

## An Ethical Interpretation of *King Lear*

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### Abstract

*King Lear* is the greatest tragedy written by William Shakespeare. One of the elements leading to tragedy is the destruction of ethics in the play. Ethics refers to the order of things and also the harmonious relationships between people. But ethics finds nowhere to hide in *King Lear* so that it lingers out in the end. The conflicts mostly occur in the fields of politics, family. Thus, this paper intends to interpret the destruction of political and family ethics based on the analysis of texts of *King Lear*. On the other hand, the appraising ethics which sheds light on that upside-down society and spares no efforts to bring order out of chaos will also be highly sung.

**Key words:** Political ethics; Family ethics; William Shakespeare; Tragedy

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### INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, the greatest playwright during English Renaissance, wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, 2 long narrative poems and some other poems during his lifetime. Among them, he is especially known for his plays, which usually mirror the social malpractice at that time. On such glorious world literature stage, what he left for later generations are his exquisite writing styles, profound

thoughts and so on. Just as Ben Jonson described, he was not of an age, but for all time.

Among all his plays, the great four tragedies win people's eyesight most, namely, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *King Lear* - *Hamlet* known for its complicated description of characters; *Macbeth* for its deep psychological depiction; *Othello* for its strong emotional shock; *King Lear* for its broadness. In the past 20<sup>th</sup> century, some scholars considered that *King Lear*, in which "Shakespeare's genius soars into the dizzying height" (Yang, 1981, p.340), gradually replaced the top position that *Hamlet* enjoyed in the past.

According to Sun Jiaxiu (1988), the tragedy *King Lear*, from a micro perspective, spots primarily on the conflicts of two families, but it also has social meaning on a macro level. The defects on certain characters can indeed be found on general human beings. And the farcical political coups actually reflect the political decay and corruption then. *King Lear* was born in 1605 in the middle period of Shakespeare's writing career. It is a story starting from the division of the Kingdom based on personal willingness, gradually eliciting the sharp conflicts in politics and family, and ending with bloody wars and bitter costs. Betrayal, compliments, treachery are prevalent in it. Furthermore, Nie Zhenzhao (2005) once mentioned that Shakespeare was good at mingling conflicts of ethical morality with political clashes and philosophical thoughts, which are effective to deepen the tragic color of the work. *King Lear*, questioning the value of the existence of human beings and the positive and negative facets of human nature, gives the tragedy into a full play.

Generally, ethics can be defined as a kind of philosophy concerning good and evil, duty, moral principles, moral evaluation and moral conducts. (Ni, 2004, p.18) As Goldbeerg once noted, literature, both in the past and present, is an irreplaceable form invoking human being's deep moral thinking. In *King Lear*, the violation of politics and family ethics is dotted here and

there so that readers may doubt the true nature of human beings. As Spencer (1942) said, *King Lear* is the play that illustrates Shakespeare's deep reflections on all kinds of relations, especially the relationships between parents and children, nation and citizens, God and mankind.

*King Lear* is a play that truthfully reflects the turbulent social fact during the period of British capitalist primitive accumulation. During the transition when feudalism decayed and capitalism prospered, feudal ethics was on the verge of collapse. The cash nexus took the place of conventional ethical conceptions. The social reality exposed the materialistic fact and the degeneration of human nature. (Jia and Niu, 2013, p.49)

## 1. ETHICAL EXPLORATION IN KING LEAR

Ethics is invisible. It is a silent contract existing in people's subconsciousness, governing our behaviors unwittingly. Once trespassing the bottom line, the relationships that bind people together will be broken into pieces. What's worse, the community we live in will be in a disorder.

### 1.1 Political Ethics

Political ethics is not only the theoretical foundation of political civilization establishment, but also the value aim of political civilization. The so-called political ethics is a political life of a socio-political community, including ethical regulations of its basic political structure, political system, political relationship, political behavior and political ideal (Wan, 2005, p.5). Therefore, political ethics has something to do with the futuristic fate of a nation, which all citizens depend upon.

It is witnessed that the evolution of politics usually accompanies the performance of the political ethics. During the Middle Ages, the Church owned the power, the Pope being the highest authority. They stood for the God, delivering the will of God. King controlled the Kingdom by the support of Church. Therefore, the hierarchy was formed: the God - the Church - the King. King then was merely a symbol. Until the Renaissance, the trend began to change. Men were in the centre of attention. More and more minorities called upon the need of establishing a centralized government. Since then, the real power was endowed to King, who enforced the right on behalf of the whole country. The period of autocratic monarchy came into being then. (Zhuang, 2012)

At the beginning of the play, Lear excuses himself that it is time for him "to shake all cares and business from our age." Spreading the map, he set a love-test for his daughters; the rule being who expresses the most love for him could get the most proportion of land. A country consists of land, minorities, culture and government. Lear, as the owner and conductor of the highest authority, should have represented the shared wills of all citizens. However, Lear regards himself as one who owns the

absolute power, nothing equivalents to him under God. He takes the country as his personal belonging and enjoys the right of deciding everything, including the ownership of the country. As a King, he willingly separates country instead of preserving it as an entity, which distinctly violates the ideal of politics. One of purposes of Lear to divide the land is to avoid future wars between sisters. But division is often the "admission ticket" of conflicts, even wars, which are the tricks of upper class but the disasters of common people. Indeed, as it is shown, division conducted by his absolutism brings nothing but endless conflicts and wars between Britain and French in the latter story.

Moreover, Lear does not handle his double identities - a father and the King - well. Different identity means different obligations and responsibilities. But, Lear intermingles them totally. He sets a love test whose rule being that who expresses the sweetest words and deepest love can win a larger proportion of land, as a criteria to measure their love and decide how to divide his Kingdom. Then, Goneril and Regan who do well in catering to their father are eager to take part in this prepared "plot". As Goneril speaks highly of her love in the most rhetoric words,

I love you more than word can wield the matter;/  
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty;/  
Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;/  
No less than life with grace, health, beauty, honour;/  
As much as child e'er loved, or father found:/  
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable. (Shakespeare, 2004, p.34)

Hearing this, the competitive Regan would not allow her sister to overshadow her love undoubtedly. Thus, she voices in the most affectionate tone, "...that I profess / Myself an enemy to all other joys/ Which the most precious square of sense possesses./ And find I am alone felicitate/ In your dear Highness' love." (Shakespeare, p.35) With these empty but pleasant words, then, Lear extravagantly gives them each a large portion of land. "Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,/ With shadowy forests and with champains riched,/ With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,/ We make thee lady." (Shakespeare, p.34) The starting point of his deeds is the meet of his personal emotion and will, not considering the subjects at all. His obscure boundary between his two identities leads to his unethical political behavior that takes country as a personal gift to his daughters. According to Giuseppina Restivo (2008), Lear is, actually, the mirror of King James I in British history. Under his governance, the conflict between monarch and subjects became so sharp that a revolution led by Charles I son of King James I in 1642 was launched. In reality, the division also implied the division of England and Scotland. Shakespeare here indirectly pointed out the latent consequence of division of Britain so as to arouse broader social concern.

The desire for power could alienate people, just as Lear himself. Long being on the throne, Lear is accustomed to

inexhaustible compliments so that he becomes wayward, headstrong and self-pride gradually. He acts as a God-like person; no one could violet his will. Therefore, when Cordelia refuses to comply with him, "I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more or less," (Shakespeare, p.35) Lear becomes extremely wrathful, "With my two daughters' dowers digest the third / Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her"(Shakespeare, p.36) and even "we have no such daughter, nor shall be ever see / That face of hers again." (Shakespeare, p.40) His words and misconducts breed certain discontent of some loyal counselors as Kent who stands out to carry his duty of giving proper suggestions:

Kent: ...Reserve thy state, / And, in thy best consideration check / This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgement: / Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least, / Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness. (Shakespeare, p.37)

Lear does not care about the political system which the counselor plays an indispensable consultative role in King's decision. Instead, he threatens Kent, worse more, banishes the dissenter. He regards him as "recreant" and ordered him not to appear within sights, or he will be executed. Lear is so immersed in playing his character as a King that he does not allow anyone to challenge his absolute authority which violates the structure and system of politics. The "sovereign in King" is deep rooted in his mind and a critical rallying point of the play.

After division, Goneril and Regan become rampant to the extent that they attempt every means to build Lear's power in still and brew their conspiracies under the surface. Their nature are metamorphosed by desire so that Goneril even publicly makes clear, "the laws are mine, not thine; / Who can arraign me for't ?" (Shakespeare, p.126) Law initially functions prescribing what could be done and what could not. The ignorance of law will lead to the chaos of the society. But what Goneril said has evidently subverted the function of the law. Her words guide her behavior. She, together with Regan, instigates the renegade of Gloucester and Edmund on their side by offering condition that they would spare no efforts to help them to catch Edgar, the "traitor" of Gloucester family. Their governance also depends much on absolute compliance and abnormal punishment. When Gloucester awakes from their conspiracy and turns to stand by the righteous side, they pluck his two eyes without mercy. And upon knowing Kent as an emissary of Lear, they deliberately put him in the stocks to exasperate Lear. From beginning to the end, with their bloated desire, they design conspiracy one after another so that their misconducts break political ethics into debris.

The absolute control of power demonstrates the breakdown of political ethics. The political structure, political system, political relationship, political behavior and political ideal find no shelters in the play. Country

needs a leader without question. but it should be such a King who is generous and sympathetic for his people, and creates a safe and free circumstance for his people. A harmonious political environment leads country into prosperity, a fragmented one goes into suffering.

## 1.2 Family Ethics

Engels takes family as a "miniature" or "molecule" of the society. The development and transformation of family synchronize with the society. With respect to family, Song Xiren (1998) described it as the oldest form of social organization and ethical relationship, and also the most realistic and direct entity of human beings. "Family", generally speaking, is always considered as a harbour where kinsfolk share happiness and sorrows. But, in *King Lear*, family ethics is put on the edge of the cliff so that the warmest place is full of storms and fissures. In the play, there are two parallel plots involving two families, the family of Lear and Gloucester.

Before the division of realm, Lear, initially, prepares to leave a most piece one for Cordelia. Such behavior has already violated the principle of justice and plants the seed of further conflicts. (Li, 2008) Due to Lear's confusion of his identities, he not only shows absolutism in political affairs, but also in the family. In Lear's eyes, love from daughters can be measured by price - land. What Lear requires in the family is also the absolute obedience. When Cordelia violates his will, "Nothing will come of nothing", he expresses. He uses his power to control the love of his daughters. Feeling disappointed at Cordelia, Lear, when choosing the future husband for Cordelia, calls explicitly that "her price is fall'n" to the candidates. He regards Cordelia as worthless substance, whoever takes her away seems having nothing to do with him. In Lear's mind, the power of king and the relationship between father and daughters coexist. If the former lost, the latter will lose too, the existence of the latter depends on the former.

Having a sight of the farewell made by Cordelia to her families, the conflict in the family is most obvious:

Cordelia: And like a sister am most loath to call / your faults as they are named.

Regan: Prescribe not us our duty.

Goneril: You have obedience scanted, / and well are worth the wait that you have wanted. (Shakespeare, p.40-41)

The gap of disagreements, apparently, is wide enough between sisters based on their conversation. Unexpectedly, Goneril and Regan, after gaining a complete harvest, change so rapidly in attitudes towards their father King Lear, which indirectly implies their evil side of human nature.

Goneril: You see how full of changes his age is.

Regan: 'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but / slenderly known himself.

Goneril: The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash;

/ then must we look from his age to receive, not alone / the imperfections of long-ingrafted condition, but / therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and / choleric years bring with them.

Goneril: If our /father carry authority with such disposition as he / bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us. (Shakespeare, p.41)

Being under the atmosphere of absolutism in the long run, they are swayed by losses and gains. Goneril and Regan are aware of the true disposition of their father and bear in mind that if they do not conform to him, they will be confronted with the same treatment as Cordelia has received. Therefore, in order to strengthen their power, they covertly conspire to deprive Lear of his power and authority. As for Lear, it is impossible for a person to change his nature one day. After divesting his power to his two daughters and sons-in-law, Lear is actually still not willing to give up his control of power. He is infatuated with absolutism, keeping a group of retainers, numbering 100, to show his authority. His conduct, no doubt, gives rise to the dissatisfaction of his two daughters. Thus, they set to take measures to build a “obedient” father. Unhappy for Lear’s remaining 50 followers, they make prescriptive suggestions to reduce his retainers to half firstly, then to ten, to five, finally to only one.

Desire is the antithesis of temperance, and usually associates with darkness, beastliness and devil. (He Yuhong, 2011) It is their desire for power that metamorphoses them and betrays their human nature. Desire forces them to leave duty behind. What’s worse, their inhumane treatment even compelled the once authoritative king and the arrogant father to kneel and beg for a living. Obviously, the madness of Lear later is primarily caused by no one but his own biological daughters. The image of Goneril lowers as animals, as Lear describes her as “serpent”, “vulture”, “hyenas”, “tigers”, “wolves” and even her husband Albany looks her as “monster”, “devil”, “fiend”. Indeed, her ruthless behaviour does not match the identity of being a human. So is Regan. There is not a slim of gratitude in their heart. Their satanic demeanour is exactly the incarnation of their inner beastliness, showing no restraint of morality.

As a matter of fact, the tragedy of Lear also results from himself. He enjoys being a dictator grasping everything in his hands. The court ruled by him is the epitome of society. The highly central feudal regime requires anyone within keeping order and rules strictly. For Lear, authority can never be provoked. The control may function well firstly. But one on the throne once being accustomed to the absolute obedience of his subjects, he will become self-centred. As a king, Lear does not carry out his obligation to care what common people care. As a father, he does not take his responsibility of educating and disciplining his kids. He himself sets an unfavorable model of a father. Facing the treatment of Goneril, Lear

does nothing but dramatically showers curses onto his own daughter. He asks the nature to accelerate her aging and “strike her young bones” without mercy. More ridiculously, a father even curses his daughter to be sterile, making clear that “if she must teem, / Creature her child of spleen, that it may live / and be a thwart disnatured torment to her.” (Shakespeare, p.55)

The contents of his words are thorny enough. It is also the implication that Lear is addicted to his life of being a commander both in the country and family and he does not allow anyone to oppose to him. Up to now, clearly, there is no trace to locate the family ethics in this royal family. Father neglects his duties as a father, while daughters neglect theirs as daughters.

While in the aristocratic family of Gloucester, the violation of family ethics begins with Edmund, a bastard son who has no right to be a legitimate heir claims to change his fate, intending to replace the position of Edgar, the legal son.

Edmund: A credulous father; and a brother noble, / Whose nature is so far from doing harms / That he suspects none - on whose foolish honesty / My practices ride easy. I see the business. / Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit: / All with me’s meet that I can fashion fit. (Shakespeare, p.46)

To achieve his aim, Edmund sets a trap on purpose to alienate the relationship between Gloucester and Edgar - father and son. The credulous father gives orders to catch the innocent son, and the innocent son runs away without an idea why father intended to catch him. No explanation between them deepens the crack. Worse still, the treacherous Edmund even “sells” Gloucester’s secretive letter to Cronwall just in order to gain a high and acknowledged political position.

Edmund: How malicious is my fortune that I must repent to be / just! This is the letter he spoke of, which approves him / an intelligent party to the advantages of France. O / heavens! That this treason were not - or not I the / detector! / ... I will persevere / in my course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore / between that and my blood. (Shakespeare, pp.88-89)

When Gloucester is abused by the clique of Goneril, Regan and Cronwall, Edmund does not show any protestation and sympathy. Upon the time they pluck Gloucester’s eyes, Edmund still does not stand out to protect his father, drawing a clear boundary with Gloucester.

In the play, Gloucester can be seemed as a mirror of Lear. The abuse of power leads to their noble son and daughter being banished. Ironically, Lear who owns everything becomes “nothing” at all, while Gloucester who believes that seeing is believing becomes blind at last.

Machiavelli remarks that a King never fails to paint a mask for treachery, only those who know how to be a “fox” can gain success. A King fully understands how to disguise the beast nature so that he acts a pretender

and a fake good man. (Machiavelli, 2015) The word “Machiavellian” is coined, thus, referring to a kind of people being labeled as effrontery, hypocrisy and extreme racialism. In the play, Goneril, Regan and Edmund are well fitted with those features.

The “partnership” between Goneril and Regan is fragile as a matter of fact. They ferment a vat of jealousy, cuckold their husbands and fight for a man’s favor by any means. Both of them bear no morality with them. Goneril, as a married woman, does not love her husband Albany who is kind and honest, but makes eyes to Edmund. She labels her husband as “coward” and expresses outspokenly, “my most dear Gloucester! / O, the difference of man and man! / To thee a woman’s services are due; / A fool usurps my bed.” (Shakespeare, p.99) Even, she plans to collude with Edmund to kill her husband Albany, as proved in her letter which reads as follows,

Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. / You have many opportunities to cur him off: if your / will want not, time and place will be fruitfully offered. / There is nothing done if he return the conqueror: then / am I the prisoner, and his bed my gaol; from the / loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply the / place for your labour. Your (wife, so I would say) / affectionate servant, and for you her own for venture. (Shakespeare, p.114)

Regan, on the other hand, though knowing the affairs between her sister and Edmund, still winks and casts signs to Edmund. The death of her husband does not win a drop of her tears. Instead, she is happy for the arrival of the chance to speak out her feeling for Edmund. Taking her advantage of being a widow, she declares publicly Edmund as her new lord,

...He led our powers, / Bore the commission of my place and person, / The which immediacy may well stand up / And call itself your brother. / ...General, / Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony: / Dispose of them, of me; the walls are thine. / Witness the world that I create thee here / My lord and master. / ...Let the drum strike; and prove my title thine. (Shakespeare, p.123)

The antagonism between sisters leads to the end of both of their lives. Goneril poisons her sister and then kills herself after her conspiracy of killing Albany being exposed.

As for Edmund, he puts inborn desire upon social regulations and is determined to walk a “different road” on which he could plan and carry out his immoral deeds regardless of so-called ethics and morality at all. To realize his desire, he makes promises to both sisters, causing kinship breakup. His hidden aim of vowing to Goneril and Regan is actually to gain power from them. No true love could be peeked at him. In a word, he plays a “mainstay” role in family tragedies. Moreover, in order to preserve his position, after catching Cordelia and Lear, he does not hand them to Albany, the new king, but gives orders stealthily together with Goneril to kill Cordelia in prison. As he soliloquizes,

To both these sisters have I sworn my love; / Each jealous of the other, as the stung / Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take? / Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed / If both remain alive: to take the widow / Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril; / And hardly shall I carry out my side, / Her husband being alive. Now then, we’ll use / His countenance for the battle, which being done, / Let her who would be rid of him devise / His speedy taking off. As for the mercy / Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia: / The battle done, and they within our power, / Shall never see his pardon: for my state / Stands on me to defend, not to debate. (Shakespeare, p.120)

As the saying goes, so the wind and reap the whirlwind. Edmund, Goneril and Regan, in the end, are rewarded with evil fruits.

The insatiable desire for power distorts the affection between family members. The bond linking relatives can be engulfed by the desire. Desire can force people to discard morality totally. Without morality in the inner mind, people’s behaviour will be out of control. But the consequences will fall on no one save themselves in the end. As Buddha said, the most fearful thing in the world is not people perform dark deeds, but own dark hearts. Dark deeds could be saved sometimes, foul hearts could never be blanched otherwise. A dark heart can incur numerous dark deeds.

### 1.3 The Ethics in Cordelia and Kent

Admittedly, Shakespeare erects a paradigm of daughter, Cordelia, who is the symbol of reason, truth and kindness. Though she appears only in 4 scenes among total 26 scenes, her admirable morality could be perceived by readers between lines.

Unlike her father and sisters who see love as something measurable, Cordelia takes love as an inner emotion and believes that love comes from actions rather than tongues, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent. / ... Then poor Cordelia! / And yet not so, since I am sure my love’s / More ponderous than my tongue.” (Shakespeare, pp.34-35) She is the favorite daughter of Lear who anchors much his hope in her. But contrary to conventional filial - absolute obedience - no deviation from what is prescribed by rites or the customary code of conduct (Yang, 1987) which Lear appreciates, Cordelia acts *xiao* - respecting her father with reason - in binary. She knows her father well, knowing him inclining to hear sweet words, or rage will dominate him. Even so, she does not bend for the rhetoric words as her sisters in order to please her father with dark intentions. In her heart, truth is so pure that nothing could stain it. When her father is wrath with her real words and grants her another chance to modify her words, the plain but determined words give a reply, “Nothing, my lord. / ... I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more or less.” (Shakespeare, p.35)

On the edge of losing a great quantity of dowry, she never nudges her stance a bit. No bending for property. Marriage, in her mind, is a heart-to-heart interaction.

She publicly despises Burgundy who looks marriage as a transaction and swears that she would never marry with hidden dark intention. Of course, love is pure. Fortunately, her inner quality is admired by the King of France who values the inner mind instead of superficial deeds.

Though away from her homeland, she never stops caring about her father. Not a slim of complaint or resentment could be traced on her. Upon knowing Lear is maltreated and abandoned by her sisters, she leads a troop of army to Britain immediately in person, not for reigning over Britain, but merely for protecting and supporting her father. She sends subjects to find Lear. With Lear's delirious condition, the idea of discarding him never dominates her. As kind she is, she cares for him meticulously. Even if after uniting with her father, she is still that pure angel who keeps love in silence. She weeps for her father, fights for her father, accompanies her father, and suffers from maltreatment and imprisonment with him, devoting all herself only for her father, then, her figure could be seen no more. What she left behind is the image of Goddess of sun emitting rays and heat illuminating and warming the upside-down and cold world.

Kent is another paradigm Shakespeare depicts. As a minister in high position, he performs his duty and adheres to every bit of his responsibility. His heart is a pot of clear water reflecting good and evil. He has an deep insight of Lear's capricious characters. But once the King decides something improper, he would stand out to protest without a second thought rather than agreeing unconditionally and complimenting unduly as others, even if his words would incur death.

Kent: My life I never held but as a pawn / To wage against thine enemies; ne'er feared to lose it, / Thy safety being motive.

...Kent: See better, Lear, and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye.

...Kent: Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow / Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift, / Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat, / I'll tell thee thou dost evil. (Shakespeare, p.37)

Muddle-headed Lear could not distinguish who is truly loyal to him, instead of taking Kent's impertinent but beneficial advice, he banishes him out of the land. Nevertheless, the loyal Kent does not leave his master a half step. He disguised himself and comes back to serve by Lear's side,

If but as well I other accents borrow, / That can my speech diffuse, my good intent / May carry through itself to that full issue / For which I razed my likeness. Now, banished Kent, / If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned, / So may it come thy master whom thou lov'st / Shall find thee full of labours. (Shakespeare, p.48)

At the end of the play, Kent appears still with his single purpose, "I am come / To bid my King and master aye good night. / Is he not here?" (Shakespeare, p.128). The thorough loyalty of a counselor runs throughout the play.

Shakespeare endows them the identities of morality. Morality guides people to conform to their obligations and responsibilities, keeps people in reason and directs people towards the bright path.

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## CONCLUSION

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*King Lear* is a tragedy in which ethics is trod and trespassed without a bottom line. The primary reason is the bloated desire for power. According to Sigmund Freud's personality structure theory, there are three levels of human personality: identity, ego and super-ego. Ethics, as a part of super-ego, guides people to conduct proper deeds and sustain healthy relationships. Once the super-ego bursts, people will conduct insane behavior and bring risks to the society. If people indulge weeds burgeoning around the ethics, ethics will corrode bit by bit. But if people are diligent in trimming, it will be like an arraignment of erect soldiers guarding our society in order.

Lear, as the King, is in his place but forgets his obligation. He mars the boundary between nation and home, dividing the national property at will. Without a clear-minded leader, the fate of a country is doomed. Lear takes himself as a God, putting himself above everything else so that he is surrounded by lies. Being partners with lies, one refuses to see dazzling sunshine which always represents truth and reason. Then, he continues to conduct a series of wrong things which in return put him at risk.

The "Machiavellians" -- Goneril, Regan and Edmund lose themselves on the way of pursuing power. The inferior treatment they receive plants a seed of resentment and subversion in their heart. They always long for more. Once the desire formed, it becomes principle of performing deeds. But the desire has such an insatiable appetite that its needs could not be met forever. Morality is overshadowed by the dark clouds that it does not function at all. Conspiracy after conspiracy, they trespass the boundary of morality and devastate the ethics with every "effort". But, as the saying goes, always walking by the river, his shoes cannot be prevented from becoming wet. Desire devours their conscience and also devours them too.

The embodiment of integrity and morality - Cordelia and Kent - strike a bright brush in the play. Unlike the people mentioned above, they keep reason all the time. They show determination facing condemnation and reproaches. Their strength is weak in front of the strong unethical side, but they never stop voicing their true observation and feelings. Though the angel Cordelia is destroyed at last, what she impresses readers most is nothing but her courage and kindness. And the loyal image of Kent touches us too. In that fragmented society, they work as an adhesive restoring the society with their capability. In a conspiracy-teemed atmosphere, they give people hope.

In conclusion, the basic principle of human deeds should be the bottom line of human nature, the desire for property and power will metamorphose human nature. (Wang, 2006) The exterior laws and constitutions are not the must in building a harmonious society, but the interior ethical conceptions. Everyone is born with obligations, King shouldering the responsibility of leading the whole country, citizens promoting the development of country with their abilities. A nation is composed of numerous families. Families and the nation are on the same chain so that they both enjoy mutual benefits or suffer from disasters together.

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