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Literature and Philosophy: A Cognitive Analysis of "King Lear" from the Perspective of Phenomenology

Mao Hongrui

Central South University, Changsha, Hunan, China

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Abstract: As one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, *King Lear* draws its inspiration from the legend of King Lear in British mythology. Grounded in Husserl's phenomenological theory, this essay examines Lear's transformation from arrogance to madness, culminating in a profound shift in cognitive understanding near the end of his life. The essay contends that Lear begins by immersing himself in an exaggerated sense of subjectivity, gradually reconciles with the presence of the other through conflicts with his external world, and ultimately attains intersubjective cognition, discovering inner tranquility within his madness.

1. Introduction

Shakespeare, a humanist dramatist and poet of the English Renaissance, composed an extensive body of tragedies, comedies and sonnets, which are deeply infused with his reflections on human existence and social development. *King Lear* was composed between *Othello* and *Macbeth* around 1605, during a period when King James VI of Scotland had ascended to the English throne as King James I in 1603. This era saw widespread debates about monarchical power, with James asserting the divine right of kings and emphasizing the political authority of the monarch as an absolute ruler. At the same time, humanism was experiencing a resurgence, which catalyzed societal inquiries into the pursuit of truth. *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, narrates the story of King Lear who, after abdicating his throne, is exiled to the wilderness by his elder daughters, while his youngest, Cordelia, the Queen of France, attempts to rescue him, though the play lacks a happy resolution. Research on *King Lear* spans diverse fields, including translation, aesthetics, and comparative studies, etc. Within literary studies, researchers are mainly concerned with narratology, ethics, pathology, character construction, and the thematic elements of tragedy. Character studies often center on Lear and his daughters, forming a critical aspect of the play. Much of the character analysis examines the dichotomy between characters or individual traits, often focusing on themes such as madness, supported by textual evidence from the play. Regarding the themes of tragedy, scholars have debated whether Lear's tragic end results from thematic elements or fate, or if it represents a transitional phase between character-driven and fate-driven tragedy. Some have argued that kinship should necessarily lead to kindness; and when a "horrible discrepancy" broaches this necessity, it becomes the fatal engine on which tragic action turns as justice—kindness—reasserts itself (Kerr 45)[1]. However, it remains valuable to explore the deeper motivations and cognitive changes behind Lear's behavior — specifically, why Lear, despite being neglected, remains steadfast in his belief that such a fate is impossible, even after abdicating the throne, and why he

experiences a shift in attitude, exemplified by his angry outbursts followed by impassioned speeches expressing sympathy for the plight of the common people amid a storm.

This essay employs the phenomenological framework of Edmund Husserl to analyze the underlying reasons for Lear's seemingly paradoxical yet coherent actions and to elucidate why the tragedy provoked Renaissance audiences to question external realities. As the founder of Phenomenology, a discipline devoted to the study of phenomena, Husserl developed an extensive philosophical system to explain the nature of things. His maxim, "we must go back to the things themselves" (*Logical Investigations* 23)[2], succinctly encapsulates the central tenet of phenomenology. In the work on literary phenomenology, American philosopher Maurice Natanson concerns with how works are presented and evoke emotional responses in readers (3)[3], while Susan Sachon, in her essays on Shakespeare and phenomenology, uses stage properties as an inspiration for exploring readers' perceptual experiences when "on-stage" objects presented to their gaze (33)[4]. In contrast, this essay focuses on Husserl's more essential concepts of Subjectivity, the Other and Intersubjectivity, derived from Cartesian philosophy. Subjectivity highlights the intrinsic connection between subject and object through "intentionality", emphasizing the subject's agency in the construction of experience. The Other examines the relational interplay between the ego and the Other, where Husserl's concept of "empathy" allows the subject to apprehend the subjectivity of the Other. Intersubjectivity, on the basis of otherness, further emphasizes the co-creation of an objective worldview through the recognition of the Other as a subject with both mental and physical dimensions, achieved via mutual association and co-presence. This essay synthesizes these three concepts to systematically analyze the elements of Lear's tragedy and his underlying motivations. It also seeks to elaborate on the reasons why Lear displays unreflective confidence, descends into madness following his downfall, and ultimately cries out for the common people amidst the storm. In addressing the Renaissance's rationalist tradition of seeking truth, this essays provides a scientific and philosophical perspective on the enduring question, "Can we ever find the truth?" It also provides a rational framework for readers grappling with existential uncertainties and doubts about the nature of truth.

2. The Subjective World: King Lear's Arrogance Derived from Supreme Power

King Lear, in the initial phase of his reign, exhibited an overwhelming sense of subjectivity, characterized by an arrogance both in speech and action that disregarded the influence of external or objective factors. This mindset, which considers the self and self-consciousness as the sole genuine existence, with all else perceived merely as extensions or appearances of the self, aligns with the philosophical concepts solipsism. Solipsism, in turn, represents the inevitable result of extreme subjective idealism. Subjectivity serves as the foundational starting point for understanding human experience (Bucklew 289)[5], forming the essential basis upon which the Other is constructed. Subjectivity refers to an individual's conscious awareness and perception of the external world. As Husserl explains in *Cartesian Meditations*, "I, the reduced 'human Ego' ('psychophysical' Ego), am constituted, accordingly, as a member of the 'world' with a multiplicity of 'objects outside me'. But I myself constitute all this in my 'psyche' and bear it intentionally within me" (*Cartesian Meditations* 104)[6].

In the opening scene of *King Lear*, the self-esteemed and honourable monarch of Britain, issues a command at the very beginning: "Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester" (1.1.34-35)[7]. These opening words establish the image of a majestic monarch of Old England, with the firmness and decisiveness of his command exemplifying his honourable status as a king. However, Lear's subsequent actions reveal his increasingly arbitrary behavior after consolidating absolute power. Having amassed unparalleled authority and wealth, both in his political relations

and on the world stage, Lear holds sway over dedicated subjects and a vast territory. Yet, the dynamics of political power cannot seamlessly translate to familial relationships. As King Lear prepares to abdicate, he resolves to divest himself of responsibilities, relinquishing rule, territory, and governance to the younger generation so that he can face his twilight years unburdened. In the course of their speech, the elder daughters, who are both honey-tongued and eager to please, do not mince words and compete to show their filial piety to their father. In sharp contrast, his youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses to embellish her love for him with words. Enraged by this unexpected response, Lear disowns her, declaring, " I disclaim all my paternal care, /Propinquity, and property of blood" (1.1.125-126).

In the context of phenomenological research, the "intentionality" of any conscious act performed by a human being serves as a central theme of phenomenology. "Intentionality" refers to the relational structure of consciousness that connects the subject to the object of the subject's conscious activity. Whether it involves the palace or the castle, King Lear and other characters, or even absent objects, there exists an intentional relationship between them. These objects of consciousness are presented to the subject through different forms of conscious behavior, such as imagining, remembering, or anticipating. Imagination, as a form of non-realistic intentionality, often occurs when a certain scenario or plan is preconceived, playing a pivotal role in Lear's projections about his retirement. While Lear's political body, representing state authority, remains intact, his natural body inevitably approaches its decline. It is thus unsurprising that he envisions his old age and the distribution of power. Lear imagines dividing his kingdom among his three daughters, reserving the wealthiest regions for his youngest, Cordelia, to ensure a life of care under her watchful attention. Within Lear's intensely subjective consciousness, the boundary between imagination and memory becomes blurred, as he projects pure conceptualization into his expectations for the future, never contemplating the possibility of contradiction. In this cognitive state, where imagination merges with reality, Lear becomes increasingly convinced that events will unfold precisely as he envisioned, particularly when Goneril and Regan lavishly praise him, aligning with his expectations. Unlike memory, which revives past perceptions, imagination actively constructs intended objects. Its non-realistic nature allows these objects to be perceived in consciousness even when they do not exist in reality. Consequently, the illusion of love Lear constructs for Cordelia, expecting overflowing declarations of affection, fails to materialize. Instead, her restrained expressions of love are conveyed only in sparse, measured words. This tension between imagination and reality expands Lear's perceptions to unprecedented dimensions. The divergence between his imagined expectations and actual events leads him to emotional turmoil, resulting in anxiety and anger that propel his descent into psychological instability.

King Lear's unwavering belief in his supreme authority and infallible judgment defines his self-perception and shapes his interactions with others, revealing a deeply entrenched egocentric worldview. This belief extends beyond political power, representing an absolute identification with himself as the central subject. He repeatedly emphasizes his authority in dialogue, convinced that his judgement is irrefutable, and dismisses the opinions of others as insignificant. The self-identification signifies a closure to subjective experience, as his worldview is constructed entirely through the projection of his subjective intentions, ignoring the subjectivity of the Other. While issuing commands may be a normal expression of royal authority, Lear's impulsive decision to banish a loyal subject based on unexamined slander reveals the perils of his self-enclosed perspective, particularly when he silences Kent's advice and proclaims, "Peace, Kent! Come not between the dragon and his wrath. I loved her most and thought to set my rest /On her kind nursery. Hence and avoid my sight!" (1.1.134-139). Lear compares himself to an angry dragon, which is often seen as a symbol of the devil in Christianity. Despite Kent's loyalty, Lear refuses to reconsider, warning, "the bow is bent and drawn. Make from the shaft" (1.1.160). After seven exchanges,

Kent's efforts to appeal to Lear's reason fail, leading to his exile, though Kent departs with goodwill toward the king and the kingdom.

This authoritarian disposition persists in Lear's arrangement of Cordelia's marriage, where he imposes his subjective intentions onto external circumstances. In a phenomenological sense, this reflects his tendency to treat his internal intentionality as the sole criterion for understanding others and the world. Lear expects Cordelia to offer the grandest of compliments and envisions a future under her care. However, when Cordelia fails to meet his expectations, Lear instantly perceives her as a cold stranger, withdraws not only her inheritance, but also his parental affection and compassion. This underscores the arbitrariness of his authority, driven by his rigid subjectivity. When reality diverges from his imagined trajectory, Lear's behavior becomes increasingly unpredictable and irrational. Within the framework of phenomenological subjectivity, such behavior reflects an obsession with the imaginary world, wherein Lear conflates his intentional constructs with objective reality, disregarding the intentionality of others.

King Lear's words, actions, and thoughts construct a self-centered world in which he views others as subordinate extensions of his own consciousness. Even as conflicts arise, he still attempts to restore order by means of his royal title, vacillating between coercion and persuasion. However, the imaginative world Lear constructs does not necessarily align with the perceived reality of lived experience. In his consciousness, these realms blur, as he projects his imagined constructs directly onto real life. This separation of consciousness from the body and the weakening of the ego's grounding leads Lear into panic and erratic behavior. This phenomenological self-enclosure prevents Lear from engaging with the true Other or accepting objective reality, ultimately resulting in a dual cognitive and emotional crisis.

In sum, King Lear, as a symbol of power and status, exhibits an inflated self-esteem bordering on conceit. His commands to ministers and daughters are outward expressions of his strong subjective consciousness, which prioritizes his self-conceived goals over moral or objective considerations. In King Lear's perception, the whole visible world is regarded as an extension of his consciousness, wherein all objects are drawn into the orbit of his subjective thoughts, weakening or dissolving their independent existence in space and time. The world he perceives operates as a closed system governed entirely by his subjective imagination, expectations, and emotions. This egocentric subjectivity aligns with Husserl's notion of "the miracle of miracles," the interplay of pure ego and pure consciousness. Lear's cognitive world, thus, is not one of external objective reality but a subjective realm constructed through pure consciousness, echoing the "egoism" described by the ancient Greek philosopher Gorgias, who argued that knowledge is confined to one's own experience and state of consciousness. While this egocentric framework represents a philosophical breakthrough in centering "pure consciousness" as an object of study, it risks devolving into solipsism if it remains confined to the ego. Such a limitation would ultimately undermine Husserl's ambition to reclassify philosophy as a "rigorous science."

3. Recognizing the Other: Lear's Homelessness Odyssey

From the perspective of the subject-object dualism, the existence of the Other initially appears as an object for the subject. If the Other is merely regarded as part of self-consciousness without independent subjectivity, then any conflict becomes a struggle between different facets of self-consciousness and ultimately resolves under the domination of the self. However, during King Lear's reign, neither the relationship between the king and his subjects nor that between father and daughter conforms to his expectations, revealing the undeniable existence of the Other. Consequently, Lear's life reflects a coexistence with the Other — a condition that aligns with the reality of a rational world independent of personal consciousness. In this world, King Lear's

relationships are defined by the dualism of subject and Other, rather than a unity of self and self-extension. Although the concept of selfhood (ownness) holds a central position in phenomenological theories of the self, it is intrinsically linked to the existence of others — those who cannot be entirely assimilated into the self (Oliver 79)[8]. The process of perceiving the world inherently involves constructing and recognizing the Other. Neglecting the Other, as King Lear does, leads only to confusion and suffering in personal growth and relational development.

As a former monarch, King Lear exhibits intense conflict and resistance when faced with the discrepancies between the external world and his own ideas. Rather than restraining himself, he expresses his dissatisfaction through heated verbal quarrels, breaking off diplomatic relations, and even self-imposed isolation. Over the course of these conflicts, however, his perception gradually undergoes some changes. In Act I, Scene 1, when his youngest daughter Cordelia and his loyal subject Kent voice dissent against his expectations, Lear demands they rephrase their words, or even commands their silence outright, venting his anger through punishment. For example, Lear declares, “The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter, /This shall not be revoked” (1.1.202-203). King Lear has difficulty understanding the inconsistency between the self and the external world, and he always believes that the external world should be on the same frequency as the will of the self and should follow the development of the inner intentions. Before abdicating, King Lear could use his monarchical power to exert pressure and forcefully remove this inconsistency by means of deterrence. However, the problems arising from this inconsistency, such as the conflict between the king and his subjects, could not be eliminated until Lear realized that “the world contains otherness”, where the self exists in distinction from the Other. One interpretation of the Other in philosophy is that the Other is recognized through its difference between the Other and the self, serving as a critical element in shaping self-identity (Honderich 637)[9]. In Husserl’s view, the subject’s perception of the Other is mediated by and contingent upon self-perception. The theoretical model of the Other proposed by Husserl reveals a complex and multidimensional relationship between the self and the Other, yet it remains incontrovertible that self-cognition serves as both a precondition and a foundational possibility for the cognition of the Other.

After relinquishing his crown and losing monarchical power, King Lear gradually returns to his “natural body” state, where the conflict between his inflated self-perception and the undeniable presence of the Other becomes more apparent. If royal authority once masked this conflict, abdication strips away such illusions, confronting Lear directly with the realities of his relationships. When anger and residual power fail to satisfy Lear’s self-consciousness, the presence of the Other intrudes upon his mind, prompting changes in his behavior and thought processes, and gradually manifesting his awareness of the Other in various forms. The key condition for transitioning from an egoistic worldview to one of intersubjective understanding lies in specific experiential motives. Empathy emerges from recognizing similarities between the Other and the self, leading to a demand for validation of the Other’s existence as an independent subject. Although Lear is aware of the existence of the Other, he has not yet achieved true intersubjectivity, which requires an interchange of experiences through genuine empathy. This incomplete state is evident in Lear’s perception of inconsistencies between his present reality and his past experiences, which he attributes to external behavior failing to align with his self-conscious expectations, rather than to a misjudgment of his own. For instance, when King Lear realizes that the servant is not as attentive to his requests as he used to be, he still suspects that he is being overly attentive and does not accept the fact of his own diminished status. Similarly, when he notices Goneril’s complaints, he does not reflect on whether the servant’s behavior is really too noisy and disregarding of etiquette, as Goneril said, but thinks that he can move to the Regan’s place, thus solving all the issues. The Fool, often characterized by irony and insight, provides a crucial commentary on Lear’s state of mind. When the Fool remarks, “Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (1.5.43-44), Lear’s response poignantly

reveals his inner turmoil: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!” (1.5.45).

King Lear’s abdication and transformation into an ordinary individual, no longer wielding monarchical power, can be seen as a form of “reduction”. Although this process does not fully align with Husserl’s definition of phenomenological reduction, it nevertheless liberates Lear from the constraints of social roles and external identities, and brings him closer to a reflection on the nature of the self. Through this process of “reduction”, Lear comes to realize that his identity and power do not derive from within, but are deeply rooted in external social structures and systems of power. With these external supports stripped away, Lear approaches a recognition of himself as an independent individual. Although this shift does not yet reach the realm of what Husserl describes as the “a priori ego,” it moves Lear one step closer to this awareness. When King Lear is temporarily removed from the self-centred world and experiences that others also play a subjective role in the world, Lear does not have a clear perception of these subjects, but only begins to perceive a “great abatement of kindness” (1.4.60) in his surroundings. This lack of courtesy is evident not only in the general attendants, but also in the behavior of the Duke himself and his daughters, who are much closer to him. King Lear’s dialogue and interaction with those around him is gradually on the verge of collapse (Dodd 487)[10]. His shock at hearing a servant refuse his summons — “He would not ?”(1.4.56) — illustrates the profound dissonance he feels. Such contemptuous treatment would have been inconceivable during his reign. If during King Lear’s reign, he was still able to resolve the conflict between the inconsistency of the ideas of the self and the Other through various commands, this method becomes ineffective after he abdication, which means that his commands lose their binding force and he no longer has the authority to control others. Lear is thus exposed to a whole new world, and the presence of the Other causes him great discomfort. According to Husserl, before intersubjectivity is finally achieved, the passage from the a priori ego to the Other involves an awareness of the ego’s body and mind from the ego, and then an understanding of the Other as a subject with a similar body and mind through the co-existence of the Other. It is in this context that Lear’s response materializes the Other as a concrete human subject with a unity of body and mind.

Nonetheless, Lear still chooses to attribute even the faintest signs of disobedience or neglect to his own multicentredness, rather than interpreting them as intentional coldness on the part of the Other. This indicates that in the process of moving from recognizing the presence of the Other to fully accepting the Other, Lear inevitably experiences a variety of internal struggles and resistances. Obviously, this cognitive process is long and full of psychological turmoil. Unwilling to accept the status quo, Lear decides to further observe and examine the changes around him. After all, not only has Lear lost his power as king, but he has also been reduced to the humble position of being controlled and not getting what he wants. In Act II, Scene IV, Regan says to Lear, “I pray you /That to our sister you do make return” (2.4.167). In the several subsequent conversations, Lear continues to compromise, gradually reducing his retinue from the one hundred retainers he initially demanded to a mere twenty-five, and eventually none. As can be seen in the above episodes, there is a profound irony in the neglect Lear suffers. In particular, Goneril’s vow that he will “serve as he is commanded” is particularly ironic in the context of the actual situation.

Through these conflicts, Lear gradually develops a deeper understanding of the world in which he inhabits. The course of his life can be divided into two phases: the phase of being “King Lear” and the phase of being just “Lear”. Within the framework of the triad “I/You/He/She”, the individual recognizes the interaction and reproduction of self and other through “allocution” and “delocution” (Dodd 480)[10]. While allocution refers to the process by which an individual communicates a message to the Other, delocution pertains to the understanding of and response to the message. This dynamic interplay not only renders the relationship between the self and the Other intelligible, but also continuously reshapes the individual’s self-perception. At the initial stage,

Lear merely feels discomfort and confusion because his orders no longer have effect on the ministers. Over time, Lear comes to realize that the problem is not only the failure of his orders, but also the complete transformation of his position: from a supreme monarch to a humble individual who must be subjected to others and unable to act according to his own will. Lear can only maintain his grudging coherence with the world by substituting patience for his former authority and mean-spiritedness, as he states, "I will be a model of patience" (3.2.39).

Through a series of escalating conflicts, Lear gradually transitions from initial self-doubt to the recognition that he has indeed been neglected, and eventually compromises and submits to the commands of others. From the former giver of orders to the humble recipient, Lear realizes in the process that the Other, apart from himself, also possesses independent wills that may oppose to his own. The Other, like the dark side of the moon, is different from the self, yet can exist in the same world as the self (Moran 26)[11]. When Lear discovers that words and actions no longer have validity, the only option is to endure. This process actually marks an expansion of Lear's cognitive dimension, reflecting a shift from a self-centred subjective perspective to a rational perception of the separate existence of the Other. This shift not only reflects Lear's move from self-enclosure to identification with the Other, but also his evolution from the subjective and perceptual dimensions to a more rational cognition.

4. Intersubjectivity: King Lear in Serenity and Tragedy

In the history of Western analytic philosophy, the question of how to become aware of the consciousness of the Other has undergone extensive exploration, and addressed this issue by introducing the concept of "intersubjectivity," with the body serving as the medium for its realization. This approach, based on subjectivity, goes beyond the mere perception of the Other and essentially recognizes the existence of the "Other". The proposal of intersubjectivity not only responds to the question of how to see the world individually, but also breaks through Descartes' egoistic limitations, enabling the subject to gain a richer and more objective picture of the world through interaction and co-presence with the Other. If the object experienced by one subject or any single subject can be experienced by the Other, then that object cannot be reduced to any individual's pure intention. In other words, the true objectivity and reality of the object are validated only when it is shared and co-experienced by another subject. In Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, particularly "The Fifth Meditation," delves into the Other as the "alter ego", a term that perfectly blends the concepts of the self and the Other (Nasu 385)[12]. If tactile and visual senses play an essential role in perceiving others, apperception and co-presence are indispensable mediators in recognizing the presence of the Other. Apperception involves the process of grasping something external to the perceiving subject. These mechanisms actually transfer the concept of the Other from the physical level to the level of the conscious subject, which is an extension of the concepts of presence and absence. Furthermore, the first-person experiential way of life in which someone feels or envisages entering into the consciousness, mind or spirit of the Other is referred to in Husserlian phenomenology as "Empathy". Empathy entails not only the understanding of emotional states, but also the ability to "step into the shoes" of the other, bridging the gap between distinct subjectivities and fostering a profound intersubjective connection.

In the play, Lear debuts in a bizarre costume, a seemingly crazy exterior that actually masks his inner sobriety. Through the strangeness of this outward appearance, Lear's inner transformation of mind and perception is more clearly shown. As he remarks, "they told me I was everything. /'Tis a lie. I am not ague-proof" (4.6.124). This is in stark contrast to the beginning of the play when he asks his daughters to express their love for him and divide the territory accordingly. However, it is at this moment that Lear finally realizes that words are sometimes unreliable and may even have

potential to betray reality. In spite of his madness, he is aware of his own situation and realizes that everything in life is not entirely controlled by his own will. Lear gradually perceives and accepts the existence of the Other, and through the intermingling of the self and the Other, he is able to dialectically and rationally evaluate the views expressed by others while retaining his subjective judgement, thus presenting himself on the stage in a state of harmony. In Descartes' time, the existence of God provided the proof of the existence of the material world, but Husserl's refutation of egoism relies on the term "empathy", which validates the existence of the Other by analogy with one's own similarity. However, the recognition of the Other often occurs indirectly, prompting us to recognize aspects of objects that are not immediately apparent.

Beneath the sweet words of his eldest and second daughters lies a calculated pursuit of profit, while beneath the words of his adversaries lies genuine loyalty to the kingdom. Lear has now come to a more rational level of understanding of what he has experienced, and is able to accept it with equanimity, even if it is not as good as he would have wanted it to be. His heartfelt revelations during the storm also reflect his change of mind to a certain extent, telling the storm and the thunder and lightning: "You owe me no subscription" (3.2.20), and later, with humility, "Pray do not mock: /I am a very foolish fond old man" (4.7.68-69). These moments of supplication reflect a shift toward humility, sobriety, as well as politeness and respect, compared to Lear's initial arrogance in the opening scene. It indicates that Lear has gone through a lot of trials and tribulations in the process of stepping out of the world of "self" and accepting the existence of the Other. After both mental and physical torture, Lear finally achieves inter-subjectivity by reconciling the self and the Other, thus gaining inner peace.

In Act V, Scene 3, when Lear learns that his two eldest daughters have died of despair, he responds with stoic simplicity, "Ay, so I think" (5.3.354). The fact that Lear at this moment does not add anger to the deaths of his two daughters because of the suffering they had brought him reflects, in part, the goodness that still resides within him. However, both King Lear and his daughters are closely related to the "more secret purpose" of his initial division of the kingdom. In the end, Lear is devastated by the death of his youngest daughter Cordelia and ends his life naturally in the presence of Kent, Edgar, and Albany. King Lear passes away in the company of his loyal subjects and the sincere Edgar, which provides a touch of solace to the reader. Upon witnessing Lear's life come to an end, Kent says, "The wonder is he hath endured so long. /He but usurped his life" (5.3.384). As a tragedy, *King Lear* encapsulates the complexity of human nature, the transient nature of power, and the capriciousness of fate, all of which throw Lear's world into disarray. While it can be argued that Lear's downfall stems from his early autocratic tendencies, the broader societal context of monarchical despotism also contributes to the inevitability of his tragic end.

King Lear's journey through suffering and realization marks a profound cognitive transformation, as he confronts the shared reality of the self and the Other, bridging his initial self-centeredness with a growing awareness of intersubjectivity. This transformation, though incomplete, becomes evident in his actions and reflections during the storm. For instance, in Act III, Scene IV, Lear laments the plight of the poor who have no clothes and no roof over their heads, expressing guilt for having ignored their hardships during his reign, despite his position of privilege and power. These moments of empathy mark a significant shift in Lear's perception, although they remain tinged with subtle attempts to justify his past actions. However, despite the empathy and concern for others that King Lear displays, his words are still laced with a sense of fluke that justifies his past. From the perspective of the play's thematic and character analyses, Lear remains a deeply tragic figure. Yet, viewed through a phenomenological lens, his transformation contains elements of positive progression. Lear ultimately realizes that the self shares the world with the Other, embracing the concept of intersubjectivity as he faces the end of his life. Previously, King Lear underwent a complex journey from self-centredness to awareness of the Other, and although he could have

chosen to abandon this transformation for destruction when the situation was worse, he persisted, taking the final and crucial step toward transformation. Although his step may have been "forced" upon him by his circumstances, Lear ultimately demonstrates the qualities befitting a "king". In this sense, King Lear's change of perception is at the intersection of comedy and tragedy, but it still has a progressive significance. Therefore, *King Lear* may be understood as a tragedy interwoven with elements of "comedy", underscoring the nuanced evolution of Lear's perception and his ultimate reconciliation with the Other.

5. Conclusion

This essay analyzes King Lear's transformation from an arbitrary monarch to a figure approaching the wisdom and equanimity of a truly wise king. Lear's arrogance and arbitrariness stem from his inflated sense of subjectivity and his failure to recognize the otherness of the world. His journey from a self-centered world of egocentric desires to a shared reality that considers the needs of others and the truth of external objects is both painful and profoundly meaningful. Through his collision with reality, Lear ultimately realizes that others are also self-conscious subjects like himself, and thus gains a more scientific and rational method to approach the truth. Descartes and Husserl both endeavored to decipher egoism, questioning whether the world consists solely of "I." They emphasize that phenomena emerge from pure ego-consciousness, which serves as the foundation for ensuring the reality of the external world. From this foundation, they developed the concept of transcendence to overcome egoism. The Enlightenment's challenge to divine authority shifted philosophical focus from God as the Other to the human self, paving the way for Husserl's phenomenological emphasis on intersubjective relationships. In *King Lear*, Lear's cognitive leap is propelled by his gradual acceptance of intersubjectivity, recognizing that his understanding of reality is enriched through the shared experiences of others. His journey beyond solipsism not only addresses Shakespeare's humanist inquiry into whether humanity can approach the truth but also provides an affirmative answer. Lear's tortuous experiences and ultimate transformation symbolize not only his tragic fall but also his profound sacrifice to achieve a higher level of cognition through self-reflection and testing. This transcendence imbues the tragedy with a touch of comedy, as it elevates Lear's character to one of ultimate redemption and enlightenment.

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