



Wonhyo and Shakespeare: A Way of Intercommunication

원효와 셰익스피어: 소통의 길

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Wonhyo and Shakespeare: A Way of Intercommunication*

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I

We seem to find our modern society highly convenient for communication. Various kinds of international communications network help us resolve the problems of conflicts, misunderstandings, and disputes. Skills and means of communication, nevertheless, have been developed to the extreme of dangerous situation. We think that we are enjoying our own private lives, but our everyday lives are being watched by the spy satellites of superpower countries. This is because one-way communications system is likely to lead to a monopoly on information and to produce a collective power.

The irony is that our individual lives are getting lost in spite of the development of network technology. Many people are drifting in a flood of information without any place to arrive at or return to. In these circumstances, the lines between private and official spaces have blurred rapidly, so that we often see

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two regions reversed: private actions can function as official measures. Now the world seems to change from order-oriented old systems to newly chaotic situations. These situations would end up, with conditions of our lives reversed totally.

Social structures and systems of human beings are abstract forms, reflecting the material world of individual desires, economic forces, and political powers. Yet the problem is that these social forms almost always betray the wishes and hopes of the common people to push this world over in the extreme of conflicts. The strong avarice of the higher classes for money and power has loomed out of the darkness, threatening to break down the two-way communication between two sides. Now we are in need of better communication with each other. How can we have any good correspondence with other people and classes, that is to say two-way intercommunication?

Wonhyo(617-686) and Shakespeare(1654-1616) treat in their works the controversies or conflicts arising from different desires, ambitions, thoughts, and ideas. Indeed, Wonhyo traces back to the origin of disputes in *Treatise on the Ten Ways of Resolving Controversies (Simmun hwajaeng non)*, yet Shakespeare displays many phases of tragic process and effect of non-communicating relationships in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. Thus Wonhyo emphasizes the cause of conflicts, while Shakespeare shows the actions of tragic conflicts.

In these ways, Wonhyo asserts that the controversies are sharing the common origin of nothing, and Shakespeare shows how the conflicts are shattered into nothing. They both think all the controversies or conflicts are based on nothing. Accordingly, the works of Wonhyo and Shakespeare are focused on the intercommunication of opposites, as starting from nothing. In these respects, Wonhyo and Shakespeare may be compared from the viewpoint of a way of intercommunication based on nothingness, through which we could go beyond the division of words and reality, being and non-being, at last attaining further enlightenment. In this study, all quotations of Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

II

Wonhyo a Korean monk and Shakespeare a British playwright, they could not share any common historical background, but from their works we are quite able to infer that they lived in the very similar circumstances of society. Wonhyo and Shakespeare equally produced their works under the unrest and terrible situations. Wonhyo was writing his commentaries and treatise in Unified Silla Kingdom, when, after the years of unification warfare, “slavery was prevalent, particularly in the capital where the aristocracy was so firmly ensconced” (Lee 79). Shakespeare was writing his plays when “people were being cut, drawn, and quartered into pieces on London streets or burned at the stake as witches and heretics” (Lamonica 48). In these societies, there might exist very long-standing conflicts between individuals or groups from different ideas or values.

Even though we could resolve any political or religious conflicts with some powerful magic, social conflicts would still exist all the time, because the complex relations between individuals and societies are established by their own viewpoints. For this reason, we need a new way of intercommunication, one position going beyond its own limits to reach other sides. When we widen our stances, we become aware that the conflicts stemming from contrasting ideas or values are usually brought out by the discrepancies in words and realities. Words have had their roots in realities but they usually become independent from their origin. Thus Wonhyo says we must not cling to words:

I make use of words to communicate, in order to express the truth that cuts off words. It is like using the finger to point at the moon, which [of course] is separate from the pointing finger. All you are doing now is grasping at the literal meaning of the words.(168)

Word and reality are like two sides of a coin. Undoubtedly, to arrive at the reality as truth we have to go beyond the word, but it is nearly impossible for

the common people to transcend the words in the real world. Naturally, we should realize that words are only methods to communicate with each other. Even so, the higher classes also are unable to attain this awakening, which Shakespeare shows in *King Lear*. Lear summons his three daughters to a speech contest to confirm ‘which of them shall love him most’ (1.1.51). Contrary to the flowery words of two sisters, Cordelia says, “Nothing” (1.1.87). When Lear urges to speak again, Cordelia replies,

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less. (1.1.91-3)

Although Cordelia is faced with crisis of losing her fortunes, she is telling a truth, the word not corresponding to the reality. In response to Lear’s reproach, “So young, and so untender?” (1.1.106), Cordelia answers again, “So young, my lord, and true” (1.1.107). She is quite sure that she is true to herself. Now Lear believes that words are the same as realities, whereas Cordelia thinks the reality of her mind cannot be firmly wrapped in her words.

In spite of this, Cordelia might be accused of her act. On the one hand, her neglect of filial duty makes her father get angry with her and lose his judgement. On the other hand, she is too self-centered to care about well communicating with each other through words. In respect of communication, however, King Lear is much worse than Cordelia, for the words of the royal prerogative generally become the very realities, so that the king easily recognizes other people’s words as realities. Besides, Lear is unwilling to admit the fact that words as forms are like “formless empty space” (Wonhyo 169), and the language as words is changing all the time. If we follow Wonhyo’s principle in words and realities, Lear and Cordelia equally fail to intercommunicate because they do not take words as a useful means of communication.

In contrast to Lear and Cordelia, people who make use of words to deceive others are Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Iago, Claudius, Polonius, and Hamlet. They do not connect their words to right actions. Among them, Iago and Hamlet are most masterly in using the complicated relations between words and realities. Iago successfully manipulates Othello into killing Desdemona. Along with this, the safe way for Othello and Desdemona to escape from the trap of Iago would be to discern the difference between Iago's play of words and his real identity. Even so, the real causes of tragic downfall of Othello and Desdemona seem to lie in the failure of communication between husband and wife: a trifle such as an outdated handkerchief hastens their death, which proves their neglect of intercommunication.

Iago lets his identity slide over realities, which he himself enjoys like hide-and-peek. When Iago says, "I am not what I am" (1.1.65), this "signals not a crisis of identity but a smug self-affirmation" (Eagleton 69). In this way, Hamlet also tries to keep his identity hidden behind the curtains of words. Although Hamlet says to the players, "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (3.2.17-8), this means that you have to speak and act properly in a drama, not in the real world. After the Ghost reveals to Hamlet how Claudius poisoned him, Hamlet tells Marcellus and Horatio that from this time he will "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.172). Accordingly, we can see how efficiently Hamlet can deal with people under the guise of feigned madness: the words carefully articulated by mad Hamlet are at once illogical and powerful, his enemies getting wild with sheer terror.

We can see many family conflicts in Shakespeare's tragedies, arising from the political power games between family members or other families. The most tragic family feud of Shakespeare's plays is *Romeo and Juliet* which is a story of "star-cross'd lovers take their life;/Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows/Doth with their death bury their parents' strife" (Pro.6-9). Both Romeo and Juliet are really unable to know the reason why they are locked into the enmity of their parents: there is nothing in the play that is mentioned

in connection with the early origins of two family feud of the Montagues and the Capulets. For this reason, Juliet deplors all use of name, which divides perfection into words and realities:

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
 By any other word would smell as sweet;
 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
 Retain that dear perfection which he owes
 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
 And for that name, which is no part of thee,
 Take all myself. (2.2.43-48)

What the secret wedding and inevitable death of Romeo and Juliet mean is, in one sense that an open communication between opposites is extremely hard to establish, in another sense that the groundless deep old hatreds have thrown themselves into solitary confinement, having lost the will to escape from their own prison. Undoubtedly, this tragic situation has been brought about by those enmities, but all the people surrounding them also cannot help but be punished accordingly:

Prin. Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!
 See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
 That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.
 And I for winking at your discords too
 Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punish'd. (5.3.291-95)

Indeed, heaven might punish human beings by making them go astray, yet this would help people seek better ways of improving their societies. In this way, Wonhyo and Shakespeare are parallel to each other. No one would deny that “Shakespeare’s plays value social order and stability” (Eagleton 1) in his England. *Simmun hwajaeng non* by Wonhyo also tries to find a new way of

intercommunication and make Unified Silla Kingdom more steady. For any social stability, words must not be estranged from its ground. But the problem is that the estranged words have political power to control the real world selfishly. For this reason, Wonhyo properly expounds the relation between words and realities, ‘using the finger to point at the moon’ as an example what he means. Upon this, Shakespeare shows that those kinds of words like fingers are seemingly achieving their immediate goals, however, ending up in ultimate downfall.

All the texts of Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus “by which we know them came into being after their death” (Jaspers 87). Perhaps they knew fatal flaws of words so full well that they did not write anything down with words. Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible to communicate with each other without words. As Jesus and Buddha used words to give an explanation of their teachings, so Wonhyo and Shakespeare combined many visual images and the spoken words to far-reaching effects in their works.

III

When we continue our long journey into the tragic world of Shakespeare, we could often meet a gaping abyss ahead of us. This abyss—it appears as disorder or chaos, heightening fears of total collapse—may be nothing itself upon which our lives are being extended every moment. In this respect, Shakespeare’s plays share a common view about life with Buddha’s teachings: all is vanity, and life is nothing. This means that our life, by its nature, is without beginning and without end. Thus, when life is ended, death opens a new world, which is Hamlet’s question:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep—
 No more, and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep—
 To sleep, perchance to dream. (3.1.55-64)

Death is at once the end of life and a beginning of new being like dream. A new life after death is for Hamlet the vexing problem. For one thing, Hamlet hesitates about committing suicide out of fear of the unexplored region with human knowledge. For another thing, Hamlet recognizes that there is no clear dividing line between life and death. Othello also does not believe that death differs from life in loving his wife. Othello's love for Desdemona extends far beyond death. He says, "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee/And love thee after" (5.2.18-9). Othello tries to erase the line between life and death of her wife. In these ways, "if Othello portrays a man in hot pursuit of nothing, Hamlet reverses the perspective and tells the story from the standpoint of that nothing itself" (Eagleton 70). Indeed, Hamlet and Othello are moving parallel to nothingness, yet the problem is that they are caught in a big dilemma as the fundamental question of existence, unable to transcend the division of being and emptiness. Wonhyo says,

Some detest being and love emptiness—this is like doing away with trees in order to enter a forest. [Being and emptiness] are like blue and green sharing the same primary color, like ice and water sharing a common origin. (167)

Being as life is not different from death as non-being. That is undoubtedly true, but opponents to this view can assert that "there are no examples of this

in the world” (Wonhyo 168). Although they have their reasons, it is certain that they strictly adhere to words of being and non-being. A serious dilemma arises when we follow only the logic of words:

There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning.
 There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning.
 There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between this being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing.
 (Chuang Tzu 38)

Logic is based on both words and reason, so that logical positions could not clearly recognize the irrational and illogical dimensions of realities. When we try to communicate with other people only by words, we might be unable to have any successful intercommunication with them, utterly impossible to do with opponents. Again, logical views almost always demand coldly the convincing proof, the evidence of which could be confirmed through human eyes. This is like Othello who says to Iago, “Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;/Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof” (3.3.359-60). Along this way, Hamlet also tries to detect any evidence for the suspected murder of his father by King Claudius, seeing any optical proof in response to a performance of *The Mousetrap* before the king and queen.

The relevance of ocular proofs to truth is like that of appearances to essence. Appearances seem to reflect essence, yet the truth is that appearances are not the very essence, which Othello could not realize; Hamlet might recognize vaguely. The irony is that one who has some deep insight into life—villains are described in the stories conventionally as being entirely devoid of their reflections on life—is Macbeth. He realizes that life is fundamentally based on the duality of being and non-being, of which Macbeth could be aware in advance of his death:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (5.5.24-28)

Life is a dark shape produced by the body on the stage of linear time. The shadow disappears forever into nothing after the death of the body. This view on life seems to be Shakespeare's basic fabric of the human world. Once more, we see Prospero making the same remark about life in *The Tempest*:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors
 (As I foretold you) were all spirits, and
 Are melted into air, into thin air,
 And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on; and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep. (4.1.148-58)

Although we could catch only a glimpse into Shakespeare's whole way of looking at the universe from his plays, it is certain that Shakespeare shows the tragic conflicts of human beings in his tragedies. To resolve the conflicts between two opposite views, we should find the third position: this might be a synthetic vision, still continuing to admit their differences until an agreement could be finally reached between them.

The rationale behind Wonhyo's treatise and Shakespeare's tragedies is nothing. Accordingly, they do not negate anything. This standpoint is closely related to the viewpoint of the change of things, *samsara* meaning the

continuous flow that all the lives in the material world are bound together by the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Hamlet refers to the cycle of life, asserting that ‘Alexander and Caesar can become a stopper of a beer-barrel or a patch to expel the winter’s flaw’ (5.1.208-16). Along with this, Wonhyo’s position is like a dream of butterfly by which Chuang Tzu elucidates the change of things:

He didn’t know if he was Chuang Tzu who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Tzu. Between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

This transformation of things occurs in the universe of nothingness, with no limit in change. In this world any partial perspective of opposites could be accommodated by modifying their own views. In these ways, we are able to have all sorts of two-way exchange of ideas and information, which might make it possible for people to interchange thoughts and sentiments with each other. This is a way of intercommunication, leading us to at once material and spiritual enlightenment.

IV

Wonhyo’s works and practices “show that he comprehensively studied all the major Buddhist traditions as well as the other East Asian philosophical traditions of Confucianism and Taoism” (Kim 171). From this fact, we could imagine what it was like for Wonhyo to make every effort to publicize ‘the ten ways of resolving controversies’ in his country. Indeed, Shakespeare depicts the traditional religious custom of Christian England, yet he does not adhere to Christianity as his religion. Besides, it is possible to argue that “Shakespeare

was a living Buddha by Buddhist definition: a bodhisattva, literally, an ‘enlightened being’” (Lamonica 17). This enlightenment of Wonhyo and Shakespeare might open a new way for us to communicate with each other.

By the third way to resolve the conflicts between opponents do Wonhyo and Shakespeare equally mean a reconciliation compatible with each other. Thus Wonhyo’s philosophical thought is based on the principle that “identity and difference may be coextensive, but this coextension does not obscure the distinctive qualities and functions of identity and difference” (Pak 56) of their own. Upon this, even binary opposites such as good and evil can, for Shakespeare, coextend far beyond “a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste” (Bradley 51). In these ways, Wonhyo and Shakespeare transcend the limits of discriminatory ideas and thoughts: they believe that the views of opponents are always to be used as ladders to enlightenment.

Shakespeare shows that his tragic heroes are likely to attain their sudden awakening to the nothingness of life when death befalls them. Hamlet’s last word about his life and death is “the rest is silence” (5.2.358): his life was ‘signifying nothing’ like Macbeth, and there remains next life as nothing filled with silence. Now he is at once leaving the world full of “Words, words, words” (2.2.192) and entering “The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns” (3.1.78-79). As the undiscovered country is beyond our knowledge, when Cordelia is hanged, King Lear cries out in agony and dies of a broken heart:

My poor fool is hang’d! No, no, no life!
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never. (5.3.304-309)

It does not seem that Hamlet and Lear think about an afterlife of some sort, as their attitudes towards afterlife are existential, not religious. This is because “the Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular; and while Shakespeare was writing he practically confined his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought” (Bradley 40). On this view, Wonhyo is similar to Shakespeare. Undoubtedly, Wonhyo was a Buddhist monk who valued a life living in solitude as a religious discipline, but after he broke “a Buddhist commandment by his union with the princess and the birth of Sol Ch’ong, Wonhyo doffed his monk’s robe and put on secular dress, adopting the punning nickname Sosong Kosa (Little Hermit)” (Ilyon 276). In these ways, Wonhyo and Shakespeare both went through lives as existential human beings:

Modern nonreligious man assumes a new existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence...Man makes himself, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god. (Eliade 203)

Wonhyo and Shakespeare do not believe that God will free us from this weary world. Wonhyo’s way for liberation from this tragic world is awakening as enlightenment. As all human beings have Buddha nature, “they all share in the sweet dew [of awakening]. All of them will attain the eternity, bliss, self, and purity [of awakening]” (Wonhyo 171). On the other hand, Shakespeare depicts the phases and process of awakening through King Lear’s sufferings and Hamlet’s madness. Shakespeare gives the last speech in *King Lear* to Edgar, who refers to Lear as the oldest who “hath borne most; we that are young/Shall never see so much, nor live so long” (5.3.326-27). Thus the play is a tragedy “of a human body in anguished movement, tugged, wrenched, beaten, pierced, stung, scourged, dislocated, flayed, gashed, scalded, tortured and

finally broken on the rack” (Spurgeon 339), visualizing the fatal condition of human beings with hidden God. Along with this, we can see Hamlet awakened by his madness to the true reality. He begs a pardon of Laertes for wrongs done to his family:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If 't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged,
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy. (5.2.234-39)

His madness is to be in his ego or self. His self as madness wronged people including himself. Now he is trying to free at once himself and the wronged people from their own selves. Naturally, Hamlet's "freedom does not mean the freedom of the self. Freedom means: freedom from the self" (Rajneesh 212). Indeed, Hamlet is longing to intercommunicate with Laertes, yet his wishes are ultimately derived from nothingness.

The question as so far considered is the way of intercommunication through enlightenment. Although Buddhism tries "to awaken the minds of people, its doctrines can be too complicated for average people" (Ko 197). For this reason, with a monstrous mask on his face and a gourd in his hand, Wonhyo "performed his dance in every corner of the country, so that even usurers and poor old bachelors (both much despised) could understand the golden sayings of Buddha and the Buddhist invocation, Namuami-tabul" (Ilyon 276). On the other hand, Shakespeare describes this weary world with "images of sickness, disease or blemish of the body" (Spurgeon 316) in *Hamlet*, and also with images "of animals in action, preying upon one another, mischievous, lascivious, cruel or suffering" (Spurgeon 335) in *Othello*. Besides, Shakespeare makes sometimes Fool and Beggar lead King Lear in a state of self-realization,

attaining a passing awakening, and sometimes the Grave-diggers induce Hamlet to think about the cycle of rebirth. To sum up, what Wonhyo and Shakespeare imply seems that any two-way intercommunication could be kept open among the common people, not by the higher classes.

When we meet with other people, we find it hard to have any two-way intercommunication with them. This is because all human individuals are unique. Naturally, the conflicts between social classes do not seem to be settled as long as individuals are concerned. It is no exaggeration to say that we live in the world where Three Witches in *Macbeth* are hovering and say to us, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.11).

We are leading our everyday life, sometimes dreaming an imaginary world for us. It is quite natural that the imaginary world should make us feel more comfortable than the real world. Nevertheless, we cannot walk into the imaginary world, so that the best way is to change our real world into a new place for our happiness. The first step towards change is to realize that all of us are connected to each other, and each existence is based upon nothingness. As there is nothing that nothingness cannot go into, our enlightenment from nothingness may make us welcome each other with open arms.

V

The conflicts which Wonhyo and Shakespeare venture epistemologically to solve through enlightenment are innately rooted in the history of human beings. Accordingly, academic schools like eschatology would not stop producing religious doctrines about the end of the world until the human species are to become extinct. The social phenomena like this—we can run across the word ‘doomsday’ in Shakespeare’s comedy, history, and tragedy—seem to emerge from the weight of the real-life situation, although religions as marketable products constitute a significant part of the business for money.

Again, the matter of intercommunication is getting worse all the time under modern capitalism: the material process of exchange values is used for communicating between people, which drives people through pleasure principle, seeking immediate satisfaction of all needs and desires. This direction toward impulses, on the one hand, makes it hard for people to intercommunicate with each other, but on the other hand, can arise in other forms when repeatedly denied. One of the latter case is increasing numbers of people who have medical treatment in psychiatric hospitals.

Confronted with these situations, we had better follow the principle in what Lao Tzu says, “Those who know don’t talk. Those who talk don’t know” (Chapter 56), and “True words seem paradoxical” (Chapter 78). In fact, Wonhyo and Shakespeare both see the real world from a purely paradoxical viewpoint, so that they are deeply able to observe people, things or situations that have two opposite features and therefore seem strange. For this reason, today, there are some ways in which we can learn from them how to avoid the brutal conflicts occurring in the global village.

Shakespeare spent his whole life in the West, while Wonhyo did in the East. There remains another question as to whether their assumptions about human beings are optimistic or pessimistic. Hamlet answers to this question, “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (2.2.249-50). This is like what is widely known as Wonhyo’s basic principle of philosophy: everything depends on our minds. On the other hand, the problem is how to do all this without friendly violence like ‘the axis of evil’ which America uses to locate the enemy countries and unite the friendly countries giving assistance to the war on terror.

Western political superpowers seem vainly to unfold Armageddon: they are attempting to propagandise for the final battle against evil. Indeed, no one is at fault, yet who decides who is good or evil? The past history of human beings reveals that the West opened Pandora’s box, all the evils spreading over the world: it seems that history like samsara repeats itself, showing an inevitable

omen of total cataclysm. To resume, we had best manage to break through the barriers set up between our opponents and begin again to communicate wholeheartedly with them, before it is too late to prepare for zero hour.

▶ Key Words: Wonhyo, conflict, intercommunication, being and nonbeing, nothingness, enlightenment, samsara. / 원효, 갈등, 소통, 존재와 비존재, 무, 깨달음, 윤회

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원효와 셰익스피어: 소통의 길

국문초록

김창호

기술 문명의 발달과 삶의 질의 향상이 서로 어긋나는 현상을 우리는 현대의 통신 방식에서 목격할 수 있다. 온갖 장비를 사용하여 가상공간에서 서로 정보를 교환하거나 만남을 지속하지만, 사실 진정한 양방향의 소통은 거의 불가능하게 되어 있다. 초국가적 거대 자본이 지구상의 모든 정보를 관리하면서, 자본의 논리에 따르는 폭력적 구조 안으로 개인의 삶을 몰아넣는, 말하자면 자본주의의 본질과 속성이 극단적 양상으로 드러나고 있는 것이 오늘날 우리의 비극적 현실이다. 이러한 질곡에서 벗어날 수 있는 진정한 소통의 길을 원효와 셰익스피어에게서 찾아보고자 한다.

원효의 『십문화쟁론』과 셰익스피어의 비극은 수많은 갈등과 불화의 문제를 다룬다는 점에서 동일하다. 그런데 원효는 그 갈등과 불화는 동일한 근원에서 시작된다고 말하고, 셰익스피어는 갈등과 불화가 진행되는 과정과 비극적 종말의 모습을 보여준다. 원효와 셰익스피어의 세계에 대한 인식론은 무(無, nothingness)에 근거하고 있다. 무의 관점에서 현실 세계를 바라보면, 모든 갈등과 불화는 말과 실제의 불일치 혹은 존재와 비존재의 연속성에 대한 인식의 부족으로 시작된다. 이런 문제를 극복할 때, 진정한 소통의 문은 열린다는 것이다. 요컨대 우리의 삶 자체는 결국 언제든 무로 돌아갈 수 있는 순간의 연속이라는 사실을 인식하는 깨달음에 이르면, 극단적인 갈등으로 수많은 고통을 재생산하는 일을 반복하지 않는다는 것이다. 원효의 주장과 셰익스피어의 연극에서 오늘날 우리가 당면하고 있는 극단적인 갈등을 해소할 수 있는 길을 모색하는 것은, 물질적 감각에 의존하는 일상의 삶을 지속하는 한, 인류의 미래는 폭력적 종말에서 벗어날 수 없다는 불길한 예감 때문이다. 이러한 경향은 자본과 군사력을 동원하여 세계를 지배하고 있는 강대국들의 행로에서 충분히 증명된다.

이제 우리는 가장 낮은 차원에서 개인이나 집단 사이에 진정한 양방향 소통을 시작하지 않으면 인류의 미래는 없다는 절박한 상황에 놓여 있다. 예나 지금이나 어떤 개인도 집단과 격리되어 삶을 영위할 수는 없는 일이다. 나와

남 사이에 이루어지는 자연스러운 관계에 대한 인식의 전환은 특별히 종교적이거나 현학적인 이유도 필요도 없다고 하겠다. 인류의 시작과 역사를 함께하는 지극히 단순한 공동체 의식 정도만이라도 회복한다면, 미래에 최악의 상황을 초래하지는 않을 것이다.

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