

An Ontological Study on Three Tragedies: *King Oedipus*, *King Lear* and *Doctor Faustus*

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Dealing with the problem of sign and symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, Paul de Man presents the possibility of the compatibility between literary experience and literary theory and also the inherent disjunction between them. He says:

Thus the sign, random and singular at its first position, turns into symbol just as the I, so singular in its independence from anything that is not itself, becomes in the general thought of logic, the most inclusive, plural, general, and impersonal of subjects.¹⁾

Here Paul de Man proposes the philosophical self-forgetting arising through the process of appropriation by language. The philosophical self-forgetting is achieved at the moment when the recognition of truth takes place, that is, when the limited self is transcended and acquires the objectivity of the world. This self-forgetting, or recognizing human nature and seeing the Way is also the ultimate aim of the human existence in the teachings of Buddhistic philosophy and Taoism.

The Hegelian concept of appropriation is more clearly developed in Heidegger's phenomenological reflection on Being and language. The Interpretation of Being as "what shows itself from itself in itself" is a hermeneutics of revealing the hiddenness of Being. Heidegger's questioning of Being is grounded in the concept of the ecstatic unity of temporality and the reflection on language. As an answer to his questioning of Being, his *Being and Time* attempts to fuse the two concepts of temporality and human existence into oneness. The way to an answer is the process of inquiry, manifestation and discourse.

Heidegger's concept of temporality and discourse for the clearing of truth synthesizes the traditional thoughts of aesthetics. His "coming to the clearing" or "unconcealment" of truth is not far from Aristotle's "anagnorisis" in his interpretation of tragedy. Recognition is a "change from ignorance to knowledge"²⁾ leading to dénouement. Recognition can be worked out between persons, but the most philosophical one in tragedy is

1) Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," in *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1982), p. 768.

2) Aristotle, *Poetics* in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 54.

self-recognition. In most cases, this self-recognition takes the form of the defeat of the extreme self-will called "hybris."

Oedipus' desperate search for the identity of the murderer of Laius makes himself caught in the net of Fate by dramatic irony. Trapped by the inevitable condition of his existence and fallen a victim to his own hot-tempered rashness, Oedipus suffers horribly and pitifully and learns about himself.

Heideggerian hermeneutics of Being is more applicable to the Dasein of the characters in *King Lear*. Condemned to freedom in Sartre's meaning, each character shows his will and chooses at each ecstatic moment. He falls by the consequences of his actions. Blinded spiritually by ignorance, lack of discrimination, King Lear chooses the inauthentic being of Goneril and Regan, who cover their ingratitude with tongue in cheek, and rejects the hidden truth of the faithful Cordelia. By his own wrong choice, King Lear falls into the terrible heath of madness.

According to Heidegger, this falling is a precondition for the struggle towards true Dasein as a necessary component of existence. King Lear's inappropriate determination to remain "every inch king" and inability to tell the true from the false, or the good from the bad, brings about the chaotic tragic landscape in his old mentality and lets him ask philosophically about his own being, "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"³⁾

That ontological question can be answered by the wise Fool. There is a changing places between King Lear and the Fool. In the state of chaos King Lear is transformed into the "Nuncle," another fool, and the Fool himself demonstrates his authenticity in wisdom and insight like a prophet.

But the moment of Falling, that is, King Lear's loss of authority and identity as king opens the way to the Potentiality-for-Being, his rise as an authentic being in the soul. His suffering in the heath with the wretched beings of the world brings a true vision, making him aware of the workings of the universe and of man's place in it.

Cordelia's resolution to "Love, and be silent" is a fatal choice. Her authentic silence is recognized at the moment by Kent, a man of faithfulness and acumen, but by King Lear too late. Her farewell speech to her sisters implies the unconcealment of truth in time:

Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper.⁴⁾

Every Dasein is determined and bound by time. Against Edmund, Edgar recovers his authentic being as a right inheritor of his father, Gloucester. Revealing himself from the disguise of a madman, Edgar says to his despairing blind father:

3) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (New York: Signet Classic, 1963), p.68.
(Act 1, scene 4)

4) *Ibid.*, p.50. (Act 1, scene 1)

Men must endure

Their going hence, even as their coming hither
Ripeness is all.⁵⁾

Here is the Heideggerian sense of Within-time-ness and Being-towards-death.

In Heidegger resoluteness and circumspective concern represent an authentic disclosedness of Dasein. Gloucester's resolution to take sides with King Lear against the immoral daughters' evil forces, makes the decisive role in the reversal of the situation, leading to King Lear's retribution. Only losing his eyes, Gloucester recognizes the villainous plot of his bastard son, Edmund, and recovers his own authenticity from rage, repentance and self-suicidal intention by Edgar's care of filial piety. Gloucester-Edgar relation reinforces the main theme of the truth revealment of the King Lear-Cordelia relation.

The authentic and inauthentic condition of human life is equivalent to the duality concept of the human being in Sartre's ontological study of consciousness. The "mauvaise foi" in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is a behavior of transcendence. He says, "the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I am my transcendence in the mode of being of a thing."⁶⁾ Sartre attempts the existential psychoanalysis of man's attitudes of negation toward the self.

The paradigmatic case of the man of resentment can be found in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Yearning for greater knowledge, Faustus wants to transcend the bonds of normal human life and discover the heights beyond. He sells his body and soul to Mephistophilis for power and knowledge with a contract of 24 years' life-span in the world. During the given lifetime, Faustus experiences the severe wavering between the two split selves. The two selves in conscience are manifested as a Good Angel and a Bad Angel, representing the Renaissance concept of the conflict of human consciousness.

In spite of his wish for repentance, Faustus is falling away into the temptation of bad faith without controlling his hybris. Showing his strong faith in bad faith, he says with self-deceit:

My heart is hardened; I cannot repent.
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears:
'Faustus, thou art damned!'
. . . .
Why should I die then, or basely despair?
I am resolved; Faustus shall not repent.
Come, Mephistophilis, let us dispute again
And reason of divine astrology.

5) *Ibid.*, p.167. (Act 5, scene 1)

6) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Gulf & Western Corp., 1978), p.99.

Speak; are there many spheres above the moon?
 Are all celestial bodies but one globe,
 As is the substance of this centric earth?⁷⁾

Faustus neglects the admonition of his good faith, his another prevalent self, misses many opportunities of salvation and falls deeper and deeper into the mire of self-deception and desperate lunacy. At the expiration of his inescapable contract with Mephistophilis, his rationalization or excuse for his existence is too late. Without achieving his dream of the universal knowledge and transcendence, Doctor Faustus recognizes his limitedness and dies, only as an absurd entity which is facticity and transcendence at the same time.

Doctor Faustus is a vivid discourse on Marlowe's Renaissance views of the human being; his free thinking, his inherent duality and the resulting conflict and suffering.

The Heideggerian meaning of "discourse" has the function of the full revealing by language:

When the "there" has been completely disclosed, its disclosedness is constituted by understanding, state-of-mind, and falling; and this disclosedness becomes articulated by discourse.⁸⁾

Heidegger's reflection on language as a "House of Being" is well discussed in his *A Dialogue on Language*. In the dialogue between the Western thinker and the Eastasian thinker, the two basic problems are raised; the meaning of Being of beings and the metaphysical reflection on language in its relation to Being. Dealing with these two problems, the two persons recognize that there arises the Event of Appropriation in the process of their dialogue:

Inquirer: What mattered then, and still does, is to bring out the Being of beings-though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being itself-that is to say: the presence of present beings, the two-fold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness. This is what makes its claim on man, calling him to its essential being.

Japanese: Man, then, realizes his nature as man by corresponding to the call of the two-fold, and bears witness to it in its message.

I: Accordingly, what prevails in and bears up the relation of human nature to the two-fold is language. Language defines the hermeneutic relation.⁹⁾

7) Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, in *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill Educational Publishing, 1977), p.373. (Act 2, scene 2)

8) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p.400.

9) Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in his *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.30.

The Japanese thinker introduces the "breath" and "color-emptiness" concepts. The theory that "color" is "emptiness", or that without "color" there is no "emptiness" is the Buddhistic one. Heidegger finds the corresponding concept in the "aistheton"- "noeton" theory. Both theories connote the meaning that what can be perceived by the senses lets the non-sensuous shine through.

The "breath" concept is an equivocative generation when the Japanese thinker tries to find the counterpart of "grace", the basic concept of the Western aesthetics. In the dialogic process between the two persons, the roughly equivocal concept of "breath" is evolved into "the pure delight of the beckoning stillness"¹⁰⁾ with the help of the Western thinker's Socratic method.

The Japanese does not articulate his Eastasian background of metaphysical reflections on human nature and natural laws in the universe. Heidegger's phenomenology has much affinity with Neoconfucianism in many ways. The Heideggerian sort of synthesis of the Western philosophical tradition can be found in the Neoconfucianists' comprehensive system of the Oriental thoughts. Neoconfucianism developed the traditional Confucianism with the influence of Buddhism and Taoism.

Confucianism emphasizes on learning and on realizing the Heaven's Command through the performances of great virtues. Its ultimate aim is to cultivate the self and govern the people. It is close to the Greek philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Taoism maintains that the Great Way is Nothingness. Stressing on a Way that is manifested as the non-purposeful, spontaneous flow of all the world, it aims at loafing in each ecstatic sphere of Absolute Infiniteness overcoming life and death. This philosophy is close to the existentialist philosophy. As in Heidegger, Neoconfucianism aims to make understanding clear by study and discourse.

In their dialogue the two persons come to the common understanding of the function of language as a blessing unconcealment of truth. It is similar to the definition of language in the Bible, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."¹¹⁾ By defining language as "flower petals that flourish out of the lightening message of the graciousness that brings forth",¹²⁾ they experience the delightful moment of "the being-toward-each-other of vastness and stillness in the same Appropriation of the message of unconcealment of the two-fold."¹³⁾

Tragedy is the best means by which the Heideggerian Event of Appropriation and clearing can take place. Speech of each character lets us see itself from itself and makes echoes far into the tragic landscape not only of other characters, but also of the spec-

10) *Ibid.*, p. 45.

11) "The Gospel According to John," in *Holy Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1972), p. 85.

12) Heidegger, "A Dialogue," p. 53.

13) *Ibid.*, p. 53.

tators. The Event of Necessity in tragedy lets the persons locate the truth of themselves, and the movement to the inevitable leads us to the deepest understanding of ourselves. It brings order into the inner chaos of our mind, working as an instrument of healing.

In the closing of the Eumenides of *Oresteia*, the chorus of Furies and Athene reconcile themselves and bless each other with grace after a long debate on Oretes' guilt of the murder of his mother. They are "calling each other" and enjoy "the pure delight of the beckoning stillness" as Heidegger says.

The Eastasian thinkers' teaching to know and follow the Heaven's Command is similar to the deterministic concept of human existence in Greek tragedy. The protagonists' lives in Greek tragedy are determined by the oracles or influenced by the divinities' help or anger. The Christian tradition is not far from this kind of determinism. Doctor Faustus is cursed and fallen into the Hell because he abjures Jesus Christ and rebels against his Commandment. Phenomenology has the same kind of perspective of the opening to the beyond, as George Steiner says:

Heidegger's teachings on Being, on fallenness and authenticity, on being-unto-death and freedom, on language as logos are a meta-theology that sets the hidden presentness of Being in the place of a supernatural divinity.¹⁴⁾

As an operative hypothesis, the phenomenological understanding of human nature as itself can be applied very convincingly to the hermeneutics of the theatre, especially tragedy for a "clearing" of the human mystery. That is another way for the sound reasoning about the compatibility between literary experience and literary theory.

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요 약

세 비극에 대한 존재론적 연구 :

King Oedipus, King Lear, Doctor Faustus

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인간에 대한 존재론적 탐구의 궁극적인 목표는 무지의 상태에서 아는 상태로 변하는 것으로 소위 깨달음에 있다. 그 중에서도 자기인식이 가장 철학적인 명제로서, 이 자기인식은 대부분의 경우에 있어서 극단적인 자기과신이나 오만으로부터의 패배에서 야기되어진다.

외디푸스왕은 불가피한 자기존재의 아이러니와 경솔하고 맹렬한 성격때문에 고통의 길을 걷게 되고 드디어 자기자신에 대해 알게 된다. 리어왕은 무분별한 판단에 눈이 멀어 딸들의 속마음을 정확히 읽지 못해 결국 미쳐 버린다. 짜르트르가 말하는 인간의 자유의지가 가져오는 잘못된 선택의 희생자가 되는 것이다. 그는 광야를 미쳐 방황하는 고행속에서 우주와 인간에 대해 깨닫게 된다.

Marlowe의 *Doctor Faustus*는 주어진 조건을 넘어서 우주적 지식과 초월의 꿈을 실현시키겠다는 반항적인 인간의 분열된 의식을 그리고 있다. 자기자신과 분수를 넘는 오만은 Faustus로 하여금 선한 마음보다는 악한 마음쪽으로 기울게 하고 구원의 기회를 놓쳐 자기기만의 수렁에 빠지게 한다. 죽기전에 그는 그의 꿈이 허황되었음과 자기한계성을 인식하게 되는데 여기서 하이데거의 시간내 존재로서의 인간의 모습을 볼 수 있다.

하이데거는 인간존재의 이중성은 언어에 의해 수용, 하나로 통일되어지고, 인간은 은혜로운 진리의 빛에 도달한다고 본다. 등장인물들의 상호대화를 통해, 갈등의 양상이 폭로되고 해결되어 드디어는 인간의 고통이 치유되고 존재의 불가사이가 해명되는 과정을 밟는다는 점에서 비극은 하이데거가 말하는 언어수용을 통한 진리도달의 과정을 가장 쉽고 명확하게 드러내 주는 문학양식이라고 말할 수 있다.