

# What is Third-World Text?<sup>1)</sup>

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## Colonial Vortex in Comparative Reading

This article reads the circular linguistic performativity as national allegory that is common in James Joyce's "An Encounter" (1914) and Wong Bik Wan's "Losing the City" (1994). It elucidates the intertextual comparability<sup>2)</sup> of these two texts by demonstrating that "Losing the City" compares the Irish colonial situation to the plight of Hong Kong through the process of *inheriting*<sup>3)</sup> the colonial literary style and theme

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1) This presentation aims to introduce a new definition of 'Third World Text,' which is my current study topic, to the Korean Academy and to receive valuable feedback from the senior scholars and peer critics. This paper is a part of my article entitled "Colonial Vortex as Third World Textual Rhetoric in James Joyce's "An Encounter" and Wong Bik Wan's "Losing the City." I strongly encourage my academic readers to read the following two papers to understand my present research more extensively.

See Hwang, Jung Hyun. "Colonial Vortex as Third World Textual Rhetoric in James Joyce's "An Encounter" and Wong Bik Wan's "Losing the City." *The New Studies of English Language & Literature* 80 (2021): 221-246.

See also Hwang, Jung Hyun. "Colonial Repetition as Third World Textual Aesthetics: A Theoretical Approach." *The Journal of East-West Comparative Literature* 57 (2021): 365-394.

2) This article explains colonial vortex by suggesting the intertextual comparability of "An Encounter" and "Losing the City." The study's intertextuality refers to the interrelationships between two literary texts. According to the theory of intertextuality, the meaning of a text is formed in association with other texts that the reader can recognize. A text is not independent: its production is founded on interrelationships with numerous extant texts. Julia Kristeva is widely recognized as a representative theorist of intertextuality. However, the arguments of this article are closer to the great writers' famous discussions below. Virginia Woolf presented the concept of intertextuality vis-à-vis a writer in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) as follows.

For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter. [...] all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn. (66)

T.S. Eliot also suggested the concept of intertextuality in terms of interpretation in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919):

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You can not value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2396)

The comparison above can effectively inform the reader of the concept of intertextuality in this article. The intertextual relation between Woolf and Eliot and the discussion of the relationship between author and reader are frequently mentioned in my previous and future studies.

3) Studies comparing the literary world of James Joyce with the literature of other nationalities are often found in academia. Recent studies of Shim and Lee have particularly shown an insightful and creative comparison of Joyce's works with Korean literature. However, the concept of inheritance argued by this present article, the intertextual comparability is the distinguishable element of this study from the previous ones. In other words, this study begins with the reader's intuition to find the traces that one

of “An Encounter.” It purposes to demonstrate that the colonial rhetoric of repetition can be comparatively discussed through the commonality of the experience of being colonized. However, this article is not intended to examine the comparison of details about the colonial history of Ireland and Hong Kong. Instead, the present article studies the symptoms of the daily life of colonized manifested in literary style, that is, colonial rhetoric. It explores how the fact that a nation is colonized by another nation is described as an individual’s *feeling* and *experience* and how this matter of private sphere is intertwined to the public dimension and the nature of third world text. In other words, this article intends to illustrate an *example* that can identify the third world textual genre through the interpretation of specific rhetoric commonly found in the *process* of comparative literary reading. Put differently, the ultimate goal of this study is to emphasize that the genre decision process of third world text is in the complexity of the characteristics that are inherent in the text and its connection to the reader’s reading experience and the feeling of the text. After all, the third world textual genre is determined by internal and external communication between the text and the reader.

In congruence with the above arguments and grounded in Fredric Jameson’s notion of the national allegory, this article posits that James Joyce’s “An Encounter”(1914)<sup>4)</sup> and Wong Bik Wan’s “Losing the City”(1994)<sup>5)</sup> belong to the genre of world literature, by suggesting a comparative deduction achieved through the process of rediscovering them as third world texts (Jameson 163, 187; Hwang 367).<sup>6)</sup> It presents examples of the

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text strongly recognizes the other that is the relationship of intertextuality between “An Encounter” and “Losing the City.”

4) Recent studies on “An Encounter” may be divided into two categories: investigations that interpret this short story as national allegorical and those that do not. Among recent research initiatives, articles corresponding to the former category include Bonnie Roos’s study interpreting the “green-eyed old man” as an allusion to Daniel O’Connell, a historical figure who led the Irish independence movement, and Greg Winston’s postulation that Joyce allegorically substitutes the discourse of British colonialism in the story “Apache Chief.” The articles conforming to the latter view include Richard Pedot’s argument that “uneventfulness” describes the paradoxical nature of the concept of event in the story and James P. Degnan’s study viewing the relationship between Mahony and “I” as “the conflict between id and superego” (91) by reading the story as “appreciating its Freudian essence” (89).

5) The question whether Hong Kong can fundamentally be regarded as a nation is not a focal interest of this article. However, the experience of the collective of people who share the geographical and cultural context of Hong Kong in the “in-betweenness” of the historical phase of British colonization and the return to China is regarded as Hong Kong’s national identity in this article. The Hong Kong writer Wong Bik Wan’s “Losing the City” (1994) can be read as a story representing a collective that experienced identity confusion during the 1997 handover crisis. Kwai-Cheung Lo did not refer to Hong Kong literature as a “national” literature in his essay, “Hong Kong Literature and its City.” However, he marks the cultural specificity and hybrid particularity that can qualify Hong Kong literature as a national narrative that reflects Hong Kong’s identity as an entity different from England and China. Despite the excellent literary representation of the post-handover situation, (international) academic circles are not actively interested in “Losing the City.” As Kwai-Cheung Lo has underscored, “the culture and literature of Hong Kong emerge from its colonial past” (136), and “Losing the City” can be a good example of the extension of that interpretation. “Losing the City” is primarily adopted in many lectures about Hong Kong’s modern literature and culture study as a representative literary sample through which to understand Sara Ahmed’s conception of “homeless at home” and Meaghan Morris’s theory of Hong Kong as an Asian study method. A recent study regards Wong Bik-Wan’s fiction to be illustrative of contextual national allegories: see Janet Ng. “Writing from the Obverse: Wong Bik-Wan’s Fiction and Nostalgia in Hong Kong.” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20.1 (2008): 44–71.

6) This argument of mine offers intertextuality between this article and my previous and subsequent

circular textual performativity produced by the *extreme* colonial repetition of representative short stories of east and west. Colonization occurs by repeating the process of *otherization*, which constantly seeks to emphasize differences to perpetrate intentional exploitation by integrating another country through the wearing of the mask of oppressive intimacy (Lowe 6). In what ways does the narrative express the themes of colonial violence of paralysis, alienation, loneliness, and confinement that colonized experience daily? This article explains that they are primarily represented in texts in languages that specify repetition of circular images that indicate colonized are trapped in the colonial structure. It further argues that this colonial rhetoric of circulation pictures and imprints the following *colonial vortex* in the reader's mind.



The rhetoric of linguistic circulation evokes a circular sensibility and enables the reader to sense the *colonial vortex* labeled in this study. The colonial vortex shown above is allegorically evinced and, in the end, confines the reader within the collective experience of the colonial condition. The mental and physical oppressions experienced by protagonists caught in colonial or neocolonial circumstances are expressed through the literary style of circular repetition, which also demonstrates that a text can allegorically express the invisibility of the oppression of colonialism through the literary and political signature of colonial vortex. Colonization is, ultimately, a situation in which people are helplessly trapped in an invisible and systemic *iron house* (Jameson 173). Within this iron house plays out the colonial situational tragedy of “crisis ordinariness” and impasse of the present (Berlant 4-10). The character of these texts as world literature is displayed through their expression of the totality of the colonial world view from which individuals can not escape. The present study identifies the two selected texts as third world texts using colonial circular repetition as a common technique despite their varied nationalities, races, and cultures. This article recognizes and highlights that the third world text is a transnational and cross-cultural symptomatic literary genre that discloses its colonial mental manifestations. In so doing, the present essay confirms that colonization is, ultimately, a global and not a national concern. In addition, the *colonial vortex* discusses that the study of the colonial rhetoric of the third world text accuses colonial violence that confines colonized physically and mentally in the colonial situational structure. It also reflects the process of discovering the significance of the study of the socio-political function of national allegory.

What is the importance of reading the interactions of circular repetition and Fredric

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studies related to Fredric Jameson's theory of national allegory, Korean context, and study of genre identification.

Jameson's theory of national allegory? The wars and conflicts occurring across the world are intensified when we only recognize differences between peoples and ignore the commonalities of humanity. In suggesting that a cross-national and cultural understanding may originate in a reader's comparative reading style, this article manifests the allegorical significance of the text that occurs when the allegorical owner of the text, the reader, appropriates the freedom of its interpretation. Thus, "meaning" is not conveyed by "a simple arrangement of words" for the reader; it is much more than what appears to be inscribed on a page of a text.<sup>7)</sup> The (allegorical) conclusion of this article may be that the text belongs to those who are prepared to undertake this pleasant journey of the *comparative literary imagination*.

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7) The ideas expressed here are linked to Zhang Longxi's *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (2005). Zhang Logxi notes that in interpreting allegories, readers can read more than what is written in the text. That is, he attends to the significance of allegory reading in the achievement of cross-national/cultural understanding through the reading process of "the interaction between text and reader" (63). Zhang argues that "the focus of theoretical analysis in criticism should be on how meaning is constructed in the reading process, rather than on what the textual meaning itself is" (62). It can be assumed that Zhang Logxi's claim of allegory reading and Jameson's national allegory theory correspond to a study of a reading style and denote a type of reader-response criticism. In addition, their view of interpretation aligns with Wolfgang Iser's perspective. Iser emphasizes reading as a "process" through which readers exercise their "imagination;" the phenomenological analysis aims to read "something beyond what it actually says" (53). Further, Stanley Fish highlights reading as an action and emphasizes literature as a "kinetic art" and "a process of extraction of deep meaning" (83-86). I will revisit this discussion later in my articles on Korean films.

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