on a lake facing bench, reading from her diary. It's quiet but for the relaxing sound of a nearby cuckoo that calls for her ears only.

Footsteps approach. She lifts her head to see Robin walking along the trail toward her.

ROBIN

[Here you are.]

JI-HYUN

[Here I am.]

ROBIN

[I didn't think I'd find you. Can I sit?]

JI-HYUN

[Why not?]

ROBIN

[I wasn't sure if you wanted to be left alone.]

He sits beside her.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[It's beautiful here.]

JI-HYUN
[I used to think so. Now it seems
ugly to me. I feel like a ghost in
my own past.]

She stares at the open pages of her diary, the sketch of the professor is on display.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
[We met here.]

ROBIN
[Here? This exact bench?]

JI-HYUN
[He sat next to me. I almost walked
away. My life would be different if
I had.]

ROBIN
[Different, but not necessarily
better. You'll never know.]

JI-HYUN
[I would have met somebody.]
I could be married now, with
children, a home.

ROBIN
[Nothing stopped you from meeting
someone else.]

JI-HYUN
[He did]... He changed me.

A small bird lands before them. They watch it hop and chirp without a care in the world.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
[You didn't look sad when I told
you.]

ROBIN
[Told me what?]

JI-HYUN
[That you can't go home.]

ROBIN
[Oh. Well, I'm not a very emotional
person.]

JI-HYUN
[You feel nothing?]

ROBIN
[Only relief.]

JI-HYUN
[Why did you ask for our help if
you didn't want to go?]

ROBIN
[I had no plan. When I met you all
I...
(pause)
I didn't want to be alone.]

JI-HYUN
Now you have no choice but to be
here with us. A crazy family.

ROBIN
[Huh?]

JI-HYUN
[I said, we are stuck with you
now.]

ROBIN
[I guess so.]

JI-HYUN
[Your father?]

ROBIN
[It's too late. Some things can't
be fixed.]

They stare out at the lake.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I'm glad to end up here with you.
I don't regret it.]

She closes the diary and sets it down on the bench, then
shuffles closer to rest her head on his shoulder.

The diary slides off the bench and falls to the floor. She
doesn't notice.

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Robin drives. Ji-hyun relaxes in the passenger seat.

Jun-ho sits between Dong-wan and Mi-sook in the back. Seung-min sits on Mi-sook's lap.

ROBIN

[We're going to be running on fumes soon. We need to fill up or get there quickly.]

The navigator signals for the next exit. Robin tries to cross lanes. Other cars block them.

DONG-WAN

He needs to get into the exit lane.

The exit is fast approaching. They are still in the wrong lane.

JI-HYUN

[You need to take this exit.]

ROBIN

[I know. I can't get across.]

DONG-WAN

He needs to be more aggressive.

Robin swerves but is blocked.

JI-HYUN

[You have to hurry.]

ROBIN

[I can't get across!]

He tries again. Another car blocks them. It's too late -- They pass the exit.

DONG-WAN

He missed it. Now we're stuck on this route until we can turn.

Robin checks his mirror.

ROBIN

[Okay. Get ready.]

JI-HYUN

[Get ready?]

ROBIN

[Brace yourself. Tell your mum to hold on to Seung-min.]

Ji-hyun turns to the back.

JI-HYUN
Hold him tightly.

MI-SOOK
Why? What's he going to do?

JI-HYUN
I have no idea.

Mi-sook wraps her arms around Seung-min.

Robin breaks sharply. Mi-sook SCREAMS.

Motorists HONK furiously as Robin reverses through the traffic back to the exit.

MI-SOOK
I have to stop expecting any of you
to act normally.

Dong-wan grins his approval.

DONG-WAN
He's fearless now.

INT. TAXI - ON THE ROAD - DAY

They zoom along an empty road. Ji-hyun checks the navigator.

JI-HYUN
We're close.

They travel along the road -- A large BAT SHAPED SIGN comes into view --

"CHEONGOK GOLDEN BAT CAVE"

DONG-WAN
There it is!

Robin pulls into the parking lot.

EXT. CHEONGOK GOLDEN BAT CAVE - ENTRANCE - DAY

A closed administration office and empty ticket booth mark the entrance to the underground cave system. A row of yellow safety helmets hang near the only door. A sign above the door reads -- "The Mouth of the Cave."

They all stare at the underwhelming sight, looking thoroughly unimpressed.

JUN-HO
This is it?

DONG-WAN
Yes.

JUN-HO
Really?

Dong-wan remains quiet.

Robin takes one of the safety helmets, turns the flashlight on and off, looks at the painted logo.

ROBIN
[It's a tourist attraction. I thought... I don't know what I thought.]

JI-HYUN
[It's not what I imagined.]

SEUNG-MIN
Where's the cave?

DONG-WAN
Through that door.

SEUNG-MIN
Are we going in?

DONG-WAN
It's locked.

MI-SOOK
We came all this way to be beaten
by a locked door.

Dong-wan shakes the door. It's strong and firm. He slams his shoulder into it, and again, and again. He begins to lose control. There is a desperation to his actions. Worry in his voice.

DONG-WAN
It will open...
(slam)
It will open...
(slam)
It has to open...

ROBIN
[Should I help him?]

Ji-hyun doesn't answer. They watch him with pity, unsure what to do.

Dong-wan slams the door a final time, then stops to rub his shoulder.

DONG-WAN

I need something to lever it open--

MI-SOOK

Stop.

Dong-wan turns to face Mi-sook. She takes his hand.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

You don't need to do this. I don't want to sit in a cold, wet cave, with nothing to eat but packets of dry ramen noodles, waiting for the world to end.

JI-HYUN

Me too.

JUN-HO

Same here.

SEUNG-MIN

I'm scared of the dark.

DONG-WAN

But, we travelled all this way for nothing...

His words are true but difficult to digest.

MI-SOOK

It wasn't meaningless. Your decision gave us one last trip together. I wouldn't change it.

She leads Seung-min away. Jun-ho follows, then Ji-hyun and Robin.

Dong-wan stares at the door.

DONG-WAN

Son of a bitch.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Robin tries to start the engine -- It chokes, splutters, doesn't start.

ROBIN
[We're not going anywhere.]

JI-HYUN
What now?

She looks at Dong-wan. He has nothing left.

MI-SOOK
We could push it to a gas station.

JI-HYUN
We don't know where the nearest gas station is. It's too heavy to push around looking for one.

JUN-HO
Let's find another car to take.

MI-SOOK
No. We're not doing that again.

DONG-WAN
We don't need a car anymore. It's too late.

JI-HYUN
So, what do we do?

EXT. DONGHAE STREETS - DAY

They walk through the small coastal town. Dong-wan, Jun-ho and Ji-hyun carry some boxes salvaged from the taxi. Mi-sook carries her prized rice cooker. Seung-min has his backpack.

Robin trails slightly behind with a bed sheet and two pillows under his arms.

ROBIN
[Was it necessary to bring the pillows?]

JI-HYUN
[My mother wants to keep them. They are memory foam.]

They pass a small playground --

A group of ELDERY MEN sit on a wooden pagoda, drinking soju, playing cards. They stop to watch the group walk past.

MI-SOOK
I'm tired Dong-wan.

Dong-wan stops. He looks around to find his bearings.

ELDERLY MAN
You look lost.

DONG-WAN
I haven't been here in many years.
What's in this direction?

ELDERLY MAN
Nothing but the ocean.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

They stand on the street, looking out at the stretch of beach before them --

CHILDREN run and play. A group of YOUNG MEN kick a football back and forth. Young and old COUPLES sit in each other's arms. Whole FAMILIES sit together under parasols.

MI-SOOK
Look how many people are here. I
can't believe my eyes.

DONG-WAN
Nobody wants to be trapped inside.
Not now.

MI-SOOK
It's a beautiful day. I can't
remember the last time we were all
at the beach together.

Dong-wan walks out onto the sand. Without a word, the others follow him.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Robin and Mi-sook stretch out the bed sheet. They all sit.

Dong-wan pulls off his shoes and socks, rolls up his trouser legs, pushes his toes into the sand.

DONG-WAN
I needed a vacation.

Seung-min watches other children building a sandcastle near the shore.

MI-SOOK
You should go and play with them.

Seung-min excitedly takes the toys dinosaurs from his backpack.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

Stay where I can see you... And be careful in the water.

She watches him run toward the shore and join the other children.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)

What will we do with him?

DONG-WAN

That decision can wait. We have to survive first.

He lies down and closes his eyes.

MI-SOOK

So, we're staying here?

DONG-WAN

For now.

Jun-ho looks out at the infinite ocean.

JUN-HO

I want to swim.

JI-HYUN

Why don't you?

JUN-HO

No swimming shorts.

JI-HYUN

Go in your underwear.

JUN-HO

And let all these people see me?

Ji-hyun laughs.

JI-HYUN

[My brother wants to swim but is scared to take his clothes off.]

Robin scans the beach -- There isn't a great deal of skin on show.

ROBIN

[Well, desperate times call for desperate measures.]

He stands and begins to strip to his briefs.

MI-SOOK

Oh my.

She covers her eyes but peeks through her fingers.

JI-HYUN

[Aren't you embarrassed?]

ROBIN

[It's just a body. Nobody cares.]

Robin stands, pale and foreign.

The beach activity seems to stop suddenly -- Heads turn, eyes stare, all focused on Robin the curiosity. He cups his crotch.

JI-HYUN

[Are you sure?]

ROBIN

[No.]

He looks down at Jun-ho.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[Are you coming or not?]

Jun-ho is encouraged. He stands and begins to strip.

MI-SOOK

Dong-wan, make him stop. These people will think we're exhibitionists.

Dong-wan smiles, doesn't open his eyes.

Jun-ho is quickly down to his superhero briefs.

ROBIN

[I'll race you.]

They sprint off, leaving the others laughing at the sight of their pale bodies racing to the sea.

EXT. BEACH ROCKS - DAY

Robin, clothed and damp, and Ji-hyun sit together on a rock. The sea laps against the rock below their dangling feet.

ROBIN

[What are you thinking about?]

JI-HYUN

[That I thought I would be scared to die.]

ROBIN

[You're not?]

JI-HYUN

[Now I don't have to worry about dying sick or dying alone. It's all over. It's out of our control.]

ROBIN

[I just hope it's quick.]

JI-HYUN

[Are you scared?]

ROBIN

[No. Not really. It doesn't feel real.]

JI-HYUN

[I wonder what will happen to all the bodies? Nobody will bury us.]

ROBIN

[Some people will survive. Maybe one day our skeletons will be on display in a museum.]

JI-HYUN

[It's good to be remembered.]

ROBIN

[Not for me. I'd rather we both turn into dust and the wind blows us away.]

Something in his words affect her. She kisses him, softly at first, pulling away before he tries to fall into passion.

He waits for a response. She reveals nothing.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

[So...?]

JI-HYUN

[It was...] Better than I expected.

ROBIN
[What does that mean?]

She smiles.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The sun is not long from setting. Small fires have been lit on the beach.

Dong-wan hums as he throws pieces of drift wood onto a small fire. Mi-sook sits by him.

Jun-ho and Seung-min share a pillow, relaxed and content.

Robin and Ji-hyun sit close together. She holds onto his arm. They watch the fire as it cracks and pops.

DONG-WAN
(singing)
*"On the days that I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come--"*

ROBIN
(singing in Korean)
"--into full bloom."

They all stare at Robin, impressed by his near perfect pronunciation.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[Don't look so surprised.]

MI-SOOK
Robin should sing an English song.

JI-HYUN
[She wants you to sing.]

ROBIN
[No way. I'm a terrible singer. Let
you dad finish his song.]

JI-HYUN
Father, he wants you to sing.

DONG-WAN
I don't want to embarrass you all.

JUN-HO
I want to hear it. Please.

SEUNG-MIN

Me too.

Dong-wan finishes throwing the drift wood onto the fire. He clears his throat --

DONG-WAN

(sings)

*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come into full
bloom. My song that flew away in
the winds, comes back to me as
whistles..."*

Heads turn to watch. Dong-wan takes Mi-sook's hand, pulls her closer, puts an arm around her.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

*"Memories pile up in my small room.
Tears wet my eyes, but I don't know
why..."*

Every person on the beach has stopped to listen.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

*"Even though I gather each and
every small piece of my heart, and
write a poem, no such poem is
enough to describe you..."*

Dong-wan stares at Mi-sook.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)

*"I'll become dust and fly away, fly
away in the wind to your side. I
gather each and every small piece
of my heart together, and write a
poem, but no such poem is enough to
describe you. I'll become dust and
fly away, fly away in the wind to
your side."*

With the last word the beach falls silent but for the sound of the gentle tide lapping the shore.

Nobody says a word.

The moment washes away with the waves. Around the beach -- People turn back to their families and conversations.

Robin takes Ji-hyun's hand and grips it tightly.

He looks up at the night sky and stares at the distant glowing asteroid that seems to hang in the darkness.

FADE OUT.

THE END

PART 3: PERMISSIONS, ANXIETIES AND STRATEGIES OF WRITING FOR KOREAN AUDIENCES AS A NON-KOREAN SCREENWRITER

3.1 Introduction

What permission do I have to write a Korean screenplay as a non-Korean screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to navigate internalised and externalised notions of permission when writing about a cultural group as an outsider? Embracing the transcultural label in the context of my screenwriting practice signifies a deliberate commitment to prioritise the act of moving physically and imaginatively beyond the borders of a single cultural perspective. Nonetheless, when endeavouring to cross cultural borders and craft a Korean screenplay as a non-Korean screenwriter, one inevitably encounters a unique set of challenges and apprehensions. Within the following chapter, I will address the notion of ‘permission’—the right to write a narrative set in Korea that represents Korean people and their cultural concerns—a subject that demands active engagement as a cultural outsider in Korea. Herein, I will explore the internalised and externalised notions of permission that challenge my practice when representing Korea and its people as a cultural ‘outsider’ and offer a rationale to justify my right to write a Korean screenplay.

In pursuit of a comprehensive examination of this issue, I will scrutinise extracts from different versions of my screenplay, *Into Dust*, to analyse the strategies employed to counter the anxieties identified. The overarching objective of this chapter is to contribute fresh insights by conducting a thorough investigation into the permission-related anxieties of my practice, thus adding to the greater narrative of representation in the realm of transcultural screenwriting.

3.2 Permission and the Right to Write in Transcultural Screenwriting Contexts

We recognise permission as an act of officiality that grants the consent and authorisation to do something. However, permission is complex in the ‘ecosystem of creativity’ (Bollier 2004: 268). Imagining and representing the experiences of people different from oneself is

a prerequisite of creative writing. In the formation of transcultural narratives, as Dagnino posits (2015: 184-191), representing people from different cultural backgrounds is an unavoidable aspect of a practice that involves comprehending and weaving together different cultural identities and perspectives to offer a more nuanced portrayal of human experience, reflecting the intricacies of a globalised world where different cultures intersect and interact. But it is unrealistic, even impossible, to gain official authorisation to write characters belonging to a different ethnic, racial, cultural, or gender identity than our own. As creative writers, we must set the conditions that authorise us to write our chosen stories and set the parameters that govern what we write.

If permission in creative writing is self-granted, I feel it is vital to explain why I, a non-Korean screenwriter, permit myself to write a screenplay representing Korean people and culture. In this time of globality, it is unrealistic to assume that people will remain rooted in their birth nation, adhering to a single set of national and cultural norms within impermeable borders. Transnational migration is common, and people can simultaneously belong to two or more societies (Levitt 2004). I am a British citizen but a long-term Korean resident through marriage, and I consider Korea my home. By drawing on the conditions of my existence, the stories I write will engage with my transcultural experience, and the characters I create will reframe and reshape the people I call family, friends, co-workers, and neighbours.

Moreover, I have devoted considerable time and effort to cultivating transcultural competence, which entails the acquisition of essential skills necessary to portray Korea and Koreans as a non-Korean. To Slimbach (2005: 206-207), a transculturally competent individual should possess the following six competencies:

1. Perspective consciousness: This involves the ability to critically examine one's cultural assumptions and ethical judgments, enabling the development of a mindset that perceives the world through the perspective of the mind and emotions of others.
2. Ethnographic skill: The ability to keenly observe social behaviour, effectively manage stress, and foster genuine connections and friendships across cultures.
3. Global awareness: A fundamental awareness of transnational conditions, systems, ideologies and institutions that influence the quality of life within in a cultural group and shape their decision-making processes.

4. World learning: Transcultural competence necessitates direct, immersive experiences with contrasting political histories, family lifestyles, social groups, arts, religions, and cultural orientations, primarily gained through immersed interaction within another culture.
5. Foreign language proficiency: A threshold-level proficiency in spoken, non-verbal, and written communication systems used by members of another cultural group.
6. Affective development: This facet refers to the capacity to demonstrate personal qualities and emotions such as empathy, inquisitiveness, initiative, flexibility, humility, sincerity, gentleness, justice, and joy when navigating the intercultural context in which one is living and learning.

Slimbach's model of the ideal transculturally competent person serves as a valuable checklist to assess one's capacity to authentically represent the people and experiences of a different cultural group. It emphasises that transcultural competence can be cultivated through a combination of knowledge acquisition and immersive, immediate, and emotional engagement with individuals from another cultural background. A pertinent example is the Iranian writer-director Asghar Farhadi and his film *Everybody Knows* (Farhadi 2019). In various interviews, Farhadi has emphasized his ambition was to create a film that offers an outsider's view of Spain, a country he found resonating with many cultural parallels to his native Iran (Deleyto 2019: 73). While some may argue that an outsider's perspective might lack depth or nuance, Farhadi's dedication to transcultural competence is evident in the decisions he made throughout the filmmaking process. Farhadi spent two years in Spain, immersing himself in the language, people, and culture during the writing process. The film was meticulously set in Spain, shot in the Spanish language, and featured a predominantly Spanish ensemble¹.

As with many films that endeavour to cross cultural boundaries, *Everybody Knows* did not escape criticism. Following its debut at the Cannes Film Festival, the film received mixed reviews, with some critiques pointing to Farhadi's supposed unfamiliarity with his chosen setting (Deleyto 2019: 73). Such criticisms, however, were not universal. Spanish

¹ Argentinian actor Ricardo Darín plays the Argentinian character, Alejandro.

audiences, arguably the most discerning regarding representations of their culture, lauded the film for its genuine portrayal (Izadi 2019). Critics, on reflection, have begun to recognize the film's unique positioning. It captures the transnational essence deeply embedded in Spanish culture, blending it seamlessly into a localized narrative (Deleyto 2019: 74). What sets this film apart is its origin: the lens of a cultural outsider from Iran, directing a tale rooted in Spain.

While Farhadi could have written the film without immersing himself in Spanish culture, his commitment to becoming transculturally competent allowed him to produce a cinematic work that truthfully and fairly represents Spain and its people. The appreciation from Spanish audiences highlights the nuance with which Farhadi approached the subject, showcasing a Spain that is multifaceted and deeply real, showcasing a profound understanding of Spanish culture without enforcing stereotypes or making unsubstantiated claims—an objective that I posit transcultural screenwriting should aim to achieve.

Nonetheless, while I may confidently assert my transcultural competence—my 'insider knowledge' and sense of 'belonging'—there remains a degree of awareness that I am a cultural outsider when I write about Korea and its populace. Thus, I am positioned in a dual role as both an insider and an outsider in relation to Korea, and there may be judgements regarding the right to write outside the parameters of my cultural identity that should be negotiated and not ignored. As Shamsie observes, if you begin with an attitude that disregards or inadequately understands the powerful reasons for people to dispute your right to tell a story, reasons stemming from historical, political, or social imbalances, you have immediately failed to understand the place and people you want to represent (2016). Writers engaged in transcultural pursuits are impelled not only to acknowledge but also negotiate these judgements. I can declare my right to write about Korea but must accept that others may evaluate and judge my work. Thus, the internalised and externalised notions of permission inherent in transcultural writing produce tension within my practice and give rise to attendant anxieties.

3.3 Identifying Anxieties in Transcultural Screenwriting: A Non-Korean Perspective on Writing a Korean Screenplay

Anxiety can play a significant role in the creative process, influencing the approaches and attitudes of practitioners. A seminal study exploring the psychological effects of creativity (Daker et al. 2020) highlights the concerns and challenges that can be encountered during the creative process. The study findings identify that while anxiety can act as an impediment, preventing practitioners from fully realising their creative capacities, it can concurrently serve as a catalyst for heightened alertness and sensitivity. This dual role allows practitioners to notice details that they might otherwise overlook in a more relaxed state.

Identifying anxieties has values in the realm of screenwriting research, a space where introspection and self-reflection are paramount, where first and foremost the ‘role of the screenwriter must be framed and articulated’ (Batty and Baker 2018: 75). Sternberg (2014: 204) further posits that ‘analytical insights of screenwriters into their practice offer additional pathways for future writers and researchers’. Ergo, by meticulously dissecting the undercurrents of tension and anxiety inherent to my creative practice—particularly those arising from internalised and externalised notions of permission—and by recognizing them as intrinsic facets of the creative journey, there emerges a promising avenue to create knowledge through the development of navigational strategies.

The first anxiety to identify relates to my outsider status and internal notions of permission, which gives rise to apprehensions regarding accuracy and authenticity when writing a Korean screenplay. I am not Korean and have not experienced and absorbed Korean culture the same way as my target audience. This internal judgement prompts me to question my capacity to depict Korea faithfully, leading to concerns that I am unwittingly misrepresenting or making assumptions about a group to which I do not belong, despite my efforts in cultivating transcultural competencies.

In addition to my internal judgement, I also content with external notions of permission as it is conceivable that Korean audiences may view my work as lacking authenticity due to my non-Korean background and the absence of shared cultural experience. It is crucial to recognise that Korea’s historical context adds to these concerns, as it has been a profoundly nationalistic and conservative nation, where ethnic homogeneity

has significantly influenced the shaping of a shared national identity (Lee 1986; Hurt 2014; Shin 2006). Notably, many Koreans view the notions of race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and citizenship as inherently interconnected (Watson, 2012: 234), meaning that, regardless of my insider knowledge of Korean culture, I might not escape the outsider label, further complicating my engagement with the subject matter. Within this context, I remain acutely aware of a certain right-wing sensibility that challenges ‘the authority of the outsider [...] to speak ‘truth’’ (Heffelfinger and Wright 2011: 167). This viewpoint holds that non-Koreans, by virtue of not sharing the lived experiences that shape Korean culture, lack the ability to fully appreciate the nuances and complexities in full and, therefore, should refrain from writing about Korean cultural topics to preserve the integrity of traditional values and cultural expressions.

McAulay’s perspective interrogates the complexities inherent in transcultural screenwriting, particularly the tension between insider and outsider status in relation to a cultural group. His extensive period of residence in Japan, proficiency in the language, and familial connections afford him an intimate perspective, enabling him to adopt an inclusive ‘we’ when discussing Japanese culture, as opposed to an alienating ‘them’ (2017: 16). Yet, his identity as a *gaijin*—a term denoting an outsider—complicates his role, casting him as an external observer and calling into question the authenticity of his screenplays that depict Japanese narratives. McAulay addresses this by embracing the concept of ‘inbetweenness’, embodying both insider and outsider roles, arguing for a dualistic identity that allows for a nuanced portrayal of Japanese culture, which enriches the narrative and overall veracity of his screen stories (McAulay, 2017: 144-145).

Nevertheless, a prevalent argument persists that practitioners should not create characters from cultural backgrounds different from their own, an issue that warrants careful consideration. It forms the argument made by August Wilson as to why his stage play *Fences* (1991), a story depicting the African American experience, could only be adapted for film by an African American director who shared the cultural responsibilities of his characters. In Wilson’s argument, African American culture ‘was honed out of the black experience and fired in the kiln of slavery and survival’ and therefore, ‘someone who does not share the specifics of a culture remains an outsider, no matter how astute a student or how well-meaning their intentions’ (Wilson 1990: 25).

While I concur that a narrative so intricately interwoven with black American culture would benefit from a director who shares the same cultural perspective as the characters—proven when *Fences* (Washington 2016) was eventually adapted—this argument overlooks the potential value an outsider’s perspective can bring. It is also the case that each example has its own cultural climate to consider—here the troubled legacies of problematic representations of African American stories in American media and the racial imbalance of power in the creation of these narratives (I will be addressing my own grappling with Anglo-Korean orientalist cultural legacies later in this section). For Bakhtin, ‘[b]eing an outsider is an advantageous position for understanding insides’ (1986: 7). While possessing a cultural affinity with the subject matter can be advantageous, embracing one’s perspective as a cultural outsider—one who does not inherently possess the cultural characteristics, such as ethnicity, national identity, or customary practices, of the group in focus (Miller 2014)—can enrich transcultural narratives by providing an external perspective which may reveal aspects of a culture that are potentially invisible or underappreciated by its insiders. That said, I cannot completely ignore that my cultural sensibilities are not fully aligned with those of my Korean characters, and there is the persistent concern that nothing can provide me with the experience of how it ‘feels’ to be Korean.

However, it is pertinent to highlight society’s more heterodox aspects and acknowledge that there is no such thing as a wholly monolithic Korean identity with which to align. Those who live their entire lives in rural communities, such as Hadong, or on small coastal islands, such as Namhae or Hongdo, develop a perspective of place and culture that will differ significantly from those who live in a sprawling and densely populated modern metropolis like Seoul. There are also specific regional differences to contend with in Korea, such as ‘significant gaps among regions in terms of economic development and public and educational services’ (Han 2022: 7). Regional segmentation impacts how citizens relate to each other and the notion of being Korean. For example, Gyeonggi-do Province, located in the west-central area of the Korean peninsula, is the nation’s most populous region and economic, political and cultural centre. Located in the nation’s south, the more rural regions of Jeolla Province and North Gyeongsang Province experience high poverty rates, poor infrastructure, and a lack of development (Park 2019).

A comparison can be made with the North-South divide that dissects England, rendering the two halves economically, socially, and culturally different.

Another factor that impacts Korean identity is that the nation has changed dramatically over the last sixty years to the point where contemporary society is barely recognisable from that of the recent past. Sook-jong Lee describes Korean society as ‘four political generations who have spent their formative years in vastly different socio-political conditions’ (2021: 1). First, there is the nation’s elderly population that came of age during the Korean War (1950 to 1953) and post-war years. Second, there is the in-between generation, the Democratisation Generation, born in the 1960s and who gained notoriety for political activism during Korea’s democratisation in the 1980s. Both demographics grew up in a society based on subsistence agriculture, with a GDP per capita income ranking it as one of the world’s poorest nations. Third, there is the first post-democratisation generation, or Generation X, who are now in their forties and know a Korea without the extreme poverty and social chaos of previous generations. Finally, there is the New Generation of young people in their twenties and thirties, who grew up in an affluent Korean society and have experienced only prosperity but face increasing economic angst (Lee 2021: 1).

Such rapid development means that the current generation of ‘twenty-somethings’—known in Korea as the *isipdae*—have been shaped in a context that is entirely different from any preceding generations. As Campbell notes:

[The *isipdae*] have grown up knowing only a democratic, economically prosperous and stable South Korea. These young people have no memory of relatives and family in the North, and no experience of the authoritarian era or the democracy movement. They are highly educated, well-traveled, technologically savvy, and fashion-conscious, and their life experiences are different in almost every way to that of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations (2016: 2-3).

The *isipdae* define themselves and their national identity in a way unfamiliar to the older generations. They have a different relationship with culture, a different experience of how it feels to be Korean and are developing a global mindset. This mindset is echoed in a study by Kang et al. (2014), which indicates that younger Koreans with access to better education, overseas travel, and exposure to foreign cultures are more open to foreigners and

multicultural families than older generations. While I experience Korean in a distinctive way, I feel much more in tune with the international sensibilities of the younger generation.

This intergenerational conversation is situated within the narrative of my screenplay, wherein Dong-wan and Mi-sook, representing the older generation, grapple with the notion of foreignness embodied by Robin, contrasting with the more accepting attitudes displayed by twentysomething, Ji-hyun, and teenager, Jun-ho. Robin's presence in the narrative delves into the ongoing and pertinent debate on multiculturalism in contemporary Korean society. As Yoon (2009) identifies, one feature of the debate revolves around the imperative of fostering integration and understanding between the native populace and immigrants, given Korea's increasing status as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society. My narrative also aligns with the elements of the debate underscored by Kim et al. (2017), who scrutinise the impact of immigration on national identity and cultural heritage. Their analysis exposes instances of discrimination and xenophobia directed at immigrants, thereby raising questions about how Korea can develop new concepts of national identity and systems of social integration. My presence in Korea as a settled migrant situates me as an internal participant in the debate, thus emboldening my capacity to meaningfully engage with the intricate socio-cultural themes like cross-cultural communication and the migrant experience from the perspective of a foreign resident of Korea.

The second anxiety I identify pertains to the historical baggage of the Orientalist narrative, which not only frames my work but also influences my internalised and externalised notions of permission when writing about Korea from the perspective of a Western screenwriter. Although there are very few Western screenwriters representing Korea specifically, I cannot avoid association with those who have preceded me in the representation of East Asian cultures. I approached the writing of *Into Dust* with a concern that my screenplay could be regarded as an Orientalist text due to my context as a Western screenwriter writing East Asian characters. *Into Dust* can be critiqued alongside other Orientalist screenplays, and the notion of this association is problematic.

Past and present factors place Korea differently than other nations once perceived as 'the Orient'. Korea is one of the few countries that have escaped European control and sphere of influence, avoiding European domination partly due to its strength, diplomacy, and isolationist policies (Bridges 1992: 314-316). Korea did not enter the Western

imperialist project, the ideological ‘system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western Empire’ (Said 2003: 202-203). Therefore, the issue for me is not a history of explicit Western orientalisering of Korea but the pervasiveness and inescapability of the broader Orientalist narrative. As Kim notes in her research, it is hard to deny that Orientalism continues to affect the thoughts and actions of Westerners today, consciously, or not (2019: 168-171).

Problems of representation dominate discussions of East Asian female characters in Western film and television. Marchetti states that ‘Hollywood has long been fascinated by Asia, Asians, and Asian themes. Mysterious and exotic, Hollywood’s Asia promises adventure and forbidden pleasure’ (1993: 1). Orientalist stereotypes were formed during the earliest days of Hollywood and have remained prominent in the Western representation of Asian females. The docile, subservient, and submissive ‘lotus blossom’ is a stereotype that stretches back to Cio-Cio-san (Mary Pickford) in the first screen adaptation of *Madame Butterfly* (Olcott 1915) but is observable in the innocent but promiscuous Asian teens who are sleeping with their white high school sports coach in *Mean Girls* (Waters 2004). A contrasting stereotype, the sinister and seductive ‘dragon lady’ who will stop at nothing to achieve her goals, was established with Princess Ling Moy (Anna May Wong) in *Daughter of the Dragon* (Corrigan 1931) but more recently with Ling Woo (Lucy Liu) in *Ally McBeal* (Fox 1997-2002) and Qiu (Bai Ling) in *Taxi 3* (Krawczyk 2003), with all characters perpetuating an image of the sexual but dangerous Asian woman.

Seethaler emphasises that, whether quiet and submissive or seductive and threatening, the stereotypes mentioned above ‘are marked by the sexualisation of Asian woman’s bodies’ (2013: 117). This fetishisation has been strikingly obvious, such as the ambiguous Asian twins ‘Fook Mi’ and ‘Fook Yu’ from *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (Roach 2002), who have Chinese-sounding names that English speakers can mistake for vulgarities but appear as hyper-eroticised versions of Japanese Harajuku girls. Such unrestrained hyper-sexualization of Asian women may be less noticeable as Hollywood matures with political correctness, yet the sexualisation and fetishisation of Asian females remain an issue. As Hillenbrand notes:

For women, the representational possibilities continue to be defined, and delimited, in erotic terms. Thus, geisha girls, dragon ladies, China dolls, Miss Saigon/Madame Butterfly, and single Asian females seeking their white knights are still the major blueprint—all highly fevered but barely differentiated creations of the white male mind as it pursues fantasies of sexual otherness that are as old as empire itself (2008: 50).

Where do I locate my practice and PhD in this discussion? After all, I am investigating the writing of a Korean screenplay, and I do not need to justify the use of Korean characters in a story set in Korea. The issue is how this history of stereotyping impacts my perspective. There have been negative Asian stereotypes in Hollywood. Although these antiquated stereotypes may have been spawned by white male minds pursuing fantasies of sexual otherness and historical prejudices that precede my practice, I have been a viewer of the stereotypes my entire life, growing up in Britain, a Western nation where Hollywood is a dominant cultural force. It is reasonable to expect that Orientalist stereotypes have formed unconscious biases that may impact my practice.

The framing of my work within the historical Orientalist narrative, coupled with the unavoidable intertextuality with other Orientalist screenplays, presents significant concerns. My response is a self-imposed mandate to write a screenplay with no Orientalist tendencies, which meant recognising and avoiding Orientalist tropes, aesthetics, and stereotypes that would misrepresent Korea and Koreans. I had to be aware of previous Orientalist writing and legacies and not let their influence encumber my practice. Ultimately, my aim was not to write an anti-Orientalist script but to write responsibly and avoid the Orientalist pitfalls of scripts written by past Western writers. However, regardless of my intentions, the fact that *Into Dust* was written by a non-Korean screenwriter means there is no guarantee that Korean culture will avoid misrepresentation on some level.

This chapter continues by examining the portrayal of Korean and non-Korean characters in *Into Dust*, delving into the strategies employed to address the concerns surrounding the internalised and externalised notions of permission that have been discussed thus far.

3.4 Engaging with Sociocultural Issues to Represent Korean Female Experiences

Restating a prior assertion within this thesis, the acquisition of transcultural competence equips a screenwriter with the experience and knowledge essential for crafting narratives representing a cultural group without perpetuating stereotypes or making unsubstantiated claims about said culture. Slimbach highlights a facet of transcultural competence is awareness of the systems, ideologies, issues, and dilemmas that impact the members of a cultural group and shape their overall quality of life and interpersonal relationships (2005: 206-207). This notion is supported by Trompenaars and Woolliams (2004: 296-297), who underscore the capacity to recognise, respect and appreciate the nuanced intricacies of cultural issues and dilemmas as an essential factor of being a transculturally competent person, able to operate effectively within the contemporary global community. I will attempt to demonstrate how I tried to develop my cultural competence to meaningfully represent plausible female experiences within the screenplay. I will demonstrate how my further reading, research and lived experience informed *Into Dust*.

The judgement of whether a screenplay is authentic or not is complex and open to interpretation. Consequently, the pursuit of definable authenticity can be an unnecessary pressure for a screenwriter, and it is more beneficial to precisely consider what authenticity means to our practice. When writing a Korean screenplay, I want essential narrative elements, such as story and characters, to be culturally authentic for Korean spectators. The various sociocultural issues that are engaged throughout my narrative, such as interracial relationship prejudices, perception of immigrants, patriarchal power, parental educational expectations, gender inequality, and abortion, have potentially universal relevance but are particularly pertinent in present-day Korea. Engaging with sociocultural issues provides sources of dramatic conflict that I need as a screenwriter, but they are also markers of cultural authenticity that Korean spectators will recognise and connect with, even if they disagree with my stance. As this critical commentary cannot comprehensively examine each sociocultural issue my screenplay explores, I will identify and examine specific trends and issues with which Ji-hyun's story engages.

As with any fictional character, Ji-hyun does not represent an essential experience of her cultural identity. She is not an everywoman embodying all that it is to be female in Korea, but aspects of her story touch upon themes of the Korean female experience because

I identified and chose to use them for their narrative function. My research targeted the communal pressures on females in contemporary Korean society, where traditional social and political values are not easily supplanted by modernisation. As Lief Palley notes:

Despite rapid transition into becoming a modern industrial society, there are cultural and social values that are sometimes used to justify social institutions and expectations that arose in the earlier eras [...] While the material culture in South Korea has modernised and has been affected by Western influences, its behavioural culture maintains and embraces some Confucian traditions, and it is slow to change. Part of this behavioural culture is reflected in the inequalities in women's roles (1990: 1137).

Gender inequality is a major topic for debate in contemporary Korea. The film *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* (Kim 2019), based on the novel by author Cho Nam-joo, sparked controversy on the issue of gender inequality in society. The titular character is not openly feminist or fighting the patriarchy as a feminist crusader. Instead, her narrative gradually exposes experiences of being a Korean woman, engaging with casual everyday sexism, feelings of being voiceless, systemic gender inequality and the trauma of digital sex crimes. She does not challenge sexism, inequality, or harassment but accepts them with a matter-of-factness as a young woman navigating life in a patriarchal society.

Despite its popularity, *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*, became a polarising narrative in Korea. Some argued that the story exaggerates gender-based bias, explaining the intense backlash from male commentators of fringe online communities who claim that they are 'the victims of reverse sexism' and that 'male privilege is a myth' (Lee 2018). The issue of gender inequality and its anti-feminist backlash were crucial factors during the 2022 presidential campaign. The rhetoric of candidate and eventual winner Yoon Suk-yeol of the conservative 'People Power Party' appealed to men anxious about losing power to women, as reported in *Time* magazine:

Yoon called for the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to be abolished and accused its officials of treating men like potential sex criminals. He has blamed the country's low birth rate on feminism—saying that feminism prevents healthy relationships between men and women. He also said that he doesn't think systemic

structural discrimination based on gender exists in South Korea—despite Korean women being at or near the bottom of the developed world in a host of economic and social indicators (Gunia 2022).

Undoubtedly, the issue of gender inequality holds utmost relevance for contemporary audiences in Korea, rendering it a subject that invites exploration.

Looking now at extracts from *Into Dust*, Ji-hyun’s social status is first alluded to when she and Robin are alone:

```
                JI-HYUN
[You must be a teacher.]

                ROBIN
[Yeah. I was at a middle school
before all this happened. What
about you?]

                JI-HYUN
[I was working in a coffee shop.]

                ROBIN
[Really?]

                JI-HYUN
[You don't believe me?]

                ROBIN
[I believe you. I just figured
you'd have a government job or work
in a bank, you know, seeing as you
speak English so well.]

                JI-HYUN
[You sound like my father.]
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.19.

The revelation that Ji-hyun works in a service role is essential as Robin assumes that she will have a career that reflects her education and impressive foreign language proficiency. Ji-hyun embodies how ‘Korean women today are better educated than ever’ (Choi 2018: 59), a consequence of modernisation and traditional educational expectations. While high educational expectations and difficulties gaining employment are not gender-based in Korea, Ji-hyun’s social status highlights that ‘the exceptional educational attainments of Korean women [...] have not yet succeeded in ensuring equally high achievements in the Korean labour market’ (Choi 2018: 59). Women must navigate the notoriously competitive education system and job market and suffer similar pressures as their male counterparts to attain academic success and forge a successful career. Ji-hyun works in a coffee shop and

suggests that her employment status is an issue with her father, who presumably is dissatisfied with her lack of career.

The relationship between Ji-hyun and Dong-wan is key to her narrative and the themes that I wished to explore. They are presented without a positive father-daughter bond. Although Ji-hyun is an adult, past educational expectations are foundational to the conflict between them, as is explored in the argument scene of the narrative's midpoint:

DONG-WAN
No, don't stop now. Tell me how I ruined your lives. This could be your last chance.

Uncomfortable silence for a beat.

JI-HYUN
You did the same to me.

DONG-WAN
What?

JI-HYUN
I wanted to go to a university close to home. You didn't listen to me.

DONG-WAN
I wanted you at a good university. I'm no different to any other father in Korea.

JI-HYUN
You didn't care where I went to study. All you cared about was impressing your friends.

DONG-WAN
I cared about your education. Do you know how expensive it was?

JI-HYUN
I didn't want to leave home. I begged you many times. You ignored me.

DONG-WAN
Next you'll blame me for your poor grades. All that money spent so you can pour coffees.

Ji-Hyun begins to cry. Mi-Sook shuffles closer to comfort her.

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.20-21.

The sequence in Seung-min's apartment has a vital narrative function, providing the burst of energy that pushes the story into the next stage. The argument is crucial as the moment when Ji-hyun and Dong-wan finally expose their feelings, fracturing their already strained relationship so that it can be repaired later in the narrative.

The issue that sparks conflict in this scenario is genuine. 'Competition for good school and university places that provide access to secure well-paid careers starts early in Korea [and] many parents invest in supplementary, private education to position their

children [...] for entrance into Korea's prestigious schools and universities' (OECD 2019: 11). Nevertheless, the struggle to get ahead is an issue as 'Korean parents face education costs that are well above the OECD average' (OECD 2019: 11). As an interviewee notes, 'Korean parents have high expectations of their children. I think higher than [...] in Western countries. Education is so serious here, that's why we have many student suicides. If she went to a good university and didn't graduate well, and then worked in a coffee shop, her father would think she failed' (Appendix A: 268). Dong-wan has high expectations and is bitter that his financial dedication to Ji-hyun's education did not result in a successful career. Contrastingly, Ji-hyun is still unhappy that she was forced to attend a specific university to satisfy her father's educational expectations, which she links to his ego. Dong-wan remains unaware of her past pregnancy and does not question decisions justified by his patriarchal authority.

Educational issues were a source of conflict between Ji-hyun and Dong-wan, but to write a substantiated Korean female narrative, I had to engage with gender-specific challenges that Korean women face in society. Comprehending those challenges meant understanding the historical background of Korea. While present-day Korea is a heavily westernised, capitalist democracy, Confucianism was once the dominant ideology, and past aspects of traditional values remain and contextualise present issues, especially gender inequality. 'Korea has been, and still is, a strongly segregated society in terms of sex' (Kim 2009: 247). Korean families are patrilineal with patriarchy operating as a prominent characteristic of family life and society, and cultural traditions impact the expectations of female family members. Park explains:

[T]he patriarch, in his position of absolute power and authority at the apex of the family power structure, controlled all the members of the family [...] Inequality in status produced inequality in the everyday activities within the family, which traditionally has been continuously reproduced through the male/patriarch-oriented ideology in Korean society (2001:48).

With traditional patriarchal values deeply rooted in a society which emphasises social hierarchy, women are forced into a position below men. Subsequently, gender inequality in a deeply patriarchal country can have serious ramifications.

The issue of sexual abuse and harassment has been a prominent media topic in recent years. The spread of Korea's version of the MeToo movement in 2018 prompted several high-profile sexual abuse prosecutions of politicians, film directors, actors, and K-Pop celebrities (Kim 2020). A 2021 report titled *Workplace Abuse 119* revealed that almost 80% of the female survey participants had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or at a work-related social gathering and that 90% of those who came forward suffered retaliatory damage, such as bullying, exclusion, dismissal, or having their complaint ignored (Ock 2021). Another issue is digital sex crimes. Korea has a long history of battling hidden spycams, the results of which reveal incredible gender bias. As detailed in a report for *Human Rights Watch*, an 'overwhelming majority of the people targeted in digital sex crimes are women—80 per cent in spycam cases' while the 'overwhelming majority of perpetrators are male; in 2016, 98 per cent of perpetrators in [hidden] spycam cases were men' (Kim 2021).

Apart from the apparent traumas related to sexual abuse and harassment, an aspect of the female experience in a patriarchal society is the feeling of voicelessness. Traditionally, 'Korean culture [...] emphasised virginity and sexual expression within marriage' (Park et al. 2016). A women's reputation, which can impact entry to employment and personal relations, still depends mainly on maintaining an image of sexual purity. Thus, the victims of digital sex crimes and revenge pornography are quickly silenced or blackmailed not to report crimes for fear of their reputation and social image, even in a changing society that is adopting a 'Western romantic love ideology and sexual freedom' (Park et al. 2016). This is a pertinent cultural dilemma, where the values from the past conflict with the values embedded in the change model being implemented through the gradual process of transculturation (Glover and Friedman 2014).

My strategy for engaging with severe issues of gender inequality was to incorporate aspects into Ji-hyun's backstory. In the following scene, Ji-hyun reveals the details of a past secret relationship and pregnancy to Mi-sook:

Now she cries. Mi-Sook tries to process the information. Lost for words, all she can do is wipe the tears from Ji-Hyun's eyes.

MI-SOOK
You should have told me.

JI-HYUN
He said a baby would ruin our lives
and bring shame on our families.

MI-SOOK
That's not true.

JI-HYUN
You know it is. I would have done
anything to stop you and dad
finding out. I couldn't tell
anyone... He gave me the address of
a clinic--

MI-SOOK
He didn't go with you?

JI-HYUN
He put me in a taxi and told me to
go alone.

MI-SOOK
That bastard son of a bitch --
excuse my language -- that piece of
shit. Oh, Ji-Hyun, You should have
come home to me. Even if you
couldn't tell the truth.

JI-HYUN
You know dad would never have let
me drop out. Never. I had to stay
there.

Mi-Sook pulls her in for a deep, motherly hug. Ji-Hyun sobs
on her shoulder.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
It still hurts. He used me. He used
me like I was disposable. I was so
stupid... I thought he loved me.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.84.

Prior to this moment, Ji-hyun's diary has been a source of exposition in the narrative, revealing that she still thinks of a past relationship that was meaningful and not easily forgotten. Now she reveals the truth, that the relationship was with an older, married man and resulted in the termination of a pregnancy. Ji-hyun's former lover encouraged her to have an abortion to avoid disgracing herself and her family.

Single motherhood and abortion are further complex sociocultural issues in Korea that I could not understand without targeted research. Kyeong-hwa Mok, President of the Korea Unwed Mothers Families Association (KUMFA), explains that:

If any woman gives birth out of wedlock, she would be stigmatised by social prejudice, economic poverty, the end of her education and career opportunities, and the absence of the child's father. Thus, she would be pressured [by] society to have an abortion or give up the child for adoption. This kind of pressure is severe if the woman is a teenager and beloved

by her parents. In particular, teenagers, by and large, cannot use their own discretion (2014: 16).

It is valid to suggest that, for a young woman like Ji-hyun, revealing the pregnancy would have been devastating for her social status and may have led to ostracisation. On the other hand, admitting to the abortion may have led to social exile and caused lasting damage to her relationship with her parents. Therefore, using a secret pregnancy and abortion for dramatic effect in a female narrative is permissible. The image of sexual purity that Ji-hyun must maintain overshadowed any desire she may have had to seek help or seek retribution for the mistreatment she suffered. One interviewee remarked that ‘it is one hundred percent believable that she would keep the secret. If she got pregnant by her older professor, she would never tell her parents. Never. She would be too scared. Korea is not a good place for girls in this situation’ (Appendix A: 262).

The narrative function of the abortion backstory was to establish the reasons for Ji-hyun’s secretiveness and why she failed to achieve academic success at university. In the previous extract, from version two of *Into Dust*, Ji-hyun was seduced by an older man and forced to terminate the pregnancy under his command. This version did not sit well with me, as presenting her as a powerless victim enforces a harmful narrative. I made the following changes in version three:

JI-HYUN
I was pregnant. I'm sorry. I'm so
sorry.

MI-SOOK
What?

JI-HYUN
I didn't tell anyone.

MI-SOOK
He didn't know?

JI-HYUN
No. He already dumped me.

MI-SOOK
We would have made him support you.
He needed to pay for his actions.

JI-HYUN
I didn't want his support. I wanted
nothing to do with him. It was my
choice, not his. A baby would have
ruined my life.

MI-SOOK
That's not true.

JI-HYUN
You know it is.

MI-SOOK
You should have told us. I would
have helped. You didn't have to-

JI-HYUN
Dad would have disowned me.

Mi-Sook is stunned. She considers the words, then pulls Ji-
hyun in for a deep, motherly hug.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
Don't tell dad. Please. I don't
want him to ever find out.

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.83-84.

The obvious alteration is that Ji-hyun decided to terminate her pregnancy and was not coerced into the procedure. Instead, her older lover ended their relationship after sleeping with her and before the revelation of her pregnancy. Now the decision to terminate was hers entirely.

Presenting my fourth draft of *Into Dust* for feedback did reveal a further issue with the pregnancy revelation scene that I did not anticipate. While female interviewees responded unanimously that Ji-hyun's secretiveness is believable, mentioning how difficult it is for young, unmarried females to reveal pregnancies or abortions to their parents, the majority questioned why Ji-hyun is compelled to reveal her secret at this moment. As one interviewee responded, 'the problem in [the scene] is that Ji-hyun tells her mommy about it. I think one hundred percent she would keep the secret until she dies' (Appendix A: 262). The consensus was that Ji-hyun has no reason to reveal her secret in such an unprompted

manner, due to the shame she would feel speaking to her mother about such a sensitive and taboo issue.

As my intention was to embody Korean female experiences with genuineness, feedback regarding the believability of the pregnancy revelation had to be actioned to avoid misrepresentation. The following extract reflects a slight change to the scene:

MI-SOOK
There is nothing stupid about a
young girl falling in love.

A beat passes as Ji-hyun tries to composes herself.

JI-HYUN
I tried to forget about him. I
really did. It was impossible.

MI-SOOK
Because you were pregnant.

Ji-hyun looks up, shocked and silent.

JI-HYUN
I... What...

MI-SOOK
It's true, isn't it?

Ji-hyun nods, tearful.

JI-HYUN
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Mi-sook leans back, silent, contemplates the information.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
How did you know?

MI-SOOK
The girl who went to university was
not the same one who came home. You
were quieter, more distant. I
always felt that you were carrying
something inside of you. Something
heavy.

JI-HYUN
I couldn't tell anyone.

MI-SOOK
He didn't know?

JI-HYUN
No. He had already dumped me when I
found out.

Into Dust: Version Five (Carter 2022) p.86-86.

Insights gained from interviewees at the late stage of *Into Dust*'s development highlighted my inability to understand the nuances of the mother-daughter relationship, instigating this change in the narrative. No longer does Ji-hyun freely reveal her long held secret. Instead, Mi-sook guesses correctly using her motherly intuition, modifying the scene to make their

interaction more palatable for female spectators without diluting the significance of the revelation.

Mi-sook's reaction to the news of Ji-hyun's past pregnancy is positive, as fitting with her character. She casts no judgement and provides an empathetic shoulder for her daughter to cry on. Still, we do not learn of Mi-sook's true emotional response. It seemed unrealistic that she would articulate her feelings about the abortion when Ji-hyun needs support, and being sworn to secrecy, she is unable to discuss the news with Dong-wan. Subsequently, I needed an action that would show her emotional response to the audience:

```
In the KITCHEN --  
Mi-sook washes dishes. Dong-wan, Ji-hyun and Jun-ho slurp  
from piping hot bowls of seaweed soup.  
  
MI-SOOK  
You should have woke us.  
  
DONG-WAN  
What good would it have done to  
include everyone? Anyhow, it wasn't  
my idea. You can ask the foreigner.  
  
MI-SOOK  
Why is he waiting outside?  
  
DONG-WAN  
Don't ask me. I can't understand a  
word he says.  
  
Mi-sook takes a towel and wipes the kitchen surfaces.  
  
MI-SOOK  
(to Ji-hyun)  
How is it? Do you want some more?  
  
JI-HYUN  
It's good. Thank you.  
  
Mi-sook's eyes linger on her daughter for a beat. She rubs Ji-  
hyun's arm. Dong-wan watches the tender exchange but looks  
away when Ji-hyun catches his eye.
```

Into Dust: Version Five (Carter 2022) p.97.

Seaweed soup (*miyeok guk*) is arguably the most symbolic food of Korean cuisine. It has, for centuries, been served to pregnant women due to its nutritional density and consumed during postnatal care as its detoxifying function is said to aid recovery. The soup is also eaten as a traditional birthday breakfast by the young and old, as a gesture to honour their mothers for giving birth to them. This deep connection between seaweed soup and motherhood in Korean culture makes the scene poignant, as to Korean audiences, there can be little doubt as to what emotions are hidden behind the gesture.

Engaging with the issue of bodily autonomy was challenging as a male writer, mainly due to not wanting to misrepresent a gender-specific experience that does not belong to me. Still, a prominent concern of writing this character was that I would present her as a powerless victim and enforce a harmful narrative. Ji-hyun needed a confrontation with harassment for empowerment. This moment occurs when two drunk men verbally abuse her. Ji-hyun is in a position where she can retaliate and confront their sexualisation and harassment:

```
DRUNK MAN 2 (CONT'D)
Sit with us. We want some female
company.

JI-HYUN
No.

DRUNK MAN 1
Why are you here with him? Only
sluts disrespect themselves with
foreigners. Have some respect for
your body.

Ji-Hyun slams the refrigerator door closed. She turns to
confront the drunk men. They are stunned by her reaction.

JI-HYUN
You think I have no respect for
myself? That I will stand here and
let you speak to me however you
want?

ROBIN
[They're drunk. Don't waste your
energy talking to them.]

DRUNK MAN 1
Watch your mouth you stupid bitch.

JI-HYUN
Look at you-- Alone with no friends
or family at your side, drinking in
silence with nothing left to do but
beg strangers for company. You sad,
pathetic old men.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.56.

Ji-hyun rejects the disrespect and returns it with venom. Her castigation of the men opposes the docile lotus blossom stereotype of Orientalism and confronts Korean internal cultural discrimination against women. I believe it was necessary to include this scene as it empowers Ji-hyun in advance of the later revelation of her abortion and voicelessness. Whatever her past, in the present, she does not accept the misogynistic attitudes that exist within her own culture. She has developed the strength needed to challenge the male gaze. I felt confident presenting Korean men unsympathetically in this manner, as experiences from my own life inspired the confrontation. Although an infrequent occurrence, as people who disagree with Korean women partnering with non-Korean men remain a minority, my

wife has suffered similar abuse from right-wing leaning strangers when seen in public with me.

To recap this exploration before moving on to the next point, to embody the Korean female experience through Ji-hyun's narrative I created for her a backstory that engages with sociocultural issues that are recognisable to Korean spectators. There is cultural authenticity to Ji-hyun's narrative, which had research underpinning each step of its creation. It was conceived with knowledge gained through lived experience, developed through targeted research, and refined through the insights gained from interviewees acting as cultural commentators. Not only does the secret pregnancy and abortion backstory assist me in representing a reality of Korean female experience, but it also highlights exactly how *Into Dust* was imbued with research during its creation.

3.5 An Englishman in Korea: Approaches to Representing a Western Character in a Korean Screenplay

A Western character was a fixture of *Into Dust* from the initial concept. Theoretically, such a character allows for an exploration of the transcultural experience, specifically the topic of intracultural communication and miscommunication that will be explored in Chapter Two of this critical commentary. Like me, Robin is a white British male residing in Korea, but I never intended to write an autobiographical story. I intended to develop a persona with my perspective and experiences as an immigrant in Korea as a strategy for building a 'plausible' base within the screenplay, allowing me to explore aspects of a narrative rarely explored in Korean film, that of the non-Korean in Korea. Discussions surrounding migration, ethnic diversity, and assimilation are particularly contentious in present-day Korea, given the nation's predominantly homogenous societal background (Lim 2009: 1-9). While Kim and Park observe that immigration regulations are becoming more lenient, there persists a deep-seated concern about the broader implications of migration for Korean society (2023: 25-50). Including a Western character in a prominent role gives opportunities to engage with sociocultural issues but creates further concerns that stem from past representations of Caucasian Western characters in East Asian settings. These concerns led me to consider strategies to represent a Western character in a Korean

screenplay to subvert the Orientalist narrative and further engage with sociocultural issues and cultural dilemmas.

The first step was understanding how non-Korean characters are typically presented to Korean audiences. It is not uncommon for non-Koreans to appear in Korean screen stories, in supporting roles or as background characters without dialogue. Several non-Korean actors and actresses appear regularly in speaking roles, are fluent in Korean, and serve as the ‘go-to foreigners’ when a production casts a non-Korean character. Notably, American performers Carson Allen and Daniel Joey Albright have featured as supporting characters in numerous dramas and movies in recent years (Asian Boss 2019), and television personality Sam Hammington, an Australian reality show star in Korea, often makes cameo appearances in dramas and films (Phillips 2020). Still, non-Korean characters remain a rarity in screen stories set in Korea, and understandably so. Korea’s ethnicity is highly homogenous, with over 99% of citizens identifying as ethnically Korean and less than 4% of the total population classified as foreign (World Population Review 2023).

Historically, Korean screen stories have been created for domestic audiences that lack diversity. However, the popularity of Korean mass media has become truly global during the third generation of the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* 3.0², which began in the mid-2010s. Supported by streaming services, social media, and global communication networks, *Hallyu* has spread to more countries and has a more extensive cultural and societal influence (Song 2020). Screen stories can be and are being made with consideration for global audiences. An example, the Netflix sitcom *So Not Worth It* (Netflix 2021) follows a diverse group of international and Korean students living together in university accommodation. The show is undoubtedly the most ethnically diverse Korean series, featuring Australian, Thai, Swedish, American, Trinbagonian, and Korean-Nigerian characters.

² The first wave—*Hallyu* 1.0 (late 1990s to mid-2000s)—was characterized by the initial international popularity of Korean TV dramas and movies, gaining a dedicated following in Asia, especially Japan and China. The second wave—*Hallyu* 2.0 (mid-2000s to early 2010s)—saw the rise of K-pop music. K-pop’s global appeal expanded beyond Asia and gained a significant following in Europe, North America, and other regions. *Hallyu* 3.0 (mid-2010s onwards) represents the current phase: the ongoing globalisation and diversification of Korean cultural exports, with a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach than its predecessors. *Hallyu* 3.0 is characterized by the broader and deeper global influence of Korean culture. It encompasses K-pop, TV dramas, K-beauty, K-food, and Korean fashion. Korean companies and brands have become global leaders in these industries, further solidifying the country’s cultural impact and resulting in a more substantial presence of Korean cultural elements in various aspects of daily life worldwide.



Figure 1: *So Not Worth It* (Netflix 2021) promotional posters.

The episodic storytelling of *So Not Worth It* engages with the narrative of being non-Korean with lightheartedness. Some specificities of being foreign in Korea are used comedically, but overall, the series is set on the trials and tribulations of being a young adult, not being a foreigner in Korea. Noticeably, every character speaks native level and seamlessly fluent Korean, which leads me to my next point: that non-Korean characters featuring in prominent roles, when the setting is Korea, are frequently represented as assimilated or in the process of assimilation.

The popularity of *Hallyu* is not only economically beneficial for Korea and its economy but also increases the international interest in Korea and its culture, leading people to visit for tourism, to study and learn the Korean language, to seek employment and consequently settle in Korea on a long-term basis (Kim 2022). Thus, engaging with immigration and assimilation is a consequence of Korea's journey toward a multi-ethnic diversification of society, a significant theme of Korean mass media in recent years. Certainly, there is a practicality to presenting foreigners living in Korea as assimilated. Assimilated characters are more easily relatable for domestic audiences, and there is no need for distracting subtitles if characters speak Korean fluently. However, Hollywood genre films dominate the box office in Korea, so we cannot assume that subtitles are off-putting for spectators.

A focus on assimilation has implications. In popular entertainment shows, such as *Global Talk Show* (KBS 2006-2010) and *Non-Summit* (JTBC 2014-2017), panels of foreigners discuss their experience of Korea, again in seamlessly fluent Korean. The reality-variety show *My Neighbor, Charles* (KBS 2015-present) follows the daily lives and adventures of foreigners in Korea, focusing again on cultural differences and language acquisition as subjects challenge themselves to survive in Korean society. These shows reflect the zeitgeist of Korean media in the face of increasing ethnic diversity. Presenting non-Koreans as model foreigners who speak Korean fluently, as assimilated or in the process of assimilating, presents the non-Korean narrative superficially and in a sanitized fashion. In an interview with Woo-young Lee of *The Korea Times*, cultural critic Moon-won Lee shared his views on media portrayal of ethnic diversity, suggesting that this portrayal ‘reflects the government multicultural policy that encourages foreign immigrants to become Korean rather than respecting cultural differences’ (Lee 2013). Although assimilation is understandable as a strategy of preservation within an intensely nationalistic society, this policy has been criticised as the ‘perfect assimilation of foreign immigrants is impractical’ (Kim et al. 2017: 34). According to Moon-won Lee, television programs ‘fail to present the cultural diversity that foreigners bring to Korean society, but rather focus on cultural assimilation’ (Lee 2013).

While this PhD cannot dive too deeply into the assimilation versus acculturation argument, presenting non-Korean characters as committed to assimilation and fluent in Korean can detract from the complexity of being foreign in Korea. Fluency in language acquisition is not achievable for all people, and not all want to lose their cultural specificity to assimilate. Circling back to the challenge of how to present Robin in my screenplay, a deeper consideration of non-Korean, mainly Western characters, in Korean screen stories highlighted the potential for a unique character. By denying Robin Korean language proficiency, I had to acknowledge that I was creating a potentially problematic character for Korean spectators who may prefer a story set in Korea to feature Korean-speaking characters. However, Robin is definable by his foreignness in a Korean screenplay, regardless of his Korean language level. My initial tactic with Robin was to make him the antithesis of Western characters that commonly appear in Korean dramas, to present a narrative absent from Korean screen stories: the experience of the unassimilated foreigner

in Korea. Robin's foreignness is vital to his function in the narrative. His lack of transcultural competence and language fluency became beneficial as straightforward sources of conflict and comedic relief. More than that, the experience of being a foreigner in Korea is one I felt confident to write.

The predominant concern was the potential for external judgement relating to a Caucasian Western character taking a central role in a Korean screenplay. The history of Orientalism looms over my practice as Western screenwriters have long been 'fascinated by Asia, Asians, and Asian themes. Mysterious and exotic, Hollywood's Asia promises adventure and forbidden pleasure' (Marchetti 1993: 1). Tropes such as 'single Asian females seeking their white knights' (Hillenbrand 2008: 50) and the white saviours who 'can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the non-white pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities' (Hughey 2014: 2) have been wide-spread blueprints for intercultural and interracial relationships created by the white Western mind. I had to negotiate these historical Orientalist narratives when creating the Western character, Robin.

The first step was to introduce Robin in the narrative:

Now we see ROBIN, 28, on his knees, struggling to work a car jack. Shaggy hair, sweat soaked shirt, pink and flustered, his Anglo-Saxon ancestry fails him in this heat.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.2.

The description is practical. Whiteness is not the default in a Korean screenplay. Marking Robin's race with his 'Anglo-Saxon ancestry' was necessary to highlight his foreignness compared to the Korean characters. Apart from delivering basic information, the character description also foreshadows Robin to my reader. He is not Korean, and his foreignness is vital to his role in the story.

It is noticeable that Robin's description focuses on imperfections, his 'sweat-soaked shirt' and 'pink and flustered' complexion, which imprint a specific vision of someone struggling to adapt to the environment compared to the Korean characters who are not provided with similar physical descriptors. This depiction is not a generalisation of all non-Koreans in Korea but a specificity that stems from personal experience in the heat and

humidity of Korean summers, during which my foreignness feels exposed. This strategy of belittlement continues through the early stages of the narrative:

```
They watch as Robin pumps the jack handle. The rear wheel rises.

                MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
He looks exhausted. Look how sweaty he is. He's going to smell bad.

                JI-HYUN
Hmm.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.3.

```
                MI-SOOK
What's wrong with him?

                JI-HYUN
He's wet. I need a tissue.

Mi-Sook takes a packet a wet wipes from her handbag. She passes one to Ji-Hyun so that she can wipe her arm.

                MI-SOOK
He has that foreigner smell. My nose is very sensitive to it.

                DONG-WAN
I can stop the car if you want to kick him out.

                MI-SOOK
No. Be nice to him. He's our guest.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.13.

To provide some context for this scene: body odour is not a naturally occurring phenomenon for ethnic Koreans due to a genetic mutation (Ishikawa et al. 2012). Almost universally, ethnic Koreans do not produce body odour, which can lead to hypersensitivity to the smell of *amnae* (specifically armpit odour). Robin's body odour again emphasises the imperfections of his foreignness in this context. Essentially, it is Mi-sook and Dong-wan, representing the older, less globally aware generation, who are challenged by the presence of a foreigner, not Ji-hyun or Jun-ho. Mi-sook shows her ignorance through casually derogatory remarks about 'foreigner smell', whereas Dong-wan is open about his desire to eject Robin from the vehicle and their lives.

Targeting Robin in these early stages was a strategy of belittlement with comedic intent. Humour as a tool to engage with sociocultural issues is a prominent feature of

contemporary Korean screen stories. As examples, the two most acclaimed Korean screen stories of *Hallyu 3.0*, *Parasite* (Bong 2019) and *Squid Game* (Netflix 2021), blend humour and drama in biting critiques of wealth disparity and inequality. By targeting Robin in this way, my strategy was to challenge the historical power relationship of Orientalism, to comedically mark his whiteness as undesirable in comparison to the Korean characters and not superior. This strategy is noticeable after the grocery store shooting when Robin exposes his wounded buttocks to Ji-hyun:

```
INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT

The pharmacy light is on. Robin lies on his stomach, on the
floor. Ji-Hyun stares at his rear.

                JI-HYUN
            [I don't want to.]

                ROBIN
            [Please. It hurts.]

                JI-HYUN
            [We can find pain medicine.]

                ROBIN
            [I don't want the wounds to get
            infected.]

Ji-Hyun sighs.

                JI-HYUN
            [Okay. Let me see...]

Robin slides his pants and underwear down until his pale
buttocks are on show. He has a red welt on each cheek from
the air rifle pellets.

                JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
            Really? I have to touch this thing
            with my bare hands? Shit. I really
            am being punished for something...
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.42.

Again, the tone of this interaction is light and comedic as Ji-hyun reveals her disgust at the sight of Robin's backside. He is devalued for humour and I felt comfortable exposing the character who shares my background, not a Korean character. However, my main motive for exposing Robin was to diminish the power imbalance of Orientalism. The experience is emasculating for vulnerable Robin, whereas Ji-hyun is dominant, neutralising any possible interpretation of their relationship as the Orientalist stereotype of an obedient Asian woman submitting to her white saviour.

The narrative thread of Robin and Ji-hyun's relationship ends with a kiss at the beach, an event that remained consistent through each version of my screenplay. Nevertheless, an observable change occurred during the writing process as I became more

familiar with my characters' wants and needs. In version one of *Into Dust*, the kiss takes place during a moment of high emotion:

```

                JI-HYUN
                [Yes. I... I never thought I would
                have this feeling again.]

They kiss and melt into a deep, passionate embrace.

They detach. He wipes away his own tears now.

                JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
                [Now you are crying.]

                ROBIN
                [The kiss was so awful. It made me
                sad.]

They laugh. She hits him playfully.

                JI-HYUN
                [What do we do now?]

                [ROBIN
                [I have no idea.]

He puts an arm around her shoulder.

                ROBIN
                [The world is ending... I guess we
                could have sex.]

                JI-HYUN
                [Now you sound like a typical man.
                Only thinking about one thing.]

                ROBIN
                [Sorry. But, we're running out of
                time. I need to be more direct.]

                JI-HYUN
                [I thought English guys are
                supposed to be romantic?]
```

Into Dust: Version One (Carter 2020) p.93.

In this early version, I wanted to close the Robin and Ji-hyun arc by clearly articulating their romantic feelings for each other. Robin suggests consummating their relationship before it's too late. However, this version was problematic due to the bluntness of Robin's dialogue. A sexual proposal from one adult to another is hardly controversial, but the fetishisation of Asian women by white male screenwriters is a phenomenon that I am aware of and do not wish to support.

To avoid the pitfalls of past representations, I recontextualized the kiss by altering the moment in which it occurs. By version five of *Into Dust*, I did not feel it necessary to force Ji-hyun and Robin into a romance to provide a happy ending. My relationship with the characters transformed during the writing process. Whereas I had initially pictured them as star-crossed lovers denied a loving relationship by the imminent asteroid impact, I began

to understand that their connection comes from their similarities. Robin and Ji-hyun are realists, and as such, have no desire to fall in love after accepting the end of the world is approaching. Subsequently, the kiss scene had to change dramatically:

```
JI-HYUN
[Are you scared?]

ROBIN
[No. Not really. It doesn't feel
real.]

JI-HYUN
[I wonder what will happen to all
the bodies? Nobody will bury us.]

ROBIN
[Some people will survive. Maybe
one day our skeletons will be on
display in a museum.]

JI-HYUN
[It is good to be remembered.]

ROBIN
[Not for me. I'd rather we both
turn into dust and the wind blows
us away.]

Something in his words affect her. She kisses him, softly at
first, pulling away before he tries to fall into passion.

He waits for a response. She reveals nothing.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[So...?]

JI-HYUN
[It was...] Better than I expected.

ROBIN
[What does that mean?]

She smiles.
```

Into Dust: Version Five (Carter 2022) p.123-124.

The dialogue is much changed from version one. Robin and Ji-hyun express fatalistic views of death. There is no admission of love nor lamenting for a future relationship that the asteroid denies them. The kiss is a gesture of their bond and mutual affection, but there are no sexual undertones. There was no need to target Robin in this scene as Ji-hyun is the one who instigates the kiss. The kiss empowers her and removes her even further from the negative stereotypes of the Orientalist narrative. As pointed out by interviewees, the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun as presented in this version is hardly controversial for present-day Korean audiences who are accustomed to seeing interracial couples in Korea. As one participant remarked, ‘someone out there will think it is demeaning to show Korean girls falling for foreigners. But who cares!’ (Appendix A: 285).

Due to my strategy of belittlement, I am confident that *Into Dust* does not paint Robin as superior to Korean characters. He is objectified and somewhat ridiculed for his foreign physicality. Targeting the character who represents my race and personal anxieties was relatively unproblematic, and belittling Robin was helpful to subvert the power dynamic of historical Orientalist narratives and alleviate my concerns. Belittlement was also beneficial for questioning negative attitudes toward migrants that permeates Korean society. However, as I will now address, this strategy created fresh concerns as I explored the anti-foreigner theme.

Introducing Robin as an unassimilated migrant in Korea laid the foundation for an exploration of the cross-cultural conflicts that can appear in transcultural scenarios. Cross-cultural conflict can be defined as a distinct form of discord that arises among individuals or social groups that are divided by cultural barriers. Such conflicts manifest as confrontations between individuals or cultural groups with incompatible objectives (Lardiés-Bosque et al., 2016), thereby underscoring the impact of cultural differences on communication skills, mutual comprehension, harmonious coexistence, and mutual perceptions (Cohen 1990). Yao aptly observes that ‘the absence of the same rules in the process of cross-cultural contact leads to the existence of significant differences [which] can lead to ambiguities and misunderstandings during contact’ (2022: 168-169). Dong-wan and Robin became useful foils for exploring this subject in a Korean context.

To understand the underlying context of these conflicts it is necessary to briefly outline the rapid evolution of Korean society in the past eighty years. Following its liberation from the Japanese Empire at the conclusion of WW2 in 1945, Korea grappled with abject poverty and endured classification as a third-world nation throughout the Cold War era spanning the 1950s and 1960s. Remarkably, by the mid-1990s, Korea had undergone a transformative shift, blossoming into an economic juggernaut—a transformation colloquially referred to as ‘The Miracle of the Han River’ (Robinson 2007). In the contemporary landscape, Korea possesses the world’s thirteenth largest economy (World Economics 2023). The narrative underpinning Korea’s unprecedented expedition towards economic prosperity within a relatively short timeframe is fundamental to the nation’s collective story. The ideology of this underlying national narrative finds succinct

representation in a cartoon strip extracted from the historical and cultural publication *Korea Unmasked* (Rhie 2005):

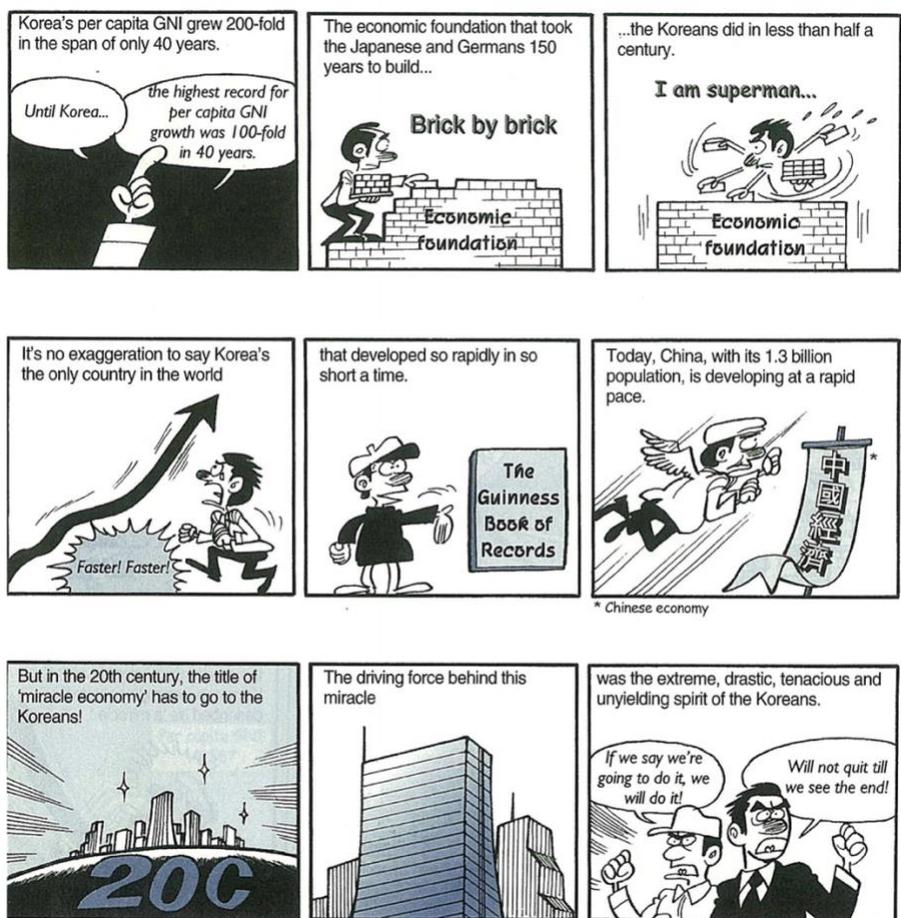


Figure 2: *Korea Unmasked* (Rhie 2005)

Korea's rapid economic growth is regarded as an extraordinary feat propelled by the collective spirit, blood, sweat and tears of its populace. This rapid development evokes immense communal pride, further aligning with an enduring ideology of national unity—a notion of one race, one nation—that continues to hold prominence (Hurt 2014: 19-22). Nevertheless, the rapid economic growth has drawn foreign laborers, international students, and spousal migrants, thrusting the acceptance and coexistence of diverse cultures into the forefront of contemporary Korean societal discourse (Kim 2022).

Returning to *Into Dust*, my intention was to inaugurate the opening scene with an embodiment of the tension pervasive in present-day Korea—a nation undergoing a transition, where transcultural interactions are increasingly commonplace. This dynamic is encapsulated through the conflict that transpires between Dong-wan and Robin, symbolizing the relationship between Korean traditions and modernity within Korean society. Dong-wan personifies the entrenched traditionalism of older generations, while Robin is a migrant who embodies the face of changing contemporary Korea, a nation that must embrace global interconnectedness to support economic progress and stability (Kim 2022). Their relationship, or more precisely, the conflict that underpins it, stems from the cultural differences that are a consequence of Korea's ongoing evolution. Notably, the pivotal opening scene of *Into Dust* centres around this very conflict.

As Dancyger rationalises, the optimal point to join the narrative is a critical moment in the story, as this effectively introduces the story and propels the reader into it (2001: 44). The critical moment of *Into Dust* occurs with the conflict between Dong-wan and Robin as they grapple with changing the flat tire on Dong-wan's car. The story starts in medias res, a creative decision to begin the story with urgency, provide a sharp introduction to characters and propel readers into the narrative world. The characters are already habituated to the impending asteroid impact, allowing me to depict them without initial shock or panic. The story catalyst—Dong-wan's decision to leave home and embark on the road trip—has transpired, as has the initial encounter between the Kim family and Robin. Given the myriad occurrences preceding the critical moment, the opening scene offered ample space to delve into the conflict arising from cultural differences, declaring emphatically that, regardless of my outsider status, *Into Dust* is a narrative committed to offering a grounded depiction of cross-cultural interaction.

After the introduction of all characters, along with the subtle allusions to the underlying tensions within the Kim family, the opening scene of the narrative focuses on the conflict that unfolds between Dong-wan and Robin. This friction is channelled through the ostensibly mundane act of changing a tire. Matsumoto and Takeuchi (1998) stress the importance of openness and flexibility in the realm of intercultural communication, underscoring that the inability to regulate one's emotions inevitably produces intercultural conflict. Employing the tire-changing scenario presents an ideal situation to incite conflict,

as this action is inherently linked to archaic notions pertaining to gender roles—a belief that changing a tire is emblematic of masculine capability (Hirschman 2016: 26). Within this context, Dong-wan and Robin find themselves at odds, each attempting to assert their masculine dominance, thus amplifying their emotions:

```
Dong-wan jumps off the barrier and snatches the tire iron
from Robin.

          DONG-WAN
    Let me do it.

          ROBIN
    [You don't need to be--
      (to Ji-hyun)
    Tell him to stop being so pushy.]

          JI-HYUN
    [Bushee?]

Dong-wan tries to twist the tire iron with all his strength.
The nut doesn't budge.

          ROBIN
    [You're doing it wrong. You have to
      turn anti-clockwise.]

          DONG-WAN
    What's he talking about now?

          JI-HYUN
    I don't know. He speaks too
    quickly.

          ROBIN
    [Turn it this way. Erm...
      Oreunjjok.]

His Korean pronunciation is clumsy but understandable.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.6.

The brewing conflict between the two characters is founded in their inability to communicate verbally but exacerbated by the uncertainty intrinsic to botched intercultural communication attempts. Cultural perspective profoundly shapes our verbal and nonverbal behaviours, with the tone of voice, gesticulations, personal space, and physical touch all constituting vital parts of the communication process. Given the widespread influence of culture on all aspects of the communication process, the norms and rules dictating the interactions of individuals from different cultural backgrounds diverge. Consequently, verbal and nonverbal exchanges, alongside the emotions they convey, are imbued with inherent uncertainty and ambiguity (Matsumoto and Takeuchi 1998: 15).

They pull the tire iron back and forth like squabbling toddlers.

MI-SOOK
Stop it Dong-wan. You're acting like a child.

Dong-wan relinquishes. Robin takes control, strains, and removes the last nut.

MI-SOOK (CONT'D)
He did it.

DONG-WAN
I loosened it for him.

Robin removes the flat tire. He takes the spare and struggles to fit it onto the exposed bolts.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
No, not like that. Give it to me...

He grabs hold of the tire.

ROBIN
[I can do it! *Naegga halkke!*]

DONG-WAN
Did you hear how he speaks to me!?

JI-HYUN
[My father is older than you.]

ROBIN
[So what?]

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.8.

The hostility festering between Dong-wan and Robin takes a distinctly cultural dimension. Robin yells at Dong-wan, disregarding or misconstruing the accepted communication protocols in Korea. In this context, where a rigid social code prevails, the hierarchal framework that governs interactions and relationships requires that juniors offer respect to their elders, as documented by Hur and Hur (1988). It is unclear whether Robin is aware of Korean culture's hierarchical nature and the customary establishment of age during interactions to ascertain the proper direction of respect (Ferguson 2001: 550). Nonetheless, Robin's inability to regulate his emotions and adapt his communication style affronts Dong-wan, further cementing the barrier between them.

As the scene nears its conclusion, Dong-wan and Robin reach the pinnacle of their frustration. Their contrasting cultural perspectives render them incapable of discerning each other's intentions, compounded by their lack of transcultural competence, leaving them incapable of reconciling the cultural dilemma at play.

JI-HYUN
He didn't say anything. He wants to help you.

DONG-WAN
He's lucky I allow him in my car. He needs to show more respect!

ROBIN
[Stop shouting at me.]

DONG-WAN
He is in Korea. He should speak Korean!

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.9.

Here, Dong-wan's response to Robin's presence transforms into a surge of heightened xenophobia, fuelled by the feelings of incongruity brought on by Robin's assumption of the traditionally masculine role of changing the tire, effectively encroaching upon Dong-wan's male dominance. This unsettling feeling often precipitates the basic 'fear of the other' intrinsic to xenophobia (Sundstrom and Kim 2014: 23). Dong-wan's oversimplified demand encapsulates the typical anti-immigration sentiment, neglecting to acknowledge the multitude of reasons that might hinder an immigrant's acquisition of language skills. Following the opening scene, Dong-wan continues to demonstrate his prejudices and represent a general generational attitude toward immigrants (Kang et al. 2014), reflecting Korea's relatively short history of accepting migrants from other countries, due to less active interaction with other countries or ethnic groups for geo-political reasons until the mid-1990s (Han 2022). He articulates that his mistrust of Robin is based wholly on his foreignness:

DONG-WAN
The sooner we lose him the better. We can't trust him.

MI-SOOK
Why?

DONG-WAN
Foreigners act unthreatening, but they can be dangerous.

MI-SOOK
You don't know any foriegners. You never left Korea.

DONG-WAN
He's British. They colonized half the world. You can't do that without violence.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.14.

Again, personal experience creeps into this scene. An aspect of being British and overseas is facing my nation's colonial history and how past colonial powers are perceived globally. Soon after, Dong-wan amplifies his mistrust by suggesting that Robin may be dangerous and planning to steal from them:

```
Dong-Wan narrows his eyes to study Robin in the rearview mirror.

                DONG-WAN
We don't know what he's planning.
He might try to steal the car.

                MI-SOOK
He looks harmless.

                DONG-WAN
That's what he wants you to think.
```

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.15.

The xenophobic notion that Robin poses a threat and is predisposed to criminal conduct due to his foreignness embodies a distinct mindset characterised by an attitude of exclusion. Within this perspective, individuals who harbour doubts or express opposition towards immigration ascribe negative behaviours to 'outsiders' as a means to rationalise their dislike or mistrust (Sundstrom and Kim 2014). Consequently, Dong-wan's attitude reflects the prejudiced outlook, thereby mirroring the bias and mistrust directed at foreign immigrants—an inclination that often surfaces as contemporary Korean society undergoes the complex transition into a more ethnically diverse future (Jang 2015).

The previous extracts are taken from version two of *Into Dust*, in which the relationship between Dong-wan and Robin asked questions about attitudes toward foreigners. Although emphasising Dong-wan as a parochial figure, someone who has never left Korea and has no foreign friends, could dilute potential criticism of the character, I remained fearful of the unsympathetic representation of Dong-wan. As a non-Korean screenwriter, I felt uneasy exploring this attitude toward foreigners as it is not a narrative commonly explored in Korean screen stories and one that could result in criticism. To an extent, my concerns would later be assuaged when interviewees read version four of *Into Dust* and commented on Dong-wan's attitude toward Robin. Though participants generally agreed that Dong-wan displays anti-foreigner sentiment, it was suggested that his

objectionable treatment of Robin is born from generational narrowmindedness, stranger mistrust and masculine head-bumping rather than outright racism (Appendix A: 261, 279, 283, 288), as was my intention with the character. Furthermore, participants speculated that his characterisation would be unproblematic for domestic audiences as bigotry can be found in Korea, just as any other nation (Appendix A: 265, 268, 275, 296). In this sense, Dong-wan is not representative of all Koreans but a truthful representation of a small subset of society, a view reinforced by the observation that no other Korean character exhibits a similar xenophobic attitude (Appendix A: 265).

Not all characters can be presented without flaws. Imperfections are part of being human and incontestably more interesting from a creative perspective. Screenwriters need to dramatise, create conflicts, and push characters to their limits to function in their narrative. However, during the writing process I remained concerned that anti-foreigner sentiment was being supported and neither criticised nor confronted through my depiction of Dong-wan. The secondary strategy employed to challenge the anti-foreigner sentiment was to characterise Robin with greater assertiveness, to balance the power dynamic of the cross-cultural conflict. I had already decided that Robin would be unassimilated, and it is fair to say that I present him as lacking transcultural fluency and, to an extent, cultural sensitivity. Presenting Robin as unassimilated allowed *Into Dust* to problematize blind nationalism, and I was comfortable presenting him this way as migrant narratives have value when asking questions of society.

Immediately in the narrative, Robin's antagonism toward Dong-wan is a signifier of frustration. Although the experience varies from person to person, cultural differences and stressful social adjustment are shared problems for expatriates and immigrants navigating a foreign culture. The sense of losing one's language and culture can be a significant stressor (Cervantes et al. 2016). Stress, frustration, and anger are all emotions I have experienced as a foreign resident of Korea, trying to navigate cultural differences and the feeling of foreigner objectification. Robin articulates this in the following scene:

DONG-WAN
 He should be ashamed to talk about
 his father in such a way. He has no
 respect for family or his elders.

MI-SOOK
 You don't know that.

DONG-WAN
 Did you hear how he spoke to me
 before? My children would never
 speak to me that way.

ROBIN
 [You know, your dad reminds me of
 him... Shouting all the time for no
 reason.]

JI-HYUN
 [He thinks you are not respecting
 him. In Korea--]

ROBIN
 [Respect older people, regardless
 of how they treat you. I know.]

JI-HYUN
 [Not exactly.]

ROBIN
 [He shouts at me, then expects
 respect? I don't think so. Respect
 is earned where I come from.]

DONG-WAN
 What did he say?

JI-HYUN
 He apologises for being rude. He
 will try to be more respectful.

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.16-17.

As previously highlighted, Dong-wan has marked Robin as disrespectful due to his use of language and the assertiveness of his tone. Oppositely, Robin is unwavering in his belief that respect is earned and not based on age or social status. Robin feels no eagerness to respond to Dong-wan with deference because of age, regardless of Korea's ingrained societal codes. While intergenerational conflict is not a rare phenomenon in any society, in Korea—where traditional values place respect for elders at the centre of society—conflict can occur when younger people fail to show respect for elders who obtusely expect and demand it, and when those of older generations wield authority based on age (Chung and Park 2021). Intergenerational conflict emerges as a recurrent theme in Korean media. This is evident in dramas like *All About My Mom* (KBS2 2015-2016) and *My Golden Life* (KBS 2017-2018), where tensions arise between elder family members and their younger counterparts. A comedic take on wider societal tensions can be seen in the popular weekly 'MZ Office' sketch from *Saturday Night Live Korea* (Coupang Play 2021-present), which humorously contrasts the views of Generation Z and millennials with those of the older

generation. However, *Into Dust* presents an intergenerational and cross-cultural clash absent from many Korean screen stories. Robin opposes the Korean hierarchal-based value system as it does not align with his cultural perspective, and he has no desire to inhibit his emotions under the pressure of the immediate apocalyptic scenario.

However, there is a problematic aspect of Robin's characterisation that needs addressing. To explore themes of transcultural scenarios like cross-cultural conflict and foreigner objectification in *Into Dust*, I needed to present characters with perceivably negative or blinkered views of 'the other.' To provide a balanced representation, I intentionally made Robin more assertive to confront the anti-foreigner sentiments that he experiences from Dong-wan, allowing him to vocalize his unhappiness with the treatment that has endured:

```
DONG-WAN
I'm sick of this son of a bitch.

ROBIN
[Oh, shut up.]

DONG-WAN
What!?!

ROBIN
[I said shut up! I get it, okay.
I'm foreign. You don't like me.
You're just another racist old man.
Guess what...nobody cares.]
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.68.

It is ironic that Robin retaliates against Dong-wan's attitude with an accusation of racism, when he himself has been the character to display the most blatant racist tendencies. In earlier scenes, Robin has made comments to target and generalise behaviour that he asserts as inherent to all Koreans. First, Robin insinuates that all Korean people are rude as they collectively lack patience:

```
ROBIN
[I'm not the rude one here. You
Koreans are always too impatient.]
```

Into Dust: Version Four (Carter 2023) p.9.

In a later scene with Ji-hyun, he recalls a past relationship with a Korean girlfriend and uses the narrow experience to generalize all Korean females as bad-tempered and ferocious:

```
ROBIN
[I know exactly what girls like you
are like.]

JI-HYUN
[Girls like me?]

ROBIN
[Korean girls have bad tempers.]

JI-HYUN
[What are you talking about?]

ROBIN
[I mean it. Kimchi temper is real.]

JI-HYUN
[Kimchi temper!?]

ROBIN
[I've experienced it. Fighting with
a Korean girl is traumatic. My
girlfriend used to shout and scream
at me for the smallest things.]
```

Into Dust: Version Four (Carter 2023) p.23-24.

Undoubtedly, Robin exhibits a form of prejudice that assumes members of a racial group—ethnic Korean in this context—have distinctive characteristics that he forms into negative stereotypes. My intention was to show his lack of transcultural competence and the problematic nature of making cultural assumptions.

The comments that he makes will not be alien to Korean audiences. The ‘impatience’ he asserts relates to the so-called ‘*ppali ppali* syndrome’. *Ppali ppali*—or ‘hurry, hurry’—is more than basic request, it is part of Korea’s DNA and an influential aspect of everyday life (Sung 2009: 18). Speed is of the essence, as exemplified by the scooter delivery drivers who weave in and out of traffic and around pedestrians to get food to customers while still piping hot or arriving at work early to rush through tasks. Completing work as quickly as possible is the mark of a job well done; yet *ppali ppali* culture can be confusing and stressful to non-Koreans who are not used to what they perceive as impatience, just as a more relaxed attitude to work can infuriate Koreans (Lawler et al. 2008: 5).

Regarding the second extract from *Into Dust*, Robin’s mention of ‘kimchi temper’ is not a phrase of his own making but a colloquialism used in Korea in reference to *haan*.

Haan is a distinctively Korean and complex concept born from a sense of national trauma induced first by the Japanese occupation and then by the post-war division of the country (Kim 1997). Bannon superbly describes *haan* as:

[S]orrow caused by heavy suffering, injustice or persecution, a dull lingering ache in the soul [...] a blend of lifelong sorrow and resentment, neither more powerful than the other [...] imbued with resignation, bitter acceptance and a grim determination to wait until vengeance can at last be achieved (Bannon 2008).

Haan is seen as an essentialist Korean sociocultural concept that is formative in Korean identity (Kim 2017; Min et al. 1997). Coping strategies related to *haan* involve the suppression of anger and anger-related emotions, and the releasing of such emotions. It is accepted in Korea that *haan* can externalize itself in an expression of anger known as *boon*—or ‘eruption of anger’—that can be surprising to non-Koreans, primarily as it is a unique, collective emotional reaction of Koreans that is difficult to understand unless you experience it (Sung 2009: 15).

To develop transcultural competence, it is essential to observe and profoundly engage with specific cultural phenomena. This process goes beyond surface-level understanding and requires a nuanced appreciation of behaviours, choices, and actions within a cultural context (Slimbach 2005). For instance, those immersing themselves in Korean culture would benefit significantly from a profound comprehension of unique cultural concepts like *ppali ppali* and *haan*. Despite observing these phenomena, Robin exhibits a superficial understanding of Korean cultural behaviours, signalling a lack of transcultural competence. Robin’s observations, while indicative of exposure, do not translate into the deeper awareness or respectful engagement that transcultural competence demands.

According to Glover and Friedman (2014: 81), actual transcultural competence involves embracing cultural relativity and avoiding the trap of ethnocentrism, where one views cultural differences through the biased lens of one’s own culture, often leading to misinterpretation and value judgments. In the case of Robin, my intention was not to create a racist character but one who, by focusing on what he perceives as negative aspects of Korean culture, demonstrates this ethnocentric perspective. He inadvertently degrades the

uniqueness of Korean culture, reducing it to negative stereotypes. Thus, Robin's portrayal underscores the difference between mere exposure to culture and the development of transcultural competence, which is marked by an unbiased, respectful understanding of cultural differences (Glover and Friedman 2014: 81). He needs to move past mere observation and engage with Korean culture in a way that fosters a clear, respectful understanding, moving beyond his ethnocentric viewpoints.

I began this section by showing how quickly I fell into belittlement for humour when exposing Robin's foreignness. It is fair to say that belittlement as a creative strategy was also a mark of trepidation as initially, I lacked the confidence to use Robin confrontationally. However, as I became more confident embracing the unassimilated foreigner narrative, I became more comfortable exploring Robin's foreignness to interrogate Dong-wan's Korean nationalism and represent the tension and negative assumptions that can imbue cross-cultural interactions.

Having constructed the conflict between Dong-wan and Robin, I had to consider how I wanted to conclude their shared subplot at the end of the narrative, the place to make a lasting impression and encourage spectators to consider the issues that have been portrayed. I wanted to come full circle with this idea of belittlement and use Robin's foreign body more assertively. There is a notable change when Robin exposes himself in this scene, compared to earlier scenes where his body is exposed for humour:

```

                JI-HYUN
                [My brother wants to swim but is
                scared to take his clothes off.]

Robin scans the beach. Everyone else wear summer clothes or
rash guards.

                ROBIN
                [Well, desperate times call for
                desperate measures.]

He stands and begins to strip to his briefs.

                MI-SOOK

Oh my.

She covers her eyes but peeks through her fingers.

                JI-HYUN
                [Aren't you embarrassed?]

                ROBIN
                [It's just a body. Nobody cares.]

The beach activity seems to stop suddenly -- Heads turn, eyes
stare, all focused on Robin the curiosity. Robin cups his
crotch.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.120.

Now, Robin exposes his body willingly. There is personal experience underpinning this scene. I have often noticed that Korean beachgoers shy away from the sun, preferring to keep skin covered, even when swimming, to protect skin for health and beauty reasons. The following images provide an accurate view of standard beach attire:



Figure 3: Haeundae Beach, Busan (Han Cinema)



Figure 4: Haeundae Beach, Busan (The Korea Times)

The sight of Robin's white, semi-naked body would undoubtedly stand out, providing the perfect scenario for him to be the object of curiosity when he strips to his underwear. Robin chooses to strip, marking himself as different with his body and approach to social nudity. Robin remains unassimilated and embraces his difference, forcing the Korean characters to

confront his foreignness. However, the result is muted. The Kim family have accepted Robin at this point, and the background characters have more significant concerns than the sight of a semi-naked foreigner. Robin, the cultural outsider, retains a sense of his cultural specificity and is allowed to join the in-group. Importantly, the Kim family has also changed:

```

                                ROBIN (CONT'D)
                                [Are you coming or not?]

Jun-Ho is encouraged. He stands and begins to strip.

                                MI-SOOK
                                Dong-Wan, make him stop. These
                                people will think we're
                                exhibitionists.

Dong-Wan smiles, doesn't open his eyes.

Jun-Ho is quickly down to his superhero briefs.

                                ROBIN
                                [I'll race you.]

They sprint off, leaving the others laughing at the sight as
they race to the sea.
```

Into Dust: Version Three (Carter 2022) p.122.

Jun-ho gains confidence from the sight of Robin's action and willingly sheds his clothes, allowing him to go full circle following the earlier bar bathroom scene (see *Into Dust*, pages 54-55), in which he nervously strips and is embarrassed to expose his body. The earlier, more absurd version of Dong-wan would indeed have reacted to seeing his son and the foreigner stripping to their underwear on a crowded beach. However, his fixed notions have changed throughout the narrative, and the lasting impression is one of mutual acceptance. The beach becomes the ideal setting for tension and conflicts to be washed away as Jun-ho's Korean body and Robin's non-Korean body are exposed together.

3.6 Conclusion

Within the realm of screenwriting practice, the authority to represent people and experiences of a cultural group different from one's own is often a self-granted right. In writing *Into Dust*, I conscientiously engaged with the awareness of how my outsider status impacts and contextualises my work, ensuring that my screenplay was mindful of and

sensitive to the implications of my foreignness. My concerns were tempered by a commitment to develop both responsible and ethical representations within the needs of my creativity.

A predominant challenge of writing a screenplay portraying Korean culture and people was navigating the tension between creative freedom, ethical responsibility, and internalised self-censorship. The notion that my non-Korean identity could potentially constrain my ability to authentically represent Korean narratives presents a dilemma, challenging the creative liberty to which I am attached. As a screenwriter, I want the freedom to write the stories of my choosing, explore my imagination, and occupy the worlds of my characters without succumbing to self-censorship.

However, in the intricate domain of transcultural screenwriting, a nuanced understanding of the cultural group and people you choose to write about is paramount. This means recognising and grappling with judgements regarding one's right to write such stories. In my endeavour, the relationship between my outsider status and the pervasive historical Orientalist discourse posed significant concerns relating to internalised and externalised notions of permission. My approach was to immerse myself with distinct Korean sociocultural issues—ranging from gender inequality and reproductive health to immigration and xenophobic undercurrents. Such immersion formed a Korean female narrative embedded with culturally resonant markers, thereby enhancing the verisimilitude of my characters for diverse segments of my anticipated audience. The inclusion of a British, non-native character further provided a conduit to infuse my personal experiences as a long-term resident in Korea, accentuating the narrative's authenticity. However, the overarching aim was to foreground a migrant narrative often marginalised in Korean screen stories—that of the unassimilated foreigner—providing a lens to interrogate the inherent frictions in transcultural interactions.

In order to delve into the theme of cross-cultural conflict, I strategically crafted Dong-wan and Robin with attributes that possess the potential to evoke unease within my target audience. The intricate challenge posed by the exploration of foreigner objectification in *Into Dust* revolved around the necessity to depict a Korean character harbouring unfavourable sentiments toward foreigners, a portrayal that might elicit discomfort among Korean audiences. To achieve a more nuanced portrayal, I deliberately

emphasized Robin's status as an unassimilated migrant who struggles to grasp the intricate facets of Korean culture. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that Robin's interactions with others, particularly Dong-wan, could be perceived adversely by Korean spectators, given the unease associated with a non-Korean character making derogatory remarks about cultural behaviours. This predicament gave rise to apprehensions about the potential for *Into Dust* to disconcert my anticipated audience.

The feedback garnered from interviewees in relation to Dong-wan and Robin did somewhat alleviate this apprehension, as neither character was widely condemned. While Robin's attitude could be subject to negative evaluation, a consensus among most interviewees underscores that his conduct and utterances are responsive in nature, a justifiable retort to Dong-wan's xenophobic attitude (Appendix A: 262, 268, 275, 279, 288-289, 296-297). However, it's important to acknowledge that the perspectives of ten individuals cannot comprehensively represent the viewpoints of an entire cultural group. Ultimately, my creative decision to shape these characters in such a manner stems from my aspiration to present an authentic depiction of the confrontational dimensions that can be part of cross-cultural dynamics, particularly within a nation that remains in the process of transitioning towards a more transcultural state. While the attitudes exhibited by Dong-wan and Robin may prove controversial, their intertwined narrative casts a spotlight on the contentious subjects of immigration and assimilation, hopefully prompting reflections on the overarching societal landscape.

Writing about sensitive Korean sociocultural issues has the potential to attract criticism, especially when represented by a Western screenwriter. My approach to sociocultural issues may be problematic for some spectators with different political views, as I chose to expose and emphasise the issues and not understate them. Nevertheless, I believe I have permission to engage with such issues through my research into the subjects, my lived experience of them within Korea, and the realisation that they can be meaningful provocations for further discussion for the audience. There is an obligation for screenwriters to truly understand the background and debate surrounding the issues they wish to engage in. Otherwise, a screenwriter engaging with controversial issues may be accused of chasing the social zeitgeist to win spectators or capitalising on sociocultural issues and debates to make their screenplay relevant without considering the spectators who

are being affected. Through research and observation, I gained the confidence to portray sociocultural issues and change characters as I developed my screenplay through different versions. Engagement with controversial topics in *Into Dust* and the evolution of its narrative reveals a confidence that mirrors my own evolution as a writer during this process. By addressing anxieties and concerns stemming from internalised and externalised notions of permission, and forming remedial strategies, I am confident that *Into Dust* presents a screenplay narrative that avoids stereotypical Western representations of the East and the typical Korean depictions of Westerners.

PART 4: LANGUAGE, DIALOGUE AND STRATEGIES OF WRITING A SCREENPLAY INTENDED FOR DUAL-LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE AS AN ANGLOPHONE SCREENWRITER

4.1 Introduction

What are the language challenges of writing a screenplay intended for dual-language performance as an anglophone screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to overcome a language barrier between Korean-speaking and English-speaking characters?

Introducing an English-speaking character to make *Into Dust* a dual-language narrative was arguably the most impactful decision made during the development process, as it generated numerous in-text language considerations. As established in the preceding chapter, a non-Korean character was developed for *Into Dust*, to explore the conflict and tensions of cross-cultural interaction, and to explore my own experiences and perspective within the narrative world.

The consequential language barrier between Robin and the Korean-speaking characters was a constant issue during *Into Dust*'s evolution, and effectively navigating the language barrier became a principal consideration of the writing process. This chapter investigates the writing of a screenplay intended for dual-language performance, examines how bilingualism impacts characterisation and becomes a creative tool for character development, and theorises strategies to navigate the language barrier between Korean-speaking and English-speaking characters.

4.2 Exploring Bilingual Dimensions in Transcultural Screenwriting: Categorisation, Character Development, and Translanguaging Dialogue

I conceived *Into Dust* as an intimate family-drama, prioritizing a narrative that centres on character interactions and dialogues against the backdrop of an impending apocalyptic event. Robin was deliberately introduced as an unassimilated anglophone figure in the Korean setting, unable to communicate verbally with the Korean-speaking characters. This strategic choice in *Into Dust* presented an avenue for probing the intricacies of

communication within a transcultural context, where characters grapple with the interplay of two distinct languages codes and the necessity to form communication strategies.

The assertion by Savchenko and Barseghyan that '[c]ultural and linguistic exchanges have existed at all times, but nowadays they acquire a special significance against the background of the globalisation of the world society' (2021: 188) underscores the profound impact of globalisation on communication. Not only has globalisation made interactions with multiple cultures and languages feasible, but it has also made such interactions a common and sometimes obligatory occurrence (Hong and Cheon 2017). This convergence of languages and cultures now shapes the daily experiences of individuals within new transcultural scenarios that have emerged because of globalisation. Consequently, the boundaries of languages and cultures are less static; they are complex, traversed, breached, transcended, and redefined in this dynamic process (Baker 2022).

Within this context, the concept of bilingualism has garnered heightened scholarly attention, particularly concerning its social advantages and role in the evolving global landscape (Ramirez-Esparza et al. 2020: 124). Bilingualism's pertinence within the field of transcultural studies bears significant weight, offering profound insights into various dimensions of transcultural phenomena and interactions (Savchenko and Barseghyan 2021: 189). By acknowledging the microcosmic perspective of globalisation—its repercussions at local and community levels, including shifts in social behaviours, attitudes, and individual perceptions (Sun 2021: 30-31)—the role of bilingualism emerges as pivotal in transcultural scenarios. In light of this, I propose that the nuanced development of bilingual characters emerges as a prescient concern in screenwriting. While the central discourse of this thesis revolves around transcultural screenwriting, it is imperative to recognise that the surge in transcultural scenarios and rise of bilingualism impose upon all screenwriters the imperative to contemplate intercultural communication as a narrative element.

The impact of bilingualism on character is a relatively underdeveloped area of screenwriting research and unexplored in the context of Korean and English narratives. Delving into the ways bilingualism can influence character development proved a worthwhile pursuit throughout this research project and may serve as a catalyst for future investigations.

In *Into Dust*, Ji-hyun stands out as the only character proficient in both languages, making her essential to the narrative as the interpreter who bridges the language gap. This character serves as the point of departure for my exploration. The first step was to identify Ji-hyun's level of bilingualism to gain deeper insight into her linguistic capabilities and limitations. There are varying degrees of bilingualism, as categorized by D'Acierno (1990: 12-13):

- A *compound bilingual* 'is an individual who learns two languages in the same environment so that he/she acquires one notion with two verbal expressions' relating to those who use multiple languages and linguistic codes from the onset of language acquirement.
- A *coordinate bilingual* 'is a person who acquires the two languages in different contexts, for instance, one at home and the other at school, so that the words of the two languages belong to two separate systems which are independent.' A coordinate bilingual learns a second language during the early stages of development (teenage to early twenties) and shifts between languages and linguistic codes but has a dominant native language.
- A *subordinate bilingual* is a person with a type of bilingualism that 'occurs when one language predominates the other' and when the individual 'interprets words of his/her weaker language through the words of his stronger language.' A subordinate bilingual is monolingual until a later stage of life and learns a second language as an adult, retaining their native language and linguistic code.

I acknowledge that a psycholinguist may flag limitations with this simplistic categorisation. Ultimately, individuals need to be bilingual to the extent sufficient for their purposes, and these categories alone cannot reveal how bilingual a person is (McCarty 1995, 2013, 2014). Nonetheless, these categories provide a practical, theoretical framework to considering bilingualism for character development within a creative writing context. Ji-hyun, within this framework, is conceived as a coordinate bilingual. She maintains a level of individual

bilingualism sufficient to communicate effectively in English, with Korean remaining her dominant language. Although I portray Ji-hyun with English proficiency that surpasses the South Korean national average—which is regarded as moderate (EF English Proficiency Index 2020)—her bilingualism remains within the realm of believability and does not alienate her from my intended Korean-speaking audience.

The intricate task of constructing a credible fictional character with emotional depth and complexity necessitates unravelling the delicate balance between exterior identity and inner essence (Hauge 2011: 59-64). Delving deeper into the interplay between inner and outer worlds, what is shown to the world and what is held within, the seminal contributions of Donald Winnicott’s Theory of Emotional Development—specifically concerning the maturational processes occurring in infancy—presents the conceptualisation of the “True Self”. This core identity, emergent from formative experiences, encapsulates the individual’s authentic emotional states and intrinsic desires and is marked by spontaneous expressions (Winnicott 1965a).

According to this theoretical framework, less-than-conducive nurturing environments instigate the creation of a protective “False Self”, emerging to act as a defensive structure that safeguards the susceptible True Self from vulnerability. This constructed facade often masks genuine emotional sentiments (Winnicott 1965a; 1965b; 1971). The continuation of this dichotomy into adult life is further influenced by the overarching imperatives of societal and cultural edicts, where feelings of emptiness persist as the individual pursues a means to connect with or reveal their genuine nature, occasionally allowing the True Self to surface during rare episodes of unbridled authenticity (Winnicott 1971).

Rather than provide an appraisal of Winnicott’s theoretical propositions, I leverage this concept of dualistic identities to probe the interplay of language in character development, particularly within the realm of bilingualism. Empirical investigations have posited that bilingual individuals often associate distinct personalities with each of their languages, mainly when there exists an emotional resonance with the respective language (Luna et al. 2008; Pavlenko 1998; Salmani Nodoushan and García Laborda 2014). In this framework, bilingual linguistic transitions do not merely epitomize a change in the

language used for communication but signify a traversal between unique, language-associated identities.

Observations from personal experiences underscore this phenomenon. For instance, I have observed my bilingual partner seamlessly transitioning between her Korean and English identities—her masked identity and her unmasked identity—exhibiting distinct personality nuances based on her language choice. Such shifts hint at the potential richness of a bilingual character’s narrative, where alternating language codes can reveal different facets of their identity.

Nonetheless, relegating bilingualism to a simplistic binary identity paradigm can be reductive. Grosjean contends that bilinguals, much like their monolingual counterparts, adjust their language and behaviour to fit different socio-linguistic contexts, rather than undergoing complete identity transformation (2010: 121-133). However, this adaptability could ostensibly underscore the dualistic identity that Grosjean critiques. The dexterous capability of bilingual individuals to switch between language codes, blend distinct identities, and adapt to diverse contexts showcases their linguistic versatility, mirroring the intricate dance of their dual personas.

While academic discourse on the extent of identity dualism in bilingual individuals remains contested, such intricacies undeniably offer a fertile ground for nuanced character depiction. Recognizing these nuances enriches creative writing, paving the way for characters with layered linguistic identities.

Grounding this exploration in Winnicott’s foundational concepts, the dualism of bilingual identities emerges as an intriguing avenue for character development. When considered as a dualistic phenomenon that creates alternate identities, bilingualism can be used to stretch a character’s cognitive and emotional parameters. A character becomes potentially dualistic with the introduction of bilingualism, as a bilingual character can be developed with distinct ‘masked’ and ‘unmasked’ identities, terms I have coined to describe the distinct personas that emerge based on linguistic contexts.

However, in a creative writing context, it is the intent of the practitioner that dictates how this concept functions and the parameters for its application. Delving into any factor or phenomenon that could influence how a character is understood and how they understand themselves is worth consideration during character development.

Within the narrative world of *Into Dust*, Ji-hyun emerges as a character of profound internal conflict, and the tension between her more genuine feelings and her curated identity is particularly pronounced. In unravelling Ji-hyun's character, it became evident that her bilingualism could powerfully interact with her internal duality. However, what I did not expect from the outset were the opportunities for Ji-hyun's bilingualism to impact character development so distinctively. Her bilingualism emerged as the key to exploring her duality and the masks she wears in varying communication contexts. For example, instead of characterising Ji-hyun as an extrovert or introvert, the duality of her bilingualism encouraged me to acknowledge that she could be an introvert in one language and an extrovert in the other. Regarding temperament, how quickly or in what manner Ji-hyun responded to emotional provocation depended on the language used to articulate her reactions. Thus, I was able to add texture to Ji-hyun's characterisation by diverging between her behaviour when speaking in English and in Korean; one became linked to her more open expression and the other presenting a more reserved image.

When writing the first version of *Into Dust*, I intended Ji-hyun to be reserved in the opening sequences so that her personality would develop as I progressed through her character arc. I imagined her as a dutiful daughter whose reservedness comes from an unwillingness to expose the genuine sentiments of her personality in the presence of her parents, especially Dong-wan, with whom she struggles to connect on an emotional level. The issue with her dialogue in the first version of *Into Dust* was the bluntness of her speech:

INT. CAR - ON THE ROAD - DAY

Dong-Wan drives. Mi-Sook is in the passenger seat. Ji-Hyun reads her diary, sandwiched between Robin and Jun-Ho in the back. It's cramped with bags and boxes of belongings. They packed for a long trip.

DONG-WAN

(singing)

*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come into full
bloom..."*

JI-HYUN

Not again.

DONG-WAN

What's the problem?

JI-HYUN

It's always the same song. You are like a record stuck on repeat.

DONG-WAN

You don't appreciate good music. There's no heart in the manufactured crap your generation listens to.

JI-HYUN

You don't know anything about my generation.

Into Dust: Version One (Carter 2020) p.10.

In this early scene, Ji-hyun's dialogue is blunt and verges on confrontational as she condemns Dong-wan openly when speaking her native Korean. Her dialogue in this version did not adhere to my intentions for her characterisation as she is candid with her opinions and not reserved. Reconsidering how Ji-hyun's use of the Korean language could create a masked identity prompted me to make the following change.

DONG-WAN
(singing)
*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories come into full
bloom..."*

MI-SOOK
Not again.

DONG-WAN
What's the problem?

MI-SOOK
It's always the same song. You
don't realize how annoying it is.
You sound like a broken record.

DONG-WAN
Only you are bothered.

Robin looks close to melting. He wipes the sweat from his forehead.

ROBIN
[It's so hot in here. Can we turn
on the cold air?]

JI-HYUN
[My father says it will waste the
gas.]

Robin opens his window fully. He lets the air blast his face.

DONG-WAN
(singing)
*"On days when I get sentimental
over the melodies of Bach,
forgotten memories..."*

JI-HYUN
Father, I have a headache. Please
stop singing.

MI-SOOK
You see. It's not only me who you
annoy.

Dong-Wan stays quiet for a beat, obviously hurt.

DONG-WAN
There was a time when you loved me
singing to you.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.10.

By altering the speaker to Mi-sook, I retained my original intent for the interaction: to have someone from the Kim family upset Dong-wan by commenting on his singing, a thread that runs through the narrative and culminates in the final scene. In this version, Ji-hyun feigns a headache to stop Dong-wan from singing and is much more respectful with her request. This attitude was adopted for her characterisation in version two and remained constant through subsequent versions. The version of Ji-hyun in my final draft is noticeably reserved and guarded when speaking Korean until the story reaches the midpoint (as I will examine later in this chapter). By limiting the content and emotionality of Ji-hyun's Korean

dialogue, I effectively gave her a mask to wear, to hide her vulnerable and genuine identity from her family when needed.

In contrast, I wanted a noticeable change to Ji-hyun's characterisation when she interacts with Robin using English. The following scene takes place in the abandoned pharmacy and presents the first intimate moment between the characters:

```
INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT

The pharmacy light is on. Robin lies on his stomach, on the
floor. Ji-Hyun stares at his rear.

(Entire scene in English)

                JI-HYUN
I don't want to.

                ROBIN
Please. It hurts.

                JI-HYUN
We can find pain medicine.

                ROBIN
I don't want the wounds to get
infected.

Ji-Hyun sighs.

                JI-HYUN
Let me see...

Robin slides his pants and underwear down until his pale
buttocks are on show. He has a red welt on each cheek from
the air rifle pellets.

                ROBIN
Is there blood?

                JI-HYUN
The skin isn't broken.

She wipes one of the wounds with an antiseptic wipe. Robin
whinces.

                ROBIN
My eyes are watering.

                JI-HYUN
I'm done.

He pulls up his pants and sits up to face her.
```

Into Dust: Version One (Carter 2020) p.42-43.

In the pharmacy scene, where other Korean-speaking characters are not present, Ji-hyun can drop her façade and express her true, unmasked identity by speaking English, away from the scrutiny of her family. However, the difference between her English and Korean language identities was unnoticeable in version one, and I decided to make the distinction more prominent by distinguishing her English-language identity with humour in version two. Reconsidering the scene instigated the following change:

Robin slides his pants and underwear down until his pale buttocks are on show. He has a red welt on each cheek from the air rifle pellets.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
Really? I have to touch this thing with my bare hands? Shit. I really am being punished for something...

ROBIN
[Is there blood?]

JI-HYUN
No. [The skin isn't even broken.]
Stop being a baby.

She wipes one of the wounds with an antiseptic wipe. Robin whinces.

JI-HYUN (CONT'D)
[Don't cry. Remember, you are brave.]

ROBIN
I'm fine.

JI-HYUN
(fake English accent)
[I'm not crying. I have something in my eye.]

ROBIN
[You're a comedian now? Very funny.]

JI-HYUN
[I'm done. Put your butt away. I don't want to look at it anymore.]

She wipes her hands clean with another anticeptic wipe.

He pulls up his pants and sits up to face her.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.42-43.

In version two, Ji-hyun reveals a new layer of characterisation when speaking English. She teases Robin, revealing confidence and a comedic nature previously hidden from her family and the audience.

Ji-hyun's contrasting identities reach a moment of confrontation during the dinner table sequence in Seung-min's apartment that is pivotal to the plot. The sequence begins positively as all characters eat and drink together, but the tension between Robin and Ji-hyun builds until an eruption:

She snatches the diary from his hand. The panic in her voice surprises them all.

ROBIN
[Calm down.]

JI-HYUN
[Don't tell me to be calm.]

She is flustered, on the verge of tears.

DONG-WAN
What did he say to you?

JI-HYUN
It's nothing.

ROBIN
[I'm sorry. I was just playing around.]

JI-HYUN
[This is not a game for me.]

DONG-WAN
Give that book to me if it's going to be a problem.

JI-HYUN
No.

DONG-WAN
Why not? What's in there?

JI-HYUN
This is my diary. Why doesn't anyone understand that it's private? I don't want him to read it. I don't want you to read it.

DONG-WAN
Then why carry it with you!?

JI-HYUN
I want to! Why do I have to explain myself to you!?

Dong-wan is shocked at her tone.

MI-SOOK
You don't have to do anything you don't want to. Come, sit by me.

Ji-Hyun sits close to Mi-Sook, the diary tight in her hand.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.77-78.

Ji-hyun's reaction is a moment of catharsis. She speaks with unfiltered indignation and does not attempt to control her emotions. Her outburst surprises Dong-wan. Instead of retreating into the reservedness of her Korean language masked identity when addressing her father, she continues to speak candidly and questions why she must follow his rules. Her façade melts away to reveal genuine expression, and she speaks to Dong-wan as directly as she speaks to Robin, the first step to refashioning their relationship. Furthermore, her directness encourages Mi-sook to speak more honestly, leading her to

confront Dong-wan later in this scene (see *Into Dust*, pages 77-84) and reveal her long-kept frustration about his self-centred approach to family life.

If compound and coordinate bilinguals are prone to acquire an emotional connection with each language they speak and, therefore, develop different personalities in the frame of each language, it is appropriate to acknowledge this phenomenon when crafting bilingual characters. From the onset, my intention with Ji-hyun was to use her bilingualism to facilitate communication and interpretations for comedic or dramatic effects. A deeper consideration of bilingualism as a force to alter her dialogue, behaviour and perspective, thus revealing different aspects of her personality, was key to her character development.

Using two languages simultaneously in communication is a specific characteristic of bilingualism that I wanted to engage with through Ji-hyun's dialogue, as it presents further implications for characterisation. The term favoured in this thesis is 'translanguaging', defined by García as 'the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages in order to maximise the communicative potential' (2009: 140). Translanguaging is closely linked to the term 'code-switching', which is well-established as a linguistic concept that refers to the sociolinguistic phenomenon of alternation between two or more languages or dialects within the same speech exchange (Baker, Jones and Lewis 2012; Gardner-Chloros 2009). I have witnessed code-switching in my teaching capacity as language students often communicate with an individualistic form of interlanguage that adapts two languages to serve communicative needs, with code-switching used to fill gaps within a vocabulary. Nevertheless, I favour translanguaging as a conscious act of toggling between and blending two languages to maximize communication options. What impresses me most about bilingualism is the ability to move between languages in dexterous and intelligent ways to communicate and create meaningful social interactions.

In the context of *Into Dust*, Ji-hyun must communicate in Korean and English, and it was logical that translanguaging would be an element of her dialogue. The following extract highlights how translanguaging benefits characterisation. Please note that Ji-hyun's dialogue in this extract is modified to better illuminate her translanguaging, with English language dialogue in brackets and Korean language dialogue in bold type:

Jun-Ho snatches the card from Robin and stuffs it back into his pocket.

JUN-HO
I don't want to speak about it.

JI-HYUN
No way! I'm not going to let my brother--

JUN-HO
You can't stop me. It's my life.

JI-HYUN
[He thinks he can do anything he wants in his life.]
That's not how life works.

ROBIN
[He's not the first guy to consider this option.]

JI-HYUN
[Because men don't feel bad about using women.]
Women aren't disposable. You can't use a woman this way because you feel like it.

No response. Jun-Ho focuses on peeling his label.

ROBIN
[I'm trying to say, don't judge him too harshly. He's young but he's not a baby. He has the right to make his own mistakes. We can't tell him how to live his life.]

JI-HYUN
[That's all?] **Fuck. I ask for help and that's all you can say?** [You are not helping.]

ROBIN
[Tell him that he might catch something. This woman could have an STD.]

JI-HYUN
What is it? [STD?]

ROBIN
[Sexually transmitted disease.]

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.48-49.

This bar scene occurs as Jun-ho waits for the call-girl (Coco) to arrive. Ji-hyun moves between languages, and the translanguaging adds texture and naturalism to her dialogue by disrupting her speech pattern as she reveals her frustration with the scenario, adding to the uniqueness of her voice and creating a more believable representation of a coordinate bilingual. As she moves between languages, she also moves between emotions to find a genuine sense of her anger and concern regarding her brother.

From a creative writing perspective, there is a usefulness to translanguaging in screenwriting that goes beyond adding texture and realism to dialogue. Translanguaging

may manifest when a character chooses to alternate from one linguistic code to another within a single sentence, or they may use different linguistic codes in particular situations to suit their needs or control relationships with other characters. The choice to move between languages is impactful as it provides power to bilingual characters. About the Myers-Scotton's 'Markedness Model' (1993), Barnes notes that:

[W]hen a speaker alternates between two languages, one of the languages can be regarded as the unmarked choice (usually the matrix language). This is the language that the speaker would normally be expected to use in that context, while the other language (normally the embedded language) is regarded as the marked language. When a speaker chooses to switch to the marked language, [they are] deliberately attempting to redefine the context or the relationship between the speakers (2012: 248).

Considering the Markedness Model, the matrix/unmarked language of *Into Dust* is Korean, and English is the marked language. Ji-hyun has the power to recontextualise her relationship with Robin by translanguaging at significant moments during the narrative. The following example illustrates this concept:

```
She closes the diary and sets it down on the bench.

                JI-HYUN
                [We met here.]

                ROBIN
                [Here? This exact bench?]

                JI-HYUN
                [He sat next to me. I almost walked
                away. My life would be different if
                I had.]

                ROBIN
                [Different, but not necessarily
                better. You'll never know.]

                JI-HYUN
                [I would have met somebody.]
                I could be married now, with
                children, a home.

                ROBIN
                [Nothing stopped you from meeting
                someone else.]

                JI-HYUN
                [He did]... He changed me.
```

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.113.

This conversation is candid, and the words Ji-hyun utters in English are truthful. Her intentional translanguaging here is understandable as an act of confession that balances her Korean and English language identities. Previously in the narrative, Ji-hyun has been revealed to be an avid diarist who values self-talk and has used English to guard memories from her Korean-speaking parents. In this scene, guarding the thoughts of marriage and to what extent her past love caused lasting damage is not an evasion of truth but an act of self-expression. Translanguaging is a strategy of control as, by vocalising these lingering thoughts in Korean, Ji-hyun allows herself to openly acknowledge the regrets she harbours without baring her soul to Robin.

Intentional translanguaging occurs in the final, significant scene of Robin's and Ji-hyun's story:

```
Something in his words affect her. She kisses him.

                ROBIN (CONT'D)
                [I wasn't expecting that.]

He waits for a response. She reveals nothing.

                ROBIN (CONT'D)
                [So, how was it?]

                JI-HYUN
                [It was...] Better than I expected.

                ROBIN
                [What?]
```

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021) p.124.

This time, Ji-hyun purposefully moves between languages to hide her actual response from Robin. Translanguaging is a playful act but still one of power. Not only does she take control by instigating the kiss, but she also redefines the context of their relationship by controlling the verbal exchange. The self-talk again fits her characterisation as a diarist. The instigated kiss and the intentional translanguaging emphasise her growth as a character that culminates in this scene, marking the end of their intertwined character arcs.

More than a linguistic-stylistic device deliberately employed to fill gaps in vocabulary and add texture to dialogue (Barnes 2012: 248), the deployment of translanguaging is a valuable strategy to develop bilingual characters in a transcultural

scenario. In *Into Dust*, Korean is the unmarked and insider language that bonds the Kim family members, and English is the marked language that defines Robin as the outsider. Ji-hyun moves between languages to control how other characters perceive her throughout the narrative. English becomes a language shield when she wishes to guard herself against other Korean speakers, and it is the language she uses to recontextualise herself outside of her family unit. Similarly, Ji-hyun uses Korean as a language shield for moments of catharsis when she is alone with Robin.

4.3 The Bilingual Interpreter Character: Leveraging Mistranslations and Misinterpretations for Dramatic Impact

Ji-hyun is the ‘cultural broker’ (König and Rakow 2016: 94) in *Into Dust*: the bilingual language bridge figure who facilitates communication between Robin and the Korean-speaking characters. A bilingual ‘interpreter character’ is the most straightforward way to navigate the language barrier issue, and there is no need to justify including such a character in a dual-language narrative as the benefits are apparent. Once a character is set as the interpreter, the question becomes: ‘what strategies can be taken with an interpreter character to impact the narrative?’ From a creative writing perspective, I believed it was essential to explore how Ji-hyun’s interpreter position could impact her characterisation without merely becoming a functional role.

Interpreter characters are reasonably recognisable in genre films, used to navigate language barriers and facilitate communication between characters who do not share a common language. I theorise that interpreter characters can fall into two broad categories:

- 1) The ‘functional interpreter’ is a character who facilitates communication by navigating the language barrier between other characters. Examples from the science-fiction genre are Lieutenant Uhura in *Star Trek* (1966-present) and communication droid C3PO in the *Star Wars* franchise (1977-present), polyglots who bridge communication between diverse otherworldly characters with reliability. Functional interpreters are often required when characters find themselves in new or alien environments, such as the Moroccan tour guide Anwar

in *Babel* (Iñárritu 2006), who faithfully serves as an interpreter for American tourist Richard after the shooting of his wife. In the war film genre, functional interpreters are required to facilitate communication in the terrains of conflict, such as the German-speaking Corporal Upham in *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998) or Japanese interpreter Takahashi in *Emperor* (Webber 2012). In all examples, functional interpreters have different language skills but fulfil their roles with truthfulness and consistent reliability to suit the needs of the story.

- 2) The ‘unreliable interpreter’ is a character who facilitates communication by navigating the language barrier but purposefully mistranslates or withholds critical information to disrupt communication. The reason for unreliability depends on the needs of the story. Unreliable interpreters may be incompetent or unqualified through a lack of language proficiency. A famous example is Guido in *Life is Beautiful* (Benigni 1997), who shields his son from the awful truth after they arrive at a concentration camp by offering to interpret for an SS officer without any knowledge of German. An unreliable interpreter may be competent but willingly deceitful, such as the nameless interpreter in *The King and I* (Lang 1956), who refuses to translate accurately for fear of being associated with the speaker, or the nameless interpreter in *Lost in Translation* (Coppola 2003), who confuses American actor Bob by purposefully interpreting lengthy Japanese instructions into the briefest of explanations for comedic effect.

I note the broadness of these categories, as there is potential for an interpreter character to switch between functional and unreliable during a narrative.

Ji-hyun was initially set as the interpreter character for practical reasons, as a cultural broker was required to mediate communication between Robin and the Kim family. Therefore, I had to decide if she should be a functional or an unreliable interpreter. What I wanted to avoid was creating a functional interpreter character who merely facilitates communication and becomes an obvious strategy to navigate the language barrier. There is a natural ambiguity in language and communication that is easy to overlook with a functional interpreter. As Quiroga-Clare notes:

[E]ven when we use language literally, misunderstandings arise, and meanings shift. People can be intentionally or unintentionally ambiguous. Nevertheless, when someone uses a potentially ambiguous sentence or expression, usually the intention was to express only one meaning. As we know, most words can have denotations, apparent meanings, connotations and implied or hidden meanings (2003).

From a creative writing perspective, there is a usefulness to misunderstandings that can be used for dramatic and comedic purposes. In this sense, an unreliable interpreter may be more suitable to provide opportunities for disruption of communication through misunderstanding.

The following example from *Okja* (Bong 2017) illustrates the usefulness of disruption through an unreliable interpreter. The Korean American character 'K' acts as an interpreter between native-Korean character Mija and English-speaking characters. During a pivotal scene, K interprets for Jay, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) leader, and communicates his mission to Mija. Jay is adamant that the mission, and therefore the plot that follows this scene, will not go ahead without Mija's permission:

We hear POLICE SIRENS growing closer in the background. Jay carefully puts a hand on Mija's shoulder.

JAY (CONT'D)
If our mission succeeds we'll be able to shut down Mirando's Super Pig project completely. We'll be saving millions of Super Pigs like Okja from death.

Jay looks straight into Mija's eyes, pleading earnestly. Mija looks straight back.

JAY (CONT'D)
But we won't do it without your approval.

Mija looks at Jay with a grave expression. The police sirens in the distance get louder...

JAY (CONT'D)
What is your decision?

K translates the last question in a solemn voice.

MIJA
I'm going back to the mountain with Okja.

She says it just like that - bluntly and squarely. In Korean, it sounds even more blunt and square. K tries to hide his surprise, speechless. Jay and the other members eagerly await his translation.

K takes a deep breath before saying...

K
She agrees to the mission.

Neither Mija nor the A.L.F. members notice K's lie. The members applaud vigorously. Jay gives her a warm, sincere hug, deeply moved. Mija stands there, not knowing what just happened.

JAY
Thank you.

Bong and Ronson, *Okja* (2016), pg. 53.

Being the only bilingual present, K deceptively confirms Minja's consent to the rest of the ALF, knowing that no one will expose his deceit. Minja's true answer becomes hidden behind the purposeful mistranslation used for dramatic effect, setting the rest of the plot into motion. The mistranslation helps characterise K as someone willing to lie for what he perceives as the greater good. Furthermore, spectators learn that K is not a simple tool to navigate the language barrier as his mistranslations disrupt the narrative, making him flawed and more rounded as a character.

Purposeful mistranslations, such as the one by K in *Okja*, helped me see the value of Ji-hyun as an unreliable interpreter. Ji-hyun's reliability as a language bridge is paramount to other characters in my story. However, her unreliability and the potential for ambiguity are just as valuable from a creative writing perspective. Accidental and purposeful

misinterpretation serve the dramatic and comedic intentions of the narrative. Allowing Ji-hyun to dictate certain scenes through intentional misinterpretations gave her power to influence her function, giving her agency as a character.

In the opening roadside scene of *Into Dust*, Robin and Dong-wan struggle with communication as they attempt to change the flat tire. My intention when writing the opening scene was to introduce all the main characters and set up the theme of language and communication by emphasising the language barrier between Robin and Dong-wan and using Ji-hyun's interpretations for dramatic or comedic effect:

He gesticulates wildly to turn the jack to the left. Dong-Wan figures it out. He tries to turn the final nut. The iron slips from his hand.

DONG-WAN
Shit. It's fixed hard. I think he had to loosen the nuts before he raised the wheel. Ah, fuck. He made a big mistake. I wasn't sure, but now I know he's a real chicken head.

ROBIN
[Is he talking about me?]

JI-HYUN
[Yes. He said thank you for helping but he will do it now.]

ROBIN
[No he didn't! Tell him I was doing fine until he tried to help. And tell him I understand bad words. I'm not stupid.]

Dong-Wan looks to Ji-Hyun for a translation. She sighs.

JI-HYUN
[He said he isn't stupid.]

DONG-WAN
He even looks stupid. Look at him. He has a dumb face.

MI-SOOK
That's not his fault. He was born with that face. It doesn't make him stupid.

Robin looks to Ji-hyun for translation.

JI-HYUN
[You have a kind face.]

ROBIN
[I heard *babo*. I'm not *babo*!]

JI-HYUN
[If you know everything, why do I need to translate?]

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 6-7

The term ‘chicken head’ was added in this exchange, knowing that *dalg daegali* is a commonplace Korean insult to belittle those who act without thinking. Dong-wan speaks freely, showing his lack of consideration for Robin and that he feels comfortable with rudeness when the target of his insult is unable to understand. Ji-hyun purposefully mistranslates to quash the tension between Dong-wan and Robin, but the act backfires as Robin understands insults and her interpretation intensifies his irritation. The purposeful mistranslation has dual intentions, creating humour for Korean-speaking spectators who hear the joke and intensifying the dramatic tension between Robin and Dong-wan.

Ji-hyun’s initial reluctance to fill the interpreter role was an intentional character trait inspired by bilingual people I know in Korea, who often dislike being used as interpreters in social situations when they are expected to fill the role of cultural broker. I thought it was pertinent to let Ji-hyun vocalise her attitude toward the role:

```
Robin listens to their conversation.

                ROBIN
[Are they talking about me again?]

                JI-HYUN
[Yes.]

                ROBIN
[What are they saying?]

                JI-HYUN
[I'm not a translator.]
```

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 13-14.

Rudvin proposes that reluctant mediation is a common global scenario in which ‘the use of unqualified interpreters is the rule rather than the exception’ (2006: 57). Language barriers arise, and without professional interpreters or mediators readily available, family members and friends become ad-hoc language/cultural brokers who must work in both languages and overcome cultural barriers that halt communication. In the early stages of the narrative, Ji-hyun’s bilingualism is more beneficial to Robin and Dong-wan than to her. They want her to facilitate their conflict, but she is reluctant to accept the interpreter role and mediate arguments, further adding to the hostility of early scenes.

Ji-hyun’s purposeful mistranslations are prominent through the early stages of the narrative as she lacks enthusiasm for the role. Her mistranslations extinguish arguments

between Robin and Dong-wan, who, on the other hand, are eager to use her bilingualism to express their frustrations and opinions of each other without considering Ji-hyun's desire for involvement. Subsequently, the mistranslations create mistrust between them. It takes time for Robin and Dong-wan to trust Ji-hyun and value her bilingualism. The following scene again occurs at a roadside. The Korean characters receive government alerts on their smartphones informing them that airports are closed, meaning that Robin has no way to return to Britain before the inevitable asteroid collision. Again, Ji-hyun must interpret for Robin:

We hear a synchronized BEEPING -- Ji-Hyun, Dong-Wan and Mi-Sook check their phones and see identical GOVERNMENT ALERTS.

MI-SOOK
Oh no.

They stare at Robin. He watches the passing cars, oblivious to the change in mood.

ROBIN
[I never thought of it until now, but I'm surprised there aren't more cars on the road. I hate to think what the roads are like at home.]

MI-SOOK
You have to tell him.

JI-HYUN
What can I say?

Jun-Ho and Seung-Min return from behind the taxi.

DONG-WAN
Tell him the truth. Nothing can be changed.

JI-HYUN
I know that.

MI-SOOK
Be gentle. Try not to upset him.

DONG-WAN
He's not a baby.

Robin yawns, still oblivious. He finally notices that they are all staring at him.

ROBIN
[What?]

MI-SOOK
He needs to know.

JI-HYUN
I know! I'm going to tell him!

ROBIN
[What is it?]

JI-HYUN
[A government alert.]

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 102-103.

Preceding events have forged a more powerful emotional bond between characters. Ji-hyun is trusted to relay the message, and her cautiousness comes from the difficulty of the

situation, not an unwillingness to interpret. She accepts the interpreter role at this stage, accepting that she is the only person able to help.

The second roadside scene ends the story thread concerning Robin leaving Korea, keeping him with this Kim family until the end of the narrative. My intention with this scene was to show Dong-wan's shifting attitude toward Robin. To signify this change, I decided that Dong-wan should use Robin's name for the first time, as opposed to calling him 'foreigner', a simple and effective way to reveal his acceptance of the outsider:

<p style="text-align: center;">ROBIN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[You don't need me with you. The universe wants me to be alone. I have to make my peace with it.]</p> <p>Dong-Wan sighs. He opens the taxi door and turns to Robin.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DONG-WAN</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Robin...</i></p> <p>Robin stares at Dong-Wan, surprised, unsure of how to react.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DONG-WAN (CONT'D)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Get in. You're with us now.</p>
--

Into Dust: Version One (Carter 2020), p. 105.

There was no need for Ji-hyun to interpret as Dong-wan signifies his acceptance of Robin in this version. Nevertheless, I thought this scene could be more influential in developing Ji-hyun's character during rewriting. In version two, the scene alters by adding a purposeful mistranslation:

Robin passes the phone back to Mi-Sook.

MI-SOOK
But--

ROBIN
[You need to get on the road.]

JI-HYUN
[You don't want to come with us?]

ROBIN
[You don't need me with you. The universe wants me to be alone. Tell your parents I appreciate everything.]

JI-HYUN
He thinks we don't want him.

Dong-Wan sighs. He opens the taxi door and turns to Robin.

DONG-WAN
Robin...

Robin stares at Dong-Wan, surprised, unsure of how to react.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Get in. You're with us now.

Robin looks to Ji-hyun for help.

JI-HYUN
[He said don't be so stupid. Get in the car.]

She hits him, pushes him to the open door.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 105.

Ji-hyun is now a more willing interpreter, but she still refrains from accuracy. Robin reveals how he values Ji-hyun's bilingualism by asking her to relay his thanks to Dong-wan and Mi-sook without questioning the accuracy of her words. Dong-wan's response remains consistent and meaningful. Ji-hyun chooses not to relay the message and instead uses the opportunity to chastise Robin for his perceived stupidity. On one level, the mistranslation is damaging as it mischaracterises Dong-wan's sentiment and stops Robin from understanding the tenderness behind the words. On another level, expressing her frustration toward Robin reveals their growing familiarity and connection. Significantly, she delivers the mistranslation with the brusqueness that we have come to expect from Dong-wan's dialogue. This role reversal reveals an aspect of Ji-hyun's identity that suggests that she is not so different from her father after all. A simple act of mistranslation develops character and adds layers to a scene that could pass by without impact.

The roadside scenes are two of several that rely on Ji-hyun as an interpreter and justify my decision to include a coordinate bilingual character. Ji-hyun's interpreter role

allowed me to explore how mistranslations and misinterpretations can provide opportunities for comedic and dramatic moments, impact characterisation and alter character trajectories. Ultimately, screenwriters must use interpreter characters how they see fit. With *Into Dust*, I made the creative decision to make Ji-hyun an unreliable interpreter to avoid her becoming a tool to facilitate communication and nothing more. However, Ji-hyun's willingness to translate transforms as the story progresses, as does the nature of her mistranslations.

4.4 Communication Strategies to Navigate the Language Barrier

Into Dust is aimed at Korean-speaking audiences but includes an English-speaking character in a significant role. Robin needed meaningful interactions to communicate and connect with the Korean-speaking characters. Using Ji-hyun as an interpreter was the most straightforward way to navigate the language barrier. However, an issue that stems from this strategy is the amount of narrative space an interpreter character needs to occupy. Quite simply, I did not require Ji-hyun to be present in every scene, and her absence forced me to consider how to facilitate cross-cultural communication without the all-important cultural/language broker. Broadly speaking, what communication strategies can be used to navigate a language barrier?

Initially, the language barrier creates detachment between Robin and Dong-wan as they cannot communicate verbally but for odd words or phrases and fail to connect emotionally during the early stages. Without relying on Ji-hyun to facilitate communication in every scene, non-verbal communication navigates the language issue when they find themselves alone, such as in the following exchange:

Robin and Dong-wan are awake, sat opposite each other at the table. Dong-wan smokes.

ROBIN
[Can I use your phone?]

DONG-WAN
Huh?

ROBIN
[Your phone. Can I use it?]

He mimes making a call with his hand. Dong-wan pushes his cell phone across the table.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2020), p. 86.

Robin uses the hand gesture to signify making a call and removes the need for an interpreter in such a brief and unimportant exchange. Physical charades are part of non-verbal communication and a common characteristic of the transcultural experience (Adler 1991; Buck and VanLear 2002). The inclusion of such gestures adds to the naturalism of communication. The non-verbal nature of this particular exchange is also thematically relevant. A phone is an obvious form of communication, and the passing of the phone from Dong-wan to Robin is symbolic of the increasing communication between characters who cannot speak directly. Furthermore, Dong-wan releasing his phone for Robin to use is a moment of trust that was previously unattainable.

Moments of non-verbal communication, such as the previous example, can be helpful to enable brief interactions as they can quickly convey meaning, but they are not always appropriate for prolonged interactions and building character relationships. It is rare to perceive a language barrier as a reason to become mute, and we seldom navigate language barriers with only gestures and charades; thus, other strategies must be considered.

4.5 *Lost in Translation* (2003) and *The Ramen Girl* (2008): Communication through Ritual Activity

The symbolic nature of ritual activities can be integral to communication in transcultural scenarios. Dredge posits that:

Ritual practices—both religious and secular—embody myriad symbols which, like words, have meanings that are grounded in contrast and likeness as well as in actual experience (both conscious and unconscious) and which therefore communicate certain messages to both participants and observers associated with ritual activity (1978: 3).

Labelling a ritual activity does not necessarily indicate an act of great significance. Of course, the birth rituals, death rituals, coming of age rituals, and so on of specific cultures are significant. However, ritual activities can also be more menial parts of a daily routine. Specific ritual activities, such as mealtimes, bring people together, traverse cultural boundaries and have the potential to connect characters in transcultural scenarios.

The way that specific ritual activities are utilised in a screenplay narrative depends on the extent to which the language barrier needs navigating and the author's intention to present an insider or outsider perspective of the cultural world of the story they write. To explore this concept further, I will contrast two contemporary films that, on the surface, share commonalities: *Lost in Translation* (Coppola: 2003) and *The Ramen Girl* (Ackerman: 2008). Essentially, both film narratives represent an East-Asian society through a Western lens. They are both set in Tokyo and feature a female Anglo-American main character. Both have Japanese characters in supporting roles, blend English and Japanese languages to different degrees, and use the unfamiliar environment to explore existential themes of isolation, authenticity, and the general anxieties of life. I will examine how these narratives engage with language barriers, use non-verbal communication, and how they influence the spectator's view of the narrative world.

Lost in Translation relates language and communication to themes of isolation and loneliness to explore the relationship between two English-speaking Americans in Tokyo. The language barrier increases the sense of alienation felt by main characters Bob and Charlotte, who connect through underlying feelings of disconnection. Although set in Tokyo and featuring Japanese characters, the reality of Japan presented to spectators is formed from an English-speaking perspective. In the following scene, Charlotte stumbles upon a Buddhist ceremony taking place at a Tokyo temple:

EXT. TOKYO - MORNING

Charlotte finds her way down a narrow street in an old section of Tokyo.

She turns a corner and finds a square with what she was looking for.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

The sun shines over a beautiful old temple. Birds chirp, Charlotte approaches and goes inside.

CUT TO:

INT. TEMPLE - DAY

Charlotte stands in the back and watches a ceremony.

A ROSHI speaks in Japanese, monks chant. It's all very foreign. Charlotte tries to feel something.

Coppola, *Lost in Translation* (2002) p.27.

Charlotte is searching for a sense of connection to the world in the alien environment. The content of the Japanese dialogue is made irrelevant; the ceremony and ritualised chanting serve no purpose but to heighten Charlotte's detachment. This scene may be a satirical jab at Westerners who visit Japan and use local culture to access pseudo-spirituality. However, the writer's intent is evident with the in-text clarification that the ritual and language are 'all very foreign', illuminating that the screenwriter used language and ritual practice to create unfamiliarity and intensify isolation felt by the Western character, thus accentuating an outsider perspective of Japanese culture that is prominent throughout the screenplay.

Lost in Translation provides an outsider's perspective of Japan. Although set in Tokyo and featuring Japanese characters, English is the matrix language, and the language barrier between English and Japanese characters is approached from an English-speaking perspective. In the following scene, Bob wants desperately to take Charlotte to the hospital and must communicate with a Japanese taxi driver:

EXT. DAIKANYAMA STREET - DAY

Bob tries to get a taxi, finally one stops and they get in.

He tries to explain "hospital", he does pantomime, draws a first aid cross, but the DRIVER doesn't understand.

Charlotte is enjoying Bob's effort.

Finally he finds a Park Hyatt matchbook and calls the hotel number.

BOB
How do you say "hospital" in Japanese?

RECEPTION (O.S.)
Excuse me?

BOB
Hospital?

RECEPTION (O.S.)
One moment, please.

She transfers call, it rings.

CONCIERGE (O.S.)
Concierge desk, may I help you?

BOB
Yes, can you tell me how to say "hospital" in Japanese?

CONCIERGE
"Hospital" in Japanese? Hosupitari.

BOB
Hosupitari?

He tells the Driver who looks at him funny. Bob says it again-faster, with a Japanese accent. The driver nods excitedly and drives off.

Coppola, *Lost in Translation* (2002) p.53-54.

Bob attempts non-verbal communication without success and uses the hotel concierge to navigate the language barrier and provide humour. The taxi driver cannot understand 'hospital' but can quickly understand the similar sounding '*hosupitari*' if spoken with a Japanese accent. Bob is the frustrated party in this exchange. It is the Japanese language and not the English language that the dialogue displays for ridicule. The narrative is firmly in the English language world and provides no space to cross the line and see Japan from an insider perspective.

The Ramen Girl features another young American female, Abby, who finds work in Japan to be with her boyfriend, who promptly ends their relationship and abandons her in Tokyo. Like Charlotte's scenario in *Lost in Translation*, Abby is a habitual quitter with no idea what to do with her life, at a crossroads in an unfamiliar environment. The story's nucleus is the relationship between Abby and middle-aged ramen chef Maezumi, who

reluctantly agrees to teach her ramen cookery. To postulate the challenge faced by screenwriter Becca Topol when writing *The Ramen Girl*, we have an English-speaking character needing to communicate and develop in an environment where most other characters speak only Japanese. Abby and Maezumi never understand each other's utterances, apart from a few moments when a pocket translation book allows them to express specific words, usually in arguments. A Japanese bilingual character, Toshi, is proficient in English and becomes Abby's love interest. However, Toshi is never present at the ramen restaurant and is impractical as an interpreter character. The language barrier is difficult and rightly presents a believable representation of a transcultural scenario.

A clear theme of *The Ramen Girl* is the transformative power of food, linking back to the idea of mealtime as a ritual activity. What is also noticeable is how the practice of cooking and serving food becomes a non-verbal communication strategy that connects characters from different cultural backgrounds. Following her relationship breakdown, Abby stumbles into Maezumi's ramen shop in tears. The following exchange takes place with a language barrier:



Figure 5: Ackerman, *The Ramen Girl* (2008), 13 minutes, 44 seconds.



Figure 6: Ackerman, *The Ramen Girl* (2008), 14 minutes.

This scene establishes the language barrier as Abby speaks no Japanese and the married couple speaks no English, allowing for the confusion and comedic back-and-forth that will underpin their relationship. Maezumi and Reiko are oblivious to Abby's words but respond to her sadness with a hot bowl of comforting ramen, an act of non-verbal communication that transcends language. Maezumi and his wife kindly refuse Abby's attempt to pay, another languageless gesture. The language barrier forces Abby to express her genuine appreciation by hugging Reiko tightly. While hugging friends and acquaintances is commonplace and socially acceptable in the Western world, the concept of physical contact is not common in Japanese culture, where the majority of people have an extremely low tolerance for physical contact and the practice of 'skinship' (Sezer: 2020). The non-verbal act surprises but does not upset Reiko. Instead of causing awkwardness, the hug symbolises Abby's appreciation and forms a bond between the characters that will continue to build from this moment.

Learning how to cook ramen and bring happiness to people becomes Abby's objective. She is the story's protagonist, yet the Japanese-speaking characters are not overlooked. Maezumi has a clear character arc that takes him from a belligerent, unaffectionate man rigid in his ritual practices to a tender father figure who willingly passes his ramen shop to his young protégé. Maezumi has meaningful dialogue throughout. In the following scene, he attempts to teach Abby how to prepare his ramen:



Figure 7: Ackerman, *The Ramen Girl* (2008), 44 minutes, 59 seconds.



Figure 8: Ackerman, *The Ramen Girl* (2008), 46 minutes, 14 seconds.

Maezumi passionately describes the intricate nature of ramen cookery that goes beyond the physical act of preparing ingredients. He talks of the delicate symphony of flavours and emotions but cannot articulate his complex meaning through simple, physical gestures. Abby tries and fails to recreate his recipe. Her irritation meets his anger, and they fight. She tries to use her trusted translation book, but he rips it from her hand and throws it in the trash can. The frustration of stilted communication presents the language barrier from insider and outsider perspectives. Such scenes are essential to provide a balanced representation of the language barrier in transcultural scenarios. Abby is the confused outsider character in an alien environment, frustrated by the lack of understanding and upset by what she perceives as rude behaviour. Contrastingly, Maezumi is the aggravated

insider. He wants Abby to understand, but the issue is not his lack of English but her lack of Japanese.

Both Charlotte and Abby search for personal authenticity in Tokyo. They share an environment that is presented in two opposing ways. I am not insinuating that Coppola had any strong desire to paint Japan positively or negatively. However, the Japan of *Lost in Translation* is an alien world for Westerners. Japanese characters lurk in the background to provide authentic mise-en-scène, while those with dialogue are stereotypical caricatures who mispronounce English words and perform ritual activities to support the screenwriter's desire to promote the foreignness of the environment. Although Japan, as depicted in the narrative world of *The Ramen Girl*, is equally alien to Abby, it is open and brimming with possibilities for transformation. The Japanese characters have meaningful dialogue and are characterised to show a range of different personalities. *The Ramen Girl* uses non-verbal communication and everyday ritual practice to overcome and not problematise the language barrier, inviting spectators to cross the line from Abby's outsider perspective of Japan and see the narrative world from the Japanese insider perspective.

4.6 Communication through Ritual Activity in *Into Dust*

The idea of mealtime as a specific ritual activity that connect characters is relatively commonplace in Korean screen stories and one that I was eager to use in *Into Dust*. It is not a stretch to state characters in many Korean dramas and films are obsessed with eating. Korean screen stories feature mealtime scenes as communal eating with family and friends is a huge part of Korean culture. The comedy-drama series *Let's Eat* (tvN 2013) builds entire episodes around characters eating together and their relationship with food, as reflected in the promotional posters for the series:



Figure 9: *Let's Eat* (tvN 2013) promotional poster.

Of course, some mealtime scenes of *Let's Eat* are incidental, but they can also be significant plot points as dramatic confrontations occur around the dinner table. Food rituals and communal eating are also meaningful in *Strong Girl Bong-soon* (JTBC 2017). The fantasy series follows the life of the titular character Bong-soon, born with superhuman strength. As the following images show, mealtimes are a prominent part of episodes, and the cameras do not bypass the act of eating:



Figure 10: Titular character of *Strong Girl Bong-soon* (JTBC 2017).

It is my conviction that the prevalence of food in Korean dramas manifests cultural pride. Meticulous food preparation often has the spotlight, and characters rarely stray from traditional Korean foods. Furthermore, communal eating is prominent in Korean culture. Sharing meals with friends or co-workers is a frequent occurrence, and multi-generational family living is common. Communal eating will inevitably feature heavily on screen.

I wanted to include a communal mealtime scene in *Into Dust* to add cultural specificity, make the story more relatable for Korean spectators, and explore how the mealtime ritual could become a communication strategy. In *Into Dust*, the mealtime scene is particularly significant as it arrives at the midpoint. The characters are tired, hungry and in desperate need of a moment of respite after the obstacles that they have overcome:

71.

DONG-WAN
There's a big difference between
the end and the end as we know it.
The world will be rebuilt. We can
be part of it.

JUN-HO
Do you really think we can survive
in a cave?

Mi-Sook carries the steaming pot from the KITCHEN AREA and
sets it down on the coffee table.

DONG-WAN
We don't have to talk about that
now. It's time to eat.

Ji-Hyun follows with a tray of rice bowls, chopsticks,
glasses, bottles of alcohol.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
You found soju.

MI-SOOK
I cooked a lot of rice. You can eat
as much as you want.

Seung-Min jumps up.

SEUNG-MIN
Army stew is my favorite.

MI-SOOK
Well, it smells delicious. Your
mother is a good cook. Go and wash
your hands.

Seung-Min darts off to the bathroom. Robin throws the T-Rex
into the toy box. He shuffles over to the coffee table.

ROBIN
(in English)
Need some help?

JI-HYUN
(in English)
No it's okay. Look what I found...

She passes him a small packet.

ROBIN
(in English)
English Breakfast Tea.

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 70-71.

The mealtime scene of *Into Dust* is significant in a few ways. In this example, Dong-wan reflects Jun-ho's question about their chances of survival by signalling the importance of mealtime as an occasion to eat, not talk. Noticeably, the female characters prepare food and serve the male characters. This representation of traditional gender roles and discrimination is realistic. During traditional ceremonies, such as *Chuseok* (thanksgiving holiday), women spend several days cooking and preparing for the ceremony and family gathering. The men, on the other hand, relax and enjoy the festivities, but do not perform any chores. With their insider perspectives, Dong-wan and Jun-ho do not question that Mi-sook and Ji-hyun are

working while they relax. It is Robin, with his outsider perspective, who offers to help. The significance of the exchange between Robin and Ji-hyun is augmented when she provides him with a teabag, which serves as a light-hearted jest acknowledging a culturally distinctive British custom. This act emphasises the characters' emerging appreciation for one another.

The following section from the mealtime scene presents an example of specific ritual activity being used to connect characters from different cultural backgrounds:

```

                                DONG-WAN
                                I'll pour.

He takes the bottle and fills all the empty glasses but his
own. He places the bottle before Jun-Ho.

                                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                                Pour for me.

Jun-Ho fills Dong-Wan's glass.

                                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                                Drink with me.

Jun-Ho shakes his head morosely.

                                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                                Have a drink with your father.

Jun-Ho takes a full glass.

                                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                                Let us drink to survival.

                                MI-SOOK
                                You shouldn't tempt fate.

                                DONG-WAN
                                We are Korean. We survived
                                colonization, war, and still we are
                                here. Koreans are survivors.

They all look at Robin. He smiles back, clueless.

                                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                                He will have to wish for good luck.

Robin lifts his glass.

                                ROBIN
                                (in English)
                                Cheers.

Robin follows Korean etiquette correctly -- Turns away from
the table to shield the glass with his free hand as he
drinks.

                                MI-SOOK
                                He knows how to drink with respect.
```

Into Dust: Version Two (Carter 2021), p. 72-73.

Confucianism has a role in contemporary Korean society and influences the rituals attached to most social functions. Strong emphasis is placed on decorum and ceremony, and rituals can be complicated and stressful for non-Koreans unfamiliar with customs (Ferguson 2001). The ritual of drinking alcohol is a prime example. Much of Korean etiquette shows

deference to elders. If an elder offers a drink, the receiver stands to present their empty glass with both hands. When returning the compliment, the pourer must hold the bottle in both hands to fill the elder's glass and should never drink until the elder in question raises their glass to give permission. When drinking, turning your head and shielding the act is essential to show respect. Returning to the extract from *Into Dust*, the meaningful act of pouring a drink for one's father can be appreciated by spectators from most cultural backgrounds, but the ritual between father and son is particularly symbolic for Korean spectators who will recognise the significance of Jun-ho filling Dong-wan's glass. Nevertheless, it is Robin who uses the ritual most effectively to communicate. The drinking ritual is complicated for non-Koreans, but Robin understands the significance of the ritual and shows his respect by adhering to tradition, an act that does not go unnoticed.

The mealtime scene sees Robin participate in specific Korean ritual activities to build bonds with the Kim family. This participation is prominent as Robin is the cultural outsider, and in previous scenes, cultural differences and the language barrier have caused conflict between him and Dong-wan. There are moments when Robin objectifies Korean culture from his English language outsider perspective. However, I never intended his outsider perspective to dominate how audiences see the narrative world. Admittedly I wanted the language barrier to create some conflict, but the language barrier needed to frustrate all characters, regardless of outsider or insider perspective.

The early conflict between Robin and Dong-wan comes from mistrust that the language barrier intensifies. In the context of character development, I wanted to lead Robin and Dong-wan into a scenario that would provide space for conflict resolution and instigate a change in their relationship before moving into the later stages of the story. The challenge was enabling this scenario without the interpreter, Ji-hyun, who was not required in every scene, forcing me to consider specific communication strategies to navigate the language barrier and connect the belligerent characters.

Conflict resolution occurs with the extended sequence that sees Robin and Dong-wan perform the burial of Seung-min's mother. With mortality and communication being significant themes of *Into Dust*, the burial scene supports my thematic intentions and marks the first time of significance in which Dong-wan and Robin must communicate without Ji-hyun to interpret. It was, therefore, essential to consider how ritual practices could facilitate

understanding to ensure the emotional impact of this pivotal scene. The following extract from *Into Dust* marks the end of the burial scene and the moment that Robin and Dong-wan perform their symbolic rituals:

ROBIN
[We should say something.]
He takes a step forward.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[Into the freedom of wind and
sunshine, we let you go. Into the
dance of the stars and the planets,
we let you go. Into the wind's
breath and the hands of the star
maker, we let you go. We love you,
we miss you, we want you to be
happy. Go safely, go dancing, go
running home.]

Dong-wan looks at Seung-min and shrugs.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
[I had to read it at my mum's
funeral. I still remember.]

Dong-wan nods, understanding the sentiment if not the words.
He pushes Seung-min forward.

DONG-WAN
You know how to make a big bow?

SEUNG-MIN
Yes.

DONG-WAN
Good. Make two big bows to your
mother.

Seung-min follows his orders and kneels to make two deep
bows.

DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
Well done. Now do it again with me.

Seung-min kneels to bow with Dong-wan. Robin copies their
actions. All three make the big bows. They stand.

Into Dust: Version Four (Carter 2022), p. 96

Robin's poem in the burial scene carries emotional weight due to the earlier reveal that he lost his mother at a young age. Hypothetically, Korean-speaking spectators will read subtitles and interpret the meaning of his words. Without Ji-hyun, Dong-wan cannot interpret the poem's content, but he understands that the speech has significance in this context. About contemporary Korean funerals, Dredge (1978: 20) notes that:

There is no eulogy or funeral service per se; condolences have been paid individually to the family members and to the spirit of the deceased (bowing to the picture of the deceased two

times is the proper expression of respect, then one bow to the chief mourners and a word of condolence).

Eulogies are uncommon at Korean funerals, so Dong-wan's decision to speak is a step outside of Korean cultural norms, a consequence of how he interprets the significance of Robin's speech.

A concern was that Dong-wan's speech would seem unnatural to native Koreans as he addresses the deceased verbally, going against tradition and presenting an incomparable scenario to real life. During the drafting stage, I considered removing the speech altogether to avoid it becoming problematic. Ultimately, my artistic choice was to retain the speech for the poignancy it adds to the scene. By speaking in this manner, Dong-wan's speech is an act of deference seemingly out of context for his character, suggesting that he is more open to change than his family and, to this point, the spectators may expect. From a Korean perspective, Dong-wan's speech is significant as it is a deviation from tradition, and by virtue of its difference, it becomes meaningful. Dong-wan's speech may seem unusual to some, but it is within the boundaries of believability, providing an unfamiliar perspective of a familiar situation to those who have attended traditional funerals. Ultimately, the ritual practice of bowing to the burial mound, a traditional and recognisable expression of respect in Korean culture (MacGregor 2008), ends the scene and restores cultural normality to provide balance.

There is no need to provide expositional dialogue to explain the importance of ritualised bowing to Robin, Seung-min or potential non-Korean audiences. The ritual practice allows them to connect through the physical act rather than words. However, the ritual practices on show in the burial scene created inconsistencies in feedback from Korean nationals. The details under scrutiny are found in the following extract from version four of *Into Dust*, the version provided to interview participants:

LATER --

The sky gradually lightens. It will be dawn soon.

The body has been buried under a mound of soil. They work together on their knees, patting the soil into shape.

DONG-WAN
Seung-min, you can stand on the mound now. Use your feet.

Seung-min stands on the mound and stomps the soil to make it firm.

ROBIN
[Is it normal to stomp on her grave like that?]

Seung-min steps off the mound. It's done.

DONG-WAN
We did the best we could in the situation.

Dong-wan takes the salt shaker from his pocket and sprinkles salt around the mound.

ROBIN
[What does the salt do? Stop weeds from growing on the grave?]

Dong-wan ignores Robin, but notices Seung-min's confusion.

DONG-WAN
The salt keeps evil spirits away.

Into Dust: Version Four (Carter 2022), p. 94-95.

Some participants noted how the culturally specific details of the burial reflect my knowledge of Korean culture (Appendix A: 262, 280) while others remarked on the same details being unfamiliar and excessive (Appendix A: 276-77, 289-90). The contradictory nature of these remarks acknowledges the variety that exists in cultural practices and reinforces an argument made earlier in this thesis: that there is no such thing as a monolithic Korean identity and, therefore, no universal experience when it comes to funerals. The fact that younger participants noted their inexperience with traditional funeral practices compared to older participants also suggests a cultural shift may be in progress, as rapid urbanisation over recent decades makes traditional burials less practical.

The contradictory nature of the answers gained through the interview process did not convince me to alter the burial scene, nor did the few comments that suggest Seung-min's presence to be unusual due to his young age. My response is to promote my own lived experience in Korea. I have attended traditional burials and witnessed first-hand the practices included in my screenplay, such as family members stamping on the burial mound and the ritualised bowing. The comments I did take on board stress how this version of the scene simply had 'too much tradition' (Appendix A: 276-277) and that my commitment to

authenticity was interpretable as a writer ‘trying too hard to show how much [they] know Korean culture’ (Appendix A: 276-277). Most participants had no knowledge of the act of salt sprinkling to keep evil spirits at bay, and even older participants with experience of traditional funerals perceived the act an antiquated superstition that is rarely performed in the present. Although I included the ritual practice elements to connect characters through physical acts, undoubtedly, I had saturated the burial scene with ritual practices and failed to comprehend how distracting the elements were for Korean spectators.

My reaction was to remove the salt sprinkling from the scene completely and rework the dialogue to include an interaction between Dong-wan and Seung-min:

```
LATER --

The sky gradually lightens. It will be dawn soon.

The body has been buried under a mound of soil. They work
together on their knees, patting the soil into shape.

                DONG-WAN
                Seung-min, you can stand on the
                mound now. Use your feet.

Seung-min stands on the mound and stomps the soil to make it
firm.

                ROBIN
                [Is it normal to stomp on her grave
                like that?]

Dong-wan places the framed photo and unopened soju bottle on
the mound. Seung-min steps off. It's done.

                DONG-WAN
                We did the best we could in the
                situation.

They stare in silence for a beat. Dong-wan places a hand on
Seung-min's head.

                DONG-WAN (CONT'D)
                You did well. I'm proud of you.

                SEUNG-MIN
                When will she go to the sky?

                DONG-WAN
                Soon. When she's ready.

                SEUNG-MIN
                Can I go?

                DONG-WAN
                No. Not now.

                SEUNG-MIN
                Why?

                DONG-WAN
                You're mother wouldn't want you to
                go to the sky yet. She'd want you
                to come with us.
```

Into Dust: Version Five (Carter 2022), p. 94-95.

Now, the scene emphasizes a different type of communication, that must take place between an adult and child. At seven years old, Seung-min does not fully comprehend the reality of death, believing that his mother will be ascending to the sky, Dong-wan can do nothing but be in accordance with Seung-min's belief. They share language, but still the truth must remain hidden.

The mealtime scene and the burial scene were written to appeal to my intended audiences' emotions. There was no need to make either Robin or Dong-wan mute because of the language barrier, nor was there a need to compromise the meaningfulness of either English or Korean dialogue. Robin and Dong-wan communicate without a lingua franca as the symbolic power of ritual activities supports their dialogue. The physical and ritualised actions are relatable for spectators and connect two characters from different cultural backgrounds. However, overly saturating the burial scene with ritual actions was detrimental to spectator enjoyment. Thus, the strategy of ritual actions for communication should be used with caution.

4.7 Conclusion

Blending two languages within a screenplay text will always pose a challenge. Considering various strategies to navigate the language barrier effectively was a significant part of the writing process. It is impossible to fully explore how to navigate language barriers in a dual-language screenplay text within the frame of this PhD. Nevertheless, a succinct exploration of the subject suggests that a deeper consideration of communication strategies opens promising avenues for screenwriting research.

Ji-hyun was characterised as a bilingual language bridge and cultural broker from version one of *Into Dust* and using her as an interpreter character was the most straightforward solution for the language issue. Ji-hyun had to be developed thoroughly to reveal her depth and nuances as a significant character. By evaluating the level of her bilingualism, I was able to form a character profile that prioritised language proficiency as an influential force in her characterisation. Subsequently, I theorised how specific aspects of bilingualism could impact character development. Ji-hyun is a conflicted character, and her bilingualism became the foundation for exploring her duality. The Markedness Model

is valid to theorise how a language barrier can alienate outsider characters who do not belong to the in-group who speak the narrative's matrix language. At the same time, translanguaging allows bilingual characters to take a liminal position between outsider and insider. Moving between languages provides texture and authenticity to dialogue, but more significantly, it allows Ji-hyun to control interactions and recontextualise herself through the languages she uses. Making Ji-hyun an unreliable interpreter was also a beneficial creative decision as it provided opportunities for purposeful misinterpretations that added tension or comedic respite.

While the benefits of an interpreter character are evident, including such a character becomes problematic when they are absent from interactions they would otherwise facilitate. Ji-hyun was not required for every scene, forcing me to consider other communication strategies to navigate the language barrier between Robin and Dong-wan. In my experience, ambiguity is part of cultural negotiation, and engaging in verbal and non-verbal communication is potentially unavoidable in a transcultural scenario. Non-verbal communications can be pure and uncluttered forms of interaction when a simple solution is required. However, verbal communication does not become irrelevant when a lingua franca is absent. What became apparent during the writing of *Into Dust*, informed by case studies of *Lost in Translation* and *The Ramen Girl*, was the opportunities to blend ambiguous verbal communications with specific, symbolic ritual activities to connect characters from different cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, a language barrier is an obstacle that can be navigated to benefit characterisation and story development, not a stumbling block.

I intended that *Into Dust* would engage with the hostility of language barriers in a transcultural scenario and showcase how characters from different cultural backgrounds can communicate without language. Notably, the English and Korean language relationship between Robin, Ji-hyun and the Kim family exposes communication frustrations in a transcultural context from insider and outsider perspectives. While bilingual and multilingual characters are not unusual in cinema, it is reasonable to suggest that they may become a staple in the future. After all, more than half the global population speaks more than a single language and bilingualism and transcultural scenarios are projected to become more commonplace as the world continues to globalise (Vince 2016). Writing *Into Dust* exposed new knowledge regarding the impact of bilingualism on characterisation, the

malleability of interpreter characters within a narrative, and how verbal and non-verbal communications can be used strategically to navigate a language barrier whilst still developing character relationships.

PART 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Reflection on Interviews

In accordance with the methodological approach outlined for this thesis, the ‘final draft’ of *Into Dust* was subjected to the critical eyes of ten Korean nationals to engage with their perspectives. This late-stage supplementary interview phase was designed to gather feedback and enrich the reflective process preceding the thesis conclusion. As a screenwriting practitioner, seeking external critiques has been an integral part of refining my work. By introducing *Into Dust* to this discourse, I aimed to gain insights into the cultural reception of the narrative should it move into production.

The value of these interviews lies in their provision of immediate and candid responses, revealing the cultural resonance of my screenplay and areas where recalibration might be necessary in the future. Feedback on character authenticity was particularly sought after to inform future revisions and ensure that, if *Into Dust* were to transcend this academic exploration, it would do so with cultural integrity intact.

It is crucial to recognise that gaining insights and opinions diverged significantly from the resource-intensive practices common in professional studio environments. Although the interviewees functioned in a role resembling cultural consultants in an industry context, their involvement was not predicated on possessing professional expertise or embodying the diversity of a whole cultural group. Their recruitment through informal social networks underlines the casual nature of their engagement, reflecting a deliberate design choice rather than an oversight. Given the resource constraints inherent to this academic setting, I could not extend monetary compensation to the interviewees, a fact that underscores the non-commercial nature of their participation. Furthermore, their lack of vested interest in the project results emphasises their impartiality, with no inclination to influence the narrative of *Into Dust*.

These interviews, though informal, constitute a valuable adjunct to my research, offering cultural viewpoints without the depth of scrutiny or the formalised engagement associated with professional advisories. With hindsight, I acknowledge that a more integrated approach to incorporating feedback at an earlier stage might have further

enriched the screenplay. Had the study been designed with this element at its core, the structure would have revolved around such feedback from the outset. Nonetheless, the timing of the feedback phase allowed for a post-completion reflection that instigated minor changes rather than foundational input, delineating its role as supplementary rather than integral.

Part Three of this commentary underscores my alignment with Slimbach's transcultural competence model, bolstering the assertion of my capability to authentically represent Korean culture from an outsider's perspective. As cultural commentators, the participants provided a lens through which potential cultural misrepresentations could be identified, assessing the integrity of my portrayal. Despite their limited number, the varied insights they offered were invaluable, though it is crucial to acknowledge that the feedback from ten participants constitutes a limited sample and, therefore, cannot be taken as an exhaustive compendium of cultural perspectives. While certain subjective opinions and insights proved beneficial, enhancing the screenplay's cultural authenticity, others stood in contrast to my research findings. Moreover, some feedback was consciously set aside when it conflicted with narrative objectives or posed practical constraints to the storytelling process.

Among the positive insights gained, I was surprised to hear participants name Mi-sook as the most genuine character. Before the interviews, I worried Mi-sook was one-dimensional and in need of development; therefore, the response from participants alleviated my concerns and stopped me from changing her characterisation. If I had learned no other insight, the affirmation that I have created a relatable, accurate and believable Korean *ajumma* (middle-aged woman) character would have been enough to alleviate the previously highlighted anxieties relating to my outsider status. The fact that I have created a character that Korean nationals instantly recognise and compare to their own mothers is a source of pride.

Observing the generational variations in response to the characters depicted in *Into Dust* proved quite insightful. Specifically, younger participants of the *isipdae* (twenty-something) generation were inclined to perceive Dong-wan as a typical *ajeossi* (middle-aged man), noting his hard-headedness and preference to deflect frustrations onto others rather than openly express his true feelings. In contrast, older participants offered an

entirely different perspective, characterising Dong-wan as a ‘typical Korean *appa* (father), working hard and suffering quietly’ (Appendix A: 288), a curious observation considering that Dong-wan is far from silent regarding his grievances. This difference in generational viewpoints supports my earlier claim that no homogenous cultural perspective exists. Instead, individuals from a specific cultural group harbour divergent opinions regarding cultural behaviour and will exhibit varied reactions to fictional characters.

It is also noteworthy that the potentially contentious cross-cultural conflict between Dong-wan and Robin was generally accepted by interview participants, alleviating my concerns regarding the potential challenges that this conflict might pose for my target audience. This aspect of the narrative was incorporated to engage with timely themes surrounding cross-cultural communication, immigration, and the migrant experience from the perspective of both the insider, represented by the Korean national, and the outsider, represented by the foreign resident of Korea. While most participants noted that the characters in question embody prejudiced attitudes, it is noteworthy that the consensus among participants was that these characters reflect an uncomfortable reality in which such attitudes persist and thus warrant exploration. In their roles as casual cultural consultants, the interview participants illuminated the nuanced responses that may be elicited by a screen story that confronts topics such as the migrant experience and attitudes toward foreigners in Korea. These themes invariably invite discourse, and as an internal participant in this dialogue as a settled migrant in Korea, the feedback supports my decision to engage with potentially contentious sociocultural issues, exemplified by cross-cultural conflict, within the narrative.

I initiated this discussion on the critical aspects of representation within *Into Dust* with illuminations of success, yet some narrative elements did not receive a similarly positive assessment. Throughout the interviews, numerous comments were made regarding the authenticity of the narrative content, comments which were deemed significant enough to incorporate into the final version of my screenplay. Within the critical commentary, I provide a more in-depth analysis of two pivotal scenes in the screenplay: Ji-hyun’s revelation of her secret pregnancy to Mi-sook (Part Three) and the scene depicting Robin and Dong-wan burying Seung-min’s mother (Part Four). These scenes, integral to character development and plot progression, were subjected to criticism by some of the interview

participants for their perceived lack of cultural authenticity. Recognising the importance of these scenes within the narrative, it became crucial to undertake further edits post-interview to enhance the verisimilitude for Korean audiences. These significant alterations underscore the vital role that can be played by cultural consultants in transcultural screenwriting endeavours, regardless of one's self-proclaimed transcultural competence. It becomes apparent that certain aspects of Korean culture elude capture through personal experience and research alone.

It is essential at this juncture to acknowledge that specific issues identified by interviewees have not been rectified in subsequent revisions, a decision driven by practical considerations. A particular point of contention arose concerning a scene at the service stop gas station (see *Into Dust* pages 18-29). Interview participants expressed scepticism over the narrative's plausibility, specifically the portrayal of Korean characters who abandon a stranded individual at the service stop. As per the feedback, this action contradicts the deep-seated values of Korean culture, encapsulated in the sentiment that the Kim family 'wouldn't drive away and leave the man behind [because] taking care of each other is the Korean way' (Appendix A: 270). Such a sense of shared communal identity and responsibility is characteristic of a collectivist society, where, according to Hofstede, loyalty is paramount and supersedes most other societal rules and regulations (2001: 225-238). Indeed, in a collectivist context, the fortification of solid relationships and the collective responsibility borne for group members are of utmost importance, and 'breaking this loyalty is one of the worst things a person can do' (Hofstede 2001: 226). The potential for cultural disagreement is evident here, as my own cultural background is rooted in individualism, which may manifest in my creative work as a tendency to prioritise individual agency and survival, as seen in the desperate father's actions to protect his family.

Additionally, the depicted scenario's authenticity was questioned, particularly regarding the operation of LPG (liquid petroleum gasoline) pumps, which in Korea are commonly operated by attendants rather than self-service (Appendix A: 273). The resulting tension, contingent upon Dong-wan's lack of fuel and subsequent commandeering of a vehicle, might strike Korean viewers as implausible. Nevertheless, I considered this alteration to be unnecessary. Screenwriting sometimes demands an artistic license to

construct a compelling fictional universe. In this instance, the logistical realities of gas station operations in the context of a looming apocalyptic event are less crucial than the narrative imperative. Audiences are often willing to engage with a story's universe by suspending their disbelief, accepting that the world within the narrative may deviate from tangible reality.

In light of these considerations, maintaining the original service stop sequence was deliberate. The scene in question is one of the more complex sequences to develop and a critical juncture for Dong-wan's character, marking a definitive point of no return and catalysing the story's progression into the second act. Its significance lies in its portrayal of Dong-wan's profound determination to protect his family at all costs, a depiction that may transcend conventional societal expectations but one I deem justifiable in the defamiliarised world of the apocalyptic scenario. Any modification to this scene would require extensive reworking of the following narrative structure, which was considered infeasible after careful deliberation given the scene's established centrality to the screenplay's dramatic arc.

I also encountered feedback that, while insightful, did not align with the underpinnings of my research. For instance, Ji-hyun's narrative involving an abortion raised questions about the practicalities of her affording the procedure independently (Appendix A: 269, 271-72). I appreciate the concern for verisimilitude; however, my understanding of the Korean healthcare system—particularly the strict adherence to medical confidentiality—supports the narrative choice that Ji-hyun could undertake such a procedure without parental involvement. Moreover, it's not uncommon for students in Korea, especially those with proficiency in English, to engage in remunerative part-time work, such as language tutoring. These jobs can provide sufficient income for personal matters, such as healthcare needs, that they may choose to keep private.

As for the portrayal of character behaviours, there were diverse opinions among the feedback providers. Some pointed out that Jun-ho's behaviour seemed at odds with Korean cultural norms regarding age and respect, especially his decision to leave his family at a pivotal moment in the narrative (see *Into Dust*, pages 38-40). Others found Jun-ho's actions understandable, sympathising with his struggle as a young adult facing an uncertain future. Likewise, some interpreted Dong-wan's behaviour as unduly abrasive, potentially

reflecting negatively on broader cultural perceptions. Yet, it was also noted that Dongwan's character is not representative of all Koreans, and varying character traits are portrayed within the screenplay.

The dichotomy in these perceptions suggests no monolithic way to interpret behaviour within any culture, and the nuances in the screenplay reflect a broad spectrum of human reactions under duress. This complexity is the essence of crafting authentic characters who resonate with various experiences and viewpoints. As such, the decision to retain the original character depictions was informed by a conscientious balance between feedback, cultural research, and the narrative's needs. In sum, while enlightening, the value of late-stage participant feedback also underscores the intrinsic limitations of a narrowly scoped cultural consultation. It is pertinent to note that, although invaluable, such feedback offers a limited and subjective perspective and cannot be used as a comprehensive indicator of broader audience responses.

This brings us to the critical discussion regarding the ethics of writing in a transcultural context. I have posited that the imperative to avoid damaging cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations should be central to the practice of transcultural screenwriting. As mentioned, feedback and insights from such a modest sample size can serve as a compass, steering the narrative towards greater relatability and cultural authenticity. Equally significant is their capacity to instigate revisions to circumvent inadvertent offence or discomfort among my intended audience. However, it is undeniable that particular feedback was overlooked to accommodate my creative intentions.

One justification may be that, in my capacity as an anglophone screenwriter steeped in Western/Hollywood screenwriting conventions, I have internalised the notion that well-rounded characters necessitate confronting obstacles and manifesting growth throughout their character arcs. This inclination led me to disregard feedback that potentially posed a threat to the carefully crafted trajectory of the plot, except in cases where the input was unequivocally compelling (e.g., the revisions made to Ji-hyun's pregnancy backstory scene and the changes made to the burial scene.) By doing so, one could argue that I prioritised my creative desires and storytelling objectives over my responsibility to authentically represent the cultural group portrayed in *Into Dust*. This tension within transcultural

screenwriting practice was not adequately addressed at the outset when examining my right to write this screenplay.

Furthermore, I must acknowledge the ethical problems that stem from ignoring feedback, which can be regarded as deliberate misrepresentation. While the characters in the narrative are fictional, they should not avoid scrutiny in the ethical debate because the effects of these characters and other facets of the narrative can deeply resonate with spectators who engage with them through shared cultural commonalities (Cosgrove 2009). One justification for the selective incorporation of feedback from interview participants is grounded in the recognition that the ten individuals providing feedback do not comprehensively represent the intricate tapestry of identities, beliefs and perspectives that constitute Korean society. Although each participant's opinions hold inherent value, it remains an unrealistic expectation to anticipate that a screenwriter can address every single concern in a manner that will appease an entire cultural group. As Barbash and Taylor aptly underscore in the context of cross-cultural documentary filmmaking, ethical dilemmas will emerge despite the best intentions, sometimes even after your screen work is completed and in distribution (1997: 49). Consequently, one must accept that criticism stemming from what is deemed as inauthentic representation may be unavoidable to some degree.

As previously acknowledged, the constructive critiques from the interview process have prompted reflection on the adjustments that could be made in future projects. Should the opportunity to revisit this methodology arise, one might consider engaging in interviews earlier in the screenwriting process, thus integrating cultural insights from the outset. Such a strategy could provide earlier access to distinct cultural perspectives that might pre-empt and thus mitigate potential misrepresentations. In addition, involving a broader cohort of participants, reflecting a wider cross-section of Korean society, would offer a richer and more intricate collection of viewpoints, enriching the screenplay with authentic experiences and identities.

Yet, one must be cautious of the 'writing by committee' trap, where the quest for cultural validity could overshadow the creative impetus. The informal cultural feedback obtained, while aimed at enhancing narrative authenticity, also brought to the fore the dilemma of permission and my 'right to write' by providing me with feedback that had to be ignored. The ensuing internal debate—balancing the respect for cultural fidelity with the

right to artistic expression—raises important questions about whether an expanded panel of cultural commentators would enrich the script’s veracity or impose a rigid framework of checks that might stifle creative expression.

This PhD has provided space for examining the concerns and apprehensions surrounding authorial permission in a transcultural context. This self-examination has acknowledged the problems and challenges of portraying Korea and its people as a non-Korean screenwriter and my navigations through crafting a transcultural narrative. Considering the positive feedback received, it is tempting to regard *Into Dust* as an accomplished screenplay that authentically portrays Korea and its people. However, this success can be contradicted by my decision to overlook particular feedback from some of the interviewees acting as cultural consultants, a choice that casts a spotlight on the complex decision-making process that underpins transcultural storytelling within a globalised landscape.

One case study, however, cannot encapsulate the questions and challenges this research unearthed. The lack of established ethical guidelines for transcultural screenwriting is a constraint and a catalyst for continued academic exploration. This thesis does not conclude with definitive answers but rather with a call to action for formulating nuanced ethical frameworks to guide future screenwriters through the complexities of crafting transcultural narratives. Such guidelines are imperative for aiding screenwriters in navigating the multiple layers of transcultural storytelling, ensuring harmony between authentic cultural representations and the sanctity of creative freedom that defines the essence of the screenwriting craft.

5.2 Thesis Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the intricacies of transcultural screenwriting, with a specific focus on the development of a dual-language screenplay for Korean audiences by a non-Korean, anglophone screenwriter. The central question that guided this inquiry was: *What considerations come into play when writing a dual-language screen story for Korean audiences as a non-Korean, anglophone screenwriter?* To delve deeper into this overarching question, two sub-questions emerged:

a. *What permission do I have to write a Korean screenplay as a non-Korean screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to navigate internalised and externalised notions of permission when writing about a cultural group as an outsider?*

b. *What are the language challenges of writing a screenplay intended for dual-language performance as an anglophone screenwriter, and what strategies can be used to overcome a language barrier between Korean-speaking and English-speaking characters?*

Against these sub-questions, this study has investigated two interrelated aims. The first has been to reveal the challenges and anxieties faced by a screenwriter when writing in a particular transcultural context. The second has been to reveal how those challenges and anxieties have informed my own screenwriting practice, bringing into being a screenplay that is intended to contribute new knowledge to transcultural screenwriting research. The creation of *Into Dust* has provided a framework enabling me to analyse my practice as a screenwriter navigating the challenges and opportunities presented when crafting a transcultural narrative and developing a framework for transcultural screenwriting. In this concluding section, I will consider the findings that have emerged from my journey in practice-based research, reflect on personal insights gained throughout the process, highlight the new knowledge contributed to the field of screenwriting research, and consider its broader ramifications.

Part Three of this critical commentary emphasized the necessity of representing diverse cultural backgrounds in transcultural writing. This involves understanding and incorporating various cultural identities and perspectives for a nuanced portrayal of human experiences. Practitioners in transcultural screenwriting should engage in representative writing, acknowledging their ability to authentically depict a culture, like Korea in this case, without perpetuating stereotypes. I presented Slimbach's model of transcultural competence to aid practitioners in assessing their ability to create transculturally aware narratives, emphasising that my familiarity with Korea enhances my confidence in writing *Into Dust*. I then discussed anxieties as a non-Korean screenwriter depicting Korea, categorizing them as outsider anxiety and Orientalist anxiety. I posited that embracing the

outsider perspective enriches the interpretation of a transcultural narrative, allowing a potentially novel understanding of the depicted culture. In *Into Dust*, specific Korean sociocultural issues were integrated as a strategy to overcome the underscored anxieties, illustrating how transcultural narratives can become a space for a screenwriter to blend personal experiences with extensive research to explore issues that resonate with the intended audience. Furthermore, by delving into the topic of immigration and interconnected issues of cross-cultural conflict and foreigner objectification, I demonstrated how a transcultural narrative can explore the complexities of a globalized world where diverse cultures intersect and interact.

Part Four of this critical commentary focuses on the complexities and challenges of writing a narrative that incorporates two languages. It begins by categorizing bilingualism in for character development, delving into how a character's bilingual abilities are strategically used to distinguish between their masked and unmasked identities, thereby enriching their development with layers of depth and subtlety. I identified how characters can be developed with different personality traits based on the language they use, creating multifaceted characterisations. A model for the bilingual interpreter character's role in screen stories was introduced, emphasizing how characters with distinct language capabilities can impact narratives that involve language barriers. Non-verbal communication through ritual practices was explored, showcasing the potential for ritual practices to bridge language gaps when interpreter characters are absent. I analysed the use of ritual practice in *Lost in Translation* and *The Ramen Girl* to demonstrate how language barriers and ritual practices can be presented to either perpetuate negative and stereotypical depictions of East-Asian cultural groups, or conversely, bridge language gaps between characters of different cultural backgrounds. The latter approach seeks not to evade the intricacies of communication but rather to offer a balanced representation that incorporates both insider and outsider perspectives, reflecting the complexity of communication in transcultural scenarios.

In the context of a screenwriting practice-based PhD, this oscillation between the roles of observer and observed during the research journey transforms the researcher-practitioner into a 'knowing screenwriter' and the resulting artefact into a 'knowing screenplay' (Batty and McAulay 2016). These conceptualisations are indebted to Gibson's

explanation of ‘knowing’ as a state characterized by illumination and the ability to unveil mysteries (2010: 4). In the specific context of screenwriting practice research, Batty and McAulay assert that ‘knowing’ occurs when the practitioner-researcher gains experiential insights through the creation of a screenplay and subsequently reflects on these insights within an academic framework (2016: 8). Consequently, as the research project culminates, the researcher-practitioner should have undergone a perceptible shift in perspective, substantiating their transformation into a ‘knowing screenwriter.’ This transformation mirrors the screenplay’s evolution, which is continually enriched by research throughout its developmental stages. To this end, this thesis comprises a critical commentary that references five different versions of *Into Dust* created during this PhD project. Subsequently, it is rational to engage in a discourse about the gains accrued from this protracted and reflective creation process, the resultant transformation into a ‘knowing screenwriter’, and the characterisation of *Into Dust* as a ‘knowing screenplay.’

The process of crafting a screenplay within the framework of practice-based research endows the researcher with the dual roles of practitioner and researcher, ultimately yielding an academic screenplay that can expand conventional screenwriting knowledge. This extensive research and revision process has culminated in a self-awareness concerning both my practice itself and my evolving identity as a transcultural screenwriter. The trajectory of my journey parallels that of the characters, Dong-wan and Robin, who both must become more transculturally competent within the narrative, emphasizing the ongoing nature of this transformation. Part Three of the critical commentary juxtaposes my insider knowledge of Korean culture with Slimbach’s model of transcultural competence (Slimbach 2005: 206-207) to support my capacity to write about Korea and its people as a non-Korean. However, the process revealed gaps in my knowledge and instances of misrepresentation within the narrative, certain compromises made in the interest of storytelling, serving as markers of my still-evolving cultural sensitivity and awareness. Acknowledging my choice to prioritise creative freedom over self-censorship, I am compelled to reflect on my aptitude for exhibiting the adaptability necessary to navigate the complex transcultural context in which I am situated.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding its imperfections, *Into Dust* encapsulates my evolving perspective consciousness, denoting the capacity to critically examine cultural

assumptions and judgments. The Western anglophone character, Robin, conceived within *Into Dust*, was not intended to be an autobiographical representation but rather a tool for exploring the experiences of a cultural outsider in Korea. Reflecting on Robin's characterisation, I must accept the ethnocentric tendencies rooted in my perspective as a foreign resident in Korea—tendencies that I failed to identify before commencing this project. However, the more contentious facets of Robin's characterisation were not removed or sanitized to present an ideal migrant figure, even at the risk of exposing my suppressed ethnocentrism. The creation of this character compelled me, as a screenwriter, to acknowledge that I am still in the process of developing the transculturally competent mindset required to perceive the world through the perspectives and emotions of others.

Furthermore, this journey prompted an introspective examination of my identity, encompassing my British citizenship, my status as a Korean resident, my immigrant status, and my identity as a white immigrant with its inherent privileges. This heightened self-awareness enabled me to adopt various stances while shaping my creative identity, facilitating the incorporation of multiple ideas and meanings into my screenplay. Throughout the development of *Into Dust*, I grappled with the experience of being objectified as a foreigner, concurrently acknowledging how my limited language proficiency marked me as an outsider. I celebrated my lived experiences and commitment to cultural sensitivity while recognizing that, just as people may make assumptions of me, I unintentionally make assumptions about a cultural group to which I did not belong. This journey fostered a deeper, more nuanced understanding of my relationship with Korea—one that transcends the desire to assimilate or remain on the peripheries. It solidified my sense of self as a transcultural screenwriter who occupies the plural position of both insider and outsider—a sense of self that crystallized as I wrote *Into Dust*.

In summary, this expedition commenced with me as a practitioner, embarking on the creation of a screenplay, and through the process of creative practice research, I have become a practitioner-researcher who possesses a heightened awareness of the contexts and meanings embedded within my creative practice. The emergence of *Into Dust* as an academic screenplay is a noteworthy achievement but I should not automatically exalt the work as a flawless example of transcultural screenwriting. Instead, it should be regarded as

a document suffused with my experiential journey through research, serving to complement discussions surrounding representation and transculturalism in screenwriting.

Prior to delving into the discussion regarding how *Into Dust* can be construed as a ‘knowing’ screenplay with academic merit for both scholars and practitioners, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research project, albeit insightful, constitutes a solitary case study centred on a specific transcultural scenario. While I have exalted the value of individual case studies of screenwriting, I must also accept that this case study naturally lacks the capacity to encompass the entirety of transcultural screenwriting challenges, with its findings firmly tethered to the ‘non-Korean in Korea’ context under examination. Consequently, the context impedes the findings having universal applicability to all transcultural narratives. Additionally, it is crucial to underscore that certain research avenues explored during this project were regrettably omitted from the final critical commentary due to word limit constraints. Notably, in the early stages of development, significant attention was directed towards the intricate art of crafting dialogue for a screenplay destined for translation from English to Korean. This entailed the theoretical exploration of the role of implied translators in the realm of transcultural screenwriting and an examination of the potential implications of mistranslations on a screenplay’s fundamental purpose—its capacity to convey the potential narrative for the screen. Unfortunately, this avenue of research had to be excluded from the final critical commentary but remains poised as the foundation for future research endeavours.

Into Dust serves as the research artefact—a dual-language screenplay tailored for Korean audiences, crafted by a non-Korean screenwriter. It explores various contemporary sociocultural concerns within Korea’s increasingly transcultural landscape, engaging with cross-cultural conflict, immigrant perceptions, and the migrant experience. Additionally, it delves into Korea-specific themes of parental educational expectations, gender inequality, extramarital pregnancies, and abortion, while also spotlighting patriarchal power dynamics and intergenerational conflicts—contentious subjects in contemporary Korea. Through Dong-wan’s interactions with his family members, the narrative explores the societal ramifications stemming from Korea’s transformation from an agrarian society to a postmodern, globally interconnected industrial one, alluding to the societal disruptions

afflicting individuals and the consequential strain on familial relationships as the traditional patriarch loses power (Park 2001: 48). The incorporation of an apocalyptic element within *Into Dust* does not diminish the gravity of the contemporary sociocultural issues addressed. On the contrary, the narrative is positioned within a realm of realism, albeit punctuated by a looming apocalyptic event, thereby defamiliarizing the narrative world and granting the screenplay the latitude to scrutinize these issues in a distinctive and unconventional manner.

I would like to underscore that while the exploration of sociocultural issues within the framework of a screenplay is not an entirely new endeavour within the industry, *Into Dust* distinguishes itself through its multifaceted approach to these themes. While industry-facing screen stories such as the previously referenced *Parasite* and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* provide poignant social commentary on specific societal and gender inequalities, respectively, *Into Dust* explores a broad spectrum of interconnected sociocultural issues, thanks to a rigorous integration of scholarly research across sociological, historical, and cultural domains. Thus, the screenplay narrative engages with multiple sociocultural issues, imbuing it with a profound depth, enriching its portrayal of Korea's sociocultural environment with an authenticity and complexity that often eludes conventional industry-produced narratives.

Furthermore, *Into Dust* does not merely present sociocultural issues within its narrative framework. It strategically employs these issues to steer through the intricate web of internal and external notions permissions that significantly impacted the creative process. For example, the way *Into Dust* approaches migration issues, such as the tension in cultural contact zones and the narratives of unassimilated migrants, through characters like Dongwan and Robin, serves not just as a depiction of a relevant sociocultural issues but also as a means to negotiate the notions of permission that impact me as a non-Korean screenwriter in Korea. Thus, *Into Dust* contributes to the field not only through its narrative content but also by exemplifying how practitioners operating in a transcultural context can engage with and incorporate comprehensive research into their creative processes to navigate concerns stemming from notions of permission. This screenplay could thereby inspire other writers to explore similar integrations of scholarly rigor and creative storytelling, potentially enriching the narrative possibilities within their own transcultural landscape.

Moreover, *Into Dust* melds diverse cultural elements, languages, and perspectives to craft a narrative that mirrors the nuanced complexities of human interactions in an increasingly globalized world. Transculturalism addresses cultural fluidity and hybridity, recognizing that cultures are perpetually evolving and intermingling; underscoring the notion that cultures possess the capacity to adapt and transform when exposed to other cultural forms and perspectives (Kraidy 2005: 1-14). Therefore, *Into Dust* emerges as a quintessential transcultural narrative, for it prioritizes the amalgamation of disparate cultural forms throughout its creation. This deliberate fusion serves a dual purpose: shedding light on the challenges embedded within cultural exchange and celebrating the gradual erosion of misconceptions and prejudices.

The key consideration at this point is to discern what sets *Into Dust* apart as an academic ‘knowing’ screenplay, distinguishing it from standard screenplays that delve into sociocultural issues (e.g., *Moonlight* (Jenkins 2017) and its exploration of the struggles faced by a homosexual African American man) or screenplays written to investigate the intricacies of transcultural scenarios (e.g., *Babel* (Iñárritu 2006) which interweaves diverse languages and cultural perspectives within a global narrative). Within the view of this project, screenwriting was approached as a research practice before being regarded as a professional one. It is imperative to recognize that *Into Dust* may potentially transform into an industry-facing screenplay in the future; however, during its conception and development, it exclusively existed within the realm of academic research. It was meticulously conceived, developed, and scrutinized within the confines of an academic research environment and its primary purpose lay in facilitating, embodying, and explicating research, thereby warranting its classification as a research artifact, intrinsic to the academy (Batty and McAulay 2016: 4-6). What *Into Dust* ‘knows’ may make it a screenplay worthy of production; yet, from an academic perspective, the screenplay materialized solely through the research process, and its genesis was inextricably entwined with the meticulous interplay of research and academic mentorship. This convergence ensures a precision of meaning, infusing the work with social, historical, and theoretical resonance—elements arguably absent had the screenplay been cultivated outside the academic domain (Batty and McAulay 2016: 9), where it is more likely to be hampered by commercial constraints such as time limitations, budgetary constraints, and production

imperatives. In accordance with the notion that research into a subject ‘enables a better practice of that subject [and] a greater awareness of what we know about that subject’ (Batty and McAulay 2016: 6), a screenplay nurtured through research at every phase of its creation must be categorically recognized as a research artifact, encapsulating the entire spectrum of knowledge amassed on the subject investigated and serving as an enlightening document for others. Thus, *Into Dust* serves this purpose—it encapsulates research and stands as a ‘knowing’ screenplay that enhances the burgeoning body of transcultural screenwriting knowledge accessible to both scholars and creative practitioners.

Into Dust emerges from this PhD as a distinctive case study in the realm of transcultural screenwriting, underscored by the unique context of its creation. The illumination of the specific challenges and strategies encountered during the production of *Into Dust* serves to manifest the insights acquired throughout this research journey in a tangible form. Although previous studies have explored facets of screenwriting in the era of globalisation, encompassing themes like universal storytelling, the dynamics of cross-cultural international co-productions, and the transnational mobility of screen narratives, this PhD project offers a comprehensive examination of transcultural screenplay development from start to finish. As noted in Part One of the critical commentary, Korea has not experienced the same degree of Western representation as neighbouring East Asian cultures. Consequently, this research bridges a significant gap in the existing literature, particularly in the context of non-Korean screenwriters crafting narratives for Korean audiences. This singular context of creation grants *Into Dust* a unique status as a screenwriting artefact without any direct parallels, highlighted by the distinctiveness of the challenges it addresses.

This research delves into the nuances of transcultural screenwriting, shedding light on its evolving role in a world marked by increasing globalisation. In agreement with Bird and Stevens (2003), this research recognises that the rise of a ‘global culture’ is unlikely to fully supplant national cultures, which tenaciously maintain their distinct identities. This necessitates adaptability in national cultures, leading to the inevitable emergence and proliferation of complex transcultural scenarios. As Dagnino (2015) compellingly argues, the emergence of a ‘global cultural order’ makes transcultural narratives not just a possibility but an inevitability. This study, therefore, becomes crucial for screenwriters

navigating the complexities of transcultural themes or portraying cultures different from their own. It illuminates strategies, particularly in addressing the creative challenges and anxieties inherent in transcultural storytelling.

A notable contribution of this research lies in its exploration of communication within dual-language narratives. By introducing the innovative concept of a bilingual interpreter character and the application of translanguaging, it offers fresh avenues for crafting stories that resonate with a linguistically diverse global audience. Considering that approximately half of the world's population is bilingual (Gaia 2016), these strategies become even more pertinent, empowering screenwriters to create narratives that are not only authentic but also reflective of the linguistic diversity that characterises our interconnected world. In summation, this project significantly enriches the field of screenwriting as research. By unveiling novel strategies for engaging with diverse cultural perspectives, it contributes to the ongoing evolution of screenwriting practice. It encourages a more inclusive, globally attuned approach, essential for the modern screenwriter. However, it is crucial to emphasise that this research does not attempt to delineate a definitive model for transcultural screenplays. Proposing such a prescriptive framework would be antithetical to the fundamental principles of transculturalism, which inherently values hybridity and the fluidity of cultural exchanges. Instead, the creative strategies outlined in this study are intended to be adaptable and versatile, allowing them to be tailored to various unique cultural contexts. This approach acknowledges and respects the dynamic nature of transcultural creativity in screenwriting.

The field of transcultural screenwriting remains ripe for further exploration and investigation. The relentless march of globalisation continually ushers in transcultural activities, affording researcher-practitioners with ample opportunities to probe the nuances of screenwriting across diverse global scenarios. Case studies that delve into the strategies employed within unique cultural environments to develop screenplays hold immense value. These practice-based inquiries, culminating in the creation of research artifacts, address a pressing need within the academic landscape. As Harper aptly notes, screenwriting has yet to find a definitive place within the realm of creative and critical writing discourse, in contrast to forms such as poetry or prose (2014: ix). Batty and Baker elaborate on the struggle of screenwriting as research to secure a solid foothold within academia, largely due

to the dearth of publishing outlets and academic journals willing to accommodate unproduced screenplays for scholarly analysis (2018: 67-71). Thus, a growing body of academic research argues for and supports screenwriting practice as a significant research mode and screenplays as viable research artefacts. The successful completion of PhD projects focusing on screenwriting as research will enrich the repository of textual artefacts that can be employed as case studies, within which the creative component of this PhD will also find its place.

The study ‘Transcultural Screenwriting: Writing a Dual-language Screenplay for South Korean Audiences as a Western Screenwriter’ delves into the intricacies of crafting screenplays within the nuanced context of a non-Korean writer in Korea, offering a rich exploration of transcultural screenwriting. This scholarly pursuit enriches our comprehension of screenwriting craft, illuminating the multifaceted challenges faced by screenwriters navigating unfamiliar cultural terrain or venturing beyond their own cultural boundaries. By presenting *Into Dust* as an academic screenplay—a ‘knowing’ screenplay that not only embodies but also scrutinizes the intricacies of transcultural screenwriting, and acknowledges the continuous evolution required to achieve transcultural competency—the thesis not only contributes academic knowledge but also provides new avenues for creative professionals who aspire to refine their screenwriting skills in an increasingly interconnected world.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Participant: 34 years old, female, Daegu, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

Yes. Mi-sook reminds me of my mommy. She looks after her children like babies, even though they are both adults. The world is going to end, and she only thinks about caring for her husband and kids. My mom would be the same.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

The part when Dong-wan apologises to Ji-hyun, late in the story. He says sorry for not listening to her and he is very emotional. But I don't think a Korean daddy will speak this way. Not an older man like Dong-wan. In Korea we are taught to put blame on ourselves if something wrong happens so the other person can be generous to us. So, apologising is okay, but not without giving a reason. He might say something like this: "Because I had to work such long hours, I never had time to listen to you" or "Because I didn't have much money, you couldn't go to a better university." Or "If I had a better job, you would have a better life." Does it make sense? He would say sorry but in a way that makes her feel sorry for him. It is kind of gaslighting, isn't it?

One more thing I made a note of is Mi-sook and Dong-wan should call kids by full name when they are angry. When Dong-wan is angry at Jun-ho he should say "Kim Jun-ho." Is it the same in the UK? (Me: Yes. My mother would use my full name when angry with me or my siblings.) Ah, so it's the same. I think this is a worldwide thing, not only in Korea.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Dong-wan is a typical Korean daddy if you are my age. He thinks he is helping but he acts with his own mind and doesn't think about what the others want. It's realistic. This kind of man has always been in charge and made decisions for the family. He would not listen to his wife and children. It reminds me of my life a little. When I was in elementary school my parents had a restaurant business, but it started to lose money, and one day my daddy just moved us to a smaller apartment in a different area without any warning. I had to change schools and leave all my friends. I cried a lot, and so did my little brother, but my mommy made us stop crying when our daddy was home. Probably it wasn't easy for my daddy, so she didn't want to make it worse. Like in the story, Mi-sook doesn't agree with Dong-wan but she tries to support him and keep family together. Until she gets drunk.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

Erm, yes, he seems racist. He seems a little racist. I know that is still bad, but I mean he is not that different to most people. If you go to any country, you will find people who don't like foreigners. In my opinion, Dong-wan doesn't really trust anyone in this situation. It doesn't matter that Robin is not Korea. Whoever is in the car, Dong-wan will dislike them. Maybe he would be even meaner if they spoke the same language. (Me: Can you explain that point further?) Well, Robin is a stranger and Dong-wan doesn't want him there because he is annoying. If Robin was a young Korean guy, Dong-wan would not be so careful with his words.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

He doesn't seem disrespectful to me. Dong-wan speaks to him rudely so his attitude is fair. I think anyone in the audience would be on Robin's side as Dong-wan is obviously the rude one. Also, when Dong-wan and Robin fight it's always funny. I didn't notice Robin saying anything bad because I was imagining the scene and it made me laugh.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

I didn't have a problem with it. Prostitution is a problem in Korea, and everyone knows it, so nobody would be shocked. And this movie is not for little kids. Adults would not be shocked to see a character like Coco. I did think maybe a similar age girl in the bar would be better than a prostitute. It is weird that Coco is much older than Jun-ho. Kind of creepy.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

It is totally believable that she would keep the secret. If she got pregnant by her older professor, she would never tell her parents. Never. She would be too scared. Korea is not a good place for girls in this situation. You can read about what happens to teenagers who have babies. Many have to move out of their family home and live alone with no help. It's so sad. And she would never tell anyone about the abortion. I know these days abortion is not illegal but still it is not accepted openly. The problem in your story is that Ji-hyun tells her mommy about it. I think one hundred percent she would keep the secret until she dies.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I think it is believable. Seung-min is the only family member, and he should go to help his mommy be buried. It would be sad but little children don't really understand what is happening. I liked the funeral part. It made me think that you really understand Korean culture because the funeral experience is not the same for all people in Korea. It depends on your family and who leads the funeral. My family is very traditional, so I have been to a burial like in the story. But other families are not traditional, so some Koreans will not know how to bury a body properly. When I buried my grandpa, I had to stamp on the burial mound like the characters in your story. But I don't know about putting salt on ground? Did you see that at a funeral? (Me: I did not. I read about salt sprinkling in a book. Apparently, it is done to ward off evil spirits.) Yes, I have heard about putting salt near your door after a funeral to stop bad spirits entering your home. But this is very old fashioned. I don't think anyone does this now. Oh, and one more thing, Seung-min should bring his mommy's picture and put it on the burial mound. This is important.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

She kisses him, which is good. I liked that. I think girls watching the movie would like to see that she is in control and not waiting to be kissed. I don't think anyone would care that Robin is a foreigner. Hmm, maybe some jealous people would not like to see a Korean girl kiss a white guy. You know, my husband is not Korean. He is British. One or two times I heard Korean guys say that I should have a Korean husband. But it is not common to hear such talk.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

Yes. When Robin is shot in the grocery store it felt like the story was trying to be an action movie and not true to Korea. In Korea, there are no guns at all. Some people in the countryside might go hunting but I think it is difficult to get a gun. Even an air rifle. When I was little, my grandpa used to hunt little birds with a *ddakchong* (slingshot) but he never had a gun, and he lived out in the countryside. I thought this was not believable because of the gun.

Also, when they are in Seung-min's apartment and they find the pot of army stew, I thought it was so strange. Seung-min says that his mommy made it because it's his favourite, but army stew is not really food that kids love. It's cheap food, not something Korean people dream about eating. Like this: Robin says he would kill for a cup of tea. It makes sense because he is British. If he said he would kill for an espresso or an iced Americano it would be strange, right? It's the same with army stew. I know it's only a little thing, but it did make me think the person who wrote this doesn't know Korean food. (Me: What is a more believable alternative?) I think *samgye-tang* (chicken broth soup). In the story it's summertime, and in Korean we always eat *samgye-tang* to stay healthy during hot summer weather. And it is so delicious. Everyone loves to eat chicken soup. It is comforting food. Apart from that, I didn't think at all about who wrote the story. I didn't think of the writer was Korean or not Korean.

2. Participant: 31 years old, male, Daegu, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

To me, not relatable. I didn't identify with any character. But I think the parents are accurate. Mi-sook acts like a real Korean *ajumma*, especially how she keeps worrying about feeding the others. Dong-wan reminds me of typical old-fashioned kinda guy. The girl, Ji-hyun, seems nice. Maybe a female will relate to her. (My prompt: How about the teenager, Jun-ho?) Ah. Yes, he is kinda strange to me. He is not young, right? How old is he? (My prompt: Eighteen.) Eighteen-year-olds should act more mature, I think. He seems younger, like a middle school student. Maybe he is immature?

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic or improbable moments of dialogue?*

No. I read in English and thought about how it will sound in Korean. Nothing the Korean characters say is unusual. Everything can translate, I think. It's good that Dong-wan says "son of a bitch" a lot. In Korean we say *gaesaekki*. It means the same. An older guy like this would say bad words all the time.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Yes. She is always thinking about food and wants to feed her family. This is the Korean way, to ask "have you eaten" when meeting someone. We really care about this. When I visit my parents, my mother gives me food one second after I walk through the door. I don't think Dong-wan is a typical father in Korea, but I don't know. He seems angry and he doesn't act always act with kindness to his family. My father is not like that so I can't imagine.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

Yes, he seems racist. Some people are racist in Korea, so it's not a lie. I don't think Korean audiences will care about this as the other characters are nice to Robin. Only Dong-wan acts this way. If they all were racist, it would be a problem. I thought it was kinda funny how he argues with Robin all the time.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

They both say and do things that are disrespectful. But no. I don't think Korean people will have a problem. And Robin is away from his family, so maybe people will feel sorry for him.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

Hmm, I think his age is less important than being with a prostitute. He is old enough to have sex if he wants. Some people won't like to see that part, I think, maybe older people or religious people, but it didn't bother me. You're right, that thing happens a lot in Korea. Girls like that work in some *norebang* (Karaoke rooms) and you can find those cards near motels. But it is strange that the boy runs away from his family. I don't think that that would happen. He seems to love his mother and running away would really upset her. And I didn't understand why the prostitute is coming to the bar if the world is ending. If she is lonely, she can just go to the bar anyway. She doesn't need to wait for someone to call her.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

You need to go through this situation to answer the question, I think. I never met any woman who had an abortion. (My prompt: Would a woman ever tell you, even if they had?) Hmm, I guess not. If I think about how Korean parents would react to their daughter being pregnant without a husband, I can understand why she would keep the secret. It is not

common to be a single parent here. If she was younger and pregnant, she would not have an easy time.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I did think this part was strange too because they didn't have to bury the body. They can just leave in the apartment. No? (Me: I wanted Dong-wan and Robin to bond over a shared experience, so in the context of the story, this was the opportunity for them to do something together, away from the other characters.) Okay. Have you been to a funeral in Korea? (Me: Yes, twice actually. One time was a traditional burial and the other was a cremation.) Maybe you know more than me. I never went to a funeral, not yet.

Question Nine: *Would the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun be problematic in any way to Korean audiences, due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

No. Of course not. They are about the same age, and both speak English, so it's easy for them to make a connection. Some guys will probably get jealous to see a Korean girl with a foreigner, but most won't think about it. You can see many Korean women with foreigner guys here. Nobody cares. Ah, actually, one time I heard some older guys at my job talking about this subject and they said that Korean women should only make Korean babies, for the population to grow. I don't think many people think this way though.

Question Ten: *Overall, is there anything in the story that highlights the fact that it was written by a non-Korean screenwriter?*

Not really. To me, this kinda story, you don't need to be Korean to write it. Nothing is wrong, and many things are correct about Korean culture. But the story has a British guy in it who speaks English. If I didn't know you, I would think: why is there a British guy in this story? So, Robin is the sign that Into Dust was written by a British writer and not a Korean.

3. Participant: 27 years old, female, Daegu, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

The mother, Mi-sook, she is the same as my mother. She is the most realistic Korean character. I like that she takes the rice cooker in the car because she can't live without it. My mother takes her own kimchi everywhere, even when she goes to a restaurant. She refuses to eat without her own kimchi.

I feel bad for Jun-ho. He is younger than me, but I understand his feelings. In Korea we study for so long. I can imagine how he would feel to be eighteen and finally ready to finish school, and then to find out the world is going to end!

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic or improbable moments of dialogue?*

I didn't like when the Koreans talk shit about Robin smelling bad. It's true that Koreans usually don't smell when they sweat, but still, I don't think they would talk about it this way. It seems unkind. Koreans who go to live overseas say that they experience the same thing when people say, "Koreans smell like kimchi." I think Koreans would be so embarrassed and sad if someone said they smelled bad, so they wouldn't say it about another.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

The relationship between Dong-wan and the rest of his family is sad but realistic. Fathers spend all their time working and drinking because of *hoesik* culture here (*hoesik* is the gathering of people to eat and drink together, something that employees are forced to attend after work if invited by their superior). They usually come home when the kids are sleeping. Husband makes the money and wife cares for the home and children. That's the way it is. I can't say all men, but most married men in Korea would not help with housework. Younger guys are maybe different. But older guys like my father never do anything to help. Not because lazy, because he would be embarrassed to help. (Me: In my

story, I made sure to show how Mi-sook and Ji-hyun make the food and set the table while the men sit and watch TV.) Yes. Exactly like this. Good. I hope Korean guys can watch one day and see how it looks.

Another thing to talk about is the relationship with Dong-wan and Ji-hyun. He's disappointed about her life because she didn't achieve anything. It's correct because Korean parents have high expectations of their children. I think higher than what you are used to in Western countries. Education is so serious here, that's why we have many student suicides. If she went to a good university and didn't graduate well, and then worked in a coffee shop, her father would think she failed.

Question Four: Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?

It's hard to answer. Dong-wan doesn't seem very racist to me, but that's because I think in real life some Koreans are way, way more racist than him. He just says a few negative things. I heard much worse before. But Robin is white and white people don't really get treated badly in Korea. (Me: So, you think Korean audiences would have no problem with Dong-wan's attitude because he is white?) I think so. I don't think people would see him as racist as he is directing it at one person, who is a white guy.

Question Five: Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?

No, he doesn't seem disrespectful. He is only rude to Dong-wan because Dong-wan is rude to him. And Robin is nice to the other characters. It might be a problem if he was rude to everyone, but he's not.

Question Six: Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?

It depends on who you ask. Sex work happens in Korea, and sometimes it is talked about in the news. It's not a secret. Other movies have more sex than this and people still watched them. Did you watch 'The Handmaiden'? It has sexual scenes between two women, which is more taboo in Korea than sex work. And the characters in your story don't have sex, so

it's not an issue for sensitive people. All I thought about when reading is how sad the situation is for Coco. I wish she didn't go back into the bar to be with those two men.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

It is believable because it happens. If Ji-hyun was older when she got pregnant, maybe it would have been possible to talk with her mother about it. But it happened when she was young, and she would definitely lie to her parents to stop them finding the truth. My question is: how did she pay for it? I don't know the cost, but I think she would have to pay about 5,000,000 won (roughly £3500) for the operation. I don't think health insurance covers. And she wouldn't want to use health insurance as probably her father paid for it.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I thought it was unbelievable because they could never dig a hole big enough in that time. They need to make a hole more than one meter deep. It's impossible. It makes more sense if they cover the body with rocks to make the mound. I think it's fine that Dong-wan takes Seung-min. It's his mother.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

Nobody will care. Koreans are happy to date anyone if they like them. And Ji-hyun kissing Robin isn't a problem because he's a white guy. (Me: You believe his skin color is an important factor?) Yes. I said before that white foreigners are not treated the same as dark skinned foreigners in Korea. If a movie showed a Korean woman kissing a black buy, it would be more controversial.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

It has a lot of English speaking. Apart from that, I can't think of anything.

4. Participant: 30 years old, male, Busan, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

The family is a normal Korean family. Just normal. I don't know what else to say really. What is relatable to me is the relationship between Dong-wan and his children. My father worked away a lot when I was a kid. He worked in Seoul when I grew up in Busan and for some years he worked in Malaysia. I didn't see him often, so my relationship with him isn't strong now.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

I didn't like that they leave the man at the gas station. It is bad a bad thing to do, right? Even if he stole the car, he doesn't deserve it. But Dong-wan says "he stole it first so screw him", but this doesn't seem realistic to me. Taking care of each other is a big part of Korean culture. Even if he's a stranger, they wouldn't leave him behind like that. (Me: Even after he and Dong-wan fight?) Yeah. They fight but the family gets the car in the end. They won. They wouldn't drive away and leave the man behind.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Mi-sook is a good depiction of a typical Korean mother. She always shows concern for her family, and she doesn't hesitate to care for the young boy when they find him. This goes back to what I said earlier. Taking care of each other is the Korean way. I said before that I can relate to the relationship between Dong-wan and his kids. He is a typical father because he worked a lot and didn't spend time with his family. He doesn't have a strong relationship with his children because he worked long hours. You can learn the term *gireogi appa*. It means 'goose father.' It's a father that works away in a different country or a different city and leaves his children behind with his wife. When I read the story, I thought Dong-wan is a *gireogi appa*.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

It was problematic for me! And if that's true, then it could be a problem for more Koreans. I felt uncomfortable reading when he is racist to Robin. I don't know if foreigners experience that in Korea, but I can imagine it happens a lot. Koreans can be slow to accept change and are not very accepting of difference. You wrote about it for a reason. It's not nice to know that foreigners writing about Korea have to include a racist character. The truth can be ugly. (Me: So, Dong-wan's behaviour is a problem as it may force audiences to confront negative aspects of society?) Yeah, that's it. I don't think anyone would feel the story is making claims that aren't true. Everyone knows that racism exists in Korea. Not everyone likes to admit it.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

There's something Robin says that I don't like. He says that all Koreans are the same, and that is something that Koreans get a lot from Westerners. I have even heard people say that all Asians are the same, talking about Korea, Japan and China as if we are no different to each other. Robin saying that seems a little disrespectful to me. At least Ji-hyun calls him out in the story.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic as prostitution is a taboo topic in Korea?*

It's fine. I mean, not fine that he wants to have sex with a prostitute. I mean it's not offensive to put in a movie. Plenty of Korean films have worse. I watched that drama on Netflix called *Extracurricular*. It's about a high school boy who is a pimp. He sells the girls in his class.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

Of course, men and women will answer this question differently. I can't imagine a young girl would tell her parents if she got pregnant, especially if the baby's father is her married

professor! Yeah. She wouldn't say anything. How old was she when she got pregnant? (Me: At university, so roughly twenty-one years old.) Okay. So, you become an adult at nineteen in Korea. She wouldn't need parents' permission to have an abortion, but she would still need money to pay for it. I don't know how she paid if she didn't tell the professor.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable in the context of the story?*

I don't think I would have buried the body. It would be more believable if they didn't bury the body because it would be impossible to do. Two people could never make a hole big enough to bury a body, not in a few hours of time. (Me: Looking past the practicalities, what about the funeral itself?) It seemed accurate. Dong-wan tries to follow tradition and makes the boy understand how important it is to make the big bows. Yeah, no problem with any of that. Seung-min should be there to bury his mother. It's not an option really, even for a young boy.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness?*

It's no problem. It's just a kiss. Do you think some Koreans would be angry to see a Korean woman kiss a foreigner? (Me: Not necessarily angry, but interracial kisses are a rarity in Korean movies and TV shows. I've never seen one. Have you?) No, but I don't watch a lot of dramas. I don't think a lack of interracial kisses means anything. How many TV shows from your country show British woman kissing Korean men? (Me: I have no idea. But interracial couples are relatively common on screens in the UK.) But the UK is more diverse than Korea. I went to London before COVID, to watch Tottenham play soccer. You can see many different types of people there. Korea is not like that. Here you see mostly Korean faces and the occasional foreigner. (Me: So, the lack of diversity in Korea may make the interracial kiss problematic. What do you think?) I still think no. It's not impossible to see Koreans dating foreigners. It's not shocking.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

When they arrive at the gas station, you talk about LPG. Do you know what it is? (Me: Liquid Petroleum Gas.) Yes. You say that only taxis can use LPG but that isn't correct. In the past, that was true. But now anyone is allowed to buy an LPG car and use that fuel. And the LPG gas stations are not self-service. I don't know if you have seen one, but they always have men working there. The way you wrote it, it doesn't work. That's just my opinion.

5. Participant: 31 years old, female, Daegu, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

I think all of them are relatable. I can understand the relationships between the family members. They are a normal Korean family. Even though I didn't think "oh, she is like me" or "she is like my friend", I still felt that the characters are the same as people you can meet in Korea on any day.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

No. Nothing the characters say is a problem. I really like the way that Robin and Ji-hyun talk to each other in English. It is so sweet. My favourite part is when he gives her flowers and she says, "nobody gave me flowers before", because I really can imagine her face. I never read a movie script before, and I could picture every scene clearly.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

I can understand the relationships between all the family members. They seem to be a normal Korean family. Mi-sook is really accurate as a Korean *ajumma*. I imagine her as so kind and loving to her family, and she really worries about their happiness. I laughed when I read that she takes the rice cooker with them. I think this will be funny to Koreans. Every home has rice cooker. We cannot live without it! Oh, and Mi-sook cooks *miyeokguk* (seaweed soup) for breakfast after she learns about Ji-hyun being pregnant. This is nice because we eat *miyeokguk* after having a baby. So, it shows that Mi-sook is really thinking about her daughter's health in this moment. Dong-wan seems to be a typical Korean *ajeossi*. He doesn't speak openly with his family, but this is normal. Older Korean guys are not open with their feelings, not like younger guys. And he is the father, so he acts like he is in charge, but this is not really a Korean behaviour, I think. Aren't all fathers like this? It is common for fathers to be in control.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

He seems a little racist, yes. I don't think anyone will have a problem with his behaviour as everybody knows that people like him exist. I don't think he does anything that bad. I think he would have a problem with anyone in his car, not only Robin.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

To me, no he didn't seem to be disrespectful because I would not want to be polite to someone like Dong-wan. He isn't Korean, so why should he speak Korean or act Korean? Perhaps some older people would have a problem with it because they have a different opinion of what is acceptable behaviour. If someone older was rude to me, I would still speak my mind. I would not stay quiet because they are older.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

Everybody knows that this happens in Korea. Everybody knows! It isn't a problem to write it because it is a fact. I have seen Korean movies that have characters who are prostitutes. But I was confused with this part of Into Dust when reading as I didn't get why he ran away from his family. You told me it was to look for some experiences, so I was shocked that he went to meet Coco (the sex worker). I didn't think about him wanting to do 'that', but I think I'm conservative. Koreans are quite conservative, especially from Daegu area.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

I think it's not right for your story. Abortion is so serious subject in Korea. If a young girl like this was pregnant and got an abortion, she would never tell her family, I think. It would create problems. I don't know why. It sucks that Korea is like that. So, if Ji-hyun kept the secret for so many years she wouldn't suddenly tell her mother. There is no reason to say it, only if she's really drunk and cannot control her mouth. This part may be unbelievable for

Korean audiences. If you changed it so that she is drunk it would be better. Or, maybe Mi-sook guesses the truth with Ji-hyun saying it?

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I thought it was very unusual that the little boy was with them. (Me: In my experience at Korean funerals, little children do attend and are a part of the grieving process.) I have never been to a traditional funeral. I have been to a cremation, and not children were there. But I guess it depends on who has died. In the story it is the little boy's mother, so it can make sense that he would go because no other family members are around. But the burial is unusual to me as so much happens that I have no idea about. They put salt on the grave and you say they step all over it. I don't know about any of this. (Me: At the funeral of my wife's grandfather, his family members were asked to stamp the soil on the burial mound. And the salt sprinkling is a practise I found in a book. Apparently, it is done to warn off evil spirits.) Oh. Well, maybe your wife's family is more traditional than mine. And you have to think that some people are very superstitious. Putting salt around the grave seems to be an old superstition. Maybe it is from the old days when shamanism was more popular. Some people still believe in it (shamanism), but less and less now. My mother thinks old superstitions like that are stupid.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

No. Why would it be a problem? (Me: My wife has been abused in public before by men who have a problem with her being with a foreigner. It is a rare occurrence, but it has happened.) That surprises me. But you cannot think all Korean people think that way. Maybe one per cent of people don't want Koreans to date foreigners, and you met someone from the one per cent. These days there are lots of mixed marriages.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

I was going to say no, but there is something that we spoke about earlier. The funeral scene is good, but there's too much tradition. It's hard to explain. Putting salt on the grave and

stepping on the mound, and all the bowing, it feels like too much. I don't think a Korean would write this scene the same way. It shows that you are trying your best, but also it feels like you are trying too hard to show how much you know Korean culture. But nothing else. I really enjoyed reading it. It was fun to read so I didn't need to think about the nationality of who wrote it.

6. Participant: 26 years old, male, Seoul, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

Yes, because they are Korean, and they act like Korean people. They eat Korean food and drink soju. I know that's obvious but it's true. If you removed their names, I would still know that they are Korean.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

I want to ask about the song that Dong-wan sings a few times. Is it supposed to be a Korean song? (Me: Yes, it's *Meonjiga Doeoo* (Becoming Dust) by Kim Kwang-seok.) Ah. It makes sense now. I didn't recognise the song with the English translation of lyrics. Then, no, there's nothing wrong with anything the Koreans say.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Yes, I think so. She is quite a typical *ajumma*. She's loyal to her family and always thinking about her husband and children. And she is not without confidence. *Ajumma* are not shy to say what they want. The way Mi-sook talks to the others, telling them what to do, and taking control of all the difficult situations, it's what I think my mother would do. She is the glue that keeps her family together. It's exactly how an *ajumma* should be.

Dong-wan is not like my dad, but I can picture him as a certain type of *ajeossi*. (Me: You mentioned before that he reminds you of a Seoul taxi driver.) Yes! He really does! He's unfriendly and he never listens to anyone else, then gets angry when the others don't listen to him. This something of Korean culture. Older men act like kings. They don't want anyone to tell them what to do. But this depends on the person. My dad is never rude. My grandma has a strong personality and she raised him to be polite. What is true about Dong-wan is that he worked his entire life to provide for his family. It's true that in Korea we are still old-fashioned: the men go to work and earn money and wives stay home to raise children and do the housework. It sounds like men have an easier life but it's hard.

There's pressure to get a good job and then more pressure to get promotions and a high wage. So, Dong-wan feels angry about his life, but it's understandable.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

He is not a racist. When I think of racism, I think of really hating someone because of their skin colour. I saw on the news many times in the US, during coronavirus times, that Asian people were being attacked and sometimes murdered, and the only reason is that they looked Asian. It didn't matter if Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, only that they were Asian-looking. This is racism. (Me: Dong-wan is vocal about mistrusting Robin because he is foreign.) But that is mistrust of a stranger, not racism. I know in Western countries people are different when they meet strangers. When I went to Canada, strangers always greeted me and asked how I am doing. And in the elevator of my building, strangers asked what floor I live on and asked where I am from, things like that. But Korea is not the same. We don't talk to strangers just to make conversation. If a stranger begins talking to us, we think "what do they want from us?" Dong-wan doesn't know Robin so he doesn't trust him. It doesn't matter that he is a foreigner.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

I don't think he does or says anything bad. He responds to how he is treated badly by Dong-wan. If you asked a lot of Koreans what they really think of Westerners, they would say you are more carefree and don't care about what other people think. You live your lives in your own way. Robin speaks his mind and doesn't care what Dong-wan thinks. That's a good thing. I wish it was more like that in Korea.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

Prostitution is a problem in Korea and anyone who says not is lying. Where I live in Seoul you can find many women like the one in your story. It's not hidden. I can tell you something that is a secret, but it's okay to say as I won't give a name. A person, a man, that

I know works for a company and always has to go out with his boss and colleagues for *hoesik*. Every week he goes out drinking, maybe three or four times, and his boss likes to go to a *kissbang* (kissing room). They spend all night there, and his boss pays for them to have sex with the women. The person I know has a girlfriend and he doesn't really want to have sex with the women at the *kissbang*, but he is worried about losing his job if he refuses. He can't go home until he does it. His situation is crazy.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

She kept the abortion a secret from her parents. That's normal. Nobody would want to tell that secret unless they have a close relationship with their parents. You must know that Koreans are not very broadminded when it comes to this.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I liked this part. Do you say black comedy? When Robin is carrying the body, he hits the head on the car door and says "sorry." I laughed at that. I don't think I have seen a Korean movie that makes jokes around death. The funeral part could be sad but it's not. It's not easy to make a funeral funny. And the funeral is traditional. You know about funeral traditions; I could see that.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

For me, it's not a problem at all as I'm used to seeing it. Seoul has many foreigners, and you can always see Koreans with them. Maybe in other parts of the country people are not used to seeing a Koreans kissing foreigners. I mean small town places. But I don't think anyone would feel any anger or disgust.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

I guess a Korean wouldn't use a British character, but I don't know for sure. You don't see characters like Robin in Korean movies. And I thought about how long this journey would

take them, from Busan to Donghae. It's far, but you can drive in about five hours. In the story it takes about two days! That could be a problem for anyone who knows Korea.

7. Participant: 30 years old, female, Daegu (South Korea) / Virginia (USA).

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

All of them are recognisable. The family is a normal Korean family. I just imagined them as normal people, the kind of people you can meet every day.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

I thought the Korean characters say a lot of rude stuff about the British guy. I don't know if you tried to make them sound so rude. The dad speaks like a racist sometimes, saying that they shouldn't trust foreigners and cussing Robin because he can't understand Korean. And the others talk about his body odour all the time. Ji-hyun is the nicest to Robin, but even she isn't that nice. She doesn't say anything that bad but complains about him smelling bad and she calls him stupid a few times. I thought "shit", the Koreans in this story don't seem that nice.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Well, he's a typical, sort of outdated father figure. He kind of reminds me of my dad. I grew up in the States while my dad stayed back in Korea, so I didn't see him much as a kid. When I moved back to Korea with my mom, I couldn't really connect with my dad. He used to have these moments of explosive anger. Real rage, for nothing most of the time. There was always a sense that he was so disappointed about everything: me, his marriage, his job, pretty much his whole life. Like Dong-wan, I would say. But Dong-wan is more vocal about his disappointment. My dad would go days without saying a word to anyone, but it wasn't always to suffer in silence. I liked to be silent to let us know how unhappy he was.

Mi-sook is less typical to me as she is motherly but nowhere near overbearing enough. She's like a watered-down version of a Korean mom. But her story is realistic. Korean women lose their identities after they marry and have kids. Maybe not so much

these days, but definitely in the past. They stay home, look after kids, so being a mom is their job. I liked that Mi-sook is devoted to her family and always thinks about how she can care for them all. Korean moms are really devoted to their kids, even if they are overbearing.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

He's casually racist. That's still bad, but you couldn't call him an out-and-out racist. The stuff he says about Robin and not trusting foreigners, it's not nice, but it's common to hear people speak like that. I experienced racism growing up in Virginia, especially from other kids in school. Compared to my experiences, what Dong-wan says is nothing! But I understand your concern about what Koreans will think. You're only pointing out that some Koreans can be racist, but it might make a few people angry. Koreans get triggered easily when people criticize anything about the country or culture. People here can be very defensive when outsiders make negative observations.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

He acts the same as any foreigner acts in Korea. These days more foreigners are living in Korea, and we notice how people—really, I'm talking about Westerners—we notice how other people act freely and don't worry about what other people think. I have foreigner friends in Seoul, from the US and Canada, and they often complain to me about how rude some Koreans can be to them. I think it's older people. I don't want to say older Koreans dislike foreigners, but younger people have a more global mindset. But my friends never stay quiet if someone is rude. They don't think "oh, I'm in another country so I must let people talk to me this way."

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

Yes, it might be. I don't know if it's different for movies, but dramas in Korea that show controversial things like prostitution get complaints. That show 'Backstreet Rookie'

received complaints because one of the characters accidentally walks into a room where prostitution is happening. You don't see anything, but people still complained. I notice how conservative Korea is because I grew up in the States. Stuff that offends people here would be so tame on TV in America. It's kind of hypocritical though as, even though prostitution is illegal here, it's everywhere and everyone knows about it. I read an article that said one in two Korean men have paid for sex. If that's true, think how many married men are sleeping with prostitutes while their wives and girlfriends are at home. And then people complain because a TV show shows a prostitute. I think it's great that you put it in your story. I like that Ji-hyun scolds her brother for paying for sex, and I'm glad he doesn't do it. That would've been too much.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

This was my favourite part because it's something that isn't engaged with often enough in Korea if you watch dramas. I feel strongly about it. I found out as an adult that my mom had an abortion before I was born. I have an older sister and when my mom got pregnant the second time, she and my dad decided to have an abortion. Back then, and now I guess, couples really want a son to carry on the family blood line. I spoke to my mom, and she regrets it now but at the time she thought it was necessary because my dad and his family had talked about it so much and she felt guilty about not giving a son. But when she got pregnant the third time, it was another girl, me, and she decided to keep the baby because the abortion was a horrible experience. It must have been so weird as abortions were illegal, but doctors still performed them. I don't understand the loophole. Sorry, I went of course! (Me: In an earlier draft of Into Dust, I had Ji-hyun reveal that her older lover forced her to have an abortion. I changed it to reveal that she made the decision to avoid having to tell her parents that she was pregnant.) Both options ring of truth. An older, married man having an affair with his student would want her to have an abortion. But she wouldn't have wanted to keep the baby anyway. It would have ruined her life. Can you imagine the stigma against a young girl getting pregnant by a married man? I can tell you for certain that her parents wouldn't have supported her if she decided to keep the baby. That does not go down in Korean society. I know it's a story and not real life but having the abortion and

keeping it a secret from everyone is realistic. I don't know if she would tell her mom though. Now I think about it, she would keep the secret forever.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

Erm, well I didn't think anything while I was reading it. Nothing jumped out as unbelievable. Maybe it's a bit weird that they take the little boy out to watch his mom get buried, but I guess it makes sense. They had to tell Seung-min eventually that his mom is dead. It would be weirder if they buried her and didn't tell him. I don't know if this part is sad enough. A little boy finds out his mom is dead, and he goes out with strangers to bury her, and it's not very emotional. Is there a reason that the boy doesn't cry? (Me: I wrote with the idea that children don't really understand the finality of death until about ten years old. I have been to two funerals in the last few years and remember seeing little kids sat amongst crying adults, looking confused.) That could be true. It makes sense.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

You know what, it depends on the person watching. Most people won't care at all, younger people especially. You get many Koreans dating foreigners nowadays. Not only Korean girls with foreign men, I also see so many Korean guys with white girls, especially young guys. But you'll still have people who dislike seeing it for whatever reason. People complain about weird things. I said about that show 'Backstreet Rookie', do you know it? (Me: I know the name.) Like I said, people complained about it being a family show that showed prostitution. I won't tell you about the entire show but in one of the episodes the main girl meets an older guy and asks him to buy cigarettes, then kisses him. Just a standard kiss on the lips, nothing passionate. That also received loads of complaints because she's a high school girl who smokes and kisses an older guy. But she's supposed to be nineteen, not a little girl, and the guy is about mid-twenties. If some people complained about that, they might complain about a Korean girl kissing a foreigner. Someone out there will think it is demeaning to show Korean girls falling for foreigners. But who cares!

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

No, I don't think so. I guess you could say that a Korean writer might not have a British character in a movie that will be released in Korea. And the story has a lot of controversial things for Koreans. Let me list them: high school boy trying to sleep with a prostitute, a racist Korean, a girl who slept with a married man and had an abortion, stealing the taxi. One controversial thing in the story it wouldn't be a problem, but because there are so many it doesn't feel like a Korean film. It's not a bad thing, though.

8. Participant: 49 years old, female, Seogwipo, Jeju Island, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

They all seem like normal Koreans, but the girl, Ji-hyun, she speaks English too much. She seems more like a foreigner to me or a *gyopo* (ethnic Korean born overseas). What is good is that they help the people they meet. Robin needs help, the young boy they find also needs protection, and the family helps them both. This is very Korean. I know some see the collective nature of Korea as a problem but helping others is a big part of our culture. That's why I disliked how they abandon the taxi driver.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

Ah, yes. As I said, they abandon the taxi driver at the gas station. Mi-sook shows the right attitude when she says that they shouldn't leave the man behind. Dong-wan says that the man is a thief, and that the man doesn't deserve help. This isn't the right way for him to speak. Dong-wan is not a bad guy, so it seems unusual that he speaks with such disregard for the man.

Another part is when they talk about North Korea, when they are in the apartment. Ji-hyun asks about North Koreans and Dong-wan says that the North Koreans will probably survive the apocalypse because they have underground tunnels to hide in. It's okay, but he could say something else to become more realistic. We think different ways about North Korea. Some, especially older people like me, think that we are all Koreans and reunification should happen to make Korea whole again. Others think that the North is dangerous, and the Kim regime should be destroyed once and for all. And a lot of younger people are indifferent to North Korea. So, Dong-wan would either be sympathetic toward North Korea or not, but he would have a different opinion to his children. If you decide to write this part again, you can show how they have different opinions. It will be more realistic.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Yes, they do. They both think about the security of their family, in their own ways. Dong-wan wants to protect them all and Mi-sook cares so much about keeping the family together. If you know Korea, then you know how central family is to Korean culture. What impressed me was your understanding of the problems that parents face. Traditionally, men are the ones who work long hours and ensure their family's security and women do everything else. This means that wives perform the parenting and form closer relationships with their children. In your story, Mi-sook is the one who keeps them all together and she's who Ji-hyun can talk to about her problems. Dong-wan has been the worker, so he has no strong relationships with his children. It's sad but true. At the end, he is very disappointed with himself when he fails to get into the cave. He doesn't cry or apologise. This is a typical Korean *appa* (father), working hard and suffering quietly.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

It depends on what you consider as racism. He could be racist, but he could be narrow-minded. I picture Dong-wan as someone who is not comfortable with foreigners. He mistrusts Robin because he's different and they don't speak the same language. I don't think the way he acts is a problem. One thing that is true of Koreans in general is that we're still learning how to be open toward foreigners, but that doesn't mean we dislike anyone who comes here. It's hard to explain to someone from a more diverse country like the UK. If you grow up and live somewhere like Korea, you are used to everyone being the same race and culture. This means Koreans find it hard to adjust to change, and it means that people really don't know what to expect from foreigners who come here. I'm sure some will see Dong-wan as racist. But some will be sympathetic to him.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

Again, it depends on the person. I didn't read anything that made me think Robin is disrespectful. He seems quite nice. What he says about Koreans having no patience is very

funny. I can understand why a foreigner would say such a thing. We do not like to wait in Korea. And Robin only has a problem with Dong-wan, and Dong-wan is rude to him.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

It's a problem because of his age. I know it's natural for him to want sex, but a schoolboy wanting to have sex with a prostitute would not be nice to see in a movie. This is a family movie. I would feel uncomfortable watching that part with my sons. I think he would be more upset about never having a girlfriend. Or he could be upset about a girl who he wanted to date but never asked.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

It's believable. We're talking about a young woman who doesn't want a baby because the father is married and her professor. I can't imagine any reason that she would tell her parents about it. There is an image that Korean girls need to maintain, of being pure. I would say that parents expect their daughters to remain virgins until marriage, even if they don't say it. I was born in 1972 and my mother pretty much told me that I could only be with the man I was going to marry. It may be different for young women now. But I'm sure the old way of thinking is still popular.

I thought it was realistic that Ji-hyun tells her mothers and wants to keep the secret from Dong-wan. I don't have a daughter but my friend who do always tell me how close they are with daughters, compared to their sons. A mother and daughter know each other's heart.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I think it's believable that they would bury her. It's more respectful than leaving her in the room. (Me: Is it right that they take Seung-min to watch the burial?) Yes, of course. There's no rule that says children must be shielded from death. He has to goodbye to his mommy. It's very sad for him but I don't think anyone grows up and regrets going to a funeral when they were young. The burial part is a little unrealistic because they sprinkle salt on the ground. I don't know where you found that idea. (Me: I read it in a book about traditional

Korean funeral practices.) I think it's too traditional. I have been to funerals and never saw that. This is a very traditional burial that you put in the story. It's not wrong, but for some people it will be unfamiliar. Cremations are more common in Korea now. Traditional burials happen if your family owns a piece of land somewhere. But it makes sense in the story as they can't perform a cremation.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

No, it's great. I was hoping that they kiss at the end. It was a good idea to stop after the kiss. If you showed them having sex, it would be too much. And there's no reason for them to begin a relationship because the world is ending. One kiss is enough. I don't believe that anyone would have a problem with Ji-hyun kissing a British man. Koreans like British people!

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

There are two parts that made me think a Korean would not write the same way: when they leave the taxi driver at the gas station and when the old couple attack them in the grocery store. I said before that Korea is really a collective society. Not everyone is perfect, but Koreans really want to help and look after each other. It's a part of our culture. I can't believe that the family would abandon that man alone with no way to escape. And I can't believe that an old couple would be so cruel to strangers who just want to buy some food. I know it's fiction and anything can happen, but that's my opinion. Koreans would help other Koreans if the world was ending.

9. Participant: 52 years old, male, Pohang, South Korea.

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

I relate to Dong-wan. Like me he has one son, one daughter. I understand his, erm, his belief that he has worked hard to give to his family. Mi-sook, yes, she is what you expect with a Korean woman of her age. She is a good mother. At the start I did think Ji-hyun reminds me of my daughter but by the end, not so much. I hope my daughter never has the same problems.

I had difficulty reading some of the parts and imagining the characters as Korean because you gave me an English copy to read. It is harder for me to read English.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

A few times I made a note when Jun-ho complains about his life. It's a bad time for the characters and I understand this boy is upset. But he is a high school boy, not a baby. His parents, Korean parents, they would not allow him to speak this way. Dong-wan, he will be angry that his son speaks in a negative way. Mi-sook would say, "The world is ending for everyone, not just you. Do you think you are the only person in the world who is sad?" They will teach that it is not about him. They are suffering together.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

Yes and no. Dong-wan should be stricter with Jun-ho. I said that. Dong-wan should teach his family that their problems are not important in this time. He wants to survive but his family is not helpful. They make more problems for him. But Mi-sook acts well, like a good mother. It's important. They will not survive without her cooking. You can't create a Korean family without a strong mother. And Dong-wan is a good father, even if his wife and children don't appreciate him. This is typical in Korea. Young women call men selfish and disgusting. They call men *hannamchung* (a slang term that translates as 'Korean man

vermin'), do you know? In Korea nowadays there is lower respect for how men give their lives to their families. Dong-wan suffers the same way.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

You made him appear as a racist. It will be a problem for some people. If I wrote a story and said British are racist, many in your country would be angry at me. The same here. But it didn't upset me. Every country has racism. Korea is not different.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

He is sometimes disrespectful, yes. I remember they talk about speaking with respect. It's a part of Korean culture. An important part. I know you understand why we use *nopimnal* (honorifics), you lived in Korea for a while. If foreigners speak Korean, we understand that they can make mistakes with complicated language. Robin in your story, he uses language to be disrespectful on purpose. That is different. If a foreigner speaks Korean that way, people in Korea will not like it.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

It may be a problem. He is a boy and really, he should not be trying to do that. Your story is about fine. Nothing happens between Jun-ho and the woman. If you want my view: Jun-ho should not take his clothes off. I wouldn't want to see that in a movie. Women might feel uncomfortable watching that. And why would Korean media need to talk about prostitution? It is not a subject to talk about openly on TV. If it happens, the police need to stop it. That's all. We don't need to talk about it.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

Yes, she would keep that secret. She would be ashamed of what happened to her, and she would know her parents' reaction. I am a father. If I heard from my daughter that she had

an affair with her teacher and was pregnant, I would be angry at her choices. Young girls can make mistakes, but this mistake is damaging for all the family. Yes, maybe a mother like Mi-sook would understand more but Dong-wan would feel very disappointed. In the story he hears but says nothing. Is that right? (Me: Yes.) I don't know about it. Yes, perhaps that's correct. It is an embarrassing thing to talk about with your daughter.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I thought so. I enjoyed reading that part as it shows part of Korean culture. I like that Robin is involved with the burial. When we talked about Robin being disrespectful, we didn't talk about this moment. He instigates the burial. So, he respects that the dead woman should be buried correctly. (Me: How do you feel about Seung-min being present at the burial?) He should be there. It's his mother. But burying the body would not be as easy as you say in the story. We have to make holes with excavators to make a burial.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

It depends on who watches. Young Koreans are more open-minded than me and others of my generation. You see more mixed relationships now compared to the past. An American guy plays at my tennis club with his wife, who is a Korean. And your wife is Korean, isn't she? (Me: Yes.) Yes, there are many couples like this in Korea. It isn't a surprise to see a Korean kissing a foreigner. (Me: I wonder, how would you feel about your daughter marrying a foreigner?) Ha-ha, good question. If he was a good man who can provide her a happy life, I am fine.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

I have two answers. First one, I looked on the map and the journey from Busan to Donghae is four or five hours. You need to think more about the distance as they should not be driving for days. Another one is Seung-min and his dead mother. The boy is alone and says his father works in China, I looked on the map, but no grandparents are home. If the world is ending the boy's family would be together, any aunty or uncle and grandparents. And if

you know Korea, you should know that all generations of a family can live together. If the father is working in another country, Seung-min's grandmother or even both grandparents would live with them. This is usual in Korea.

10. Participant: 18 years old, female, Busan (South Korea) / Melbourne (Australia).

Question One: *Are any of the Korean characters of Into Dust instantly relatable or recognisable?*

Mi-sook is so sweet. She reminds me of my grandma, who is also so sweet and caring. I love how she takes all the things from home because she wants to make the cave comfortable. It's so right! She really cares for her family and feels that it's her job to care for everyone. She is kind and a little bit pushy sometimes. This is typical Korean *ajumma* behaviour. I can empathise with Jun-ho and how he acts. I'm a student, too. Education in Korea is no joke! Now, I'm getting ready for the *suneung* test next year (standardised test for entry into Korean universities). I go to school at 8am and stay until 4:30, then I go to my *hagwons* (private after school learning academies) until 10pm most days. And I must go to school on Saturdays twice a month! We don't have time for anything but studying. So, I get why Jun-ho is so angry because he worked hard and did all that studying for no reason.

Question Two: *Are there any obviously problematic moments of dialogue spoken by Korean characters?*

There is something, but I don't know if you can do anything about it. Because you wrote the script in English, the Korean characters don't sound like Koreans. Mainly because they don't use the honorifics. The kids would call their mom *eomma* and dad *appa*. Ji-hyun would call her little brother *namdongsaeng* and Jun-ho would call his sister *eonni* because she's older. Oh, and when they meet Seung-min, he would call Ji-hyun *noona* and Jun-ho *hyeong*. How they call Robin *waygookin* is correct. It is not really that rude to call a foreigner *waygookin* in Korea, even if it sounds kinda rude. What I mean is: if you put that into the script it would make the Korean talking sound more realistic. But you will have to have Korean words and English words all mixed up and it might be weird.

Question Three: *Do Dong-wan and Mi-sook demonstrate any behaviours that make them typical Korean parents, or not?*

I already said Mi-sook is like a typical Korean mom. I guess you can say the same about Dong-wan because of the stuff with Ji-hyun's university. There is a lot of pressure to get

into a top university here. It's normal for a parent to control their kid's future by making them study something that will ensure them a good career. This is why Korea has such high suicide rates. Parents want their kids to study hard and go to Seoul University or one of the other big ones, but the pressure's too much and when they fail the entrance test, they kill themselves! In the story, Mi-sook and Ji-hyun say that Dong-wan never listens to them. I get it. My daddy can be like that. He is kind but hard to talk to, and there's no way he'd listen to me if I said I didn't want to go to university. No way! He'd make me go. But I though Dong-wan is a good man, inside his heart. He obviously loves them all and really wants to do the right thing.

Question Four: *Does Dong-wan seem racist and is his attitude toward Robin problematic for Korean audiences?*

I think he would seem racist to most people, especially people who aren't Korean. He definitely says some racist things about Robin: that he's a foreigner so he'll probably steal the car. To me, that's racist because Robin didn't do anything and Dong-wan only dislikes him because he's foreign. But I don't think any Korean people will be surprised by it. It's normal to hear about racism here. Like, my friend here is half-Korean and half-Russian. She had to move schools twice in middle-school because she got bullied so much. She speaks Korean fluently, but she doesn't look 100% Korean, so other kids called her things like *honhyeol-gae* (mixed blood dog). The crazy thing is when her parents complained, the school didn't do anything about it! They just kinda said it won't be easy for her because she's mixed race, but no apology, nothing. It was like her parents had to accept that racism happens and it's their fault for having a baby. And on the subway once I heard an older guy shouting at foreigners to get out of Korea and go back to their country. He was being so disgusting and racist. So, I don't think anyone would be angry because they know it happens here.

Question Five: *Does Robin seem disrespectful and is his attitude toward Dong-wan problematic for Korean audiences?*

I love that Robin tries to make Dong-wan angry. Dong-wan is so rude to him, so he is rude back. My mom told me that I should always be nice to adults, even if they are rude to me.

But, you know, I grew up in Australia where everyone speaks their mind. It's hard for me to stay silent when someone is rude to me. This one time, an *ajumma* cut the line when I in the 7/11 store, and when I said that I was before her, she shouted at me! So, I said in Korean, "don't talk to me like that, you're not my mother!" Her face was so shocked. If you want to make older people angry in Korea, you can stand up to them! (Me: What do you think Korean audiences will think about a foreigner character standing up to a rude Korean man?) They will like it! Well, not everyone. Younger people would really like to see it. Older people will probably think it's rude.

Question Six: *Is Jun-ho's interaction with a sex worker problematic due to his age or the fact that prostitution is a topic rarely presented in Korean media?*

Erm, if you watch a lot of Korean dramas like me, you can see prostitution in the shows. That show on Netflix called *Extracurricular* has in it. The main guy is a great student in school and kinda quiet and well-behaved, but outside school he makes money from managing a group of prostitutes. And some of the girls in his class work for him, too. If that show is on TV, then your movie would be nothing.

Question Seven: *Is Ji-hyun's abortion backstory and her secretiveness presented in a way that is believable to Korean audiences?*

Yeah, it's totally believable. There's no way she could tell her parents that she was pregnant. This happens in Korea more than you might think. I hear about girls my age getting pregnant and having secret abortions. Some girls get a really get a bad reputation because of rumours like that. I go to an all-girl's school and rumours spread around all the time. If it happened for real, it's not worth telling the truth. I wouldn't tell anyone, not even my best friends. But I think it's the same in any country, not only here. Parents don't want their daughters to have babies until they're married because having a baby so young can really ruin your life. So, it's believable that Ji-hyun had an abortion and kept the secret from her family.

Question Eight: *Is the burial scene believable and accurate in the context of the story?*

I've never been to a funeral, so I don't know what they're like. But it's nice that Robin and Dong-wan do it for Seung-min. It made me kinda like Dong-wan more. (Me: What do you think about Robin and Dong-wan waking Seung-min to attend the burial?) I think it's okay. I guess. I don't really know if it's okay for a little kid to be there or not.

Question Nine: *Is the kiss between Robin and Ji-hyun problematic in any way due to his foreignness or that she is the instigator?*

It's only a problem if you're a racist. In my age group it's normal to like handsome guys, Korean or not Korean. My friends at school really, really love Harry Styles. Korean girls are the same as any girls, they just like handsome boys! I can only think some guys in Korean might not like to see this kiss because they are jealous of Robin, especially if he's handsome. Or, if you are the kinda person who thinks Koreans should only date other Koreans, you will have a problem with the kiss. I told you about my friend who is half Russian. A boy told her once that they can't date because she's not Korean. His parents won't let him. So, people do think like that here. But nobody I know would care about her kissing him.

Question Ten: *Is there anything in the story that marks it as the work of a non-Korean screenwriter?*

Only the language stuff I said earlier. If you were Korean, you would write in Korean. Saying that, if the script was translated into Korean, I don't think anyone would know a British guy wrote the story. I really liked reading it. Oh, another thing is Robin. You don't see many foreigners speaking English in Korean movies.

APPENDIX B: RELEASE FORMS

Lancaster University 

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter
Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 6 weeks of commencement of the study my data will be removed.
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.
6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: JiHyeon Son	Date: 2022.11.4	Signature: 
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I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent 
Date 4/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

v27-6-16

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: Yurim Park	Date: 2022/11/4	Signature: 박유림
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I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 4/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY



One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

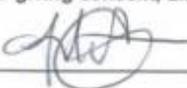
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
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7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:	Date:	Signature:
Youn On Hur	2022-10-30	

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 30/10/2022 DD/MM/YYYY



One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

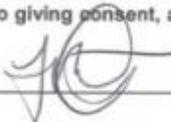
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: <i>Chang Wook Song</i>	Date: <i>2022.11.28</i>	Signature: <i>송창욱</i>
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I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 28/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY



One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

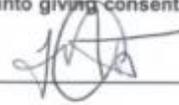
Please read the following carefully:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: Min ho Park	Date: 2022/11/10	Signature: 
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I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 10/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY 

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

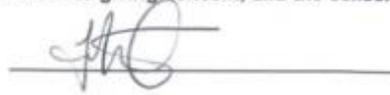
Please read the following carefully:

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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:	Date:	Signature:
Taekwang Kim	2022.11.18	

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 18/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY 

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

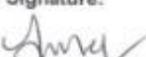
Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: l.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

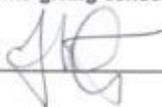
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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:	Date:	Signature:
Jiyeon Kim	2022/11/15	

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 15/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY



One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Please read the following carefully:

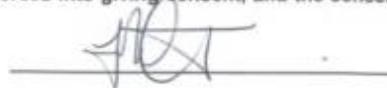
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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: JISOO Song	Date: 2022/11/19	Signature: Song Ji-soo
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I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date 19/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY



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CONSENT FORM

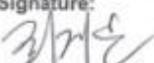
Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

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7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:	Date:	Signature:
Jieun Choi	2022. 11. 20	

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent 

Date 20/11/2022 DD/MM/YYYY

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: "Questionnaire: How do you think the feature film script, *Into Dust*, represents South Korea and Korean people?"

Name of Researchers: Thomas Carter

Email: t.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

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6. I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant: <i>Dong won Son</i>	Date: <i>2022/11/14</i>	Signature: <i>[Signature]</i>
---	----------------------------	----------------------------------

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent

Date *4/11/2022* DDMMYYYY

[Signature]

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

FILMOGRAPHY

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Seoul Searching, dir. by Benson Lee (Netflix, 2017).

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So Not Worth It, Netflix, 18 June 2021.

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Strong Girl Bong-soon, JTBC, 24 February 2017 – 15 April 2017.

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Taxi 3, dir. by Gérard Krawczyk (EuropaCorp, 2003.)

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