Melodramatic Tactics for Survival in the Neoliberal Era: Excess and Justice in *The Heirs* and *My Love from the Star*

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This article examines two 2013 TV miniseries, *The Heirs* and *My Love from the Star*, by relating their melodramatic aesthetics to the survivalist imperative under neoliberal governance. From the colonial *sinp’a* theater to Golden Age films, melodrama has operated as a popular mode of imagination that expresses inarticulate experiences generated over the course of Korea’s modernization. To extend and complicate existing scholarship on modern melodrama, this study approaches recent K-dramas’ melodramatic modes as both an affective response to and an everyday tactic for coping with failing economic democracy in contemporary Korea. In this light, the intensifying fantastic elements of the genre are deemed not so much anachronistic but tactical, as they are deployed to reclaim the justice and equality that are felt to be hopelessly disappearing in daily lives. As I look at their excessive aesthetics within the context of diminishing social mobility in the neoliberal era, my analysis of the two miniseries further notes the gendered structure of these melodramatic fantasies in which the survival of women, who have fewer privileges, is achieved by the reform of male elites.

Keywords: Korean TV melodrama, neoliberalism, *chaebŏl*, family, hereditary power, educational capital, female precarity, counter-survivalist fantasy