The Limits of Representation in *King Lear*

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This essay aims to explore *King Lear* from the viewpoint of representation. As W. J. T. Mitchell puts it, "Man. . . is the "representational animal," *homo symbolicum*, the creature whose distinctive character is the creation and manipulation of signs — things that "stand for" or "take the place of" something else" (11). In *King Lear*, various attempts at representation in this sense are made, but they end in failure. What this play shows us is the limits of representation, the way the tragic situation escapes and defies the will to determine itself through representation.

The play opens with the division of the kingdom, which follows Lear's abdication. This division makes the inherent instability of the kingdom clear. Then let us examine the qualities of the kingdom, thereby illustrating its instability more clearly. Among them, two aspects of the kingdom will be especially emphasized: first, it is a political fiction; secondly, it is the world of representation.

To begin with, the development of the play reveals that Lear's kingdom is fundamentally a political fiction. Although this political fiction inherently has no absolute origins or foundations, it is or has to be incessantly actualized. Thus, it changes into the real power structure. Both discourses and visual images contribute to this transformation.

Let us discuss this problem in great detail: first, I shall consider the function of discourses in Lear's kingdom. They take the form of various

kinds of narrative. As regards narrative, the argument of Jerome Bruner is relevant here. Narrative, as he puts it, "operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (6). It creates reality or, to be more exact, its own version of reality. These points apply to *King Lear*. In the opening scene, for example, Lear believes that he can always "speak creatively, substantially, with automatic truth" (Burckhardt 240). Thus, while justifying his own existence as a king, he tries to actualize the kingdom's existence.

More importantly, through narrative, there arises "the domain of social beliefs and procedures," which is "widely (though roughly) shared for a culture to operate with requisite effectiveness" (Bruner 20-21). Lear's kingdom forms a "domain" of this kind. It distributes a wide range of narratives in order to actualize its own existence. Through this "narrative construction of reality" (Bruner 1), most characters take its existence for granted. Thus, narratives actually implant "social beliefs" concerning the existence of the kingdom in these characters and powerfully constrain them.

Next, I shall consider the function of visual images. They often take the form of ceremonies. To be sure, the performance of the ceremonies produces only an illusion. Yet, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "[t]he only serious action is transpiring in the minds of the audience" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 101). So even an illusion can impress authority and sacredness on the minds of spectators.

Lear's kingdom really combines the theatrical performance and the creation of authority and sacredness. For example, let us take the opening scene, again. This ceremonial scene is equal to a play in that everything is already decided. By directing what should be done in the ceremony, Lear tries to enhance not only his but also the kingdom's authority and sacredness in the presence of his subjects.

But it becomes difficult for the kingdom to produce an illusory play. Just as the first ceremony does not unfold as Lear expects, the subsequent ceremonies are no longer effective and become empty. This indicates the crisis of sovereignty.

In this connection, we should notice that visual images also have a close relation to such material realities as real power, property, and the right to an inheritance. These material realities serve to actualize the kingdom, too. Jonathan Dollimore rightly refers to the fact that "*King Lear* is, above all, a play about power, property and inheritance" (197). This fact is foregrounded when the play opens with Lear's abdication and the division of the kingdom.

Then, I shall further investigate the problem of Lear's kingdom from the standpoint of representation. Lear's kingdom is, or aspires to be, the world of representation. Representation is, according to Mitchell, "always *of* something or someone, *by* something or someone, *to* someone" (12). To begin with, Lear represents or symbolizes the kingdom to his subjects. Next, by means of visual images and discourses, the kingdom represents authority and sacredness. Finally, Lear, as a king, also represents these qualities.

But what is more important is that this play deals with the crisis of representation in Lear's kingdom. In fact, the division of the kingdom in the opening scene causes two problems which make this crisis clear. One is the problem of government: who will rule and represent the kingdom? The other is, in short, that of the stability of the kingdom: who and what will inherit and represent authority and sacredness? The fate of the kingdom entirely depends upon these two problems. Thus, representation is never stable and fixed: it is rather arbitrary. Relevant to this point is the following remark by Mitchell: "When something stands for something to somebody, it does so by virtue of a social agreement — "let us agree that

this will stand for that" — which, once understood, need not be restated on every occasion" (13). In short, representation becomes possible only when there is "a kind of social agreement."

But Lear is ignorant of these issues which the division of the kingdom involves and actually brings about. Indeed, it is unsettled not only who will represent the kingdom but also who will represent authority and sacredness. This problem plunges the kingdom into difficulties. The problem remains unsettled throughout the play: it becomes a transverse axis which penetrates the play from beginning to end.

We can briefly put the whole question concerning Lear's kingdom in this way: the kingdom establishes not only the world of representation but also that of transformation. There is indeed the transformation from a political fiction to the real power structure. This process becomes highly tricky and deceptive: it is hidden from the subjects in the kingdom. Therefore, it needs delusion and misunderstanding on the subjects' part. Similarly, the arbitrariness of representation has to be concealed from the subjects, since it damages Lear's and the kingdom's authority and sacredness. Thus, representation also requires institutional delusion and misunderstanding on the subjects' part.

Considering this institutional mechanism concerning transformation and representation, we can divide the characters into two groups. On the one hand, there are those characters who can see through this mechanism and avoid delusion. It is Edmund especially who belongs to this group. On the other hand, there are those characters who do not doubt this mechanism at all, so they are easily deluded and entrapped. For example, Lear and Gloucester belong to this group. They become victims of the former group.

To begin with, I shall investigate the problem of Edmund. As a bastard, his position in the kingdom becomes ambiguous and unstable. In fact, he has been absent from the kingdom. Gloucester says to Kent: "He

[Edmund] hath been out nine years, and away he shall again" (1. 1. 31-32). Thus, Edmund can take his place only in the margin of the kingdom.

But Edmund transforms these handicaps by making them his weapon. As Terry Eagleton puts it, "by reflecting sardonically on his own determinants," Edmund can "escape a blind enslavement to them" (80). In addition, since the kingdom's hierarchy, with Lear at its top, is under unstable conditions, some authority, which is different from legitimate descent, naturally arises from these conditions. Indeed, though Edmund is "base" (1. 2. 6), he has close relations with Goneril and Regan, the *king*'s two daughters. Thus, Edmund always thinks selfishly how to defend his own interest: "my state / Stands on me to defend, not to debate" (5. 1. 69).

It is Edmund's self-knowledge that supports his strategy. For example, against Gloucester's blind faith in astrology, Edmund says as follows:

> This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars. . . . Fut! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. (1. 2. 115-18, 28-30)

To borrow Harold Bloom's phrase, this self-knowledge makes Edmund "the purest and coolest Machiavel in stage history" (7).

Since Edmund is alienated from society, his self-knowledge turns into skepticism towards the kingdom. Thus, his exclusion from society gives him an insight into the kingdom's central mechanism. As a result, he comes to realize the importance of material realities, especially real power, property, and inheritance: he recognizes them as "the ideological basis" of his society (Dollimore 197).

Moreover, Edmund repudiates everything that represents the universal,

the inevitable, and the fixed. That is to say, as Dollimore points out, Edmund rejects "a way of thinking which represents the contingent as the necessary and thereby further represents human identity and the social order as metaphysically determined (and therefore unalterable)" (198). Consequently, Edmund rejects his socially determined and imposed identity as a "bastard."

Edmund's skepticism is finally "made to serve an *existing* system of values" (Dollimore 198). Although his skepticism gives him an insight into the institutional mechanism of the kingdom, he does not disclose it or destroy it. Rather, he takes advantages of it for his favor. Within the system, he succeeds, to borrow Greenblatt's term, in "self-fashioning." Edmund in fact gradually advances his social position in the kingdom, acquiring real power, property, and inheritance. Ultimately, Edmund desires to become a king.

In order to realize his desire, Edmund plots various underhand treacheries. Interestingly enough, he consistently uses letters through these treacheries. His treacheries show his insight into the function of representation. In letters, he re-presents the conspiracies of his enemies — Edgar and Gloucester. To put it another way, he makes letters represent their conspiracies. Thus, he brings about their ruin.

But Edmund ends up in failure. It is Edgar who finally brings about Edmund's ruin. In the world of real politics, that is, in the game of strategies, he is never invulnerable.

Lear and Gloucester are in a directly opposite position to Edmund. Compared with Edmund, they are utterly careless about the institutional mechanism of the kingdom. As a result, they fall and lose their power. But, as we shall see later, they finally arrive at a new form of vision or insight.

What is characteristic of Lear and Gloucester is blind faith in representation. They fix the boundaries between the concrete and the abstract; the

present and the absent; and the visible and the invisible. Thus, Lear and Gloucester uncritically believe that the former group represents the latter group. Furthermore, they believe that the latter group is more essential, important, and real, so they always concentrate their attention on it.

For example, when trying to understand a concrete problem, they seek to find an abstract order which they assume to exist behind the problem. Only abstractly can Lear and Gloucester consider and understand the concrete. Therefore, they cannot directly face what exists here and now. They continue to divert their attention or thoughts from reality. As a result, reality dissolves in illusion. This kind of cognition accelerates the fall of Lear and Gloucester. They treat reality as though it were fictitious. By trying to solve a problem, Lear and Gloucester paradoxically make it distant from themselves.

I shall now discuss this point in greater detail. To begin with, from the viewpoint of representation, I shall examine Lear's problem in particular.

First, Lear recklessly decides to live with only "The name and all th'addition to a king" (1. 1. 135). He also decides to give away such material realities as real power, property, and inheritance: "the sway, / Revenue, execution of the rest, / Beloved sons, be yours" (1. 1. 135-37). When making this decision, Lear believes in "pure majesty" and "the pure idea of kingship" (Kott 136). By trusting to "the aura of a title" (Eagleton 77), he mistakenly thinks that, with only the title of a king, he can remain a perfect king. But, as Northrop Frye points out, it is impossible "for a king to represent only the ideal of kingship, to live with "The name and all th' addition to a king," as Lear proposes to do" (44). Thus, by renouncing material realities, he loses the means of actualizing his existence as a king.

Secondly, Lear assumes that there is a natural bond between word and thing. For example, when he divides the kingdom by showing "the map" (1. 1. 36), we can find the following equality formulated by him: Lear's words

= "the map" = the kingdom.

Moreover, Lear assumes that there is a natural bond between word and truth. This is the reason why Cordelia's "Nothing, my lord" becomes intolerable to him (1. 1. 86). He believes that his daughters' words lead directly to truth. But this reply represents or promises no-thing — no truth and no meaning — to him. So he says: "Nothing will come of nothing" (1. 1. 89). Thus, in his speech, Lear shows his belief that word automatically represents truth. William Willeford calls this "magical thought" (212). Meanwhile, Lear "treats the real world as though it were nothing" (Willeford 212).

Thirdly, Lear firmly believes in the existence of absolutes. Indeed, he invokes various gods and goddesses. For him, the present situation directly represents the divine will. Lear also believes in the divine justice. In the present miserable conditions, he vainly expects "great and terrifying judges high above" to intervene (Kott 129). In act 2, scene 4, for example, when Lear meets Goneril again, who maltreated him, Lear appeals to "Heavens": "Make it your cause; send down and take my part!" (2. 4. 190). Thus, Lear always thinks of his present sufferings in terms of absolutes: by doing so, he tries to justify his sufferings. For all of Lear's invocations of the gods, the gods remain silent.

Finally, in order to understand the meaning of his sufferings, Lear depends on the storm in act 3. As Greenblatt points out, Lear "tries desperately to make it [the storm] *mean* something" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 123). Lear furthermore tries to detect the intention of the storm in the present reality. He believes that the bad weather, which intensifies his sufferings, is the direct representation of the storm's malice. He claims to "fire," "rain," "wind, and "thunder":

> But yet I call you servile ministers,

> That will with two pernicious daughters join
> Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul. (3. 2. 21-24)

For all Lear's appeals, the storm also refuses to speak.

Gloucester reflects and emphasizes these qualities of Lear. That is to say, when his fortunes are declining, Gloucester also shows blind faith in representation.

To begin with, the forged letter becomes the emblem of this faith. Gloucester mistakenly believes that the letter represents Edgar's treachery.

Next, Gloucester's belief in astrology is further evidence of his blind faith. According to him, the disorder in the world represents or reflects that of the celestial sphere. So he imputes Edgar's treachery to the stars: "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. . . . This villain of mine comes under the prediction" (1. 2. 100-01, 106-07).

Finally, Gloucester appeals almost constantly to the gods. For example, when he is bound by Cornwall and Regan, Gloucester calls upon divine justice: "I shall see / The winged vengeance overtake such children" (3. 7. 63-64). Moreover, the divine will is absolute to Gloucester. For example, before attempting suicide, he invokes the gods again. Concerning this scene, Jan Kott points out as follows: "Gloster's [sic] suicide has a meaning only if the gods exist. It is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice. . ." (120). That is to say, Gloucester regards this world as the representation of the divine will.

Because of their blind faith in representation, Lear and Gloucester, who cannot face the present reality, become vulnerable in the world of real politics. So they become the victims of deceptive strategies.

While falling, however, Lear and Gloucester come to have a new form of vision or insight. This is because their blind faith in representation gradu-

ally changes into its rejection. This consequently enables them to communicate with reality directly. In this communication, the body plays an important role. On the one hand, nakedness, which is accompanied by madness, is particularly important concerning Lear; on the other hand, blindness in its literal meaning becomes especially significant for Gloucester.

For example, in act 3, scene 4, by exposing his body to the external nature, Lear learns what it is to be poor, naked, and wretched: he shows, at the same time, how to achieve social justice.

> Take physic, Pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the Heavens more just. (3. 4. 33-36)

These speeches of Lear's are evidence that he begins to face reality through his own body.

The climax of this process is Lear's meeting with Edgar, who is disguised as Tom of Bedlam. Edgar is in fact naked. And Lear considers that Edgar is placed in the most extreme but real situation of a human being. Lear says to him: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. . . . Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself" (3. 4. 100-01, 103-04). Nakedness means reality and truth to Lear. Then, Lear tries to become naked himself.

In act 4, scene 6, through the rediscovery of his own body, Lear discovers the facts concerning his two merciless daughters: "When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found'em [Goneril and Regan], there I smelt'em out" (4. 6. 100-03). Lear also discovers that his identity depends on "the narrative construction of reality": he admits that his royal identity has been

created through speech and flattery. He says, "Go to, they [Goneril and Regan] are not men o'their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie" (103-05). It is the expression "they told" that counts here, for it functioned so as to create Lear's royal identity.

As Barbara Everett points out, "the simplest discoveries become, through him, a matter of immediate physical experience, felt both intensely and comprehensively" (336). And Lear no longer shows the will for representation.

Additionally, we can realize the change in Lear's language. While he comes to face present vivid realities through his own body, his language becomes more plain, concrete, literal, and direct. In some cases, it becomes meaningless. Lear's language gradually ceases to serve the function of representation.

In *King Lear*, the situation in general grows more serious and deteriorates. Death is always final and dominant. Therefore, the world inevitably becomes what G. Wilson Knight calls "grotesque," "incongruous," "absurd," and "fantastic."

Through language, some characters try to impose an arbitrarily constructed order on the present disordered reality with the purpose of giving it meaning. In other words, through verbal expression, they attempt to re-present this reality which is perilous, safely and in an orderly manner. They also attempt to make gestures toward order and meaning in slightly another way: they expect and believe that the present situation is becoming better. But all these attempts end in failure and the world becomes deformed. Therefore, the characters finally has to accept this world in all its irrationality and deformity.

We shall now look into this problem more carefully. Edgar, Kent, and Albany always try to re-present and "report" the present reality: among the three characters, Edgar becomes the most important reporter. Concerning

the function of "report," James L. Calderwood points out as follows:

> It [Report] cushions the impact of immediate experience because it re-presents it at some distance in time, but also because, however scant it may be, report is still a made meaning, a transformation of rawness into the once-remove of speech, and hence of coherence, sequence, order, and form. (14)

With the help of "report," that is, rational discourse, these characters think that they can avoid direct confrontation with the irrational situation. Through "report," they try to transcend it.

For example, at the end of act 3, scene 6, by "reporting" the present conditions, Edgar expresses his expectations, although he is now addressing himself as "thee": "Mark the high noises, and thyself bewray / When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee, / In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee" (3. 6. 109-11). He *a priori* believes that the present situation, which is only transient, is certainly becoming better. In this process, he believes, he will also be restored in perfect condition.

However, reality always disappoints and invalidates "report" in the end: the present disorder finally subverts every arbitrarily constructed order. We can find a typical example of this subversion at the beginning of act 4, scene 1. As usual, Edgar "reports" as follows:

> The lowest and most dejected thing of Fortune
> Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear:
> The lamentable change is from the best;
> The worst returns to laughter. (4. 1. 3-6)

In this "report," Edgar says "I am at the worst," supposing that the "worst"

situation can never get worse. But this is only his wishful thinking, for "I am at the worst" is only fictitious. Indeed, reality subverts this "report" of Edgar's. As soon as he "reports," he finds his blind father and says as follows:

> O Gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?
> I am worse than e'er I was.
> . . . . . .
> And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
> So long as we can say 'This is the worst.' (4. 1. 25-26, 27-28)

To say "This is the worst," which implicitly represents a meaningful order, is completely different from experiencing "the worst" itself immediately. There is inevitably a wide gap between them. Edgar realizes this difference.

Edgar is finally confronted with a painful situation which he can no longer "report." In act 4, scene 6, when he witnesses the reunion between the mad Lear and the blind Gloucester, he says: "I would not take this from report; it is, / And my heart breaks at it" (4. 6. 139-40). Thus, the development of the situation forces Edgar to experience what is here and now directly. But this experience is unspeakable and incommunicable. This is because "it is" rejects any kind of "report" or representation. It relentlessly makes the limits of representation clear.

Now, all Edgar can do is to bear his pain and suffering. But the fact is that the world becomes too hard for men to bear. As Frank Kermode points out, "[i]n *King Lear* everything tends toward a conclusion that does not occur" (82). So, Edgar can never abandon "report" entirely. Furthermore, in order to give meaning and order to the world, Edgar invokes the gods: like Lear and Gloucester, he believes in divine justice. After defeating Edmund, he says to him, "The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices /

Make instruments to plague us" (5. 3. 169-70). Edgar depends on divine justice for the recovery of the world, but, needless to say, the gods never help the world out of its difficult situation.

Like Edgar, Albany vainly invokes the gods and divine justice. But his attempt ends in failure, too. For example, after Edmund confesses his assassination plot against Cordelia, Albany cries, "The Gods defend her!" (5. 3. 254). But immediately after his cry, Lear re-enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. As Greenblatt points out, "[a]ll attempts by the characters to explain or relieve their sufferings through the invocation of transcendent forces are baffled" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 123).

Thus, the world comes to reject interpretation or re-presentation. Being confronted with Cordelia's death, Kent, Edgar, and Albany say respectively as follows:

> Kent. Is this the promis'd end?
> Edgar. Or image of that horror?
> Albany. Fall and cease. (5. 3. 262-63)

Kent and Edgar attempt to pursue the meaning of the present situation. But Albany defiantly repudiates the pursuit of meaning. For him, the situation is nothing but what exists exactly here and now.

The deformation of the world progresses more intensely. In the end, Lear dies, and the world loses its former transparency. As a result, the characters who survive feel the deformed world to be a kind of excess: they feel that the world has become too excessively deformed for them to deal with it. Edgar's last words are as follows:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey;
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

> The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5. 3. 324-25)

Thus, the world appears as surplus for Edgar. All that men has to do is to "see it feelingly," like Gloucester, in order to "speak what they feel." Here, they come near the limits of representation.

Finally, I shall investigate the problem of the kingdom. In the closing moments of the play, by performing a ceremony, Albany embarks on the reconstruction of the kingdom. Then, he expresses his "intent" (5. 3. 295). In his "intent," Lear's reinstatement on the throne is the most important: "for us [Albany], we will resign, / During the life of this old Majesty, / To him our absolute power" (5. 3. 297-99). But moments later Lear dies. Thus, Albany fails to return his "absolute power" to Lear. Therefore, Albany asks Kent and Edgar to assume the reins of government. But Kent politely but enigmatically refuses this offer: "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no" (5. 3. 320-21). It is ambiguous where he goes. Edgar's last words, which I have quoted above, are also ambiguous from the viewpoint of the government of the kingdom.

Just who will become a king? And, as a king, who will rule and represent the kingdom? As Stephen Booth points out, "[t]he play began in doubt about who would rule; the three final speeches, a reprise of the division of the kingdom in I. i, leaves us in new doubt about who will rule" (15). These questions concerning kingship and government are never absolutely and satisfactorily answered. Thus, they are left suspended.

The ceremony itself, which Albany tries to perform, is no longer effective. In short, it has emptied itself out. As M. C. Bradbrook points out, "The emptiness and exhaustion at the end of this play match the emptiness of the stage" (200). In addition, as a new king, no one does and will hold his enthronement ceremony. Or rather, no one can do it. In this way, the

kingdom can no longer represent authority and sacredness through the ceremony.

Thus, near the end of the play, the difficulty of representation in the kingdom becomes more serious. As we have seen before, the division of the kingdom caused two problems: who will rule and represent the kingdom?; who and what will inherit and represent authority and sacredness? In the end, neither of these problems has been completely solved or concluded. For the kingdom, the crisis of representation is equal to its own crisis. This is because the kingdom depends on its representational character for its existence.

The kingdom is really left drifting, as the very end of *King Lear* implies. Concerning the last scene, Booth comments as follows:

> After the last speech, the Folios provide an urgently necessary stage direction, *Exeunt with a dead march.* This is the only one of the tragedies where the last lines do not point to an immediate offstage destination and invite the remaining characters to repair to it. The last lines of *King Lear* leave the survivors just to walk off the stage. (16)

Just as the survivors merely "walk off the stage," the kingdom only indeterminately drifts without any specific goal. This suggests the decay and fall of the kingdom. Furthermore, in the play, such decay and fall immediately effect the deformation of the world.

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Synopsis

The Limits of Representation in *King Lear*

By Hachitori Yoshiaki

This paper investigates *King Lear* from the viewpoint of representation. Indeed, *King Lear* displays the problems of representation in different ways. Moreover, it emphasizes the limits of representation in particular. Therefore, the full investigation of these problems can throw new light on this play.

Lear's abdication and his division of the realm intensify various aspects of instability in the kingdom. Two characteristics of the kingdom illustrate its instability more clearly. First, it is basically a political fiction. Accordingly, discourses and visual images always have to actualize it. Second, it is the world of representation. As a king, someone should represent the kingdom and its authority and sacredness. Thus, it strongly depends on representation. These characteristics make the kingdom potentially unstable, especially after Lear's reckless abdication. Lear starts his tragedy through his ignorance of these instabilities concerning the kingdom.

Then the problems of three characters, that is, Edmund, Lear, and Gloucester, are respectively analyzed.

To begin with, concerning Edmund, it is insight that characterizes him. In fact,

his skepticism gives him an insight into the institutional mechanism of the kingdom. He also shows an insight into the problem of representation in general. This insight enables him to plot treacheries by using letters. But Edgar finally ruins him. In the kingdom, even Edmund cannot be invulnerable.

Next, what characterizes Lear and Gloucester is blind faith in representation. Because of this faith, they cannot directly face reality: reality dissolves in illusion. But, when their fortunes are declining, they acquire a new form of vision or insight. Through their bodies, especially their physical nakedness and blindness, Lear and Gloucester respectively come to face reality. Furthermore, they finally reach a new realm of experience which is beyond representation.

Nevertheless, as the play develops, the situation grows worse. In order to give meaning and order to the world, Edgar, Albany, and Kent attempt to re-present it. But reality surpasses representation. So all their attempts end in failure. Thus, for them, the world becomes deformed. And they have to accept it in all its irrationality.

At the same time, the kingdom loses its representational character. After Lear's death, it is no longer certain who, as a king, represents the kingdom and its authority and sacredness. This problem is left suspended. To the kingdom, the crisis of representation suggests its own crisis. So the last scene deeply implies its decline and fall.