

# **‘THE RULE OF THREE’ IN THE GROWTH STORIES – GANGBAIK LEE’S DRAMA “LIKE LOOKING AT THE FLOWER IN THE MIDWINTER”**

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**Abstract:** This paper focused on the structure of the growth stories, especially in surveying Gangbaek Lee’s (이강백) drama “Like Looking at the Flower in the Midwinter (동지섣달 꽃 본 듯이)”. It is structured by ‘rule of the three’. In this text, three sons go to seek their mother, they experience the tests three times. Third son wins the game because he succeeds to find his true and alternative mother. It is similar to the story of English fairy tale “Three Little Pigs”.

In Freudian terms, the characters of the both texts are superego, ego and id. The core of the growth story is that third son (id) wins the first son (superego) and the second son (ego) by using his own energy (meaningful labor). In Levi Strauss’ terms, the contrast between the third and the others can be schemed the contrast between culture and nature.

Lee’s drama presents the third son as the real hero who overcomes two elder brothers. The first is so conservative (oversleep), the second is so selfish (overeat). Two brothers were too political or too ideal to become a true, humanistic and warm-minded adult. In his view, ‘drama’ related to the third son is the most humanistic and warm-minded action in the world. These both stories are based on the plot ‘rags to riches’ which contains the success of the poor and powerless. In other words, the poor and weak child can grow to the true hero, and reach the final destination, according to the Gustav Jung’s expression, ‘the Self as a Whole’.

**Keywords:** growth story, Rule of the Three, nature/culture, superego/id, rags to Riches, the self as a whole

### 성장담 속의 ‘3의 법칙’ – 이강백의 희곡 <동지선달 꽃 본 듯이>

**개략:** 본고는 이강백의 희곡 <동지선달 꽃 본 듯이>을 성장담의 관점에서 읽고자 했다. 이 작품은 ‘3의 법칙’에 입각하여 세 명의 인물이 세 개의 시련을 거쳐 자신의 최종 목적지인 ‘어머니 찾기’의 과제에 도달하는 구조를 가지고 있다. 이는 아직 미성숙의 단계에 머물러 있는 셋째 아이가 첫째, 둘째를 극복하고 훌륭한 영웅으로 성장하는 성장담에 속하는 것이며, 이는 영국 민담 <아기 돼지 삼형제>의 구조와 비슷하다.

프로이트의 용어를 빌면, 이강백의 희곡과 <아기 돼지 삼형제>에서 첫째는 초자아, 둘째는 자아, 셋째는 이드에 해당한다. 이들 성장담의 공통점은 이드에 불과했던 셋째가 의미있는 노동을 통해 자연을 극복하고 문명에 달한다는 이야기이며, 이는 레비 스트로스가 설정한 ‘문명:자연’의 구조와도 일치한다.

이강백의 희곡은 의미 있는 노동의 자리에 ‘연극’을 삽입함으로써, 첫째가 보이는 정치 지향성, 둘째가 보이는 관념 지향성을 극복하는 셋째의 인간적인 모습을 제시한다. 지나친 정치 지향, 지나친 관념 지향을 극복하는 셋째의 연극 행위는 지나친 잠 (첫째), 지나친 폭식 (둘째) 를 극복하는 셋째 돼지의 이야기와 중복되면서, 미약한 존재가 위대한 영웅으로 재탄생하는 ‘거지에서 부자로’의 플롯을 재현한다. 이제 미약한 존재는 구스타프 융의 개념을 빌면, ‘전체로서의 자기’에 도달한 셈이다.

**키워드:** 성장담, 3의 법칙, 자연/문명, 초자아/이드, 거지에서 부자로, 전체로서의 자기

## 1. Preface

This paper is focused on ‘The Rule of Three’ in the Growth Stories: I chose the drama “*Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter* (동지선달 꽃 본 듯이, 1991)” as the typical model. My questions are these: Why does the third son win the first and second in the growth stories? What does the victory of the third son mean? How are the

characters of three sons related to the psychological term; superego, ego and id? How can we accept the meaning of the growth stories?

Finally I could find the narrative model of ‘The Rule of Three’ is the most powerful way of transmitting the meaning of the growth stories.

## 2. An Analysis

### 2.1. Introduction

Gangbaik Lee (이강백, 1947-present) is the most important playwright in Korean Modern drama. He debuted in 1971 and made many masterpieces which have had deep influence on Korean modern drama. His drama *Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter* is one of his most brilliant dramas. It deals in the Relationship between human growth and theatrical experience.

In fact, Koreans are accustomed to this drama’s title because it is borrowed from Korean folk song, “Arirang (아리랑)”. It is often considered the unofficial national anthem of Korea.<sup>1</sup> Milyang Arirang (밀양아리랑) is one of the most popular versions of Arirang. This song contains the same phrase of this drama’s title. Let’s see the following.

Ari arirang suri surirang, arari comes. It goes over the arirang pass.

Look at me please. Look at me please. Look at me please.

Look at me please Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter.

Lover came to me. But I couldn’t exchange greetings even though I met my lover.

I only smiled to him silently (...)

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<sup>1</sup> In December 2012, it was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity programme by UNESCO.

[아리 아리랑 쓰리 쓰리랑 아라리가 났네. 아리랑 고개로 넘어 간다.  
날 좀 보소 날 좀 보소 날 좀 보소.  
동지선달꽃 본 듯이 날 좀 보소.  
정든 님이 오셨는데 인사를 못해 행주치마 입에 물고 입만 방긋 (...)]

In this song, a girl says to a man, “Look at me please.” But he does not know her love for him. A girl say to him one more time, “Look at me please like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter.” The meaning of ‘the flower in the midwinter’ is the beauty, scarcity and higher value for it blooms at the hard-conditioned weather of midwinter.<sup>2</sup> The playwright wanted to connect the meaning of theatrical experiences to the “flower in the midwinter”. In his view, theatrical experiences contain the essence of beauty, scarcity and higher value.

The original source of this drama came from the old folklore at Jeju island. A mother committed suicide to give her dead body to her hungry babies. They ate the unknown meat wolfishly because they were so hungry. Afterwards they gradually learned that they had eaten their mother’s corpse. Before this however, they went mad in search of their mother. They travelled all over the country but couldn’t find her.

The playwright rewrote this folklore into the drama *Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter*. In his drama, the title word “flower in the midwinter” has another meaning of ‘their lost mother’. Three sons have travelled all over the country to find their lost mother, but they could not find her.

It is clear and distinct that their lost mother cannot come to life again. The only way to meet their mother again is to seek another ‘dual mother’ (Joseph Campbell 1976: 3-22). The playwright seems to assert that the theatre is the only and true way to meet their dead mother again because the theatre contains the essence of mother’s love and warm feelings (This drama was written by the proposal of ‘Korea Actors Association’. The Association introduced the first public performance of this drama to celebrate ‘The Year of Drama and Film’).

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<sup>2</sup> ‘The flower in the midwinter’ is very similar to the Frazer’s keywords ‘Mistletoe’ in *The Golden Bough*. (J. G. Frazer 1993: 608-710).

## 2.2. On Three Sons

In this drama, three sons are travelling for their lost mother. The first son tries to be a powerful man who can order people to find his mother. He kills a prime minister who has helped him to be a powerful man. At last, he becomes the most powerful man in the country and orders his people to find his mother. He succeeded in finding another mother who resembles her perfectly at least in view of outward appearance. The second son tries to be a monk who can find his true mother in religion. Finally, he rises up to the highest rank of the monk in the country. He has been enlightened that Buddha is more important mother than living and real mother. He has identified the portrait of Buddha as the religious and ideal mother. The third also tries to find his lost mother but becomes a beggar. A group of clowns finds him and teach him the skills of clowning. Finally, he has become the most popular clown who could afford much fun, happiness and entertainment to the poor spectators. He married the poor clown's daughter for she was so poor, but kind and comforting. Previously she had prostituted herself to escape from the threat of deadly hunger. In his mind, she is similar to his own mother who committed suicide to feed her hungry babies. He couldn't find his real mother, but he has found another kind, comfortable and sacrificing mother within his wife. She can be thought to be a true mother. I think Carl Gustav Jung would call her the 'Great Mother'.

\ elements characters	final point	meaning	mother they have found finally
First	prime minister	politics	another mother who resembles her perfectly at least in view of outward appearance.
Second	highest monk	religion	the statue of Buddha as the religious and ideal mother.
Third	beloved clown (actor)	theatre (art)	the spouse who has the mind similar to his mother's.

The third son contrasts with the other two sons. The former is very weak, flexible and humanistic while the latter is powerful, stubborn and anti-humanistic.

### 2.3. On Three Tests

Greimas reduces Vladimir Propp's thirty-one functions to three categories of the wonder tale, the 'Contract' (agreement, category A), the 'Contest' (fighting, category F), and the communicated 'consequences' of the test (compensation, category C). The word A, F and C mean Agreement, Fight and Compensation. Sometimes we call it briefly as 'preparatory test', 'main test' and 'glorifying test'.<sup>3</sup> In this drama, each of three sons must pass three tests. Three tests are constituted as these; preparatory test, main test, glorifying test.

The first son was helpless but accidentally met the prime minister. The prime minister received him as his family because he needed another fake son who should be sent to the neighboring country as a hostage. The first son went to neighboring country as a hostage. By changing his genuine son to fake sons, they gained some profits each other. The first sons could pass the first tests by pretending alternative son. The second test is to become a powerful man. But the highest position of the prime minister was the only one. If the son wants to be the prime minister, he must kill the existing prime minister. Finally he killed the prime minister to rise up to the highest position. The final test is to find his lost mother. He ordered all the people to find her. The people were forced to find her. They barely managed to find her. All they could do is find the counterfeit mother who resembled their genuine mother. Finally, the first son could not meet his lost mother. In other words, he failed the glorifying test. The second son met a group of merchants and monks. He succeeded in his preparatory test because of his sincerity. Next time he separated from the merchants

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Schleifer, *A. J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory*, Croom Helm, 1987. p.126.

and followed the group of monks. In the continuation of hard discipline, he finally has risen to the highest monk in the country. It belongs to the main test. But he failed at the point of the last, glorifying test because he could not meet the real, living mother. He thought the statue of the Buddha was the real mother. But it is just his own wish. In other words, he also failed the glorifying test.

The third son joined the group of clowns. By joining the group, he also has passed the preparatory and main test. When he became the leader of the clowns, he decided to marry the maiden whose father was the previous group leader. At first her father refused his proposal because he knew his daughter prostituted herself to escape from the threat of deadly hunger. But the third son said to him that he could forgive her prostitution because he knew exactly the conditions of the extreme poverty. In addition, he said that she was the real mother of this clown group because she sacrificed herself to feed on them. We can agree that she was the real mother who replaced his lost mother. The action of the third son can be considered the only success in the glorifying test, which the other two could not achieve.

It is thought that the playwright has the intention to compare the three son's attitudes to politics, religion and theatre. Only the third son could achieve the glorifying ending because he chose the theatre instead of politics or religion. In his view, theatre is the synthesis of the powers (politics) and the ideal world (religion). Only the theatre can afford the full satisfaction of human life.

\ tests characters	beginning (preparatory)	middle (main)	end (glorifying)
First	adopted son of the prime minister	killed him to be the prime minister himself	found the similar mother in outward appearance.
Second	group member of the monk	rose up to the highest rank of the monk	found the spiritual mother in inward religion.
Third	group member of the clown	was chosen to be a leader of the clown group	found the alternative mother in his wife

## 2.4. Concluding Remarks

This play has been constituted by ‘the rule of three’. Three persons, three tests were given in it. The first son became the prime minister, the second became a high ranking priest. But they could not find their true mother despite their efforts and masculine successes. They had experienced many difficulties and overcome them, but rarely learn the meaning of love. Only the third son could have reached his destination owing to his love for woman and theatre.

His stage that the play shows through life corresponds to the archetypal stages of human development. His life from birth to rebirth corresponds to the process of the theatre. The idea of a second birth is found at all times and in all places. The motif of dual mother is an archetype to be found in many variants in the field of mythology and comparative religion and forms the basis of numerous “representations collectives.” (Joseph Campbell 1976: 63) Three sons wanted to find their dual mother. The first and second failed to find their true dual mother. Only the third can meet his lost mother within his wife. In other words, he can grow into an adult and reach ‘the Self as a Whole’.

## 3. Adaptation of The Rule of Three

### 3.1. Meaning of the Rule of Three compared to *Three little pigs*

*Three little pigs* begins with the title characters being sent out into the world by their mother, to “seek their fortune”. The first little pig builds a house of straw, but a wolf blows it down and eats him. The second pig builds a house of furze sticks, which the wolf also blows down before eating the pig. The third pig builds a house of bricks. The

wolf fails to blow down the house. He then attempts to trick the pig out of the house by asking to meet him at various places, but is outwitted each time. Finally, the wolf resolves to come down the chimney, whereupon the pig catches the wolf in a cauldron of boiling water, slams the lid on, and cooks and eats him. In another version the first and second little pigs run to their brother's house and after the wolf goes down the chimney he runs away and never goes back to eat the three little pigs, who all survive (see the website of Wikipedia).

In Freudian Terms, the character of first little pig belongs to the realm of the superego. He is not willing to work because he is afraid of being blamed by his parents. His inevitable choice is not to work and to sleep. During sleep, he can escape from being blamed because he does nothing he can be blamed. According to the Freudian observation, this behavior is common among the elder brothers. The second little pig belongs to the ego. He must win the elder's right for survival. So he wants to eat more than his elders. According to the Freudian observation, this selfish behavior is common among second brothers.

The third was too weak and young to make his own house and to live by himself. But he has 'his energy for his life (Libido)'. At first, he was too immature. But using his vital energy for life, he gradually grows to be an adult who can make his own house and keep himself and his brothers from the attack of the wolf (savage, nature). He is the true hero of folk tales.<sup>4</sup>

The story uses the literary rule of three, expressed in this case as a "contrasting three", as the third pig's brick house turns out to be the only one that is strong enough to withstand the wolf. In Levi Strauss' terms, the first and second belongs to the "nature", the third to the "culture" (김만수 2012: 359-374).

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<sup>4</sup> Bettelheim analyzed fairy tales in terms of Freudian psychology in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976). He discussed the emotional and symbolic importance of fairy tales for children. Bettelheim suggested that traditional fairy tales allowed children to grapple with their fears in remote, symbolic terms. If they could read and interpret these fairy tales in their own way, he believed, they would get a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Bettelheim thought that by engaging with these socially-evolved stories, children would go through emotional growth that would better prepare them for their own futures.

	explanation	Freudian Terms	Levi Strauss' Terms
First	not willing to work, only sleeping idly...	superego	nature (house of straw and sticks)
Second	not willing to work, only eating selfishly...	ego	
Third	immature but having his own energy for living...	id	culture (house of bricks)

### 3.2. Type of the Rule of Three

‘Three’ occurs so insistently in the folk tales familiar from childhood. Again and again, we see how things appear in threes: how things have to happen three times; how the hero is given three wishes; how Cinderella goes to the ball three times; how the hero or the heroine is the third of the three children. The rule of three is a writing principle that suggests that things that come in threes are inherently funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than other numbers of things. The reader or audience of this form of text is also more likely to consume information if it is written in groups of threes. From slogans (“Go, fight, Win!”) to films, many things are structured in threes. Examples include *Three Little Pigs*, *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Christopher Booker 2010: 229-238).

A series of three often creates a progression in which the tension is created, built up, and finally released. Similarly, adjectives are often grouped in threes to emphasize an idea.

## 4. Conclusion

In the next tables, we can meet the schema of superego, ego and id. This schema can be adapted to *Three little pigs* and *Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter*.

	<i>Three little pigs</i>	<i>Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter</i>
super-ego	The first pig	The first son
	sleeping too much, too inactive... He is afraid of being punished by his parents when he works at his will... So he had better not work...sleep idly against his will. Sleeping is the safest way of his life.	too responsible for his duty... He act as if only he is responsible for the duty... He cannot help escaping from his destiny of the leader for he is the First son...
ego	The second pig	The second son
	eating too much, too greedily... He must overcome the elder brother...eat more than the elder brother... So he became more selfish....	too selfish.... He escapes from himself into the religion... He is satisfied with his mind... In his religion, all is filled up in the image of Buddha...
id	The third pig	The third son
	too young, but laborious and clever... He was too young and too immature... but had his will and intelligence... Finally he overcame the two brothers because he works hard at his own energy (libido).	At first, he was too weak and instinctive... He chose singing, dancing, playing... Finally, he could find another true mother within his wife and the theatre...

We can also recall the Bruno Bettelheim's suggestion that traditional fairy tales allowed children to grapple with their fears in remote, symbolic terms. If they could read and interpret these fairy tales in their own way, he believed, they would get a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Bettelheim thought that by engaging with these socially-evolved stories, children would go through emotional growth that would better prepare them for their own futures. We can also confirm

this 'rule of three' in the Modern Korean Drama *Like looking at the Flower in the Midwinter*.

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