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THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

SPECIAL
KING LEAR
NUMBER

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Kenneth Muir

THE TEXTS OF *KING LEAR* : AN INTERIM ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTROVERSY

The last of the New Arden editions of Shakespeare's plays appeared in 1982; a new General Editor, Richard Proudfoot, was appointed; and the publishers decided to start again with a new 'New Arden'. Many of the original editors are dead—Ridley, Cairncross, Nosworthy, Lever, Ure, Maxwell, Leech—and for their ten plays other editors will have to be found. But I was urged to re-edit *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, two of the earliest volumes in the series (1951-2) and last revised in 1972. There will be no major changes in *Macbeth*, but *King Lear* is another matter. During the last thirty years there have been several important books written on the play; there have been some memorable performances; and I myself have written several articles on the play, setting forth my changing attitudes. But these facts are of minor importance compared with the textual revolution, of which the first rumblings were heard at the Washington Congress of the International Shakespeare Association in 1976.

Until 1975 it was taken for granted by all editors, whether wise or foolish, competent or incompetent, conservative or radical, that their duty was to conflate the original texts of 1608 and 1623, and, with one notable exception, they agreed to take the First Folio as their copy-text. Now a group of textual critics in England and the United States has claimed that such a conflated text is illegitimate, since it creates a play that was never performed in Shakespeare's lifetime, and that therefore an editor should print two separate texts, one based on the First Quarto, and the other on the Folio. It is this new and proselytizing orthodoxy which it

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is my aim to question in the present article. Until the matter is settled, I cannot complete my new edition of the play.

Let me begin by making four admissions : 1. Where it can be shown that lines in the Folio text were meant to replace those in the Quarto, we should not print both. The Quarto lines should be printed only in the notes. 2. When one has been familiar with the play for many years—I myself directed a performance half a century ago—it is impossible to banish from one's mind speeches which one has heard on the lips of Olivier or Gielgud, and hard to admit that Shakespeare deleted them. The textual Reformers (if I may so call them) may be justified in regarding such an attitude as reactionary prejudice. 3. Two separate texts of the play, threatened by both the Oxford and Cambridge editors, will inevitably cause a good deal of alarm and despondency among teachers, students, actors, and the general reader. But, of course, this ought not to weigh too heavily against the demands of scholarship. 4. Two more books on the controversy have been announced, so that this article can only be regarded as an interim assessment.

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Meanwhile it can be said that the argument of the Reformers, indeed the *only* argument, is that the Folio text represents a radical revision by Shakespeare himself and that his responsibility for the changes is proved by their brilliance. It is my contention that the argument rests on iterated assertions, that some of the alterations are dramatically disastrous, and that we ought (in Hamlet's words) to demand 'grounds more relative than this.'

The first shot in the campaign was fired by Michael J. Warren in April 1976. It was published, somewhat expanded, in the Proceedings of the Conference,[1] as 'Quarto and Folio of *King Lear* and the interpretation of Albany and Edgar.' Warren argues quite fairly that

> it is not demonstrably erroneous to work with the possibility (a) that there may be no single 'ideal play' of *King Lear*, that there may never have been one, and that what we create by conflating both texts is

merely an invention of editors and scholars; (b) that for all its problems Q is an authoritative version of the play; and (c) that F may indeed be a revised version of the play, that its additions and omissions may constitute Shakespeare's considered modification of the earlier text, and we certainly cannot know that they are not.

Warren proceeds to show that the dialogue when Lear discovers Kent in the stocks differs in the two texts, and that F's is intended as a replacement for Q's and that therefore we ought not to print both.[2] Here I agree; but as Q has clearly muddled the passage, I suspect that all F has done is to *restore* what Shakespeare originally wrote.

Warren goes on to argue that the alterations in the last two acts of the play were carefully designed (by Shakespeare himself) to reduce the importance of Albany and increase the importance of Edgar. We may allow that this is the effect of the alterations, but it may be doubted whether they were so designed; and even if this was the purpose of the changes, they could be the result of a change in the cast. Most of the alterations are savage cuts and cuts are usually motivated by the need to shorten a play, *King Lear* being one of the longest. Certainly Edgar takes from Albany the last speech of the play, either as the future King or because the words 'we that are young' are more appropriate to him. Warren, I think, indulges in a good deal of special pleading, as when he asserts that

> The absence of Edgar's moral meditation from the end of 3.6. brings the speech at 4.4.1 into sharp focus, isolating it more obviously between the blinding and entrance of Gloucester: in F the two servants do not remain on stage after Cornwall's exit. The additional lines at this point emphasize the hollowness of Edgar's assertions; while the quantity of sententiousness is reduced, its nature is made more emphatically evident. Edgar gains in prominence, ironically enough, by the loss of a speech, and the audience becomes more sharply aware of his character.

This last sentence is difficult to swallow: and the whole paragraph seems to me to be evasive. Of course Edgar's moralising is frequently upset by the realities he has to face,

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as Albany's is too. But Warren slides over the dialogue between Cornwall's servants after the blinding scene (which is discussed below) and he is not aware of the positive merit of Edgar's rhymed soliloquy at the end of 3.6. He reminds one of theatre directors who call for the scissors as soon as they see a passage in rhyme. During the whole of the act Edgar has been posing as Poor Tom, and he has been given only one brief aside in his own person. The soliloquy is therefore important to him as a character. He plays so many parts in the course of the play that we are liable to lose sight of the man behind the masks. The lines, moreover, make two vital dramatic points. They make the first verbal link between the two plots—'He childed as I fathered'—and they emphasize that the mental suffering of the King is harder to bear than the physical suffering of the Bedlam beggar, though he too has had more than his share of mental suffering in being rejected by the father he loves.

> When we our betters see bearing our woes,
> We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
> How light and portable my pain seems now,
> When that which makes me bend makes the King bow.

Now if Shakespeare was indeed responsible for this cut, he was presumably also responsible for the addition of the Fool's prophecy at the end of 3.2. Neither the addition nor the subtraction would seem to be the work of a supreme dramatist.

Warren mentions that the cuts in 4.2 severely reduce Albany's theatrical impact, so that he appears more futile, 'less obviously a man capable of action'. His most powerful speech (4.2.46 ff) is dismissed as 'a pious pronouncement'. But this, and his later speech on hearing of Cornwall's death ('This shows you are above, you justicers') although they may exhibit Albany's illusions about a divinely ordered universe, are very necessary to the poetic framework of the play, with its varied and conflicting attitudes to the gods[3]. In any case, Warren gives not a single dramatic, or even theatrical, reason

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for spoiling Albany's part. Perhaps the company found that the actor just was not adequate for the part.

Steven Urkowitz devotes a chapter[4] to the alterations in Albany's character, caused particularly by the omissions in 4.2. He points out that

> The lines omitted from F are precisely those stressing Albany's conscious articulation of, and personal adherence to, the value of respect for parents and benefactors. The lines remaining . . . are those expressing his new hostility to his wife, but they yield no hint of his own beliefs . . . The references to 'origin', 'sap' and 'branch' assert Albany's association with a positive, natural value system. They are not in the Folio.

Urkowitz goes on to point out that Albany's references to wisdom, goodness, grace, reverence and the obligation to gratitude are removed' so that only two speeches declare his moral system. In the Folio, Urkowitz claims, Albany 'seems to espouse no positively defined ethical standards', This, he concludes, was the purpose of the alterations.

To this one must object that there seems to be no dramatic point in the alterations, and that the defence of the cuts is so feeble that it can hardly increase our confidence that they were Shakespeare's own. As two moral speeches are retained, it is absurd to pretend that Albany is deprived of defined ethical standards. Moreover, in the last scene of the play, Albany plainly expresses those standards. Presumably the cuts in 4.2 were made because the play was thought to be too long—possibly for a provincial tour—and they castrated Albany's part : it is surely probable that the mangling was not deliberate, but an unfortunate and inadvertent result of the cuts.

Gary Taylor, while making legitimate points about the treatment of the war in Q and F, goes out of his way[5] to approve both of the cuts in Albany's part and of the dialogue between Cornwall's servants:

> We surely no longer need to be told, by Edgar, or the two servants or Albany or Cordelia, what to think of the two sisters' treatment of Lear and Gloucester. Albany need not go on at such length in 4.2 in order

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> to motivate his eventual repudiation of his wife in 5.3; so horrendous are the events of Acts II and I'I that we will easily infer that Albany's feelings are similar to our own.

Apart from the fact that this conflicts with Urkowitz's views, it is surely a peculiar line of argument, a strange notion of drama. The point of Albany's speeches is not to motivate his later repudiation of Goneril—obviously he repudiates her in 4.2. The various comments by the good characters on the deeds of the evil ones are felt by the audience to be a necessary expression of our sense of outrage. The multiple choric effects of the speeches of sympathetic characters are an essential part of Shakespeare's method. To cut them out will leave us feeling deprived, if not in a moral vacuum. Some modern directors, indeed, have gone as far as they dare to make us irritated, with Albany and Edgar, if not yet with Cordelia, and to sympathise with Edmund and Goneril.

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Steven Urkowitz is another critic who approves of the cutting of the dialogue between Cornwall's servants. He points out that the servants' plan 'is at odds with how the meeting between Gloucester and Edgar occurs in the next scene'. Moreover, and more importantly, 'the statement of the plan removes the theatrical element of surprise, that is clearly intended in the design of 4.1'. The meeting, Urkowitz thinks, 'should be a surprise to the Old Man who is leading Gloucester, to Gloucester himself, to Edgar, and especially to the audience[6]. He argues that Gloucester's 'accidental meeting with Edgar', his plan to use Poor Tom as a guide, despite the Old Man's objections, are the things which cause the poignancy of the scene. To which one may report that the upsetting of the servants' plan is itself a surprise, that Shakespeare, often, even usually, writes scenes which happen differently from what he had led us to expect, that the real poignancy of the scene depends on the meeting of the son with the father who cannot see him, and that there are two cogent reasons why the cutting of the servants' dialogue is a dramatic disaster. Philip Edwards has eloquently expressed one of the reasons :

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> The moment of stillness provided by the shock and compassion of the servants in Q is a theatrical experience of the highest order. Whoever cut the scene failed to grasp its theatrical imaginativeness as well as its thematic importance, and he could hardly have been Shakespeare.

The second reason I put forward with some satisfaction, as Urkowitz has branded me as an academic with no practical knowledge of the stage. In the production of the play I directed in the 'thirties [in collaboration with a professional actress] and also in the Leeds production in 1951 when Wilson Knight played Lear and I was Gloucester, we found on both occasions that after the blinding, and despite an interval between Acts III and IV, Gloucester had very little time between his exit in 3.7 and his reappearance in 4.1 to change his clothes or put on a cloak, and to have his eyes bandaged. Even with the additional $2\frac{1}{2}$ lines in Edgar's opening soliloquy, Gloucester has only 14 lines in the wings if we stick to the Folio text. It is not enough.[7] Apart from its dramatic value, the dialogue between the servants is a theatrical necessity. Either the cut was made accidentally by the Folio compositor, or the cut was not Shakespeare's.[8] Anyone who saw the Peter Brook production of the play will remember the dire effect of the omission of this scene; and this was the Director's aim. He wanted to eliminate this trace of humanity, so that he could enrol Shakespeare as a forerunner of the Theatre of Cruelty.

Another cut in the Folio is the mock trial of Goneril and Regan in 3.6. Gary Taylor argues that the purpose of this cut was to stream-line the plot. One has only to look at the second act of *Hamlet* to know that stream-lining was not always one of Shakespeare's priorities—perhaps it never was. Stream-lining is the tragic flaw of certain directors who imagine that a play is more dramatic if it is stripped of its poetry. Perhaps the real reason for the omission of the mock trial was that it was unsuccessful in performance, the original audience not having read Wilson Knight on the grotesque element in the play. Even today it is the hardest scene to stage; yet, as Ronald Peacock has finely said : 'It is an illumi-

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nation that produces from the subconscious the effect of order.'[10]

To consider all the passages discussed by the Reformers in their attempt to prove that the Folio represents an inspired revision by Shakespeare himself would require a fair-sized volume. All I can hope to do in this article is to take seven or eight typical passages—and they are genuinely typical. The first I have chosen is the dialogue between Edmund and Edgar at the end of 1.2. Instead of a cut it consists of a substantial addition to the Q text.

> *Bast.* That's my feare brother, I aduise you to the best, goe arm'd. (Q)
>
> *Edm.* That's my feare, I pray you haue a continent forbearance till the speed of his rage goes slower: and as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from when I will fitly bring you to heare my Lord speake: pray ye goe, there's my key: if you do stirre abroad, goe arm'd.
>
> *Edg.* Arm'd, Brother?
>
> *Edm.* Brother, I aduise you to the best. (F)

The F version is manifestly a great improvement. It makes Edmund's deception of his brother more plausible. Where I differ from the reformers is that I do not believe this was part of the revision. It is much more likely that the Q compositor's (or whoever compiled the text) eyes skipped from 'That's my fear, brother' to 'brother', accidentally omitting the intervening passage. The Q passage, feeble as it is, can hardly be what Shakespeare ever wrote. The original was happily restored in F, apart from the omission of 'brother' after 'feare'.

The next passage (I.4.310 ff) is also an addition in the F text and it too is an obvious improvement.

> *Gon.* Doe you marke that my Lord?
>
> *Duke.* I cannot bee so partiall *Gonorill* to the great loue I beare you.
>
> *Gon.* Come sir no more, you, more knaue then foole, after your master?
>
> *Foole.* Nunckle Lear . . . *(3 lines omitted)*
>
> *Gon.* What Oswald, ho.
>
> *Oswald.* Heere Madam.
>
> *Gon.* What have you writ this letter to my sister? (Q)

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> *Gon.* Do you marke that?
> *Alb.* I cannot be so partiall, *Gonerill*,
> To the great loue I beare you.
> *Gon.* Pray you content. What Oswald, hoa?
> You sir, more Knaue then Foole, after your Master.
> *Foole.* Nunkle *Lear*, Nunkle *Lear*. . . (*6 lines omitted*)
> *Gon.* This man hath had good counsell,
> A hundred Knights?
> 'Tis politike, and safe to let him keepe
> At point a hundred Knights: yes, that on euerie dreame,
> Each buz, each fancie, each complaint, dislike,
> He may enguard his dotage with their powres,
> And hold our liues in mercy. *Oswald*, I say.
> *Alb.* Well, you may feare too farre.
> *Gon.* Safer than trust too farre;
> Let me still take away the harmes I feare,
> Not feare still to be taken. I know his heart,
> What he hath vtter'd I have writ my Sister:
> If she sustaine him, and his hundred Knights
> When I haue shew'd th'vnfitnesse.
> *Enter Steward*
> How now Oswald?
> What haue you write that Letter to my Sister? (F)

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The extra lines spoken by Goneril are a valuable addition to the text. As Urkowitz says, 'introducing a delay between the time she calls for Oswald and the time he appears' she is shown to be 'thinking aloud during the intervals between her brusque commands'. What is more important, perhaps, is that her complaint about Lear's knights and her fear that they will prove dangerous, is a useful preparation for her later conduct, and goes some way to excuse Albany's tame acquiescence. This may be a rewriting of the Q version, as the reformers assume. But as the basis and nature of the Q text are still a matter of controversy—which may be settled when Peter Blayney's second volume appears—it may well be that the F text represents not a revision but a restoration.

The next problem is afforded by adjacent passages in 3.1, one in Q only, the other in F only.

> . . . *Albany* and *Cornwall*
> But true it is, from *France* there comes a power

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Into this scattered kingdome, who alreadie wise in our negligence
Haue secret feet in some of our best Ports,
And are at point to shew their open banner,
Now to you, if on my credit you dare build so farre
To make your speed to Douer, you shall find
Some that will thanke you, making just report
Of how vnnatural and bemadding sorrow
The King hath cause to plaine.
I am a Gentleman of blood and breeding,
And from some knowledge and assurance.
Offer this office to you. (Q)

Albany, and Cornwall:
Who haue, as who haue not, that their great Starres
Thron'd and set high; Seruants, who seeme no lesse,
Which are to France the Spies and Speculations
Intelligent of our State. What hath bin seene,
Either in snuffes, and packings of the Dukes,
Or the hard Reine, which both of them hath borne
Against the old kinde King; or something deeper,
Whereof (perchance) these are but furnishings. (F)

The reformers think that the lines in the Folio were meant to replace those in the Quarto. To me both texts seem inadequate as they stand. I suspect that the F lines were written on a slip of paper attached to the Q text (as was the custom) and that the F compositor wrongly supposed that the passage was meant to replace the Q lines. It is true that the retention of both passages involves an awkward join, and this may be due to the loss of one or more lines.[11]

The next alteration to be discussed is the total omission by F of a whole scene (4.3) in which there is some discussion of the King of France's departure, followed by an account of the reception by Cordelia of the news of her father's treatment, and the information that Lear is in Dover, and that, because of his feelings of shame, he refuses to see Cordelia. Urkowitz complains that this scene conflicts with what we learn later—that Lear does not mention Cordelia's presence in Britain, that in neither 4.6 nor 4.7 does he express shame, that he is surprised to see Cordelia when he awakens, think-

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ing her a spirit, and that in 4.4 he is in the country, not in the town. Taylor adds two other points:[12] that to give a reason for the French King's absence 'raises an awkward question, which would be better left unasked'—F has Cordelia, not La Far in command, thus camouflaging that it is a foreign invasion—and that it is more immediately satisfying to see and hear Cordelia than to be told about her. I agree with Taylor's first point, that the explanation of the French King's return is feeble; but he does not appreciate the serious disadvantage of omitting the account of Cordelia in this scene. She has been absent from the stage for 2000 lines—the length of some of Shakespeare's entire plays—and she will have a difficult entrance in the next scene unless the audience has been reminded of her. She is presumably dressed as a soldier and some who have not read the play will wonder 'who is she ?' or even 'who is he ?' Cordelia's part, moreover is the tiniest of any major Shakespearian character—just over 100 lines, and she often speaks in monosyllables. The account of her weeping and Kent's comment on it help to build up her importance in the scheme of the play.

Urkowitz's complaints seem to me to be frivolous. It is made clear that it is only in his lucid moments (his 'better time') that Lear remembers the situation, that his escape to the country in 4.4 is not inconsistent with the account in 4.3, that he is described as 'mad as the vexed sea', that he is clearly mad throughout 4.6, and that he recovers his senses in 4.7. His kneeling to Cordelia is the expression of his sovereign shame. Urkowitz seems to expect a madman to behave rationally and consistently. It is surely obvious that the motive of the cut is not to improve the play by subtle alterations, but simply to reduce its length.

Urkowitz also congratulates Shakespeare for cutting the last twelve lines of 4.7, after the exit of Lear and Cordelia, on the grounds that only in the Folio version 'does the audience see . . . contrasting images following one another', i. e. the moving scene of the reunion of Lear and Cordelia, follo-

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wed immediately by the entrance of Edmund and Regan. This comment is not merely insensitive, it is lacking in theatrical understanding. The audience needs a moment to wipe away their tears; they also need to be told that Edmund is leading Regan's forces, and they can appreciate the way of the rumour that Edgar is with Kent in Germany and Kent's dry comment: 'Report is changeable'.

> *Gent.* Holds it true sir that the Duke of *Cornwall* was so slaine?
> *Kent.* Most certaine sir.
> *Gent.* Who is conductor of his people?
> *Kent.* As tis said, the bastard sonne of *Gloster.*
> *Gent.* They say *Edgar* his banisht sonne is with the Earl of *Kent* in *Germanie.*
> *Kent.* Report is changeable, tis time to looke about,
> The powers of the kingdome approach apace.
> *Gent.* The arbiterment is like to be bloudie, fare you well, sir.
> *Kent.* My poynt and period will be throughly wrought,
> Or well, or ill, as this dayes battels fought. *Exit.*

An even more blatant example of special pleading is Urkowitz's comment on the omission by F of the lines given to the Captain who agrees to murder Lear and Cordelia :

> I cannot draw a cart nor eat dried oats.
> If it be man's work, I'll do't.

Urkowitz remarks that

> Instead of seeing the Captain explain his moral subjugation to the force of corrupt power, the audience watches Edmund drive him to his task, and then immediately turns to see Albany, Goneril and Regan enter. In the Folio the Bastard is the only active figure and the important focus of attention. His agent is practically mute—a figure, not a character. Although the Q text gives us a Captain vividly realized in only a dozen or so words—[Here Urkowitz reveals his soverign shame at his own argument]—the line seems to have been cut in order to allow Edmund to be shown, at his most villainous moment, against a neutral rather than against a lively background.

My disagreement here is not that Urkowitz is substituting a theatrical for a dramatic or poetic effect, but that he seems to be ignorant of the way audiences behave. They would never want to sacrifice such a condensed biography and such a

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revelation of character. The cut is too silly even for those who perpetrated the others: it must have been accidental.

My last example of inauspicious cuts is the account given by Edgar of his meeting with the dying Kent,

> *Edg*. This would haue seemd a periode to such
> As loue not sorrow, but another to amplifie too much
> Would make much more, and top extremitie.
> Whil'st I was big in clamor, came there in a man,
> Who hauing seene me in my worst estate,
> Shund my abhord society, but then finding
> Who twas that so indur'd with his strong armes
> He fastened on my necke and bellowed out,
> As hee'd burst heauen, threw me [him] on my father,
> Told the most pitious tale of *Lear* and him
> That euer eare receiued, which in recounting
> His griefe grew puissant and the strings of life,
> Began to cracke[,] twice then the trumpets sounded.
> And there I left him traunst.
> *Alb*. But who was this?
> *Edg*. *Kent*, sir, the banisht *Kent*, who in disguise,
> Followed his enemie king and did him seruice
> Improper for a slaue.

Gary Taylor thinks that the lines were omitted 'to reinforce an audience's interest in the long gap between Lear's exit with Cordelia and his entrance with her body'. Warren, on the other hand, thinks that Edgar in the Q version was too much concerned for his own dramatic role and that this cut (among others) reduces somewhat 'his callowness, his easy indulgence of his sensibility in viewing the events through which he is living'. Apart from this questionable assessment of Edgar's character, both comments are beside the point. It shortens the gap between Lear's two appearances by only a minute; and the suspense between Edmund's order for the murder and his decision to reveal it is a vital factor in the last scene of the play. Above all, Edgar's account is a necessary introduction to Kent's appearance eight lines later. His role in the last minutes of the play would otherwise be obscure to those who had not perused Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*.

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It will be gathered from my comments on particular passages that I do not believe that the Folio alterations were made by Shakespeare himself in order to improve the play. I cannot agree with Ernst Honigmann that only Shakespeare 'was capable of thinking at this level'.[13] Some of the additions—perhaps, as I believe, all of them—restore Q's accidental omissions. There are a very few genuine substitutions which may likewise restore what Shakespeare originally wrote. But the savage cuts in the second half of the play had the sole purpose of reducing its length. It is a long play and Shakespeare may have been reluctantly responsible for cutting it down to size, but the cuts may have been made when he was no longer there to protest. A few of the changes were probably designed to make a foreign invasion less offensive to an English audience, but the alterations in the characters of Edgar and Albany were a fortuitous result of the cuts, not the purpose of them.

Some of the changes seem to have been made because of a reduced cast—perhaps for a tour.[14] At 4.6.186 three gentlemen enter in pursuit of Lear, according to Q; in F there is only one.

Given other circumstances, some or all the cuts might have been restored. It is clear that a modern director has every excuse to ignore the cuts. It may also follow, that despite the deplorable state of the text, Q would better serve as the basis for a modern edition than F. An editor would be foolish to omit, or to relegate to the notes, the passages so savagely pruned in 1623. The cuts do not improve the play: they damage it fatally. Whoever was responsible was the first of the vandals, to be followed by Tate and a long line of actor-managers and directors.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] *Pattern of Excelling Nature* ed. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (1978).

[2] See 2.4.12-23.

[3] *King Lear and the Gods* by William R. Elton (1966).

[4] *Shakespeare's Revision of 'King Lear'* (1980).

[5] *Shakespeare Survey 33* (1980).

[6] In a review of Urkowitz's book, *M. L. R.*, July 1982.

[7] I understand that the reformers are driven to suggest that there were intervals after each act.

[8] I am reminded of a trivial cut in *Cymbeline* made by a director at Stratford. He found at the dress rehearsal that Imogen did not have time to change into her night-gown.

[9] If one examines the prompt-book of *The Elder Statesman*, one finds that T.S. Eliot was allowed to retain only one image in the last scene, the characteristic 'As the asthmatic struggles for breath'.

[10] *The Poet in the Theatre* (1946), 128.

[11] Or Kent may break off in the middle of a sentence. Urkowitz wittily retorts that the transition between the two sections of Kent's speech 'is more a bibliographical quirk than a dramatic subtlety'.

[12] *Op. cit.*

[13] *The Library*, June, 1982, p. 155.

[14] Greg pointed out (*R. E. S.*, 1940, 302) that no alcove and probably no balcony would be needed; and this suggests that the cut version may have been made for touring purposes.

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John J. M. Tobin

NASHE AND THE TEXTURE OF *KING LEAR*

King Lear draws from a number of Nashe's works for diction relating to the themes of bestardy, astrological determination, fornication, hypocritical justice, and the ultimate negative, 'nothing.' in response to the division of a kingdom.

Pierce Penilesse, which provided Shakespeare with material for Hamlet's 'dram of ev'l' speech (I. iv. 13ff.) and for Duke Senior's paean to the hypocrisy-free Forest of Arden (*As you like It.* II.i), links in Nashe's attack upon the three Harvey brothers (one of whom, Richard, was an astrologer) 'Brother' 'bastards,' and the '*adultrie* of *Planets*' in a context of the absurdity of astrological prophecy :

> Thou hast a *Brother*, hast thou not, student in Almonacks ? Go too, Ile stand to it, he fathered one of thy *bastards* (a booke I meane) which, being of thy begetting, was set forth under his name. Gentlemen, I am sure you have hearde of a ridiculous Asse that many yeares since sold lyes by the great, and wrote an absurd Astrologicall Discourse of the terrible *Conjunction* of Saturne and Jupiter, wherein (as if hee had lately cast the Heavens water, or beene at the *anatomizing* of the Skies intrailes in Surgeons hall) hee prophocieth of such strange wonders to ensue from stars destemperature and the unusuall *adultrie* of Planets, as none but he that is Bawd to those celestiall bodies could ever discry (196).

One notes Edmund's impassioned discourse on *brothers,* legitimate and *bastard,* and his scoffing at heavenly influence, as if men were '*adulterers* by an enforc'd obedience of *planetary* influence' (I.ii. 1-22, 124-25). Ten pages later amid Nashe's disquisition on drunkenness which Shakespeare drew from in *Hamlet*, Nashe cites the royal efforts of 'King *Edgar*' against drinking (206). It is important to remember that the comparable 'kind sonne' in Sidney's *Arcadia*, thought to be

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the source for Edgar, is nameless.

Later Nashe has Pierce ask a devil to describe 'what Hell is,'

> . . . a place of horror, *stench*, and *darknesse*, where men see meat, but can get none, or are ever thirstie and readie to swelt for drinke, yet have not the power to taste the coole streams that runne hard at their feet : where (permutata vicissitudine) one ghost torments another by turnes, and he that all his life time was a great *fornicator*, hath all the diseases of lust continually hanging upon him, and is constrained (the more to augment his misery) to have congresse every houre with hagges and old witches : (218)

One recalls Lear's invective against women :

> Let copulation thrive . . .
> But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
> Beneath is all the fiend's : there's *hell*, there's *darkness*,
> There is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding,
> *Stench*, consumption. (IV. vi. 114, 126-29)

Finally, on the next page of *Pierce Penilesse*, the situation of hell in regard to heaven is described in terms of Calais and Dover, 'for, as a man standing upon Callis Sands may see men walking on Dover Clyffes, so easily may you discerne Heaven from the farthest part of hell' (219), and at the bottom of the page reference is made to Fortune, 'under the fiction of this blinde Goddesse we ayme at the folly of Princes and great men in disposing of honors, that oftentimes preferre fooles and disgrace wise men, alter favours in turning of an eye, as *Fortune turnes* her *wheele*' (219-20). The image of objects seen from above and below Dover cliff is unforgettable in IV. vi, and though much of this description seems coloured by *Faerie Queene* III. x. 56-7,[1] the reference to Dover Cliff and the problem of perspective, following as it does that of the previous paragraph, 'we that[2] to our terror and griefe do know their dotage by our sufferings, rejoyce to thinke how these sillie *flyes plaie* with the fire that must burn them' (218), so evocative of Gloucester's slightly earlier, 'As *flies* to *wanton* boys are we to th' gods,/They kill us for their *sport*' (IV.i. 36-7), is at least suggestive of overdetermination.

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The turning wheel of blind Fortune who sees the folly of Princes in the bestowing of honors seems to have affected Kent's stoical resignation in the stocks of Gloucester's castle, '*Fortune*, good night, smile once more, *turn* thy *wheel*' (II. ii. 173). The proximity of most of these pages, some references, indeed, even on consecutive pages, makes still more understandable Shakespeare's ease in recalling them from a work he had drawn upon many times even during the composition of the two earlier Bradleian tragedies, and he was to draw upon again for the last of them, *Macbeth*, when he created the juggling witches.

Have with you to Saffron-walden continued Nashe's attack upon the Harveys and in terms of its exuberant lampooning is the most memorable of the pamphlets in that controversy. Dover Wilson in his edition of *King Lear* noted that Edgar's '*Fie, foh*, and *fum*,/ *I smell the blood of a* British *man*' (III.iv. 183-84) echoed Nashe's

> O, tis a precious apothegmaticall Pedant, who will finde matter inough to dilate a whole daye of the first invention of *Fy, fa, fum, I smell the bloud of an* English-*man* : and . . . hiw owne name beeing so generally odious throughout *Kent* and Christendome, hee would presently transforme & metamorphosize it from Doctour Harvey to Doctour Ty, . . . (p. 37).

Dover Wilson did not point out the presence in this passage of 'Kent,' present also in person in the hovel, nor the theme of metamorphosis common to both passages.

Later in the pamphlet Nashe returns to Harvey's interest in astrology and, according to him, venery :

> Gabriell was alwayes in love, Dick still in hate, either with Aristotle, or with the *great Beare* in the *firmament*, which he continually bayted; or with Religion, against which in the publique Schooles he set up Atheistical Questions, . . . & a little while after I heard there were Attachments out for him : whether he hath *compounded* since or no, I leave to the Iurie to enquire . . . I have not yet seald and shakt hands with him for making two such false Prophets of Saturne & Iupiter, out of whose iumbling in the darke and conjunction copulative he denounced such Oracles and alterations to ensue, . . . but as he (for all his labour) could not attaine to it, no more could Dick (with his *predic-*

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tions) compasse anie thing but derision, . . . and out of all Authors perspicuously demonstrating what a lying Ribaden and Chincklen Kraga it was, to constellate and *plannet* it so *portentously* . . . and then, if it bee a Warrior or Conqueror they would flatter. who is luckie and successful in his enterprises, they say he *is borne under* the auspicious Signe of Capricorne, as Cardan saith Cosmo de Medices, Selimus, Charles the fifth, and Charles Duke of Burbon were: albeit, I dare be sworne, no wizardly Astronomer of them all ever dreamd of anie such Calculations, till they had shewd themselves so victorious, and their prosperous raignes were quite expired. On the other side, if he be *disastrous* or retrograde in hys courses, the malevolent Starres of Medusa and Andromeda, inferring suddaine death or banishment, *predominated his nativitie*. But (I thank heaven) I am none of their credulous disciples, nor can they cousen or seduce me with anie of their iugling coniecturalls, or winking or tooting through a six penny *Iacobs Staffe*; (81, 82, 83)

Gloucester uses *'portend'* (I.ii. 104) and *'prediction'* (I.ii. 110) while Edmund uses *'disasters'* (I. ii. 120), *'stars'* (I. ii. 121). *'villains'* (I. ii. 122), *'heavenly'* (I. ii. 122), *'knaves'* (I. ii. 123), 'predominance' (I. ii. 123), 'adulterers' (I. ii. 124), *'planetary'* (I. ii. 125), *'compounded'* (I. ii. 128), *'nativity . . . under'* (I. ii. 130), *'Ursa Major'* (I. ii. 130), *'firmament'* (I. ii. 132), *'portend'* (I.ii. 136), and *'prediction'* (I.ii. 140). Edmund's remark about 'Tom o' *Bedlam*' (I. ii. 136) recalls Nashe's description of Harvey as a' braine-sicke *bedlam*' (101).

Nashe goes on to indulge in some bawdy commentary at the expense of Harvey and his mysterious 'gentlewoman' in terms which seem to have affected Lear's indictment of hypocritical lust :

It would doo you good to heare how he gallops on in commending her; hee sayes shee envies none but art in person and vertue incorporate, and that she is a Sappho, a Penelope, a Minerva, an Arachne, a Juno, yielding to all that *use her* and hers well, that she stands upon masculine and not feminine termes & her *hoatest* fury may bee resembled to the passing of a brave Careere by a Pegasus, and wisheth hartily that he could dispose of her recreations. Call for a *Beadle* and have him away to Bridewell, for in every sillable he commits *letchery* . . . If she strip thee of thy shirt, if I were as thee, I would *strip her* to her smocke . . . As Ovid writes to a *Leno*, . . . (112-23)

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Compare Lear' 'Thou rascal *beadle* . . . / . . . *Strip* thy own back/Thou *hotly lusts* to *use her*' (IV. vi. 160-62). The lines following, 'And the strong lance of *justice* hurtless breaks;/ Arm it in rags, a *pigmy's* straw does pierce it,' (IV.vi. 166-67) recall Nashe's description of the Harvey brothers on pages eighty-one and eighty-two : 'This John was hee that being entertained in *Iustice* Meades House (as a Schoolemaster) stole away his daughter . . .' and in the first words of the next paragraph '*Pigmey* Dicke . . . another such Venerian steale *Placard* as Iohn . . . *luxurious* vicar . . . should never *lust* after . . . answered it in Print *pell mell*': (83)—compare Lear's '*To't, luxury, pell-mell,* for I lack soldiers' (IV. vi. 117), and Edgar's advice to keep one's hands out of *plackets*.

The Fool's 'Truth's a dog must to kennel, he must be whipt out, when the Lady *Brach* may stand by th' fire and stink' (I. iv. 111-112) echoes Nashe's comparison in *Saffron-walden* of Harvey's 'gentlewoman' to the promiscuous Messalina, 'and so it is with this his *bratche*, or *bitch*-foxe' (122), and, of course, Goneril has some of the sexual longings of Messalina. Shakespeare uses '*bitch*' in the genitive in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as a combining form with 'wolf' in *Troilus and Cressida*, and simply in Kent's attack upon Oswald as 'the son and heir of a mungril *bitch*' (II.ii. 22-23). One notes also that Kent three lines before calls Oswald a '*finical* rogue' —'*finical*' is unique in the canon and it occurs in *Saffron-walden* both in the '*finicall* descanting' of a Cambridge Barber, and in the first sentence of Nashe's 'life' of Harvey, 'betwixt a kinde of carelesse rude ruffianisme and curious *finicall* complement' (76). Kent adds, among other insults, the idea that Oswald is a '*barber*-monger' (II. ii. 33). Harvey, of course, is viewed by Nashe as a vain fop, and *Saffron-walden* is dedicated to the Master *Barber* of Trinity College, Cambridge, who is to trim and let the blood of Gabriel Harvey.

Nashe's comments about the Harvey brothers' lasciviousness and their interest in astrology seem particularly to have impressed themselves upon the mind of Shakespeare during

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the writing of *King Lear*. *Have with you to Saffron-walden* contributed to several of Shakespeare's plays, but then so did *Nashes Lenten Stuffe*, published three years later in 1599.

When Edgar in the guise of Tom o' Bedlam is made a man of justice by the maddened Lear, he utters some simple verses about dogs including in his list the 'bobtail *tike* or *trundle-tail*' (III. vi. 70). Lear responds with the judgment that they 'anatomize Regan' (III. vi. 76) and a criticism of Edgar/Tom's clothing, 'you will say they are *Persian*, but let them be *chang'd*' (III. vi. 80-81). Both Edgar and Lear are echoing diction which Shakespeare found in Nashe's mock-encomium, *Lenten Stuffe*, a work which he had absorbed while composing *Hamlet*. Nashe in the midst of his praise of the Yarmouth fishermen who pursue the herring describes just how far out to sea these skillful men are willing to go :

> they are for Ultima Theule, the north-seas, or Island, and thence jerke over that worthy Pallamede don pedro de linge, and his worshipfull nephew Hugo Habberdine, and a *trundle-taile tike* or shaugh or two; and towardes Michelmas scud home to catch *Herring* againe. This argues they shulde have some experience of navigation, and are not such *Halcyons* to bundle their neastes all on the shoare as M. Ascam supposeth. (182)

The '*Herring*' recalls Tom's rumbling stomach and its cry for 'two *white herring*' (III. vi. 31)—although later in *Lenten Stuffe* Nashe writes specifically of '*white herrings*' (222) and 'a *white* pickled *herring*' (223). The 'Halcyons' may have affected Kent's indictment of Oswald, one of those who 'turn their *halcyon* beaks/With every gale and vary of their masters' (II. ii. 78-79). The probability of Nashe's influence is increased when one notes the link of '*halcyon*' with 'dogs' (II. ii. 80) and the reference, unique in the canon, to '*Sarum plain*' (II. ii. 83), which echoes Nashe's 'my old *Sarum plaine* song' two pages after '*Halcyons*' (184). Lear's '*Persian*' and '*changed*' recall Nashe's words in the same paragraph, 'Let any *Persian* oppugne this . . . how from white to red he *changed* would require as massie a toombe as Holinshead' (195).

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There are many other instances of parallel terms the contexts of which are on the surface less strikingly apposite than those cited above, or their propinquity to other suggested terms is less noticeable, but one, nevertheless, is impressed by their adding to the frequency or repetition of already noteworthy terms. For example, Kent's threat to *'carbonado'* Oswald's shanks (II. ii. 38), in a scene with several Nashean elements, including the unique *'finical'* and the unique *Sarum plain,'* suggests that Shakespeare may have been recalling either the 'scotcht and *carbonadoed'* of *Saffron-walden* (17), or the 'scorching and *carbonadoing'* of *Lenten Stuffe* (208), or, indeed, given the principle of overdetermination, both. The spelling *'hurricanoes'* (III. ii. 2), as in F2, seems best of the alternative spellings when one compares Nashe's analogous *'Furicanoes'* in *Saffron-walden* (20). Lear's *'pelican daughters'* (III. iv 75) looks to be resonant of 'a true *Pellican* he is, that pierceth his breast & lets out all his bowels to give his life to his yong' in *Saffron-walden* (124), two pages after *'bratche* or *bitche-foxe.'* The *'Placard'* of *Saffron-walden*, eighty-three, is made appropriately plural in Nashe's calling Harvey, 'Sir Murdred of *placards'* (129), one or both having affected Edgar's 'keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of *plackets'* (III. iv. 96-97). The use of Nashe in *King Lear* may have been, as I do believe, simply part of Shakespeare's habitual reliance upon Nashe's works, but *Nashe's Lenten Stuffe* was licensed for printing by Samuel Harsnett, chaplain to Bancroft, the Bishop of London, and the author of the *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, from which Edgar has gained the names of his spirits : 'to the whiche copie master Harsnettes hand is sett for the allowance thereof with the wardens handes.' *Lenten Stuffe* also uses *'pell-mell,'* unique in the canon at IV. vi. 117, cited in *Saffron-walden* (83), in the description of the Yarmouth herring boats 'holding their owne *pell-mell* in all weathers' (18). Goneril's 'That eye that told you so look'd but a-*squint'* (V.iii. 72), with an adverb that appears only here in the canon and in no

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other form anywhere in the canon, may have been affected by Nashe's remark in *Lenten Stuffe*, 'there is a fault in the print escapt, that curstly *squinteth* and leereth[3] that way' (183). The '*pigmy's* straw, 'influenced by '*Pigmey* Dicke' of *Saffron-walden* (83), may have been affected equally, especially given the context of a tyrant turned schoolmaster (compare Regan's 'O sir, to willful men,/The injuries that they themselves procure/Must be their *schoolmasters*' (II. iv. 302-04), and the Fool's poignant request, 'prithee, nuncle, keep a *schoolmaster* that can teach thy Fool to lie' at I.ii. 179-180, by Nashe's reference to Dionisius (sic) in *Lenten Stuffe* :

> from his throne he chaced, and cleane stript out of his royalty, & glad to go play the *Schoolmaister* at Corinth, and take a rodde in his hand for his scepter, and horne-book *Pigmeis* for his subjects, *id est*, (as I intimated some dozen lines before.) of a tyrant to become a frowning pedant or *schoolmaister* (194).

On the following page, already cited as providing the '*Persian*' and '*changed*' of III. vi. 81, Nashe mockingly describes the Persians as having a '*fopperly* god (who) is not so good as a red Herring' (195), with '*fopperly*' suggestive of Edmund's 'excellent *foppery* of the world' (I. ii. 118). *Halcions*' appears again in the list of water-fowls in *Lenten Stuffe* (202), and '*bedlam*' again in the '*bedlam* hatmakers' (212).

These many parallels between words and images in *King Lear* and those in the three pamphlets of Nashe naturally lead one to look for common elements in still others of Nashe's writings. Perhaps there are some, although I have not found them in the other pamphlets nor in *The Unfortunate Traveller*. However, in Nashe's play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, licensed for printing by Harsnett in 1600 but written and performed in 1592, there is a division of a kingdom by an aged ruler and his calling to account that are proleptic of the description of Lear's division of Britain. As we know Shakespeare earlier had used *Summer's Last Will and Testament* in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, necessarily from its manuscript form, for at least two passages, the Prince's 'what a devil hast thou to do

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with the time of the day,' etc. (I. ii. 7ff.) and Falstaff's complaint at the indifference to him of Prince John of Lancaster (IV. iii. 85ff.). The first of these derives from a section of *Summer's Last Will and Testament* devoted to the transfer of power by Summer and the calling of his officers to account. The most interesting lines in terms of an anticipation of *King Lear* are Summer's statement of purpose, his querying of Ver and Solstitium, and some of their responses :

I must depart, my death-day is set downe:
To these two must I leave my wheaten crown.
So unto unthrifts rich men leave their lands.
Who in an houre consume long labours gaynes.
True is it that divinest Sidney sung,
O, he is *mard*, that is for others made.[4]
Come neere, my friends, for I am neere my end.
In presence of this Honourable trayne,
Who *love* me (for I patronize their sports),
Meane I to make my finall Testament:
But first Ile call my officers to count,
And of the wealth I gave them to dispose,
Known what is left, I may know what to give.
Vertumnus then, that turnst the yere about,
Summon them one by one to answere me;
First, Ver, the spring, unto whose custody
I Have committed more then to the rest:
The choyse of all my fragrant *meades* and flowers,
And what delights soe're nature affords . . . .
Presumptuous Ver, uncivill nurturde boy,
Think'st I will be derided thus of thee?
Is this th' account and reckoning that thou mak'st? . . .
This world is transitory; it is made of *nothing*,
and it must to *nothing:* wherefore, if wee will doe the will
of our high Creatour (whose will it is, that it pass to *nothing*),
wee must helpe to consume it to *nothing* . . .
the *Scythians* always detested it . . .
Cui nil est, nil deest: hee that hath *nothing*, wants *nothing* . . .
But say, Solstitium, hadst thou nought besides?
Nought but dayes eyes and faire looks gave I thee?
Nothing, my Lord, nor ought more did I aske.
(139-57, 222-24, 256-59, 283, 292 404-06)

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Then follows the passage used by the Prince to Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*. One notes the 'wide-skirted *meades*, (I.i. 65) given to Goneril, Lear's 'Lest you may *mar* your fortunes' (I. i. 94), his 'barbarous *Scythian*' (I. i. 116), and the repeated play on '*nothing*' in the tragedy—all this within the context of ingratitude marked by the rage of a monarch at insufficient response.

Clearly, our knowledge of Nashe as the source of certain diction in the canon about which there is textual disagreement can be most helpful in establishing the most probably correct reading. For example, '*tike*' (III. vi. 70), the Q1 reading is clearly correct, agreeing as it and its surrounding phrase do with Nashe's phrase, and 'tight,' the Folio reading, is quite likely an error. More generally, these parallels in their number and importance indicate yet again that Shakespeare knew Nashe's works almost as well as he knew his Bible, and that his use of them was almost as pervasive as his use of it. Indeed we may say of Nashe that if he has not afforded us 'whole Lears,' he has provided some very important 'handfuls of Tragicall speeches,' so thoroughly has Shakespeare borrowed words, phrases, and motifs for the texture, if not the plot of *King Lear*.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] For still more influence of *The Faerie Queene* upon *King Lear*, see 'Spenserian Parallels,' *Essays in Criticism*, (July, 1979), 266.

[2] Note the similar theme and indentical syntax of Edgar's lines which end the play, 'The oldest hath borne most; *we that* are young/Shall never see so much, nor live so long.'

[3] The association of pamphlet and play on the level of pun is striking.

[4] This line of Sidney's is from the *Arcadia* in which Shakespeare found the story of the Paphlagonian King and his two sons, the seedbed for much of the plot of *King Lear*.

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Leo Salingar

KING LEAR, MONTAIGNE AND HARSNETT*

Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?

I

King Lear can perhaps be regarded as the expression of a sense of crisis within the social thought or the general culture of the age. It evidently represented an important shift in Shakespeare's methods as a playwright, as if he felt a need to present a tragic conflict within a broader framework of ideas than before. In *Julius Caesar, Hamlet* and *Othello* the settings are comparatively realistic and the dramatic interest presses on the psychology of the leading characters and their close interaction. In *Lear*, by contrast, the leading characters are kept apart much of the time and, except at vital points, the portrayal and interplay of their personalities is, for Shakespeare, relatively sketchy; while their setting, the fictional world they inhabit, begins to take on the contours of fable or romance. In the scenes on the heath, which embody Shakespeare's most striking modification of the old legend, the close-meshed engagement of personalities which had been so notable in the central passages of *Othello* gives place to a form of drama in which the hero's personal travail is combined with quasi-choric fantasies belonging to folly and madness and with the generalised emotional impact of the storm. Similarly, *Lear* could be called more philosophical than Shakespeare's previous tragedies, in the sense that the speakers so often and so insistently raise general questions about the nature of man.

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Macbeth sustains this kind of interest while also continuing that psychological probing that had been crucial in the earlier tragedies. But in the plays written after *Macbeth* Shakespeare seems to be returning from one side or another to trains of imagination he had been exploring more particularly in *Lear. King Lear* is largely a fable about alienation: an old king drives away not one but two people he should have loved and trusted, is morally forced himself into a kind of exile where he loses his sanity, but is succoured by those he had driven away. Shakespeare duplicates this pattern in his subplot; and he returns to variations on the theme of semi-wilful exile in a sense in *Antony,* and plainly in *Coriolanus* and in *Timon—Timon* coming very close to *Lear* in the rhythm of the hero's excessive expectations of compliance from those around him, followed by a furious reaction against society in his exile. And in his late romances Shakespeare again returns to themes from *King Lear* both in giving a key position to relations between fathers and daughters and in making the motif of exclusion or exile central to each of the plots. As in *Lear*, the romances exhibit disjunctions and continuities between civilisation and nature and locate the breakdown of civilised concord in failures of love, trust or gratitude. And though it may be excessive to call each of the late romances a fable, they show the dramatist pushing further along the line foreshadowed in *Lear* of subordinating his powerful interest in personality to the general design of each play.

It can be argued that in the new directions Shakespeare took in *King Lear* a weighty factor was his reading of Florio's Montaigne[1]. He also borrowed more localised matter from Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures,* published in the same year as Florio, 1603. With a work so rich as *Lear* in reflection and allusion it would be rash to single out any literary source as decisive. And we have no biographical hints to go by. But the evidence assembled by Kenneth Muir in his edition of *Lear* and in

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Shakespeare's Sources makes it highly probable or even certain that Shakespeare was recalling one or other of these two books repeatedly. More than a hundred words from the vocabulary of the play have been attributed to Florio's Montaigne; Muir gives, with some 'caution', a list of 96 of them, of which 42 are peculiar to *Lear* in Shakespeare's writings and another 20 are used by him in *Lear* for the first time[2]. Obviously, some of these words could have reached the play from any of a multitude of other sources (including Harsnett)[3]. Collectively, however, they amount to very strong evidence for Shakespeare's interest in Montaigne, especially when some words common to both are considered in context, and above all when account is taken of the many passages containing similar ideas that Muir and others have adduced. Caution is very necessary again with regard to parallels or resemblances of thought, as Pierre Villey pointed out long ago in his study of Montaigne's influence on Bacon, since a modern reader is prone to exaggerate any coincidence of ideas between two major Renaissance authors, neglecting possible common sources and overlooking the contribution of the mass of forgotton minor literature of the time[1]. On the other hand, it wouid have been distinctly surprising if Shakespeare did not take a special interest in the most richly suggestive explorer of men and manners from the previous generation, whom Samuel Daniel was hailing, in his prefatory poem addressed to Florio, as a 'Prince' and 'great Potentate', who had 'adventur'd more 'of himselfe' than any writer before him.[5]

Discussing Montaigne's influence, or possible influence, on Shakespeare, Robert Ellrodt has maintained that it had already passed its peak by the time of *King Lear*[6]. This may well be true with regard to Ellrodt's chosen theme of analytic self-consciousness, since Lear 'hath ever but slenderly known himself'. Novertheless, his tragedy is allied to a major concern of the *Essays* through its emphasis on the meanings of 'nature', a word used more often there than in any other

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Shakespeare play. One can hold (with critics like John Danby or Rosalie Colie)[7] that what is at stake in the tragic conflict is Hooker's conception of a divinely ordained and graduated world-order, as against a Machiavellian conception of self-interest. But many of the actors' utterances about 'nature' do not refer directly to either of those concepts. They refer primarily instead to man's genetic make-up, his basic needs and resources, or the interconnection between body and mind; in short to the subjects Montaigne had made his own. Again and again the characters turn to thoughts—about sexuality, sickness and health, old age, preparedness for death, or men's beliefs about and their ignorance, of the human condition—which recall the frequent topics of the *Essays*, raising similar questions if not reaching the same answers. Most of the reasoning in the play seems to be coloured by Montaigne.

One essay peculiarly relevant in this connection is II, viii: 'Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children'. Notwithstanding the sudden twists and turns of exposition customary with Montaigne, this chapter is exceptionally single-minded, and it is packed with observations on contemporary life and with striking sketches of men the essayist knew, sketches offering, it has been said, 'a premonition of the world of Balzac'[8]; as it happens, this chapter was also one of the few from which Bacon was to borrow substantially for an essay of his own, that 'Of Parents and Children' in his edition of 1612[9]. Montaigne's central discussion, dealing with the use and abuse of paternal authority, starts from a far-reaching proposition about nature:

> If there be any truly-naturall law, that is to say, any instinct, universally and perpetually imprinted, both in beasts and us, (which is not without controversie) I may, according to mine opinion, say, that next to the care, which each living creature hath to his preservation, and to flie what doth hurt him, the affection which the engenderer beareth his offspring holds the second place in this ranke (Florio, 2,67)[10].

Attachment to our own creations belongs to the very 'frame' of nature, which directs us towards the future, whereas any

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reciprocal feeling from children, such as gratitude, cannot be so deeply entrenched (67); it is even a fallacy to suppose that filial recognition is based on 'a naturell instinct' at all (85). At the end of his chapter Montaigne draws from his leading principle a startling inference, which Bacon in turn paraphrases by remarking that 'the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men, which have sought to express the images of their minds where those of their bodies have failed'. But meanwhile Montaigne dwells on how fathers can thwart or misconstrue 'the Law of Nature' (80), ruining their own and their children's lives by self-centredness. Most parents look for pets in their children, not rational beings; they may 'liberally' indulge them as infants, but 'miserably pinch it, for their 'necessaries' when adults. A main cause of this is a father's 'jelousie' of his grown children, as if 'supposing they solicite us to be gone hence'; but if we fear this effect of 'the order of things' then 'we should not meddle to be fathers' (68). Montaigne later adds the reservation that he is thinking of noblemen, not husbandmen, for whom children are a benefit (71): It is 'meere injustice' for 'an old, crazed, sinnow-shronken, and nigh dead father', one over-burthend with years' to cling to his surplus goods—the 'pompe and trash whereof hee hath no longer use or need'—instead of distributing them in time 'amongst those, to whom by naturall decree they ought to belong'; 'otherwise without doubt there is both envy and malice stirring'. With a father like this, who will 'suffer' his children 'to lose their best dayes and yeares, without thrusting them into publike service and knowledge of men', the children are 'often cast into dispaire'; and much of the blame for the crime, 'pilfering' and 'debauches' Montaigne has witnessed among gentlemen's sons attaches to their fathers' avarice (69-70, 72-3). In any case profit is a 'very slipperie' motive for love (67), and a father is 'miserable' who retains his children's affection, 'if that may be termed affection', only by that means, or hoards his wealth in order to be 'honoured, respected and suingly

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sought unto' by his children (70)

Even more sharply, Montaigne condemns the use of 'violence' against children to exact 'servility in compulsion' (70). He hates the 'custome' of extorting excessive 'reverence' in forms of address—'As if nature had not sufficiently provided for our authoritie. We call God-almighty by the name of father, and disdaine our children should call us so' (75). All such inflations of authority are 'tyrannicall' and 'ridiculous'. In contrast, Montaigne upholds the example of the Emperor Charles V, whose 'worthiest action' was to resign wealth and power to his heir when he realised that he was past his prime (73).

Among the character-sketches to support his argument, Montaigne includes the biting portrait of the nobleman 'whose youth had beene very imperious and rough' and who bullies his household incessantly in his fretful and 'tempestuous' old age. 'He is had in awe, he is feared,...he is respected his belly-full'. Yet all the time that he 'flattereth himself' on his strict management, 'his masterie' and 'his absoluteness', he is 'cleane falne from them like a childe'. His servants deceive him, 'soothingly' but systematically. Behind his back, his wealth is 'lavishly wasted...in riotous spending'. If one of his servants is feeble-mindedly diligent, 'he is presently made to suspect him'; if he dismisses a servant, the latter disappears—'but whither? onely out of his sight' not out of his house'. The master is too slow and confused to detect the fraud and in the due course he is persuaded by letters procured for the purpose to take the dismissed man back into his 'office'. By 'forging causes, and devising colourable excuses' the servants really manage the estate; even letters for the master are either concealed from him or else read to him by one of his men (who 'will presently devise that he thinketh good, whereby they often invent, that such a one seemeth to ask him forgivenesse, that wrongeth him by his Letter'). In short, the nobleman only 'lookes into his owne business' in the form of a 'designed and as much as may be pleasing image, so con-

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trived by such as are about him, because they will not stirre up his choler, move his impatience, and exasperate his frowardnesse' (76-7). Montaigne adds that he has known 'many' comparable households. As a pendant to this picture of senile tyranny (which is said to represent the Marquis de Trans) he reports the passionate grief of Marshal Monluc, whose son had died in early manhood without ever glimpsing how much his father loved him, because of the father's 'austere humour' and 'severe surly-countenance' (79).

Montaigne discusses the making of wills. There are old men who 'play' with their wills 'as with apples and rods'; they disregard long-standing 'merit' because of 'a word ill taken', so that 'not the best and most frequent offices' from their children but 'the freshest and present worke the deed'. Or they found a preference on 'divinations' about a young child's development, which are often wrong-as they would have been in Montaigne's case (82). It is far better to rely on law and custom than on such 'private humours and frivolous fantasies'. As to their widows, men leave them with too much power or else too little security.

'Moreover,' where motherhood is concerned, 'experience doth manifestly shew unto us, that the same naturall affection, to which we ascribe so much authoritie, hath but a weake foundation'. Wealthy families give their infants to peasant wet-nurses to suckle – a 'custome' giving rise to a kind of 'bastard-affection' in the nurses, 'more vehement than the naturall'—while the peasant women are obliged to send their own babies away, often, in Montaigne's part of the country, to be suckled by goats, whose willingness in turn shows that '*Beasts as well as we doe soone alter, and easily bastardize their natural affection*' (84-5). Edmund's reflection in *Lear* on mankind's 'goatish disposition' sounds like a spin-off from Montaigne's anthropology.

Men, it seems, mistake the force of instinct. Since God has given us 'capacitie of discourse', 'we should not servily be subjected to common lawes' like beasts, but should utilise

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our 'reason'; 'we ought somewhat to yeeld unto the simple auctoritie of Nature: but not suffer her tyrannically to carry us away' (67-8). The ideal—much as in Terence (70)—is a 'well ordred affection' with 'loving friendship' between fathers and children. But just as a father should curb his 'naturall power' over his children, so he should regulate his 'naturall inclination' towards them, showing love, 'if they deserve it', to the measure of 'reason' and in the light of his 'experience' of their characters (68,74). For his own part, Montaigne would be willing in advanced age to share the management of his estate with his children and finally to give them possession of his manor-house, living nearby so as to enjoy their company; but not to live with them ('by reason of the peevish frowardnesse of my age'), and not to place his gift beyond his power to 'revoke' it: 'I would reserve what I pleased unto my selfe'. As they grew up, he would try to 'breede' in his children 'a true-harty-loving friendship, and unfained good will'. However,

> if they prove, or be such surly-furious beasts, or given to churlish disobedience, as our age bringeth forth thousands, they must as beasts be hated, as churls neglected, and as degenerate avoided (74-5).

To go to law with one's family is to be trapped in 'civill bonds'. Montaigne would deliver himself from anxieties on that score (inward 'treasons'), 'not by an unquiet, and tumultuary curiosity', but by way of a mental detour or 'diversion' characteristic of him. He would compare others with himself; he would look within. 'If others deceive me, yet do I not deceive myself' (78-9).

On the whole this chapter brings forward the humanist idealism in Montaigne. Shakespeare in *King Lear* is much less confident about rationality. But in the chapter he could have found a study of the relations between age and youth, parents and children, immeasurably more searching, realistic and challenging than anything in the versions of the Lear legend or even in Sidney's tale about the Paphlagonian king. And the coincidence of verbal echoes and variations on identical

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moral themes is so strong between the essay and the first two acts of *King Lear* as to imply that Shakespeare was not merely recalling the essay here and there while he was penning the play but that he had been considering it in detail about the same time as he was planning the scenes of exposition and had altered his narrative source-material accordingly. For example, as W. B. D. Henderson has pointed out, the essay contains 'the abstract of Lear's abdication, and the philosophy of Edmund's forged letter.'[11]

Among the words from *Lear* which are new or rare in Shakespeare a number occur in this chapter of Florio's Montaigne, which are close to key subjects within the play: *curiosity, interessed, bastardizing, pined away, bellyful, copulation*. Montaigne uses his title-word, which provoked considerable interest, to point out the distinctive content or method of his chapters ('Here is simply an Essay of my naturall faculties...'; 'my Judgement..., whereof these be the Essaies'[12]; and Edmund employs the word in a similar way, for its one instance in Shakespeare's plays, when he tells his father, concerning the letter he has forged, that he hopes Edgar has intended it 'but as an essay or taste of my virtue' (I.ii.44). He adds the synonym *taste*, to make his meaning seem clear; but he is speaking, like Montaigne, about a literary composition[13]. What he wants his father to understand—though not believe—is that the document may be no more than a literary exercise to try out or disclose his (Edmund's) moral quality; while for himself there is the hidden joke that it is an experiment, a 'prentice work,' to try out his powers in intrigue. Not only has he borrowed the letter's 'philosophy' from Montaigne's chapter on fathers, but the circumstance of the forgery, the allegation of *'the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffer'd'*, and the subsequent charade of hide-and-seek all recall the conditions in the household of the Marquis de Trans.

In Holinshed and the other chronicle versions of the Lear story Shakespeare is likely to have known the king proposes

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the love-test without any intention of abdicating. In the old play, King Leir resolves to 'resigne these earthly cares' as soon as he has married off his daughters, but there is no abdication scene[14]. Shakespeare gives weight to the abdication and presents it in terms closely resembling what Montaigne has to say about the abdication of Charles V. This applies particularly to the metaphor-translated-into-action of the old king's desire to 'unburthen' himself, to be followed by his response to Tom's nakedness, his need for sleep, and then his dying words, 'Pray you, undo this button'. Montaigne, leading up to the exemplary case of Charles V, quotes a saying common with fathers, 'I will not put off my clothes before I be ready to goe to bed' ; and he praises the Emperor precisely because

> he had the discretion to know, that reason commanded us, to strip or shift ourselves when our cloathes trouble and are too heavy for us, and that it is time to goe to bed, when our legs faile us.

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Conversely, 'this fault, for a man not to be able to know himselfe betimes, and not to feele the impuissance and extreme alteration, that age doth naturally bring', has undone most great men's reputations (72-3). In the decision of Shakespeare's king to resign his rule there are rational and irrational factors combined, and without the former the latter would lose their tragic force[15]. Montaigne's comments surrounding the precedent of Charles V bear on both sides of the question as Shakespeare presents it.

In *The Mirror for Magistrates*, as in Geoffrey of Monmouth and, by inference, in Holinshed, it is the daughters or the sons-in-law who give Lear a personal retinue, in a compromise settlement after they have rebelled and dethroned him from half of the kingdom he had originally kept for himself[16]. In Shakespeare it is the king who decides upon the 'reservation of hundred knights', to be 'sustain'd' at Goneril's and Regan's expense (I.i. 131-4). We cannot be sure whether this reflects a premeditated plan or, as seems more likely, an impulse to salve his dignity in his raw disappointment over

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Cordelia. In any case, it bears an inverted resemblance to Montaigne's theoretical project to share his goods with his children in old age, leaving 'the use and fruition of all unto them, the rather because it were no longer fit for me to weald the same', but yielding nothing beyond his power to 'revoke', and intending to 'reserve what I pleased' in 'the disposing of all 'matters in grosse' (74). In the play, Montaigne's words re-echo through the debate that has already opened between Kent and the king: 'Reserve thy state;...Revoke thy gift' —,'This shall not be revok'd' (I.i. 148, 163, 178). Lear's retention of the knights (who are absent from the old play) amplifies the image of his self-will. And with more economy than the chroniclers, Shakespeare goes on to make it a crucial instrument in his plot, since the retinue becomes the *casus belli* between the king and his daughters. 'I gave you all', he reminds Regan,

> Made you my guardians, my depositaries,
> But kept a reservation to be follow'd
> With such a number (II.iv.248)[17].

In the scene on the heath where the king imagines Poor Tom has been 'brought...to this pass of nakedness 'by his daughters', the Fool reverts sarcastically to the same thought: 'Nay, he reserv'd a blanket, else we had all been sham'd' (III.iv.64). By this point the motifs borrowed from Montaigne have spread from a rearrangement of the incidents in the opening scenes to affect the whole texture of ideas in the play.

II

Shakespeare may well have noted Montaigne's asides in this chapter about the 'unrulie appetite' of women and their lust to 'usurpe' authority in a household, 'either by wily craft or maine force' (78,84); Goneril and Regan are more violent, as well as more calculating, than their counterparts in the chronicles or the old play. Like Montaigne, he makes explicit the relation between the old man's failure to under-

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stand his children and his failure to understand himself. In all probability, he took suggestions from the same chapter in depicting the tensions between motives of status and feeling, love and selfishness at work in Lear's break with Cordelia. He certainly drew upon Montaigne's comments on the oppositions between sons and fathers to develop Gloucester's story. Montaigne's essay may even have prompted the first suggestion of coupling Gloucester's story with Lear's. But it is noticeable that resemblances with this chapter fade out of the play by the end of the second act. It is as if Shakespeare concentrated upon this particular chapter with a particular purpose, the setting out of the exposition in his play.

On the other hand, there are echoes from other essays by Montaigne running through the play, to the end of the fourth act at least, notably from 'An Apologie of *Raymond Sebond*' (II, xii) and 'Upon Some Verses of *Virgil*' (III, v). W.B.D. Henderson has gone so far as to claim that Shakespeare took, mainly from the 'Apologie', his leading thought of Lear as 'a Renaissance God-King' who must be humiliated until he can find 'redemption', 'purged by such pains and benefits as Christianity, and the Christian humanists, had prescribed for the salvation of such a soul'. This is not only excessive but falsifies, puts a tendentious reading on, Shakespeare and Montaigne alike[18]. Nevertheless, Henderson is justified in emphasising the importance for *King Lear* of Montaigne's attack on man's intellectual pride: 'He must be stripped into his shirt' (II, xii; Florio, 2.188).

Lear's intense exasperation and the shock or bewilderment of his sympathisers soon reach beyond localised, personal questions to search for the human sources of evil and to set in doubt the whole scope of the natural order in human affairs. Shakespeare, as L.C. Knights has written, has 'submitted himself' to something like 'the famous Cartesian intellectual doubt'[19]:

> Some of the most fundamental questions concerning the nature of man are posed in a way that precludes all ready-made answers, that,

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in fact, so emphasizes the difficulty of the questions as to make any sort of answer seem all but impossible.

For the intellectual factors in the passionate upheaval at the centre of the play, the formulation of thoughts that provoke or grasp at general principles in the midst of emotional conflict, and even for the prevailing sense Knights alludes to of meeting questions that are fundamental but can hardly be answered, Shakespeare seems strongly indebted to that important precursor of Cartesian doubt, Montaigne. In the essay 'Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children', the significance of naturall affection' is repeatedly put in doubt; at the outset, it is even—though in passing—made a question 'not without controversie' whether there is any 'truly-naturall law', any instinct perpetual, universal and common to animals and men, at all (67). Elsewhere the essayist dwells again and again on two general principles bearing on the same doubts: first, that, whatever philosophers may have said, man is ignorant about his composition, his own nature; and, second, that Nature has been obscured or corrupted by civilisation. Both of these principles are active in *King Lear*.

Between these two propositions, considered in the abstract, there is the obvious contradiction that if nobody knows what 'nature' is it cannot be said that we pervert it[20]. But Montaigne is thinking now of one aspect and now of another of the wide range of meanings covered by 'nature' in Renaissance usage. His criticisms follow a consistent mental temper even though, by intention, they are not brought together in any consecutive, systematic treatise, even in the 'Apologie'.

Coming to terms with old age is one of his urgent preoccupations. When Regan taunts her father (II.iv.143),

> O, Sir! you are old;
> Nature in you stands on the very verge
> Of her confine,

and when Goneril follows her (II.iv.194) with

> All's not offence that indiscretion finds
> And dotage terms so,

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in effect they are enforcing Montaigne's thoughts on the subject. Death from old age is not the only 'naturall' form of death, as people say (that is, it is not 'generall, common, and universall'); on the contrary, it is exceptional, a 'rare privilege' from nature: 'Indeed it is the limit, beyond which we shall not passe, and which the law of nature hath prescribed unto us, as that which should not be outgone by any' (I, lvii, 'Of Age'; Florio, 1369). Cato the Younger had thought the age of forty-eight 'very ripe', 'considering how few men come unto it'; and, with a phrase Shakespeare may have remembered for Edgar, Montaigne later adds: 'It is the body, which sometimes yeeldeth unto age: and other times the mind' (1371). In 'Upon Some Verses of *Virgil*' he writes:

> both wisedome and folly shall have much ado, by enterchange of offices to support and succour me in this calamity of age . . . .Well may my judgement hinder me from spurning and repining at the inconveniences which nature allots me to indure; from feeling them it cannot;

and he comes back again to 'the doting and crazed condition of our age' (3.65,124).

But age is no more than the last phase of that constant struggle or mutual interference between body and mind that Montaigne dwells upon at great length in the 'Apologie', using it as his main argument for scepticism. The senses deceive the mind and the mind the senses. 'Let a Philosopher', he says, be fastened securely in a wire cage to the 'steeple' of Notre Dame and, in spite of his 'reason', 'that exceeding height must needs dazle his sight, and amaze or turne his senses'. Montaigne himself has experienced from the heights of the Alps how 'if but a tree, a shrub, or any out-butting crag of a Rock presented it selfe unto our eyes, it doth somewhat ease and assure us from feare'—and yet 'we cannot without some dread and giddinesse in the head, so much as abide to looke upon one of those even and downe-right precipices...: Which is an evident deception of the sight' (2.314-5). (Yet it was in vain that 'a worthy Philosopher pulled out his eyes', since sound no less than sight can fool the mind [2.315]. On

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the other side, 'what we see and hear, being passionately transported with anger, we neither see nor heare it as it is... Our senses are not onely altered, but many times dulled, by the passions of the mind' (2.316-7); while conversely 'the accidents of sickenesse make things appeare other unto us, then they seeme unto the healthie...' (2.321). Shakespeare must surely have been using these passages when he makes Lear check his anger against Cornwall with the reflection that 'we are not ourselves/When Nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind/To suffer with the body' (II.iv.104), or declare, in the midst of the storm, that 'when the mind's free/The body's delicate' (III.iv.II); and, above all, in the startling scene dramatising sense-deception at Dover Cliff[21].

Philosophers have made an 'imaginarie' commonwealth out of the 'little world' of man (2.246); their endless speculations about the soul show that the mind's attempts to know itself result merely in words (2.251-68). No more can philosophers 'know their owne being,' the reasons why the body instinctively moves or changes (2.247): '*in the corporall part, man is no more instructed of himselfe, then in the spirituall*' (2.270). How much, for example, can Aristotle or Galen teach us 'of what matter men are derived and produced one from another'? (2.269). Montaigne returns to the subject of our ignorance about human generation, in a mood this time of wonder rather than scepticism, in his essay 'Of the Resemblance between Children and Fathers'' (II, xxxvii)[22]:

> Wee neede not goe to cull out miracles, and chuse strange difficulties: me seemeth, that amongst those things we ordinarily see, there are such incomprehensible rarities, as they exceed all difficulty of miracles. What monster is it, that this teare or drop of seed, whereof we are ingendred brings with it; and in it the impressions, not only of the corporall forme but even of the very thoughts and inclinations of our fatheres? Where doth this droppe of water containe or lodge this infinite number of formes? (2.496-7)

This touches a question that throbs deep in *King Lear*.

The question is prepared for at the outset when Gloucester introduces Edmund—'there was good sport at his making,

and the whoreson must be acknowleged' (I.i.22). For Lear it is crucial; meeting it shapes his whole experience in the play. So closely has he bound up the moral expectations with the physical fact of paternity that disillusionment threatens to tear his mind apart. His first mention of 'nature' matches paternal instinct with moral virtue in his children:

> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge (I.i.50).

In his rage with Cordelia, he wishes at once to annul the biological as well as the personal ties between them:

> By all the operation of the orbs
> From whom we do exist and cease to be,
> Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
> Propinquity and property of blood,
> And as a stranger to my heart and me
> Hold thee from this for ever (I.i.110).

Birth is one of the 'mysteries' governed by the stars; nevertheless, Lear is convinced that the fact of birth entails moral imperatives. He tells France that Cordelia is 'a wretch whom Nature is asham'd/Almost t' acknowledge hers' (I.i.211); by which he means, superficially, that it is abnormal and shocking for a daughter publicly to rebuff her father and more powerfully, that such intransigence is contrary to the whole cosmic order. That, it seems, would be his rationalisation of the speech. But at a deeper level he seems convinced—in contradiction to Montaigne's view in the essay 'Of the Affection of Fathers'—that filial gratitude must be an instinct implanted by birth. So, in his first confrontation with Goneril, he calls 'ingratitude' in a child a 'marble-hearted fiend' (I.iv. 257), and declares that Cordelia's 'fault', now 'small' by comparison, had 'like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature/From the fix'd place' (I. iv. 266). No doubt his *frame of nature* is his personality as a coherent whole; but at the heart of this, the suggestive phrase seems to imply, is that paternal love which Montaigne had described – in contradis-

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tinction from children's love for their fathers—as an instinct, derived from 'nature', 'ayming to...advance the successive parts or parcels of this her frame (2.67). Certainly, in his next speech, his terrible curse, Lear calls upon 'Nature' as a 'Goddess' to

> Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful!

The first and most fitting punishment he imagines for Goneril, as a 'thankless child', is to be a punishment in 'her womb'. It is probably indicative of Shakespeare's train of thought here that some of the most striking words in Lear's speeches, all of them new or unique in the plays, appear to have been taken from a reading of Florio : *marble-hearted, sterility, derogate, disnatur'd*[23].

In his meeting with Regan Lear perhaps distinguishes between

> The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
> Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude (II.iv.176).

But the four terms in apposition clearly overlap; and, while *nature* is separated from, for example, *courtesy*, the distinction only serves to emphasise that the *offices* of nature are moral obligations, physically inherited. So too, as Lear meets Goneril again, he thinks of her as

> my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
> Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
> Which I must needs call mine (II.iv.219).

And in his next scene, his first in the storm, the identification in Lear's mind between sexual begetting and moral prerogatives has gained the strength of an obsession :

> Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
> That make ingrateful man! (III.ii.8)

The way he identifies his children's obligations with his own physical self comes out again in

> filial ingratitude!
> Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
> For lifting food to't? (III.iv.14)

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Within this rhetorical question is a shock of violent feeling more primitive than moral indignation. Only when he turns mad is Lear able to think of the identification between moral life and physical life no longer as an unshakeable axiom but as an agonising question:

> Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts? (III.vi.74)

Gloucester had said that 'the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet Nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects' (I.ii.101). That comment on reason's limits had been comparatively trite. Lear's question goes much deeper. His tragedy, as he feels it during the storm scenes, is not only that his daughters have betrayed him, or that he fears he may have betrayed himself, but that nature, the very stuff of humanity, has betrayed him as well. It is that that goads him beyond rage to madness. But to put his question, unanswerable though it is, is a step for Lear towards release.

There is an echo of these thoughts in Kent's speech in a later scene :

> It is the stars,
> The stars above us, govern our conditions;
> Else one self mate and make could not beget
> Such different issues (IV.iii.32).

This scene was omitted from the Folio text of the play: possibly in part because Shakespeare came to think such choric repetition was not needed.

III

Nature for King Lear means the social order as well as the source of physical life. The course of the play will shatter the assumptions about society that he shares with his loyal subjects—and, in effect, with many, if not most, of the play's first spectators. Nothing in the narrative sources points directly to any such social implication of the legend. In those moments when Lear is driven to question or reject the whole

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constitution of civilised society, Shakespeare is again drawing largely from his reading in Montaigne.

The first explicit challenge comes to Edmund's first soliloquy :

> Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
> My services are bound, Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base? (I.ii.I)

These lines give a mocking twist to his submissive acknowledgement towards Kent in the previous scene—'My services to your Lordship' (I. i. 28). Edmund is plainly an outsider with a grievance, and a scoundrel. Since he could not expect to inherit Gloucester's estate in any case because he was the younger son, there is an impudent sophistry in his harping on his bastard origin. As Bradley remarks. 'it is hard to say' how far Edmund 'is serious in this attitude, and really indignant at the brand of bastardy'. But this is partly because of what Bradley calls 'a certain genuine gaiety' and even a 'cheery' tone in the soliloquy, which distinguishes Edmund from the coldly systematic machiavellism of Iago[24], or the sardonic tone of the malcontent Don John, the bastard in *Much Ado.* In tone, he much more resembles the buoyant Faulconbridge in *King John.* On the other hand, the latter has and needs no doctrine, and is even prepared to forego his advantage in law as an elder brother, relying on the natural advantages his bastard origin has given him as the son of Richard Coeur-de-lion. It is as if Edmund, lacking any trump card of this potency, has turned to a theory to strengthen him instead. Yet, at the same time, his words threaten to undercut the position taken for granted by Lear, who will also (in all consistency) appeal to Nature as his 'Goddess'. If Nature is indeed a more-than-human arbiter of right and wrong, then Edmund's inferences from that premise may seem as logical as Lear's.

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Edmund probably owes his word, *curiosity*—which he appears to use here in the sense of capricious refinement, with an overtone of officious meddling—to Florio[25], and the attitude behind it to Montaigne, who insistently contrasts Nature and Custom. Custom is immensely variable, self-contradictory, arbitrary and compulsive. In his chapter 'Of Custome' (which leads, however, to a warning againstinnovation), Montaigne begins with the proposition that *'Custome is a violent and deceiving schoole-mistris'* (Florio, I.105). In his final chapter, 'Of Experience', he writes.

> *It is in the hands of custome to give our life what forme it pleeseth:* in that it can do all in all. It is the drinke of *Circes*, diversifieth our nature as she thinkes good (3.340);

and in his chapter 'Upon Some Verses of *Virgil*' he says of his own writings:

> The wisedome and reach of my lesson, is all in truth, in liberty, in essence; disdaining in the catalogue of my true duties, these easie, faint, ordinary and provinciall rules; all naturall, contstant and gnerall, whereof civilitie and ceremonie are daughters, but bastards...For there is danger, that we devise new offices, to excuse our negligence toward naturall offices, and to confound them...[And] we see...that among nations, where lawes of seemelinesse are more rare and slack, the primitive lawes of common reason are better observed, the innumerable multitude of so manifold duties stifling, languishing and dispersing our care (3.117-8)[26].

Montaigne's first admirers took this 'lesson' particularly to heart (however differently from Edmund). In her Preface to her edition of the *Essais* in 1595, Montaigne's *fille d'alliance*, Marie de Cournay, summed up his teaching as first of all 'la connaissance de nous mems, celle du bien et du mal et surtout en face du tyrannique aveuglement de la coutume'[27]; and in his dedicatory verses to Florio, Daniel saluted his author for having.

> made such bold sallies out upon
> *Custome*, the mightie tyrant of the earth,
> In whose *Seraglio* of subjection
> We all seeme bred-up from our tender birth.

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As Edmund's speech on 'the plague of custom' unfolds, he takes in these suggestions of an alien, tyrannical and yet effeminate (or 'languishing') power together with the paradox that the true 'bastards' are the codes of 'civilitie'. Ignoring the reservations and ambiguities in Montaigne's standpoint, his is already the language of D'Amville in *The Atheist's Tragedy* and the *libertins* of the next generation[28].

In Edmund's mind, his own natural superiority comes directly from his bastardy—from what his father has already called the 'good sport at his making':

> Why brand they us
> With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
> Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
> More composition and fierce quality
> Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
> Go to th'creating a whole tribe of fops,
> Got 'tween asleep and wake? (I.ii.9)

Here again, in the contrast between himself and 'honest madam's issue', Edmund is following Montaigne's essay 'Upon Some Verses of *Virgil*' (which fascinated Marston and Webster also)[29]. Montaigne there qualifies his intense admiration for Virgil's lines describing the coupling of Venus and Vulcan with the thought

> that he depainteth her somewhat stirring for a maritall *Venus.* In this discreete match, appetites are not commonly so fondling; but drowsie and more sluggish (3.72).

Later, however, he notes that in Virgil, Venus 'becomes a suiter' to Vulcan 'in the behalfe of a bastard of hers', Aeneas (3.90). Through this extraordinary essay, which weaves in and out between admiration for the language of Virgil and Lucretius and many-sided comments on love, marriage and sexual mores, runs a series of contrasts between 'amorous licentiousnes' and 'languishing congression' (72-3), between 'a dull spirit' and '*a vigilant, lively and blithe agitation*' (121). When Edmund concludes his soliloquy with, 'Now, gods, stand up for bastards!' he must surely be thinking still of

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Montaigne and the Venus genetrix of Lucretius and Virgil.

Another passage probably contributing to Edmund's speech is that in the chapter 'Of the Caniballes' where Montaigne considers the Brazilian Indians:

> I finde...there is nothing in that nation, that is either barbarous or savage, unlesse men call that barbarisme which is not common to them. As indeed, we have no other ayme of truth and reason, than the example and *Idea* of the opinions and customes of the countrie we live in...They are even savage, as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe...hath produced: whereas indeed they are those which our selves have altered by our artificiall devices, and diverted from their common order, we should rather terme savage. In those are the true and most profitable vertues, and naturall properties most lively and vigorous, which in these we have bastardized, applying them to the pleasure of our corrupted taste. And...there is no reason, art should gaine the point of honour of our great and puissant mother Nature (1.219).

Shakespeare certainly drew upon this and the next page for *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*[9]; almost certainly he was thinking of it when writing *Lear* also—as the irony of Edmund's later words to Gloucester, 'Most savage and unnatural!' (III.iii.7), seems to confirm. In that case, Shakespeare was probably struck also by the passage at the end of the chapter describing Montaigne's talk with the Indians brought to Rouen, who had been asked what they thought of 'our pompe' and 'fashions' in France (1.228-9). Explaining that 'they have a manner of phrase whereby they call men but a moytie [a portion] one of another', Montaigne reports that

> *They had perceived, there were men amongst us full gorged with all sortes of commodities, and others which hunger-starved, and bare with need and povertie, begged at their gates: and found it strange, these moyties so needy could endure such an injustice. . . .*

This may well have suggested, as a corollary to Edmund's rise in the world, Edgar's choice of a means of escape by adopting 'the basest and most poorest shape/That ever penury, in contempt of man,/Brought near to beast' (II.iii.7). In the mere mechanics of the plot there is nothing to require

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Edgar to disguise himself as a naked beggar, any more than Kent.

In any case, Edgar's role as a beggar belongs to that vein of thought in the play close to the strong vein of naturalism or primitivism in Montaigne, in which he draws upon various sources in classical philosophy, sceptical, stoical or epicurean, but regularly with an emphasis upon civilised 'excesse'. The word *gorged* in his report from the Indians strikes a characteristic note. In a lengthy passage in the 'Apologie', for example (2.146 *ff)*, he rounds upon 'the daily plaints' against man's natural condition, 'which I often heare men make'

> exclaiming that man is the onely forsaken and outcast creature, naked on the bare earth, having nothing to cover and arme himselfe withall but the spoile of others; whereas Nature hath clad and mantled all other creatures, some with shels,...with haire, with wooll, and with silke...And hath moreover instructed them in every thing fit and requisite for them...where as man only (Oh silly wretched man) can neither goe, nor speake, nor shift, nor feed himselfe, unlesse it be to whine and weepe onely, except he be taught. . . .

To which Montaigne replies forcibly, 'Such complaints are false'. Man's skin can resist the weather as well as any other animal's—'Witnesse divers Nations, which yet never knew the use of clothes'; and even among Europeans, the stomach, the part of the body which ought most to be protected against cold, has often been left uncovered:

> Our forefathers used to have it bare, and our Ladies (as dainty-nice as they be) are many times seene to goe open-breasted, as low as their navill.

Reverting to 'the nations, that have lately bin discovered', Montaigne repeats that their life shows that nature can provide 'whatsoever should be needfull' to man, 'without toyling' and without 'art' (148-9). But later, he appears to extend the charge of 'excesse' beyond Europeans to mankind in general, by comparison with beasts (2.165):

> Lustfull desires are either naturall, and necessary, as eating and drinking; or else naturall and not necessary, as the acquaintance of males and females: or else neither necessary nor naturall: Of this last kinde

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are almost all mens: For, they are all superfluous and artificiall. It is wonderfull to see with how little nature will be satisfied, and how little she hath left for us to be desired. The preparations in our kitchins, doe nothing at all concerne her lawes. . . .

He adds that 'Brute beasts are much more regulare than we; and with more moderation containe themselves within the compasse, which nature hath prescribed them: yet'—with a characte istic swerve in his exposition—'not so exactly, but that they have some coherency with our riotous licentious-nesse'. Comparisons with animals figure as prominently in this section of the 'Apology' as in *King Lear*, though from differing points of view. Montaigne strains his ingenuity (or Pliny's, or Plutarch's) to demonstrate the rationality of animals, whereas the creatures in *Lear* are more akin to those in medieval bestiaries or express the unleashing of a predatory libido. In both, however, the comparisons are used to diminish human pride, whether intellectual or moral.

The king takes up the themes of Montaigne's 'Apology' at the climax of his confrontation with Regan and Goneril. Hitherto, apart from brief exchanges, virtually asides, when in the company of the Fool, Lear's speeches have consisted almost entirely of affirmations of his authority—assertions, demands, imperatives, sarcasms, curses. Now, for the first time, in the course of the dispute over his retinue, as he is driven into a corner, the old man contains his will and passion for a few lines and steps far enough aside from the immediate dispute to resort to reasoning from principles.

O! reason not the need; our basest beggars
Are in the poorest things superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,—
You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!—(II.iv.262)

Already by this point Lear becomes choked with emotion, and his repetition of 'patience' shows the opposite at work

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in him. What 'true need,' is, he cannot or will not say. But meanwhile he has, in effect, turned, to Montaigne to supply him with themes, terms and a telling illustration, in his effort to shift the quarrel to the ground of first principles. As against the stoicism in the 'Apology', Lear maintains that man *needs* some excess or superfluity; in other words, man needs more that he needs. He cannot articulate this seeming paradox further and breaks away from the argument. But he has begun to look from the outside at his own position, his assumptions about 'nature', for the first time in the play.

In the storm scene, just before he meets Poor Tom, Lear's prayer on behalf of 'Poor naked wretches' shows that he has travelled further along this line;

> O! I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just (III.iv.32).

And Gloucester later—though less rhetorically or imperatively[31]—repeats the substance of the king's prayer as, after he has been blinded, he gives Poor Tom his purse in order to guide him to Dover;

> that I am wretched
> Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still !
> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough (IV.i.64).

No doubt both of these speeches stem from a broad homiletic tradition; but they have a particular thread of connection with the *Essays* in their emphasis upon inequality and superfluity, and especially in Gloucester's striking epithet, *lust-dieted*, which concentrates Montaigne's argument about man's lustfull desires' (as shown by 'the preparations in our Kitchins')[32] with a sharp recall of the speaker's personal history.

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These speeches branch out from the main action in the play, or mark a change of direction. We can imagine that Gloucester and, even more, Lear, has not felt deeply before about social inequality; and we can see that Lear's prayer revises what he had said about beggars in his speech to Goneril and Regan. But nothing has suggested that the faults in the two old men at the beginning have sprung directly from callousness towards the poor—just as nothing suggests subsequently that Lear will take charity as a guiding motive in what remains of his life. Nevertheless, his rejection of Cordelia (and of Kent) has come from his quality as a king, as well as a father, while Gloucester's credulity over his sons has shown a similar blindness in a men with authority. Before Lear meets Cordelia again he will have dismantled his whole conception of kingship, and his prayer in the storm is a step in that direction. It gives a new dimension to the play. For Lear himself, that new dimension is confined to ideas and those ideas are to be intensified but also distorted by the onset of his madness. But in the middle scenes, what goes on in Lear's mind is crucial to the play.

What breaks his sanity down is meeting a 'poor naked wretch' face to face in the person of Poor Tom. For a moment, he tries to identify himself with beggary, to act out the abject state he had only begun to imagine before. Here at what is virtually the mid-point and the turning-point in the tragedy, the nadir of his royalty, the king again borrows themes and language from Montaigne[23]; but with a variation that suggests that deliberateness and the subtlety of Shakespeare's use of the *Essays*. One of the main passages Shakespeare recalls here is that in the chapter 'Of Phisiognomy' (III, xii; Florio, 3.304-6), where Montaigne criticises the teaching of philosophers on preparation for death (developing his reflections in the earlier chapter [I, xix,] 'That to Philosophize, is to Learne how to Dye'). Montaigne has been describing an epidemic of plague in his district, the digging of 'graves' and the exemplary 'resolution' of the country

people; and then he turns towards men of 'learning 'for a disadvantageous comparison :

> Wee have forsaken nature, and yet wee will teach her her lesson... learning is compelled to goe daily a borrowing, thereby to make her disciples a patterne of constancy, of innocency and of tranquilitie. It is a goodly matter to see how these men full of so great knowledge, imitate this foolish simplicitie...[and] that our wisedome should learne of beasts....[how] we should live and die, husband our goods, love and bring up our children, and entertaine justice. A singular testimonie of mans infirmitie: and that this reason we so manage at our pleasure, ever finding some diversitie and noveltie, leaveth unto us no maner of apparant tracke of nature. Wherewith men have done, as perfumers do with oyle, they adulterated her, with so many argumentations, and sofisticated her with so diverse farre-fetcht discourses, that she is become variable and peculiar to every man, and hath lost her proper, constant and universall visage: whereof we must seeke for a testimony of beasts, not subject to favor or corruption, nor to diversity of opinions.

The 'borrowing' and the sophisticating here spring from the intellect, not from the human condition as such. Montaigne continues by illustrating (from Seneca) philosophy's advice to meditate '*Banishments, torments*' and the like as an armour against '*misadventure*'; and he demands, 'What availeth this curiosity unto us...?'

> surely it is a kind of fever, now to cause your selfe to be whipped, because fortune may one day chance to make you endure it: and at Mid-Sommer to put-on your furr'd Gowne, because you shall neede it at Christmas?...It is certaine, that preparation unto death, hath caused more torment unto most, than the very sufferance.

Lear, of course, is genuinely in torment of mind, in a state verging on banishment, but he reacts to the sight of the outcast with a self-mortifying gesture directly contrary to Montaigne's counsel, while shifting the reproach of being 'sophisticated' (Shakespeare's only use of this word) from philosophy to the normal—though admittedly, as Montaigne has noted elsewhere, not universal—protection of dress:

> Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no

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> wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come; unbutton here (III.iv.99).

Shakespeare seems to be balanced between challenge and agreement in his attitude towards his source. His characters are in a condition of 'extremity', as if to test the strain of complacency within Montaigne; and the king cannot be equated with the 'rusticall troupe of unpolished men' the essayist has justifiably admired. Yet the Fool comments in Montaigne's spirit with, 'Prithee, Nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in'. Just possibly, Lear has intended to share his clothes with the beggar, but the main drive behind his gesture of undressing is his wish to treat his own case as exemplary, to force its exemplariness to the uttermost. He is placing himself outside of the human condition by the very gesture of trying to identify himself with it completely. Shakespeare is surely indebted to Montaigne for the terms in which he poses Lear's problem at this crucial place in the play.

In his madness Lear touches extremes of humility and arrogance. During the storm scenes, he sees himself as at once a helpless scapegoat and a merciless judge. In the later scene where he meets Gloucester near Dover he is prophet and despot, disabused but irresponsible, all-accusing and all-permitting. But there is lucidity as well as derangement in his harangues to Gloucester on adultery and then authority—'matter and impertinency mix'd', as Edgar says of the latter speech; 'Reason in madness' (IV. vi. 172). And here once again, Motaigne has furnished Lear with the 'matter' for his exposure of contradictions at the basis of social life. In the first of these two speeches (IV. vi. 107-31), when the king proclaims

> die for adultery! No:
> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight,

and again when he denounces the 'riotous appetite' in

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women, he is extracting ideas from Montaigne, principally from the essay 'Upon Some Verses of *Virgil*'[34] (though he ignores what Montaigne has to say against the double standard in sexual morals). And when he denounces 'yond simp'ring dame,/Whose face between her forks presages snow;/That minces virtue, and does shake the head/To hear of pleasure's name', Lear seems to be thinking of another essay in Montaigne, 'Of Vanitie' (III. ix; 3.237):

> To what purpose are these heaven-looking and nice points of Philosophie, on which no humane being can establish and ground it selfe?... I often see, that there are certaine Idaeas or formes of life proposed unto us, which neither the proposer nor the Auditors have any hope at all to follow; and which is worse, no desire to attaine. *Of the same paper, whereon a Judge writ but even now the condemnation against an adulterer, hee will teare a scantlin, thereon to write some love-lines to his fellow-judges wife. The same woman from whom you came lately, and with whom you have committed that unlawfull-pleasing sport, will soone after even in your presence, raile and scold more bitterly against the same fault in her neighbour, than ever* Portia *or* Lucrece *could. And some condemne men to die for crimes, that themselves esteeme no faults.*

There is a violent reversal in the midst of Lear's speech on adultery, as his mind swings from his false belief in the 'kindness' of 'Gloucester's bastard son' to his obsession with his own progeny; but the thread of association follows the lines of Montaigne's exposure of hypocrisy.

This thread reaches into Lear's more coherent harangue on 'authority' (IV. vi. 148-71). Montaigne's attacks on the law are frequent, ranging from his contrast between positive and natural laws in the 'Apologie' to more biting criticism in his third Book, such as the passage I have just quoted, or his earlier comment—'The Schoolemaster whippeth his scholler for his docility, and the guide striketh the blinde man he leadeth. A horrible image of justice' (III, i; 3.20)—; and to the radical attacks in his final chapter: 'How many condemnations have I seene more criminall, than the crime it selfe?; and, 'Lawes are now maintained in credit, not because they are

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essentially just, but because they are lawes. It is the mysticall foundation of their authority; they have none other: which availes them much' (III. xiii; 3.329, 331)[35]. These passages provide the 'matter' for Lear's

> great image of Authority:
> A dog's obeyed in office.
> Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
> Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
> Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
> For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Lear's mind soon wavers to 'None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em'; but not before he has denounced the 'mysticall foundation' his own authority had rested on.

With this speech, the borrowings from Montaigne in *King Lear* come very nearly to an end[36]; there is nothing evidently from Montaigne, for instance in the great scenes of reconciliation between the king and Cordelia. Moreover, Lear's speeches on adultery and authority correspond to some of the central preoccupations in Shakespeare's work; they form a kind of weird reprise of the themes of *Measure for Measure*, with Lear in effect revoking the edict behind the plot of the Viennese play and meditating afresh on the absurdity of 'proud man,/Dress'd in a little brief authority'. Nevertheless, as Muir says, 'it would be unreasonable to deny that Montaigne had a substantial influence on the thought of *King Lear*'—especially in those speeches reflecting critically on the king's initial assumptions about Nature. What is striking is how selectively and consistently Shakespeare has applied his extensive borrowings from the *Essays*.

IV

In a sense, it can even be felt that Montaigne had too much influence on *King Lear*. The thoughts prompted or supported by him vastly extend the scope of the legend. The passages where his influence can be traced are among the most memorable in the play. They are like *Essays* in miniature,

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speculative and sententious. But, setting aside their contribution to the planning of the opening scenes, for the most part Shakespeare's borrowings from Montaigne remain relatively theoretical. To exaggerate a little, they are felt as marginal commentaries rather than essential to the action. And it is just the quality that makes them memorable that makes them seem relatively detached.

Moreover, the Montaigne passages in the play are critical in tendency rather than constructive; they teach what Lear has to unlearn in the course of his suffering, rather than what he has positively to learn. In H.A. Mason's study of the play, where he opposes the tendency common among critics to interpret it along the lines of moral allegory, the writer remarks about the two prayers uttered by Lear and Gloucester and the run of scenes connecting them that

> so many of the speeches are put in not to make us aware of how one man responds to a situation but to suggest how mankind is placed generally.

By the fourth act, he complains, it is difficult to 'resist. . . the invitation to generalise everything and to suspend our normal expectations of probability'. And, in order to explain this flaw—as he sees it—he puts forward, at least as 'a hypothesis to be tested', the consideration that

> from now on the play wants, and suffers from the want of, an element to control the other elements. This special want is created by the madness of Lear, which in this context means his failure to make sense of what is happening.

No other character can be allowed to overshadow Lear; 'but we must have lights on the experiences that are now beyond Lear to interpret'; in other words, 'a few dramatic ultimates, things which cannot in the context of the fiction be questioned or made to look subordinate to anything else'[37]. As against this, one may well feel that in order for the recognition scene with Cordelia to reach its full dramatic effect it has been necessary during the middle scenes to keep Lear's mind—in a double sense—*distracted;* tormentedly questioning his own

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world and status but yet unable to see, or even think about, his feelings and motives clearly. That Shakespeare had something like this in view seems evident from the way he altered the incidents from the chronicles and the old play by canceling Lear's wish to leave Britain with the express object of meeting Cordelia again. Shakespeare's Lear in the middle scenes has almost forgotten Cordelia; there is a dramatic gap, which his madness triumphantly fills. In those scenes Lear attains at times the stature of 'a prophet' (as Mason says) 'for whom madness had been a revelation of painful general truths'; truths which may appear to be no more than 'partial' but which 'make what was merely fantastical in the storm scenes a grim reality'[35]. For those 'general truths' Shakespeare owed much to Montaigne; but only at a price; the price of turning attention to some extent aside from the central emotional current in the play

There were limits to what Shakespeare could utilise from Montaigne. An essential theme in *King Lear*, a vital part in the tragedy's power, is the presentation of evil, and of a human response to evil. Goneril and Regan do not seek to explain themselves, still less to exult in villainy, like Shakespeare's earlier villains; they are what they are. They are too sure of themselves to need self-justification, even primly satisfied: 'Prescribe not us our duty'. Nor do they need to invoke demonic powers, like Lady Macbeth; in a way they are too natural, and that is partly what makes them horrifying. But Montaigne, it seems, could offer little to Shakespeare imaginatively here, any more than he could suggest the quality of Edmund in action, as distinct from the rationalisations Edmund uses against his father and brother. Montaigne has fine and deeply felt things to say about cruelty, from his reading about the conquest of the New World and his experience of the civil war. But he remains too firmly rational, too civilised—in spite of his primitivist sympathies—to submit to the imaginative pull of evil subjectively; (as in his curt, decisive but dismissive comment on the

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imprisoned witches he had talked to: 'in my conscience, I should rather have appointed them Helleborum, than Hemlocke)[39].

In *Macbeth,* Shakespeare himself enters the mind of evil imaginatively, involves his audience in a kind of sympathy with it. In *Lear* his approach is more external, and until we are forced to watch the blinding of Gloucester (a scene of raw cruelty which has no counterpart in *Macbeth*) our principal response to it follows its effects on others, mainly through the moral shock of bewilderment in the king: 'Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?' But this response is deeply intensified in the middle scenes, partly through the nervous shock of the storm, but chiefly through ravings of Edgar in his role as Poor Tom and through their consequences for Lear's mind as well. Here Shakespeare makes use of another literary source, as remote as Montaigne from the narrative starting-points for the tragedy. He had drawn upon Montaigne's essay about fathers and children to bring out the lines of potential conflict between reason and emotion in his opening scenes. But as the play travels from irrational impulses towards mental breakdown, he takes material from a source of a very different stamp, Harsnett's exposure of alleged demonic possession.

The undisputable borrowings from Harsnett are confined to Poor Tom's part in the storm scenes and some passages connected with it psychologically. Since Shakespeare was adding Edgar's disguise as Tom to the subplot scheme he had taken over from Sidney, it again seems clear that he was turning to an extranarrational source for specific dramatic purposes. Before meeting Tom, the King has feared he may go mad, and his prayer in the storm on behalf of 'Poor naked wretches' seems to show that he feels he has reached the limits of self-criticism compatible with his self-command. Tom is the living embodiment of his prayer and, worse, it seems, a raving madman. In sympathy with him, Lear's sanity breaks. Tom's essential dramatic function, then,

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is to precipitate Lear's collapse, the transformation of his kingliness. For this, Shakespeare drew liberally, though not exclusively, on Harsnett—not as to Tom's nakedness (there are no beggars in Harsnett) but as to his pretended hallucinations. Evidently these were considered a major attraction in the play, since the title-page of the 1608 Quarto featured Edgar's life-history 'with sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam'. Madness scenes had of course been popular on the stage, in *The Spanish Tragedy* for instance and in *Hamlet*. But in this case Shakespeare was taking on exceptional theatrical risks.

When, in phrases provided or suggested by Harsnett, Edgar describes his sufferings and names his devils, he pretends to be genuinely tormented (for which he has cause) and genuinely crazy. In type, his alleged symptoms were certainly common among Jacobean mentally disturbed patients[40]. But the specific manifestations Edgar has adopted had been set down by Harsnett as palpable, sinister and ridiculous impostures. Harsnett's officially sponsored *Declaration* attacks a team of Jesuit missionaries who had brainwashed and exploited some maidservants and young men in order to win converts by exhibiting exorcisms. So that when Edgar cries out how 'the foul fiend' has placed 'knives under his pillow', halters in his pew' and 'ratsbane by his porridge' (III.iv.50-4) he is citing what, on Harsnett's showing, had been merely clumsy tricks[41]. And Harsnett has had great fun, in the style of Marprelate or Nashe, with 'these new strange names' of devils that Edgar is to reproduce, comparing them with gypsies' 'gibridge', calling on 'Trismegistus' and 'the old Platonicall sect' to explain them if possible, and printing the subsequent deposition of one of the pretended demoniacs, Sara Williams, who relates how she had denominated one of her devils from memories of a merry tale of *Hobberdidaunce'* and many of the rest from graffiti (some 'very strange names' written on a wall); her reason had simply been to give in to the priests (Harsnett, 45-50,

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180-1). Now, Edgar needs strange, not well known, devils' names, if only in order not to clash with the pagan setting of the play. But he does not need to remind those who have read, or heard about, the *Declaration* that they are trumpery inventions. Yet, in one of his last speeches as Tom, he even takes the risk of drawing attention to his source:

> Poor Tom hath been scar'd out of his good wits: . . . . Five fiends have been in poor Tom at once; as…Hoberdidance, prince of dumbness; .. Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing; who since possesses chambermaids and waitingwomen…(IV.i 55-62)

Flibbertigibbet was surely incongruous enough, without the pointed topical allusion.

There is a wide difference between assuming madness for self-protection—Edgar's motive—and faking madness for profit. Shakespeare courts the risk that his public's response to one kind of deception will block their feeling for the other. In the storm scenes he treads a knife-edge between pandemonium and absurdity. He makes Edgar's 'counterfeiting' seem real enough to provoke Lear's emotions, but contrived enough to reveal the strain of pretending, while leaving the main emphasis on the force of delusion in the mind of the king.

A hint as to his methods lies in Edgar's first speech as Poor Tom 'Through the sharp hawthorn blow the cold winds. Humh! go to thy bed and warm thee'. This picks up words from the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew:* 'Go by, Jeronimy; go to thy cold bed, and warm thee'[12]; the nobleman turned beggar recalls the tinker turning nobleman. Edgar says nothing about Hieronymo. But the scene he is introducing is to resemble that in *The Spanish Tragedy* (III.xiii) where Hieronymo, the grief-crazed judge, meets the petitioner, Don Bazulto, and confounds Bazulto's case with his own. Shakespeare places his borrowings from Harsnett within the frame of this (already complex) theatrical model.

This cold night', says the Fool, 'Will turn us all to fools and madmen' (III.iv.77). Although he is terrified by Tom at

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first, the Fool remains detached from him and from his effect upon Lear; beside them both, he stands for the hold of sanity, however perverse, paradoxical or fantastic in its expression. But he has already driven home his commonsense criticisms of Lear's conduct; and to leave him alone as Lear's chief companion in the storm would leave the dialogue between them merely static. Tom forces Lear, and our imagination, further. At the same time, Lear in his mental breakdown cannot be left for long to mere incoherency (in the manner of Othello's momentary fit), nor, evidently, does Shakespeare mean to keep him at the pitch of frenzied rage, the pitch of Seneca's Oedipus. Edgar forces him to contemplate the image of an outcast harried by guilt and, beyond that, the image of an exposure to nature, even identification with nature, more extreme and revolting than anything he has imagined:

> Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the todpole, the wallnewt, and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cowdung for sallets; swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipp'd from tithing to tithing, and stock-punish'd, and imprison'd... (III.iv.126).

This nightmare imagery is independent of Lear. It seems to Lear a reality; (in his next speech, he calls Tom 'this philosopher'). It projects the forces of evil that Edmund—and the other main characters—have unleashed. Nevertheless, it is a piece of acting, just as Lear's response, beginning with the tearing off of his clothes, is an imitation of Edgar, a piece of acting. This play-acting within the play can reveal psychological possibilities or tendencies beyond the scope of the characters' sincere, consciously willed, reactions. But, by being presented as playacting, it is kept distinct from the sense of an ultimate reality.

Tom's horrible diet has not been borrowed from Harsnett, but it is in keeping with the demonic fantasies Harsnett reports, and Shakespeare picks up material from the *Declaration* again in Tom's following lines, with 'Smulkin' and, 'The

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Prince of Darkness is a gentlman; Modo, he's called, and Mahu'. At one level, Shakespeare's reaction is very unusual for him, in that he cuts out the comic—sadistically comic—vigour from his source[43]. But at another level, it seems that Harsnett set Shakespeare thinking about episodes of sadism and moral perversion, taken from recent experience but not to be met with in any versions of the Lear story; they are documented instances of evil assuming the form of the grotesque. The principal torture Harsnett describes consists of tying the victim-accomplice to a chair, pouring a noxious mixture down his or her throat, and then holding the victim's face over burning brimstone or feathers, as an infallible means of inducing symptoms of possession:

> Now I present to your imaginations, *Sara Williams* sitting bound in a chayre (as poor wench she often did) with a pinte of this *holy potion* in her stomacke, working up into her head, and out at her mouth, and her eyes, nose, mouth, and head, stuffed full with the smoake of holy perfume, her face being held down over the fume, till it was all over, as black as a stocke, and think if you see not in your minde, the lively *Idaea* of a poore devill-distressed woman in deede. . . .There is neither Horse, nor Asse, nor Dogge, nor Ape, if he had been used, as these poore seely creatures were, but would have been much more devillishly affected than they (Harsnett, 40-1).

As a clever propagandist, Harsnett makes a great deal of the priests' hot hands traversing the girls' bodies in search of devils; and he relates how they bully-ragged the young people into thinking that their illnesses were not natural, but diabolic, that Sara's menstruation was devil-caused, and that she would be unable to have children (which proved false [Harsnett, 62-3, 84, 191, 201, 270]). The whole business was 'against nature' (as Sara said of the procedure of thrust- a holy relic, one of Edmund Campion's bones, into her mouth [186]).

Images of malevolence, torment and degradation, apparently suggested by Harsnett, stretch across Shakespeare's play, still mainly connected with Edgar's story, but hence also with Lear's madness. The first echoes from the pamphlet

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come in I ii, with Gloucester's word *machinations* (*1* 109; compare V.i.46, but not used elsewhere by Shakespeare; Harsnett applies the term to Jesuit plots [Sig. A3^{v}] and with Edmund's strange aside about his 'cue' for 'villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam', as he prepares to deal with Edgar's first arrival on the stage. As Muir has pointed out, Harsnett has a running fire of theatrical metaphors[44]: he emphasises melancholy as a cause of belief in witchcraft (131-2, 137): and Shakespeare's conspirator and forger probably owes his very name to the Jesuit Father Edmunds, the *'rector chori'* in Harsnett's 'holy Comedie' (1) —the 'devil Edmunds' who stages dialogues composed by himself, being 'alone the Author, Actor, and penner of this play' (86). Next from Harsnett (at II.iii.15) comes Edgar's mental picture of the mutilations of Bedlam beggars; and then—though still before Poor Tom emerges—comes the Fool's reaction to the sight of Kent in the stocks *(nether-stockes* being also one of Harsnett's word)[45]:

> Ha, ha! he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied by the heads, dogs and bears by th'neck, monkeys by th'loins, and men by th'legs: when a man's over-lusty at legs then he wears wooden nether-stocks (II.iv.7).

Shakespeare constantly imagines the human body in movement; images of constriction, deformation of the body seem to be some of the main things that struck him in Harsnett. In the same scene, the king's symptom, *'Hysterica passio'* (II.iv.55), is a complaint mentioned and discussed more than once in the pamphlet (25, 257, 263). And, after the storm scenes, Cornwall's torture of Gloucester—'Bind fast his corky arms' (III.vii.29)—picks up from Harsnett (23) an adjective Shakespeare uses only this once; it goes with the action of tying a victim to a chair.

Edgar's trick to exorcise his father's despair seems to follow the same line of thought set going by Harsnett, even though no verbal echoes from Harsnett have been traced in the Dover Cliff scene. If so, the stage action as a whole of Edmund's conspiracy and its consequences owes more to Harsnett than to Sidney.

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At times, Shakespeare uses material from Harsnett and from Montaigne in close proximity. While Tom's lurid vision of his animal-form demons comes largely from Harsnett, Lear's response about the 'sophistication' of mankind is taken from Montaigne. Harsnett has contributed something to the physical horror of the scene of the blinding of Gloucester, while the sequal to it in Gloucester's development conforms with Montaingne's aphorisms to the effect that we must lose our sight to become wise[46]. Conversely, the *Declaration* may have led Shakespeare to think of the structural motif of mock-exorcism in the Dover Cliff episode (IV.vi), but Montaigne has supplied something of the psychological insight into sense-deception and, more materially, of the physical imagery that supports it. But later in the same scene Lear's half-mad harangue about adultery swerves from the moral paradoxes adapted from Montaigne into the hysterical climactic images about 'the sulphurous pit' in women, strongly coloured by Harsnett. Broadly, then, while much of the considered reasoning by the characters, at least as far as the end of the fourth act, comes from the *Essays*, many of the images of physical immediacy, grotesque or horrifying, have been suggested by the *Declaration*.

Shakespeare took profit where he found it. In contrast to the anodyne previous versions of Lear's story and Sidney's coolly decorous episode of romance, Harsnett gave Shakespeare keys to a direct rendering of the experience of evil, in a little world of Bosch-like images, diminished but also rendered more perplexing and sinister by the writer's insistence that its offences 'against nature' have been factitiously contrived. On the other hand, Shakespeare keeps this material subordinate to the sustained questioning of man's place in nature borrowed very largely from his reading in Montaigne; and even that, on the whole, is kept within dramatic bounds. Probably Montaigne stimulated Shakespeare to the most searching questions in the play; but the thoughts borrowed or converted from the *Essays* are those

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of the characters, Edmund's Lear's thoughts for instance, or not the play's ultimate statements. These borrowings indicate Shakespeare's recongnition of the most fruitful thinker of his time. But the way he places his borrowings also confirms his economy as a dramatist, his highly selective artistry.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] The present article is a revision and expansion of a paper originally submitted to a seminar on Shakespeare's use of his sources at the International Shakespeare Association Congress at Stratford-upon-Avon, in August 1981.

Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear* (New Arden edn., 1952; revised, 1982), pp. 235-9. (This is the edition used here). Cf. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources I* (London, 1957), pp. 161-2. Muir incorporates, with reservations, source materials collected by previous scholars, notably G.C. Taylor (in *Shakespeare's Debt to Montaigne* (1925) and W.B. Drayton Henderson in 'Montaigne's *Apologie of Raymond Sebond*, and *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Association Bulletin 14* (1939), pp. 209-25 and *15* (1940), pp. 40-54.

[3] 'At a clap' (I.iv.292: see *Lear*, ed. Muir, p. 236) occurs in Harsnett's *Declaration* (1603), p. 52; 'discommend' (II.ii.106), in Harsnett, p. 38.

[4] Pierre Villey, *Montaigne et Francois Bacon* [Paris, 1913] Geneva: Slaktine Reprints, 1973), pp. 5, 33, 54; see William R. Elton, *'King Lear' and the Gods* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1966). The parallels between *Lear* and the political teachings of Lipsius, set out by Arthur F. Kinney in 'Some Conjectures on the Composition of *'King Lear'* " (*Shakespeare Survey 33*, ed. Kenneth Muir [Cambridge, 1980]), seem to me too general to amount to strong evidence about sources.

[5] Samuel Daniel, 'To my deere friend M, *Iohn Florio*', in *Montaigne's Essays*, trans. Florio (ed. L.C. Harmer, Everyman's Library, 3 vols, 1965), vol. 1, p. 13; (this edition of Florio is cited throughout the present article).

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[6] Robert Ellrodt, 'Self-Consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare Survey 28*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, 1975), p. 49.

[7] J.F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London, 1949); Rosalie L. Colie, 'Reason and Need: *King Lear* and the 'Crisis' of the Aristocracy', in *Some Facets of 'King Lear'*, eds. R.L. Colie and F.T. Flahit (Toronto, 1974), pp. 185-219; cf. G.R. Hibbard, *King Lear' : A Retrospect, 1939-79*, in *Shakespeare Survey 33*, pp. 3-8.

[8] R.A. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: a Critical Exploration* (London, 1972), pp. 84-5, 270.

[9] P. Villey, op. cit., pp. 30-7.

[10] Florio, ed. cit.; (I have lightly modernised Florio's punctuation here).

[11] W.B.D. Henderson, *S.A.B. 15* p. 47; see also Paul Reyher, *Essai sur les idees dans l'oeuvre de Shakespeare* (Paris, 1947), pp. 510-3.

[12] Montaigne, "Of Bookes' (II, x); 'Of Presumption' (II, xvi); (Florio, 2.92, 380). On Montaigne's use of his title-word, and the first reactions to it, see Alan M. Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne* (London, 1935), pp. 2-3; R.A. Sayce op. cit., pp. 20-2; R. Ellrodt, op. cit., p. 40.

[13] Shakespeare uses the noun elsewhere only in Sonnet 110, where it means simply trials or experiments ('And worse essays prov'd thee my best of love'). In his note on Edmund's speech, Muir comments that *essay* and *taste* were synonyms, and he doubts any special link with Montaigne (*ed. cit.*, pp. 25, 237). However, *gustus*, 'taste', was exactly the word put forward by Lipisius as the nearest Latin equivalent for Montaigne's title—though *conatus*, prentice effort', was soon preferred instead—(A.M. Boase, op. cit.). One or two of the *Essays* are cast in the form of letters, including 'Of the Affection of Fathers', which is addressed to Mme d'Estissac.

[14] *Leir* I.i. 26-31, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare VII* (London and New York, 1973).

[15] Cf. R.L. Colie, op. cit., pp. 197-8, 218.

[16] See Geoffrey Bullough, ed., op. cit., pp. 313, 318, 326.

[17] The word *depositaries* (unique in Shakespeare) is another borrowing from Florio; see Muir, op. cit., p. 237.

[18] Henderson, *S.A.B. 14* pp. 210-11.

[19] L.C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes* ([1959] Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 73.

[20] See A.M. Boase, op., cit, pp. 189, 192, discussing the criticisms of Montaigne and Charron by Pierre Chanet in *Considerations sur La Sagesse de Charron (*Paris, 1643). The seeming contradictions in Montaigne's view of Nature are discussed from another angle by

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A. Micha in 'Art et nature dans les 'Essais', *Bulletin de la Societe des Amis de Montaigne*, 19 (July-December, 1956), pp. 50-5

[21] W.B.D. Henderson, *B.S.A. 15* p. 41; Muir, ed. cit., p. 238.

[22] I was first led to think about the probable interest of this essay for Shakespeare by a lecture by Emrys Jones on *The Winter's Tale*.

[23] Muir, *ed. cit.*, pp. 48, 236. R.L. Colie emphasises Lear's concern with this issue (op. cit., p. 197). In another article in the same book, she points out how the close of Lear's speech—'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/To have a thankless child' (I.iv.286)—gives an echo from Psalm 140, one of a series of biblical echoes running strongly through the tragedy ('The Energies of Endurance; Biblical Echoes in *King Lear*', p. 124). Further there is a close linkage between Lear's speeches to Goneril in this scene and the hero's curses in *Timon of Athens*, especially at IV.iii. 176-92, with the sequence there of 'nature', 'man's unkindness', 'womb', 'teems', 'arrogant man', animal images including the 'eyeless venom'd worm', 'abhorred births 'one poor root', 'fertile', 'ingrateful man', 'dragons, wolves, and bears', 'new monsters', and finally, the 'marbled mansion' of heaven. It is of course characteristic of Shakespeare, as of other poets, to repeat themes or images from one work to another; but here the associations seem unusually close.

[24] A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* ([1904] London: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 250-1.

[25] *O.E.D. curiosity* §§ 5 and 9; cf. Muir, ed. cit., pp. 236, 237; (Muir's gloss on I.ii.4, 'squeamishness, false delicacy' seems to me to underplay the sting in Edmund's *curiosity)*.

[26] Again, I have lightly modernised Florio's punctuation (cf. Montaigne, *Essais*, 2 vols., ed. Maurice Rat [Paris: Garnier, 1962], (2.317-8). R.A. Sayce (op. cit., pp. 194-7, 235-7) discusses Montaigne's critique of 'custom'.

[27] A.M. Boase, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

[28] Tourneur borrows frequently from *Lear* in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, especially from Edmund's speeches (see Irving Ribner's edn. [London: Methuen, The Revels Plays, 1964], p. lxiv, and notes to I.i.45, II.iii.36, II.iv.136, II.ii.8, and IV.iii.105; there is a further echo, from Lear himself, as well as from Edmund, at V.ii.145-51). See W.R. Elton, op. cit., pp. 138-46 on the resemblance between Edmund's views and those of the *libertins*; on the latter, cf. A.M. Boase, op. cit., pp. 167, 172 and Henri Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la litterature francaise de la Renaissance (1533-1601)* (Paris, 1957), pp. 461-8. Edmund's speech against astrology (I.ii.115-30)

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recalls Montaigne's criticisms, and its vocabulary draws upon Florio (Muir, *ed. cit.* pp. 29-30, 236).

[29] See A. Jose Axelrad, *Un Malcontent elizabethain: John Marston* (Paris: Didier, 1955), pp. 98-101; Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, The Revels Plays, 1960), I.i.46; I.ii.43, 198; IV.ii.91, 102.

[30] J.H.P. Pafford, ed., *The Winter's Tale* (London: Methuen, New Arden, 1963), p. 169; Frank Kermode, ed., *The Tempest* (New Arden, 1954), pp. xxxiv, 145-7.

[31] See H.A. Mason, *Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 196.

[32] W.B.D. Henderson, *B.S.A, 15*, pp. 44-5.

[33] See Muir's note on III.iv.101-7.

[34] W.B.D. Henderson, op. cit.; Muir, notes on IV.vi.112, 120.

[35] See Muir, notes on IV.vi.145-76; W.R. Elton, op. cit., pp. 230-4. The section in Montaigne's 'Apology' contrasting positive and natural laws refers to cannibals eating their fathers and to Plato being offered a robe made after the Persian fashion' (Florio, 2,297-9)—references possibly recalled by Lear at I.i.116-7 and III.vi.77-9.

[36] But see Muir's notes on IV.vi.176 ('we came crying hither') and V.ii.II ('Ripeness is all').

[37] H. A. Mason, op. cit., pp. 208, 210.

[38] H.A. Mason, op. cit., p. 215.

[39] 'Of the Lame or Crippel' (III, xi; Florio 3.286); see R.A. Sayce, op. cit., pp. 248-50; cf. Montaigne, 'Of Crueltie' (II, xi; 2.121) and 'Of Coaches' (III, vi; 3.146-8).

[40] See Michael Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 155-6, 168-9, 198-217.

[41] Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures* (1603), pp. 178, 180, 219, 253.

[42] Muir, note on III.iv.46-7; (cf. Stanley Wells, '*The Taming of the Shrew* and *King Lear*: A Structural Comparison', in *Shakespeare Survey 33* [Cambridge, 1980]).

[43] On Harsnett's style and tone, see Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources I*, pp. 147-61, and M.C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare, the Poet in his World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), pp., 193-8.

[44] Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources I*, op. cit.

[45] Muir, *ed. cit.*, note on II.iv.7-9; quotations from Harsnett, p. 241.

[46] See Muir *ed, cit.*, p. 238.

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P. W. Thomson

KING LEAR AND THE ACTORS

Professor Wilson Knight has become increasingly convinced that the poetry of Shakespeare's tragic heroes improves as each play goes on. So much so that 'when Romeo hears of Juliet's death he's delighted'. The actor of Romeo that is, of course. The actor of Romeo is delighted when he hears of Juliet's death because he knows that his great speeches are to come. I am not here concerned with Professor Knight's main point—*King Lear* is not, indeed, an easy play by which to support it—but with the irresistible way in which he illustrates the dislocation of the actor from his role. A part at least of the human paradox that allows an audience to 'enjoy' a tragedy is explained by the tragic actor's enjoyment of his professional skill. The actor of Lear is delighted when Regan outdoes Goneril in bitchy self-centredness because he knows the great storm-scenes are to come. The cruellest thing Regan could do to *him* would be to welcome him with open arms.

Shakespeare understood with rare sympathy that aspect of an actor's temperament that can only be satisfied by an audience. Most of us, I mean, are unsympathetic to it. We call our histrionic friends exhibitionists, and turn them into enemies. Or we call them *flamboyant*, allowing some admiration to creep into a word that demands it, but also conveying a warning to whoever is listening that this man is not to be trusted. There is no doubt that Shakespeare's ability to endow his created characters with histrionic temperaments allows sensitive actors to inhabit those characters directly, intuitively, without Stanislavskian predication. His historical kings are royal actors as surely as Charles I on the scaffold. So are the Kings of the tragedies. The rival claims of the Danish audience

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of old Hamlet and Claudius, the different style of their winning ways, is as competitive a contrast as that of Richard II and Bolingbroke, and contains the promise of Othello and Iago or Antony, Cleopatra and Octavius. And we are in danger of missing a point about the short-lived Duncan if we overlook his sense of an audience. But Lear's sense of the theatrical occasion, rivalled by Richard II at Coventry, is not exceeded by him there. It needs only a parade of courtiers to turn a King into a Player King.

It is not, of course, a great distance from the concept of the King's two bodies to the social reality of role play. And for Lear the scene is carefully set. Sir Henry Irving, greatest of Victorian actors, rejected a play once because its young author required him to be on at the opening. It is not so in Cibber's version of *Richard III*. A star actor needs his prologue, needs to be anticipated. 'The *manner of coming on* made it extraordinary with great actors,' Gordon Craig observes in his book on Irving:

> —it was this manner of timing the appearance, measuring its speed and direction, which created a rhythm that was irresistible.
>
> An exit was important too—very important: but the going off of an actor was nothing comparable with the prime importance of his coming on.
>
> To prepare for [Irving's] entrance in *The Bells*, the entire first fifteen minutes of the play conspired.

And Craig talks of the applause that always greeted Irving's appearance in the doorway :

> This applause was no false note, whereas silence would have been utterly false; for though Irving endured and did not accept the applause, he deliberately called it out of the spectators. It was necessary *to them*—not to him; it was something they had to experience, or to be rid of, or rather released from before they could exactly take in what he was going to give them.

There is something of that in Lear's first entrance. After Gloucester's shoddy, all-men-together confessions to Kent, there is an abrupt switch of mood. 'The King is coming.'

Sound a sennet. Enter one bearing a coronet. Enter King Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and attendants.

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And Gloucester is despatched, hoisted away from stage-centre, demoted :

> *Attend* the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester . . . .
> Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
> *Give* me the map there. *Know* . . . .

From the mildly interrogative tone of the Gloucester/Kent dialogue, we are pitched suddenly into the imperative. Lear *requires* our attention.

The difficulty, of course, is that he does not *deserve* it. His language, however it may be superficially impressive, is dissonant. It jars on us because it is inappropriate. Later—and not much later—we will discover that it is inaccurate as well. Cornwall is 'less loving' than Albany, Burgundy's is not an 'amorous sojourn' in the court, the 'open' trial of the daughters' affection has been anticipated by a verdict in favour of Cordelia. Leontes, who has similarly summoned a court for the vile pleasure of having his moral judgment publicly confirmed, defies the oracle and loses everything immediately. It is only 'face' that Lear loses immediately, but everything in the end. There is a rhetorical vigour in his rejection of the true Cordelia, but the regal poetry is not impressive. This kind of rhetoric belongs to the flawless body of the King. It is windy and self-excoriating when misapplied by a flawed mortal. The gesture that must accompany 'Hence and avoid my sight' would suit the villainous expropriating landlord of melodrama. It does not suit the hero. Reproached by Kent, Lear puffs and pants like the Turkish Knight of a Mummer's play :

> Hear me, recreant,
> On thine allegiance hear me!
> That thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
> Which we durst never yet, and, with strained pride,
> To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
> Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
> Our potency made good, take thy reward.
> Five days we do allot thee for provision
> To shield thee from disasters of the world,

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> And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
> Upon our kingdom. If on the tenth day following
> Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions
> The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
> This shall not be revoked!

And Kent is bold enough to point up Lear's histrionics in a reproachful couplet :

> Fare thee well, King, sith thus thou wilt appear,
> Freedom lives hence and banishment is here.

Before an audience, the player king must 'appear' what he is not. Lear performs, but, to Kent at Least, he is not Lear but already the 'shadow', the poor player that the Fool will call him in I. iv. 227. The loss of self, I am trying to suggest, is in the poetry.

I do not want to press the point about Lear's royal acting any further. The Fool is wrong to encourage Lear to revive his rejected role in the line to which I referred a moment ago. A snatch of the dialogue that follows Goneril's plum-in-the-mouth reproof of Lear (I. iv. 196-209) will make the point :

> FOOL : May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?
> Whoop, Jug, I love thee!
> LEAR : Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, his discernings
> Are lethargied—Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so!
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?
> FOOL : Lear's shadow.
> LEAR : I would learn that; for by the marks of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded I had daughters.

As I read this, the Fool is needling Lear into reclaiming 'the marks of sovereignty', encouraging him even to assume the peacock vanity of the actor whose best audience is a full-length mirror. 'Does Lear walk thus, speak thus?' The old man is as laughable now as Arturo Ui or Monsieur Jourdain, enquiring how best to play a role in front of the very audience they are hoping to deceive by playing it. Kingship does not consist in walking and talking like a king, nor in the nice

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conduct of imperious eyes. Lear knows this, but the Fool obstructs his understanding. The symbiotic relationship of King and Fool is threatened if Lear ceases to play the King. There is something self-protective about the Fool's banter. I shall return to this. For the moment I want only to say that there is a section of the play, lasting from the Fool's entrance in [I. iv. until Lear's first undoubtedly fine speech in] II. iv. ('O, reason not the need!') in which the Fool alone keeps open the possibility that Lear will play the king again. In the course of that speech Lear seeks and fails to find a 'noble anger.'

> I will have such revenges on you both
> That all the world shall—I will do such things—
> What they are yet I know not; but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth.

The words do not come to him, and the nobility vanishes in a broken sentence. One other role is open to him, and it is a tempting one to an egocentric (or to anyone)—the self-pitying role of the suffering old father. When he rejects that, Lear rejects role-playing altogether, or rejects, at least, the playing of roles for social advantage;

> You think I'll weep.
> No, I'll not weep.
> I have full cause of weeping ; but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
> Or ere I'll weep. O Fool, I shall go mad !

This is the point at which Wilson Knight believes that Lear 'elects to go mad rather than weep'. From now on, in both his madness and his recovered sanity, Lear is outstandingly without the self-consciousness of the actor. He rejects role-play, and at the same time begins the drawn-out rejection of his Fool.

Lear's sudden abandonment of role-play is highlighted by the pretence that surrounds him from the start. Goneril initiates it with an accomplished audition piece. 'What shall Cordelia speak ? Love, and be silent.' No actress ever got a job that way, unless on the notorions casting couch. Regan

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follows with Cornwall in sinister support—though her greatest performance is reserved for the gouging out of Gloucester's eyes. The cruelty of that scene is genuine, of course, but made the more terrible by our sense that it is being staged as well. We are in no more doubt than Kent that Oswald's acts of loyalty are an ingratiating pretence:

> You come with letters against the King, and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father.

Oswald, in this interesting image, becomes the unnamed lackey of a generalised Morality play evil counsellor. Edmund is vastly effective. He is an actor in the sense that he is always more concerned with the deed than with the thought. His rejection of any interest in motive as a sub-textual aid to performance is quite specific:

> for my state
> Stands on me to defend, not to debate.

His hold over Goneril and Regan results from his refusal to give his motives the kind of attention that they do. There is a beautifully shifting sentence in Regan's attempt to explain Edmund's absence to Oswald. The truth, if truth there be, is held until the end:

> It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,
> To let him live. Where he arrives he moves
> All hearts against us. Edmund, I think, is gone,
> In pity of his misery, to dispatch
> His nighted life—moreover to descry
> The strength o' th' enemy.

Edmund is resourceful and unscrupulous in the devising of a scenario for the confusion of Edgar and Gloucester, and it is his active impulse that augments the heavy sense of something impending at the end of almost every scene in the play; but he lacks the clear-cut desires of a melodramatic villain. Such bland self-interest is almost indistinguishable from altruism. I am puzzled by Albany. His change of character from the mildness with which Goneril twice reproaches him to the vengeful strength that might almost have averted the

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tragedy is primarily a change of language. He is either a lazy actor, or no actor at all. What we observe in him, perhaps, is not a change of role but a discovery that he has one. Even that would be the strongest evidence the play offers of the world's capacity for redemption. But the supreme role-player, certainly the hyper-active one, is Edgar, whose first appearance comes pat 'like the catastrophe of the old comedy', It is probably true, though no more than rephrasing a point that J.F. Danby made finely, to say that Edgar acts in order to preserve the *status quo* whereas Edmund acts in order to disrupt it. Edgar seems, in the storm, to understand intuitively Lear's profound predicament, and to propose the only life-asserting escape from it. With his father, though, especially in IV.vi., he over-acts to the point where he forfeits our confidence. The setting up and careful staging of Gloucester's leap is contrived and over-subtle. Such directorial invention in the theatre would be called gimmickry. It is a far cry from the immediate responsiveness by which Edgar rescues Lear from the Fool's cruel common sense in the storm. The gradation of dialect is an actor's indulgence, and Edgar's sudden Mummerset outburst to Oswald is, in its context, a callous exposure of Gloucester's credulity. I am looking for the kind of value judgment that is involved when the noun 'craft' leans towards the adjective 'crafty'. The honest actor will not confuse the two, and it is Edgar's defect that he is not always honest, or his dilemma that he cannot be.

Even so, Edgar's is a virtuoso performance. In *King Lear* the ability to sustain a role is a survival tactic. There are characters who cannot, and of these Cordelia is the prime example;

> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth.

Shakespeare's theatre company must have given some thought to the training of boy actors to heave their hearts into their mouths. There is a lot of it for them to do, or seem to do, in Elizabethan drama. Cordelia can say nothing that she does

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not really feel. There was a brief phase in the American theatre when this would have been thought an excellent qualification for an actress, so utterly can Stanislavsky be misread; but it is the supremely stagey Regan, with her grand entrances and calculated effects who speaks for Elizabethan acting styles. The Victorian actress, Lady Tree, we are told, began a recitation at a charity matinee by sweeping forward to a gold-painted chair, herself gorgeous in purple tulle, and saying: 'I want you all to imagine I'm a plumber's mate!' Regan might have persuaded them. Not Cordelia. Nor Kent, whose occupation is 'to be plain'. Cornwall accuses Kent of acting:

> This is some fellow
> Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
> A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
> Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he!
> An honest mind and plain—he must speak truth!
> And they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
> These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
> Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
> Than twenty silly-ducking observants
> That stretch their duties nicely.

It is a plausible suggestion, but quite wrong. Kent's only piece of acting is—he himself suggests it—involuntary. Out-manoeuvred by Oswald, he plays Ajax the fool to this 'silly-ducking observant'. His adoption of disguise points up, not his likeness to Edgar but his extreme unlikeness.

> 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.

The accomplished actor, Edgar, knows there is more to performance than costume and make-up. Despite the promise of this, his first speech in disguise, I find no evidence in the text that Kent changes voice or language. He certainly gives to his new self no context and no circumstance. In his encounters with the Gentleman, the disguised Kent is either Kent or Nemo, a persona without character. But even anony-

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mity is a survival tactic amid violence. Gloucester can neither act nor vanish. He is Edmund's stooge, but the stooge called up from the audience, scriptless and at the mercy of the comic man. Gloucester is the ideal audience for a cloak-and-dagger play. He will believe contrivance. The shift in him from the man whom we despise to the man whom we can justly pity is delayed until he can envisage Lear's plight in the storm—Gloucester's first evidence of imagination:

> Alack, the night comes on and the bleak winds
> Do sorely ruffle. For many miles about
> There's scarce a bush.

What follows in Gloucester is the utter abandonment of self-consciousness, the negation of all acting, that we also see in Lear at the moment when he turns away from the Fool to question Poor Tom.

The characters, I am tritely saying, commentate on Lear's dilemma, his initial need to act and his later magnificent refusal to do so. But the most searching commentary is provided by the relationship and eventual interchangeability of King and Fool. Wolfit's advice to an Old Vic actor about to play Lear was, 'Watch your Fool !', and the play's stage history is behind him. Acting is an essential part of a Fool's equipment, though, it is the kind of rough acting that is always in full consciousness of the audience. 'He must observe their mood on whom he jests.' 'Am I a fool ?' asks T.F. Powys at the opening of the *Soliloquies of a Hermit :*

> Is not a fool the best title for a good priest ? And
> I am a good priest. . .I am without a belief;—a belief is too easy a road to God.

In a way that is never entirely explicit, the Fool mediates between Lear and the Devil. ('In Shakespeare,' says Powys, 'there is a great deal more of the love of the Devil than of the fear of God.'). Lear's Fool, like the disguised Kent, and like the old Vice for that matter, is without context and circumstance. His role may be to protect Lear, but his function is to lead him down to the very bottom of his experience. In the

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book of Powys's which I have found fruitful in illuminating for me my darker responses to the play, there are two longer passages to which I would like to make reference. The first describes a contrast which binds together the Lear of the opening scene and the Fool who enters only (and can only enter) when Lear's confidence has been shaken. Powys is describing 'the common man, the happy man, the working man, the immortal man':

> . . . . he is the people, and his dominating mood is the getting mood.
> On the other side of the road is the priest,. He is vulnerable, he is mortal; this life is his only life, he is not immortal like the other man; the only immortality that he gets is by believing that he is immortal; his children are not his children, and his life is not his life, it is God's. He is the soil in which God practises His divine moods; His hating moods; His loving moods, His cruel moods. The other man is dominated by one mood all his life; the manner of his life never changes, he moves in one small circle. The priest is never under one mood for long; he is always breaking, or rather being broken by God. God takes him up and casts him down, and pitches him from one mood into another, taking care that no mood lasts that the priest can live and feed upon. The priest prays; he tames the moods by prayer, and he tries to shut up the bad moods, the good moods, all the moods in the Bible; and then he tries to hide the Bible in the Church, And he prays all through the bad moods, even when they bite him (and moods can bite), and he waits and prays till a gentle mood comes like a dove from heaven; then he rejoices and quietly eats his bread like any other man.

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The play traces Lear's descent (in such a way as to leave open the possibility that it might be an ascent) from immortal man always getting and spending to Fool/Priest broken by the moods of God and Devil. In the course of that descent he subsumes the Fool. A Fool is different from all other men in one respect. He is not afraid of looking a fool. It is Edgar's triumph in the role of Poor Tom to seem unafraid of looking a fool, and he draws Lear away from the fool into folly. In so far as Lear's Fool is a character, it is his endeavour to prevent his master from playing the fool. In so far as he is a numinous force, he guides Lear to the brink of folly but cannot lead him in. Edgar does that. Having played the fool himself, he can make

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Gloucester play the fool as well as letting Lear into madness. But that is his limit. The meeting of mad King and blind father returns him from the world of his imagination to the world of telegrams and anger:

> I would not take this from report. It is;
> And my heart breaks at it.

It isn't in Edgar but in Albany that I place my final trust. Egdar has excelled himself during the course of the play, Albany is getting better and better as it goes along. So far as it concerns Lear, Edgar makes the Fool unnecessary but does not replace him, Lear's enlightenment is lonely. The second passage from Powys is written from an apprehension of it, I am sure:

> We that love to be at the bottom, we saints in the wilderness, we humble people in the fields, we peaceful people in leafy lanes—it is with reason that the city man, the wicked sinner, should treat us somewhat roughly, for he fears us. He fears that if he did not speak very loud, we might make him take off his shoes when he comes into our garden, and stand in the mud with bare feet. Perhaps if we of the saintly tribe, we exempt ones,—if we were compelled te be iron kings or wheat kings, or petrol kings,—it is possible that we saints might relinquish some of our abominable pride. The very size of our palaces would then diminish some of our bigness. I can make myself out to be a saint, I can pull myself to pieces as a sinner, I can show myself as a fool in a world of folly. We are little men that eat off the earth's crust; I am one of the mob, that is all that can be said.

Lear's Fool is not really an actor since his role is indistinguishable from his life. When Lear subsumes him, he has escaped the last vestige of his kingly role, so that in his truth-perceiving madness he can discover his self. Not iron king, wheat king or petrol king, but one of 'the little men that eat off the earth's crust'. Edgar, on the other hand, returns from madness to another role—the romantic one of unknown champion, Sohrab, the knight in shining armour. The duel he contrives is altogether too grand for the play's new style. Edgar is unfaithful now to the world of Lear which his imagination has allowed him spasmodically to inhabit. There is no clearer criticism of the limitations of Edgar's

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understanding than our realisation that while he fights his formal, clean battle for justice and revenge, Lear and Cordelia are being put to dirty death in a dungeon. When Lear describes how he tried to save Cordelia, it is not of Edgar that we think but of Cornwall's servant.

I have been trying to talk about role-play, and its attractiveness to the actor, but I have not always stayed close to the theatre. May I end by following a little way a suggestion of J. L. Styan's : 'The whole shape of the *Lear* experience is marked out by the simple sequence of his costumes.' I find the comment enticing, and dangerous, and I risk exploring it only because the costume-designer must, *and* be blamed for it. I count seven costumes for Lear in the play, each defining a role or the abandonment of a role. A stripping process occurs in sequence twice. Lear begins in highly declamatory regal robes, probably with sceptre and orb (carried as insistently as he will carry Cordelia on his final entrance). There is nothing modest about this costume, and we can spare little sympathy for the actor criticised by Eugene Field for playing the king 'as though he expected someone else to play the ace.' The change of costume from reigning King to travelling (? hunting) King is substantial, but not yet significant. The clothes are less in splendour and in quantity, but our awareness of this will grow with the next change to ragged king, fronting the storm, and torn by it. The final step in this sequence is the stripping to nakedness, representative or real, that is the final abandonment of role. Now. 'The Devil has ta'en a longer, stronger, pull'. The Act Four entrance 'fantastically dressed with wild flowers' is a step into unselfconscious satire of man's pretensions. Naked and unashamed is one thing, dressed like this and unashamed a step on. Lear is not acting now, but there is no disguising in the theatre that he is a spectacle. It is here, decisively, that he subsumes the Fool, for he not only plays the fool with Gloucester, he plays the Fool to Gloucester. The reader may ignore the upstaging aspect of this astonishing costume. The theatre can-

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not, nor can the contrast of the next costume be under-played, (though one might fairly question whether this costume should be white.)' 'In the heaviness of sleep,' explains the Doctor, 'we put fresh garments on him', and immediately the Gentleman ushers in an old man in a chair carried by servants. 'All fall to their knees', says a stage direction, grouping round a still sleeptng suit of clothes in which an unknown king, who may wake up as anything, breathes. Just as the second costume was reduced to rags, so will this one be at the last entrance, and Lear is repeating the move towards nakedness that he made from his previous ragged state when he dies. Happy or sad ? 'He is the soil in which God practises his divine moods.'

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James Ogden

THE ENDING OF *KING LEAR*

'Sitting down to read *King Lear* once again' may be for most of us an academic duty; unlike Keats we may need to remind ourselves that Dr Johnson was 'so shocked by Cordelia's death that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor'.[1] Would he have been less shocked if he had been able to see the play performed? The very best performances in the public theatres of Shakespeare's time and ours may well be less harrowing than those we stage in the private theatre of the imagination. Would he have been less shocked if he had lived the horrors of our century? Modern audiences and readers seem able to view the last scenes with fortitude, and there are critics who are ready to moralise about them in a manner not much less shocking than Edgar's moralising about his father.[2] Yet arguably our ability to endure these scenes is not evidence of callousness, but of a more balanced response.

We are likely to have been deeply dissatisfied with our last sight of Lear and Cordelia before they go to prison. We have agreed with Regan that the Lear of Act I must have 'but slenderly known himself'; but we have also agreed with Kent, that he was a man of authority; we have admired his heroic progress to self-knowledge and human sympathy; and we have rejoiced at his beautiful reconciliation with Cordelia. Now unlike her he cannot face his evil daughters, but is eager for the fancied security of prison, and the endless repetition of that reconciliation scene:

> We too alone will sing like birds i' th' cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh . . .

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The original audiences would probably recall the unintentionally comic scene in the old chronicle play of *King Leir*, where Leir and Cordella kneel and rise competitively time after time. Admittedly Lear's fancies are not wholly absurd, and in his next speech there is a stronger note of defiance of his captors; yet our dominant impression is likely to be that these are truly the words of 'a very foolish fond old man', who is not in his perfect mind. If this is the end, it is depressing.

Some odd things happen just before Lear takes the stage again. Edgar waxes rhetorical, becoming such a windbag that one of his speeches was apparently cut in early performances; at least, it does not appear in the Folio text.[3] Then there is an episode bordering on the farcical at the entry of the 'Gentleman with a bloody knife'. We have a good view of the thing before he manages to say

> 'Tis hot, it smokes;
> It came even from the heart of—O! she's dead.

Hardly surprising if the lady has had a knife in her heart, but is she Cordelia?—the audience may know she is stabbed in some versions of the story. Happily, she turns out to be Goneril; but we may feel that the dramatist has been merely piling on the agony. Soon afterwards, Lear himself being mentioned, Albany, always in some danger of becoming a comic figure, has the ridiculous line, 'Great thing of us forgot!' There is a relaxation of tension in this part of the scene which could be regarded as evidence that Shakespeare's inspiration was flagging. However, in performance the odd sequence of events may do duty for a comic scene which settles us in our seats with a too easily earned comfort, before we are jolted by whatever we see or think we see as a result of the stage-direction 'Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms'.[4]

Here we suffer the shock which made Johnson unable to re-read the scene. But we are not alone; the entire court neither knows what it ought to say nor can speak what it feels. And our feelings include amazement, even excitement. Cordelia is apparently dead, but the eighty-year-old King

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whom we feared senile has, astonishingly, found the strength to carry her back to the court, followed by the officer who was sent for them. Lear has recovered not only his physical strength but also his power to dominate the scene; we would not have wanted Cordelia to die so that we can see this, but it is something we have wanted to see. The effect is underlined a little later when Lear breaks off his pitiful communion with his daughter to declare: 'I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee'. The court can scarcely believe him, and the officer must step forward now, to confirm the truth of his claim: 'Tis true, my lords, he did'. Among our other emotions, we are glad to hear it. We can feel proud of Lear's response to the last and most terrible of his disasters. He has regained authority, and has become a tragic, as distinct from a pathetic, figure.

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Critics have found it hard to say whether Lear seeks reasonable grounds for believing that Cordelia is alive, or some means of comprehending that she is dead. Much will depend on the production.[5] But although we may at first think that Cordelia is only fainting, the courtiers assume she is dead, and a producer who encourages us to share Lear's hope for her life risks mocking us with strutting and fretful melodrama. We must know that she is dead when Kent and Edgar wonder if this is the end of the world, and when Kent says 'All's cheerless, dark, and deadly'. She lies motionless as Lear voices wild hope and black despair. We probably remember the description of Gloucester's death, earlier in the scene:

> his flaw'd heart,
> Alack too weak the conflict to support!
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy, and grief,
> Burst smilingly.

Lear's end cannot be wholly different, but for him the terms 'joy and grief' seem inappropriate. No doubt Gloucester's heart could have 'burst smilingly' at the knowledge that Edgar was after all alive and well, but if we are to suppose with Bradley and others that Lear's heart bursts smilingly too, then

the King must take refuge in the illusion that Cordelia lives. His final words,

> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!

do suggest that he thinks he sees signs of life. An actor trying to express Bradley's 'unbearable *joy*' might well convey only Nicholas Brooke's 'retreat into insanity'. Nothing an actor does is likely to render Lear's and Cordelia's deaths easier to contemplate.

And yet there are developments in this final scene which may help us to feel less pessimistic than Kent.[6] The outcome has general truth to life. Virtue in Cordelia's case must be its own reward, evil in her sisters punishes itself. Edmund is moved to attempt some good, despite of his own nature. Albany remains ridiculous and pathetic by turns, but his detachment from the group of evil characters is confirmed. He tries to make the grand summing-up of a Malcolm or a Fortinbras, but his pompous moralising is cut short by Lear's final agony. Twice he tries to renounce his power: before Lear's death, in the grandiose manner of Lear himself in the opening scene; after Lear's death, in the simple words of a sadder and a wiser man. He addresses Kent and Edgar:

> Friends of my soul, you twain
> Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain.

But Kent is too old, and the Folio is surely right in allowing Edgar the last speech:

> 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.

In a good production, there will be a feeling that nobody quite knows what to say, though something must be said. In these circumstances Edgar does extraordinarily well, better than we could have expected from some of his earlier speeches. Hence there is an encouraging development in his character right up to these last lines.

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And it is fitting that Edgar should voice, as well as the sense of shock, the admiration for Lear which we have all felt. Clifford Leech has argued that tragedy in general balances feelings of terror and pride.[7] The impression that the universe may be cheerless, dark, and deadly arouses the feeling of terror; the impression that we have seen men like ourselves facing this terror with full awareness and heroic endurance arouses the feeling of pride. It seems to me that Shakespeare obtains this effect so surely at the end of *Lear* that he can risk the suggestion of what we all know to be true, that there are limits to the awareness and endurance of even the most heroic among us. This suggestion does not upset the tragic balance; 'the wonder is he hath endur'd so long', as Kent says. Edgar too has the idea that Lear has 'borne most', and that the rest of us 'shall never see so much'. He can give no assurance that he will sustain the gored state and prevent further outbreaks of evil, but he is not pessimistic either; Lear's strength gives him strength.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1]Keats, 'On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again'; Johnson, note on *King Lear* in his edition of *The Plays*. There are pretty thorough surveys of more recent criticism in: Barbara Everett, 'The New *King Lear*', *Critical Quarterly* 2 (1960) 325-39; Joseph H. Summers, ' 'Look there, look there!' The Ending of *King Lear*', *English Renaissance Studies Presented to Dame Helen Gardner*, ed. John Carey, Oxford 1980, pp. 74-93; and G.R. Hibbard, '*King Lear:* A Retrospect, 1939-79', *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980) 1-12.

[2] Edgar says to his brother, of their father: 'The dark and vicious place where thee he got/Cost him his eyes'. Some critics apparently approve of this idea of justice; Robert Bechtold Heilman, *This Great Stage* (1948) devotes an entire chapter to the proposition 'The

Gods Are Just'. I know not whether I ever endured to read it again.

[3] Act V, scene iii, lines 204-21 in *King Lear*' ed. Kenneth Muir (Arden Edition), from which all quotations are made. Modern editors generally conflate the Quarto and Folio texts, with some unfortunate results. See Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare's Revision of 'King Lear'*, Princeton 1980, a work of textual criticism that has the rare merit of being interesting to both literary critics and producers.

[4] Muir and other editors read 'Cordelia dead in his arms', and some producers leave a noose round her neck, but they are not supported by the early editions. See note 3.

[5] For the former view, see C.F. Williamson, 'The Hanging of Cordelia', *Review of English Studies* XXXIV (1983) 414-18; he concludes that 'it makes all the difference whether Lear dies reasonably or unreasonably deceived'—he thinks, reasonably. For the latter view, see J. Stampfer, 'The Catharsis of King Lear', *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1960) 1-10; reprinted in *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Laurence Lerner (Penguin, 1963) 147-60. The most comprehensive study of the question I know is by Derek Peat, 'And That's True Too': *King Lear* and the Tension of Uncertainty', *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980) 1-12.

[6] Hence I somewhat disagree with Nicholas Brooke, *Shakespeare: King Lear* (Studies in English Literature, 15, 1963), when he says: 'the process of the play seems to me calculated to repudiate every source of consolation with which we might greet the final disaster' (p. 57), but not when he concludes: 'our feelings, crushed by facing ultimate negation, are simultaneously channelled towards recognising the perpetual vitality of the most vulnerable virtues' (p. 60). John D. Rosenberg, 'King Lear and his Comforters', *Essays in Criticism* XVI (1966) 135-46, reaches a similar conclusion. John Shaw, '*King Lear:* The Final Lines', *ibid.*, 261-7, supporting Rosenberg, takes his argument too far, I think, in finding the final speech 'ambiguous and negative' and 'confused'.

[7] *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth Century Drama* (1960), esp. pp. 16-18. I would like to acknowledge a general indebtedness to Professor Leech, though I do not think he would have agreed with all I have written in this essay.

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Pierre Sahel

KING LEAR : A WAR OF THE THEATRES

The existence in Shakespeare's works of play metaphors, images of the theatre, plays-within-or scenes-within-the play has for long been acknowledged[1]. In *King Lear* where another truism is the uneasy coexistence of marvellously good and utterly wicked characters, the dread summit of metadrama is perhaps reached because so many *personae* seem intent on building plays of their own, the sole purpose of which is often to pluck a theatre down and set another up.

As usual in Shakespeare, the villains in *King Lear* can counterfeit the deep tragedian. Edmund's Nature soliloquy[2] propels the plot of a playlet which is to be unfolded in two parts or tableaux and crowned by a denouement. It creates, moreover, conditions propitious to the birth of suspense and dramatic irony. The initial stage direction mentions his forged letter which is referred to only at the end of his tirade:

> If this letter speed,
> And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
> Shall top th'legitimate. (I. II. 19-21)

A special connivance is thus established between the character and the spectators. Soon after, Gloucester enters, and his perfunctory query—'what news?' (I. ii. 26)—brings about an answer—'none' (1. ii. 27)—which would be just as perfunctory if the answerer were not trying to belie it so obviously and to conceal so ostensibly his letter. Edmund's theme, for the moment, is to arouse his interlocutor's curiosity by pretending to evade it. He does not reply to Gloucester's new question (1. ii, 28), but reiterates the answer given to the previous one: 'I know no news my Lord' (1. ii. 29).—thus

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—suggesting that the letter *is* the piece of news. His father's more pointed interrogation, 'what paper were you reading?' (I. ii. 30), entails a 'nothing' (I. ii. 31) which, always in *King Lear* and sometimes elsewhere, is stored with more pregnant meaning than any description and consequently arouses further questions. Gloucester and we are spectators of Edmund's pretended hesitation: the interest in the letter is greatly heightened for Edmund's interlocutor and us who have been waiting for its content to be revealed; the Bastard's scanty and cryptic answers bring about intense expectation in us while they increase Gloucester's prejudice against the writer of the missive. Before the letter was read, Edmund played the part of the tempter. After it has been read, he casts himself for the part of the loving brother and trustworthy son. Here spectator Gloucester and the spectator of *King Lear* part ways: there is indignation for him and appreciation of the dramatic irony for us. Midway between first and second tableaux, Edmund reflects, sees himself as a comedy-writer, and underlines the right moment of Edgar's arrival: 'and pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the/old comedy'. (I. ii. 131-132) Having thus characterized his brother, he offers this definition of his own characterization: 'my cue is villanous melancholy' (I. ii. 132). During a brief interlude executed for his brother's benefit, he embarks upon an astrological tirade (I. ii. 133-146); his scene seems altered from a serious thing and now changed to a parody of his father's humour[3]. His spectator has changed too, for now Gloucester is replaced by Edgar. He had promised the former to organize an interview where the latter's words could be overheard (I. ii. 87-89); he now urges Edgar to keep away from their father (I. ii. 156), but promises him to arrange an interview where Edgar could overhear their father (I. ii. 165). This second tableau, we can see, is also brimful with dramatic irony as, for example, when he agrees that 'some villain hath done [Edgar] some wrong' (I. ii. 160-161). The denouement of the playlet is enacted in II. i. Edmund's spectators-within must now come

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to two separate places on his stage and at the same time perform the parts he has cast them for. Edmund the playwright will join them as leading actor, for he has 'one thing of a queasy question,/Which [he] must *act*'. (17-18) He pretends to be protecting Edgar from Gloucester ('Fly, brother', 31), then Gloucester from Edgar ('by no means he could . . ./ Persuade me to the murther of your lordship', 41-43). He gives stage directions with the night and the moon serving as decor (23); the scene is replete with the language of drama ('seem', 30, 'opinion', 33); theatrical tricks include the pretence of 'some blood drawn on me' (33).

The villains' theatre of blood starts later. It consists in a counter-justice drama initiated by Edmund who brings in the proof of his father's 'treason' (III. v. 11) to the *de facto* rulers of the kingdom. He acts as the more or less silent stage-manager, contents himself with a minor part in the show when he presents a stage dilemma between his blood and loyalty (III. v. 20-22), and lastly is the implicit audience (III. vii. 79) to the performance, a sort of trial procedure but truly an anticipation of Lynch law (III. vii. 4-6). Gloucester tries to suggest a different cast, insists on friendship, goodness, hospitality (III. vii. 30-31)—time-honoured social and moral roles to be strictly adhered to. All is in vain. They ignore his supplication to do him no foul play; they torture him, gouge out his eyes, and bring to an end their melodrama of uninhibited violence and hardly bearable horror.

Though it may well be that 'the subplot simplifies the central action, translating its concerns into familiar . . . verbal and visual patterns'[4], the villains' theatre is not restricted to the Gloucester-Edgar-Edmund scenes. Goneril engineers a plot to drive Lear to despair. When she decides: 'I will not speak with him' and orders: 'Say I am sick' (I. iii. 9), this is the first preparation of the show she intends to give her father. The troop of her servants will be her troupe. To Oswald she declares:

> If you come slack of former services
> You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer. (I. iii. 10-11)

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This is the advice of a producer, who claims responsibility for the actors' gestures, words, and silences. She insists:

> Put on what weary negligence you please
> You and your fellows; . . .
> And let his knights have colder looks among you;
> What grows of it, no matter; advise your fellows so.
> (I. iii. 13-14; 23-24)

The show ordered, rehearsed, and performed once in Goneril's castle is to be re-enacted elsewhere (I.iv.336). The effects of the instructions are soon perceived. 'Ceremonious affection' (I.iv.57) conspicuously vanishes; 'a great abatement of kindness' (I.iv.58) can but be noticed: Goneril is 'too much of late i' th' frown' (I.iv.187), Lear discovers all this as he watches, an incredulous spectator. Understandably, the characters of *King Lear*, when they play parts in Goneril and Regan's show, have countenances (II. ii. 81) or faces (II. ii. 90), but no substances. Kent tells Oswald that he is not more than a costume : A tailor made thee. (II. iv. 53). Such people are at best figures against or in a decor: A stone-cutter or a painter could not have/made him so ill (II.ii. 55-56). Kent himself is unwittingly and most reluctantly annexed—both exposed and exhibited in the stocks—to arouse Lear's indignation. When Lear realizes that what he witnesses has been purposefully staged—

> This *act* persuades me
> That this remotion of the Duke and her
> Is *practice* only (II. iv. 110-112)

—he histrionically tries to enter the play his daughters have prepared for him only to watch. But they dismiss him as an intruder on their stage-business :

> LEAR : On my knees I beg [Kneeling]
> That you vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.
> REGAN : Good sir, no more; these are *unsightly tricks*.
> (II. iv. 152-154)

Their performance soon proves successful. Lear is compelled to go down the stage and leave the theatre room altogther:

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GONERIL : My Lord, entreat him by no means to stay; (II. iv. 297)
REGAN : Shut up your doors; (II. iv. 302)
CORNWALL : Shut up your doors, my Lord. (II. iv. 306)

If we consider the motivations of the villainous stage-managers, it is not difficult to agree that they stage plots to further their own fortunes and favour their social promotions: Edmund does become Gloucester's favourite son and promised heir, then Cornwall's trusted follower, then earl of Gloucester in his father's place, then lover of both Goneril and Regan, then virtual leader of the British forces[5]. But perhaps their aims are wider and more ambitious. With their scenarios and intrigues they try to superimpose a new order of things upon what is established, against, that is, the political, social, and moral establishments. In his Nature soliloguy, Edmund proclaims his resentment at his inferior position; he shuts off his filial and other feelings in order to concentrate on the unbearable injustice. His is the voice of the leftist or the radical or the dissenter who has to have recourse to some sort of art-form to create a position and give legitimacy to his cravings. Goneril and Regan, who are in search of no social position, similarly hurl challenge at established laws. Is not Regan's gesture, as she plucks Gloucester's beard (III.vii. 35-36), a symbolic abuse at respectable old age and also at man and virility ? Is not Goneril's courtship of Edmund (IV.ii. 20-21 etc.) a protest against woman's traditional position as a creature to *be* wooed? As she contemplates her husband's assassination, she boldly writes, like a feminist freedom-seeker:

> His bed is my gaol; from the loathed
> warmth whereof deliver me. (IV. vi. 262-263)

And her protests well agree with Edmund's plea in favour of *union libre* and against the legally-sanctioned matrimony which only offers 'a dull, stale, tired bed' to create 'a whole tribe of fops,/Got 'tween asleep and wake' (I. ii. 13-15). Regan, as she publicly asks Edmund to marry her, not only wishes to use the habitually masculine privilege of taking the

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initiative ; she also expresses her readiness to replace the officiant :

> Witness the world, that I create thee here
> My lord and master. (V. iii. 78-79)

Should the villains' dynamic and aggressive theatre be thoroughly successful, the world would be topsy-turvy.

As usual in Shakespeare, the villains in *King Lear* may well be 'masters of deceit'[6]. But sometimes in Shakespeare, the good characters too know how to cheat their enemies and are able to use tricks against them. Salvation and rescue in *King Lear*, may, as at the end of *Richard III*, come from France; but just as in *Richard III*, the enterprise involves armed forces and the recourse to cunning—spies, 'intelligence', letters to and from potential allies. The irreproachable Kent goes disguised, for to be known contradicts his 'made intent' (IV. vii. 9). If Edmund once contemplates playing a part punctuated by sighs like those of 'Tom o' Bedlam' (I.ii.133), it is his brother who takes up the role. Edgar precisely stages the most complete scene-within-the play[7].

Instead of launching a perhaps impossible plea in favour of life in order to persuade his desperate father not to commit suicide, he surrounds Gloucester with a theatrical universe. He wishes to cure him of his suicidal humour and make him believe that his survival after the fall from the false cliff is a god-given miracle[8]. The actual stumble achieves the ironical conjunction of Gloucester's self-murderous project and Edgar's farce (IV.vi). The troupe performing this miniature play amounts to only one actor. Edgar is compelled to give a one-man show, in other words to play in one person many people.

Persona 1. Up to the edge of the cliff, he is the naked and simple-minded Poor Tom.

Persona 2. Down the cliff, he pretends to be a passer-by who has beheld the old man's fall; he shams surprise ('alive or dead?', 45) and affects not to know him ('what are you sir ?', 48) He even assures he has seen the creature who led

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Gloucester to the crown of the cliff and describes his fantastic appearance, thus creating *persona 1*:

> As I stood here below methought his eyes
> Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,
> Horns whelk'd and wav'd like the enridg'd sea:
> It was some fiend. (69-72)

Persona 3.' Since he cannot resume the part of Poor Tom whom he left 'up there', he assumes the part of 'a most poor man' willing to lead Gloucester 'to some biding' (218-221).

Understandably, things do not go smoothly as far as the cast is concerned, and it happens that *Persona 1* anticipates the part of *Persona 2*. It is fortunate, in a way, that the only beholder of this cheap show is a blind spectator ! Gloucester once notices the altered voice of his companion :

> Methinks thy voice is alter'd, and thou speak'st
> In better phrase and matter than thou didst. (7-8)

To which Edgar clumsily replies :

> You're much deceived; in nothing am I chang'd
> But in my garments. (9-10)

But Gloucester insists :

> Methinks you're better spoken. (10)

Elements of decor and stage scenery exist in Edgar's playlet which provides several stage directions. It should here be said that *no* audience with or without 'Elizabethan theatrical conditioning' could for a moment 'believe that Gloucester is on the edge of a cliff'[9]. Convention certainly 'prescribes that we accept whatever is said on the subject of immediate place and setting'[10]. Convention certainly requires us to believe that, on the heath, 'bleak winds/Do sorely ruffle; for many miles about there's scarce a bush' (II. iv.299-300) ; but such is not the landscape Edgar pretends to be watching and describes for his father as he organizes it spatially like a painting[11]:

> The crows and choughs that wind the midway air
> Show scarce so gross as beetles; half-way down
> Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!

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> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
> The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice . . . (13-18)

Only the real spectator, that of *King Lear*, can fully appreciate the differences, ironies, and discrepancies of the situation, for his level of consciousness is higher not only than Gloucester's but also than Edgar's. Indeed he may all at once understand and share Gloucester's agony and despair *and* Edgar's optimistic and didactic purpose, watch Gloucester's pitiful stumble *and* imagine the fall so many fathom down the top of the cliff ; he may contrast the ruthless world where Gloucester's eyes have been plucked out with the miraculous place where old men are rescued from death. Jan Kott perceived that the described countryside is different from the landscapes suggested by Elizabethan theatrical conventions :

> Shakespeare often creates a landscape on an empty stage . . . . But no other Shakespearean landscape is so exact, precise, and clear as this one[12].

The reason why *this* landscape is so utterly different is simply that it is not Shakespearian but Edgarian. Hence the rather comic exchange between the reluctant spectator-on-the stage and the playwright intent on making him believe what, in effect, are stage directions in Edgar's dramatic production :

> EDGAR : You do climb it now; look how we labour.
> GLOUCESTER : Methinks the ground is even.
> EDGAR : Horrible steep:
> Hark! do you hear the sea?
> GLOUCESTER : No, truly. (2-4)

While fhe villains' dramatic essays are pugnacious and unconventional, Edgar's cliff is conventional and neatly framed play. As a healer of his father's harms Edgar displays many a feature of an emblematic drawing[13], or resembles an illuminated manuscript figure[14]. Because of its didacticism the aim of his comedy is easy to grasp; his theatre is protective and benevolent : the gods do not kill men for their sport, and Gloucester should think that they have preserved him. As for the stage-manager himself, he could hardly be blamed:

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'Why I do trifle thus with his despair/Is done to cure it'. (33-34).

Because Edgar is morally prejudiced and wishes to summon the forces of evil to their destruction, he stages another 'curative' performance. The trial by combat where he kills Edmund is once more *his* show. He has prepared it for long and invited a large audience to attend it. As early as v. i. he asks Albany;

> If you have victory, let the trumpet sound. (41)
> When time shall serve, let but the herald cry,
> And I' ll appear again. (4-49)

The main device of the display, since this is a *Jugement de Dieu*, is the essentially theatrical trick of the *deus-ex-machina*. The herald reads a formal challenge and the blast of the trumpet, which is like the trumpet of Judgment, is heard thrice. Edgar, who claims to embody the chivalric defeater of evil, seems to appear magically, costumed in the armour of a knight, a rare item, probably, in his thatre's parapher-nalia. When he was offering Albany to preside over his dramatic ceremony, he admitted that he only 'seemed' to be 'wretched' (V. i. 42). Now he seems god-like. Such is Edgar's attempt to cure not a suffering man but the suffering world.

Another therapeutic attempt is made in *King Lear* as Cordelia tries to rescue her father from *his* despair, it is also given several theatrical qualities. The dressing of Lear in new garments during his artificial sleep helps him acquire a new identity[15]. Cordelia arranges the waking scene with the Doctor ; when she asks him, while the old man is still asleep, 'Is he array'd ?' (IV.vii.20), she means : Is he costumed for a new role ? Surprise and the discovery of completely different surroundings—Regan and Goneril's trick turned upside down —will be Lear's medicine. The Doctor carefully directs his main actress :

> Be by, good Madam, when we do awake him. (IV.vii.23)

It appears the scene has been calculated if not rehearsed :

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> Please you, draw near. Louder the music there. (IV. vii. 25)

Further instructions are given when the king awakes ; Cordelia is asked to speak to him (IV. vii. 43), later to 'let him alone awhile' (IV.vii.51). Gradually, Lear emerges into the universe of the performance, a universe fraught with melodramatic atmosphere, a universe where such words as 'King', 'dear', 'pity', 'poor' are spoken, and where children are kneeling, women weeping, and tears wet. The privileged spectator of the show wonders in astonishment :

> I will not swear these are my hands : let's see ; (IV.vii.55)
> Am I in France ? (IV.vii.75)

Soon he thinks that all this is too good to be true ('Do not abuse me', IV.vii.77). Why they do trifle thus with his despair is, of course, done to cure it.

Lear learns the lesson well, and in the next Act, he himself wishes to lead Cordelia away from the rough world into the secluded world of a wall'd prison. After reality has emphatically been denied ('No, no, no !' V. iii. 8), Lear's cue is paradoxical escapism. The prison is metamorphosed into a place full of joy and colours and sounds, where games will be so numerous that they are the theme of a projected play :

> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness ; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh. (V.iii.10-12)

So many and antagonistic stage businesses, logically, will clash together and mitigate or nullify each other as, we have seen, when Goneril and Regan's performance given before Lear is (much later, much too late) undone by Cordelia's.

At the moment when Edgar, using the eminently theatrical device of the protracted revelation and refusing to identify himself, prepares his armed and costumed reappearance, Edmund is imagining a totally different scenario. The two half-brothers acknowledge that Albany is an essential agent in the success of their plans :

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EDGAR : If you miscarry,
Your business of the world hath so an end,
And machination ceases. (V. i. 44-46)

EDMUMD : we'll use
His countenance for the battle ; which being, done,
Let her who would be rid of him devise
His speedy taking off. (V. i. 63-65)

When in V. iii Albany throws down his glove, Edmund's project has one chance of success ; but Edgar's playlet is performed and brings Edmund's to naught. Machinations thus miscarry, letters are intercepted, schemes are thwarted. The playwrights—producers—and protagonists-on-the stage relish the fun of having the enginer hoist with his own petar. Twice at least, Albany and Goneril exchange banters proving their consciousness of each other's dramaturgy :

ALBANY : For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife ;
And I, her husband, contradict your banes.
If you will marry, make your loves to me,
My lady is bespoke.

GONERIL : An interlude ! (V. iii. 85-90)

ALBANY : Shut your mouth dame,
Or with this paper [Goneril's letter to Edmund]
shall I stople it. (V. iii. 153-54)

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As the play draws towards its close, it may seem that the villains are definitely not the *masters* of deceit. Edmund is ready to admit his defeat and the failure of his endeavours, and wishes to convert himself[16]. His words testify to his will to cooperate with the forces of good and annul his own scheme :

I pant for life ; some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature. (V. ii. 242-43)

He fancies that the deaths of the monstrous sisters and his own imminent end are proofs of the deserved denouement of the good characters' dramaturgical efforts : 'The wheel is come full circle; I am here' (V. iii. 173).

But competition between the rival theatres does not necessarily open the perspective of a spiritual triumph. In III.vii an

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anonymous (and ignored) spectator of Cornwall's melodrama of blood interferes with the savage treatment inflicted upon Gloucester ; such unexpected themes as sympathy, generosity, and pity intrude on the plot of the defenceless man's torturers :

> Hold your hand, my Lord.
> I have serv'd you ever since I was a child.
> But better service have I never done you
> Than now to bid you hold. (70-73)

Moreover, Cornwall's whole counter-justice plot is aesthetically battered by the mock-trial Lear tries to stage in the immediately preceding scene. There some good characters rally and, to piece out the roughness of the world, endeavour to pass judgment on Lear's guilty daughters in the sheltering walls of the farmhouse. They recreate their characteristically protective theatre ('Here is better than the open air', III. vi.1; 'I will piece out the comfort with what addition I can', III. vi. 2; 'will you lie down and rest upon the cushions', III.vi.34). Within these relatively cosy precincts, Lear may indulge in a fantasy game in which he disposes of armed forces (III. vi. 77), charges the she-foxes (III. vii. 23), orders sapient man, most learned justicer, robed man of justice, and recreates within elements reminiscent of a justice and formalism sadly deficient without.

The most conspicuous clash between the two systems occurs in I. i. No matter how the scene is watched, understood, or studied, the love-test or game is a theatrical performance ; Lear wishes to be its masterful showman, and to stage it for the sole purpose of glorifying himself in public[17]. He would like first and foremost the assembled court to hear and behold his solo performance. It might have been indeed a dramatic monologue with his daughters' predictable responses. As it happens, when he announces that he will divest himself 'both of rule,/interest of territory, care of state' (48-49) while retaining 'the name and all th' addition to a king' (135), he proclaims himself literally a player-king. He

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distributes roles (33), reveals his unquestionable purposes (his 'fast intent', 37), and does what an actor does : he speaks his mind ('we shall express', 35 ; 'know that', 36; 'we have . . . a constant will to publish', 42). The performance is also a ritual since most of the king's projects are already known to some (1-6), which implies that it has, partly at least, been rehearsed. The courtly rhetoric, the numerous inversions, the balanced style[18] confirm that all has to some extent been pre-arranged : 'Goneril, our, eldest-born, speak first' (53)—and Goneril, who has learnt her part by heart, gives her answer in seven lines ; 'What says our second daughter?' (66)—and Regan, who also knows her text very well, gives hers in eight lines. Only Cordelia does not want to give her expected response, as her aside informs us ('What shall Cordeila speak? Love and be silent', 61), Lear's playlet evidences the main feature of the good characters' theatre: it is orderly and protective. It is because there is danger ahead that the King must have his say and show, so 'that future strife/May be prevented now' (43-44). The future strife, that is, war between the dukes of Albany and Cornwall, will be avoided if the fairest justice is imposed on both:

> In the division of the Kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety. (3-6)

If we choose to grant Lear at this stage a relatively high degree of consciousness, we may admire his idea of mixing love with justice. We may even suspect that he understands Cordelias' genuine love as well as Regan's and Goneril's fake feelings, since he has decided to reserve a 'third more opulent' part of the kingdom for his youngest daughter. Lear's show fails because it is subverted by Regan and Goneril's strategy. They accept to speak the parts Lear has cast them for because these are a prologue to *their* play. Cordelia and Kent simply dismiss the show because, for the moment at least, they know not seems; France mocks it as an old man's

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fantasy which to be believed 'Must be a faith that reason without miracle should never plant in me' (221-222). Cordelia, Kent, and France are heterogeneous people in Lear's attempted dramatic artistry : he had not foreseen their attitude.

Lear's mistake and all the other would-be dramatists' mistake is to oversimplify. Actually the essential touchstone of a work of art is perhaps simplification and elimination of unnecessary elements. What both villains and good characters do as they, artist-like, conceive a playlet or a scene-within-the play is to eliminate cumbersome and complicating elements. They are concerned only with making their ideas of right or wrong prevail. But their black-and-white dichotomy will simply not work. Theirs is the manicheism of melodramatic patterns—where thoroughly 'good guys' affront thoroughly 'bad guys' or where a part stands for the whole—while the pattern of *King Lear* persists in remaining tragic. The clash between the rival theatres, in spite of intimations, hopes, and illusions, does not bring about the victory of one of the two camps. The much more real clash is between their artificial conceptions and the whole play of *King Lear* which gives itself as the world itself.

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When the battle near Dover is finished, we realize that the victor belongs to the side of the vanquished. Before he fights the forces of Lear and Cordelia, Albany himself expresses his consciousness that he is going to meet with the best of enemies and to struggle against one he loves :

> Where I could not be honest,
> I never yet was valiant : for this business,
> It touches us, as France invades our land,
> Not bolds the king, with others, whom, I fear,
> Most just and heavy causes make oppose. (V. i. 23-27)

This is not a man who oversimplifies and boisterously claims he knows for sure where right and wrong are. Edmund has to enquire :

> Know of the Duke if his last purpose hold,
> Or whether since he is advis'd by aught

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> To change the course; he's full of alteration
> And self-reproving. (V.i.1-4)

His hesitations and his unspectacular evolution[19] do not (or do not only) reveal a colourless character; they disclose his consciousness of, or puzzlement at, the complex situations of a play which is not framed within the narrow schemes of the extempore playwrights but which has been imagined by the playwright.

What is true of Albany is even more obviously true of Lear whose evolution goes so far beyond the boundaries of the theatre that he tries to build or that others build for, against, or around him. B.G. Lyons rightly diagnoses that 'Lear's experience is truly tragic. . .because the literary forms that avoid tragedy are so clearly inadequate to express what he goes through'[20]. But it would be correct to add that even Gloucester's experience can only misleadingly (and wishfully) be explicable by the moral terms of Edgar's dramatics. When Edgar justifies the blinding of his father thus: 'The dark and vicious place where thee [Edmund] he got, Cost him his eyes.' (V. iii. 171-172) not only can the justification seem 'obscene'[21], but one should wonder at this belated interpretation instead of taking it for granted. The reason why Gloucester's eyes were gouged out is first of all (and perhaps only) his support of, and sympathy for, Lear, an unforgivable fault for Cornwall and Regan. Now Edgar, though he does not suggest any reason for his father's death, neutralizes its shock :

> His flaw'd heart. . .
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
> Burst smilingly. (V.iii. 197-198)

But should we not also question his account since only he witnesses and reports Gluocester's end ? Could it not be suggested that this obstinate moral optimist is, once again, offering an arranged rendering rather than a simple testimony ? Critics and readers are not bound to follow an interpretation intent on rationalizing—nearly rationalizing away—

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the existence of evil. Such an effort is in complete agreement with the 'ideology' of Edgar's reassuring dramaturgy; but it is contradicted by the essence of the vaster play, *King Lear* where a refusal to follow the Seventh Commandment is heard more than once :

> I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause ?
> Adultery ?
> Thou shalt not die : die for adultery ! No :
> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight.
> Let copulation thrive. (IV.vi.109-114)
> Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand !
> Why dost thou lash that whore ?
> Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
> For which thou whipp'st her. (IV. vi. 158-161)

Much in the same way, death-wishes persistently ooze through the play and bring the lie to Edgar's rehabilitating construction in favour of life and the gods. Immediately after his pseudo fall and resurrection, Gloucester relapses and complains : 'Is wretchedness depriv'd that benefit/To end itself by death ?' (IV.vi.61-62). Even after he has understood the lesson of his apparently miraculous survival, he prays: 'You ever-gentle Gods, take my breath from me'(IV.vi.214). Later he encourages Oswald to stab him : 'Now let thy friendly hand/Put strength enough to' t' (IV. vi. 227). Lear once wishes to drink poison (IV.vii.72). Lastly, Albany pronounces his opinion in favour of euthanasia :

> O let him pass; he hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer (V. 3. 612-314)

No more than the other characters' theatrical elaborations could Edgar's achievement during the cliff scene be lasting. In the words of Robert Egan, his drama 'superimposes a scheme of order and meaning upon experience by entirely artificial and illusory means.'[22] His panoramic decor was like a forged painting and the medical cure he administered Gloucester was a placebo. His demiurgic attempt lifts him to

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god-like heights, but his is the limited power of a false god. He may only seem to take (IV. vi. 41) or give (IV. vi. 55) life. Lear's demiurgic capability too is feeble and does not extend beyond the love-*game* and the *mock*-trial scenes. The scope of such essays is narrow, and the infinitely vaster drama of Shakespeare's play—'this great stage of foolls' (IV. vi. 181)—thwarts them all.

Indeed the play tyrannically, arbitrarily, dimisses such efforts. Its stage directions are like curt verdicts passed upon practically all the dramaturgical elaborations. Just as Edgar wishes to re-assert his self-confidence and stoically encourages himself ('The worst returns to laughter', IV. i. 6), he watches his blind father walking upon the heath :

Enter Gloucester, led by an old man.

When Edgar congratulates himself for having driven home his anti-suicidal lesson and draws for his father a comforting conclusion from his philosophical playlet ('Bear free and patient thoughts', IV. 6. 80) the play decrees that Lear is conspicuously mad:

Enter Lear, fantastically dressed with wild flowers.

As the play's survivors are about to exchange compliments (V. 3. 232),

Enter Lear, with Cordelia dead in his arms.

This debunks the triumphant victory of Edmund whose death, the outcome of Edgar's technically successful last performance, in comparison with that unexpected horror, is 'but a trifle here' (V. iii. 294).

Could the invading forces win the day?—they could; why are they defeated?—why not? Could the order to rescue Lear and Cordelia be executed in time?—it could; why is it delayed?—why not? The play, ignoring all 'trifles', does not spare its characters contradictions, absurdities, necessities, and contingencies. The world of *King Lear* is a stage; but it is the world;; the other stages are but stages. Definitely 'nature's above art in that respect' (IV. vi. 86). Papier-mache will not stand the test of life. The war launched by one

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theatre-within-the play against another is of course won by Shakespeare's play.

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[2] 1, 2, 1-22. All quotations are from *The Arden Shakespeare*, edited by Kenneth Muir (London, 1972).

[3] Cp. 1, 2, 109-114 and 137-146. For a different reading of the lines, see John Reibetanz, 'Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*', *Some Facets of 'King Lear': Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, edited by Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff (University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 48.

[4] B.G. Lyons, 'The Subplot as Simplification in King Lear', *Some Facets of King Lear'* p. 25.

[5] Thomas F. Van Laan, 'Acting as Action in *King Lear*', *Some Facets of 'King Lear'*,p. 66.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[7] For a longer study of the cliff scene as a play-within-the play, see Pierre Sahel, 'La scene de la falaise dans *Le Roi Lear*: Une piece dans la piece', *Les Lanques Modernes* LXXII (4, 1975), pp. 339-344.

[8] Alvin B. Kernan, 'Formalism and Realism in Elizabethan Drama: The Miracles in *King Lear*', *Renaissance Drama* IX (1966), pp. 64-65.

[9] Cf. James Black, '*King Lear'*: Art Upside-Down', *Shakespeare Survey* XXXIII (1980), p. 39.

[10] Harry Levin, 'The Heights and the Depths: A Scene from *King Lear*', the Signet Classic *King Lear* (1963), p. 272, quoted by James Black, *ibid.*

[11] B.G. Lyons, 'The Subplot as Simplification', p. 31.

[12] *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, tr.B. Taborski (London, 1965), p. 113.

[13] John Reibetanz, 'Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*', *Some Facets of King Lear*, p. 40.

[14] *Ibid.* p. 43.

[15] Thomas F. Van Laan, 'Acting as Action'. p. 72.

[16] J.K. Walton, 'Lear's Last Speech', *Shakespeare Survey* XIII (1966), pp. 15-16.

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[17] Thomas F. Van Laan, 'Acting as Action', p. 61.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

[19] See Leo Kirschbaum, 'Albany', *Shakespeare Survey* XIII (1960), pp. 20-29.

[20] 'The Subplot as Simplification', p. 37.

[21] Robert Egan, *Drama within Drama* (New York, 1975), p. 51).

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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KING LEAR : THE VISION OF HORROR

Presumably the central drive in *King Lear* is directed towards an attempt at probing the human condition, involving of course the skilful protrayal and interaction of characters and done through the inner organisms of image and symbol. These indeed constitute the complex architecture meant for clarifying and objectification of that condition. The calculated plan of parcelling his kingdom into three portions at a finger's stroke, reserving the largest and most opulent one (as it is disclosed later) for Cordelia who was expected to outweigh, in exuberant and fulsome protestations of love, both Goneril and Regan, smacks of the folk-lorist prudence and has also the element of ritualistic formality in it. The standard set up by Lear for the evaluation of love, it has been widely recognized, seems to be quantitative rather than qualitative; love for him is a commodity, and not a relation, something which is ponderable and measurable, resting not on the total personality of the speaker but on words uttered speciously and with glibness and with an eye on securing the alloted portion by humouring, as a public gesture, the old autocratic king. Lear in a way clings to form, and keeps in view only the marketable value of love and tends to deny its real substance. In arranging this awkward and irrational love-contest he is undoubtedly motivated by the unappeasable desire to be flattered and his largess was bound to follow proportionately to the love offered by each competitor. What does transpire is rather upsetting and clean contrary to his expectations: whereas the other two daughters are maximal in their empty, rhetorical effusions, Cordelia is minimal, reticent and almost tongue-tied. Lear's immediate

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repercussions betray a state of mind deeply rooted in self-centredness, egotism and a sort of imperiousness which is not likely to be qualified and moderated by the exercise of of cool-tempered wisdom. Logically enough, when Cordelia, instead of indulging in mouthfuls of hollow and hypocritical adulation, insists, unlike the other two sisters, on following strictly the compulsions of the natural 'bond', Lear instantly flies into violent and tyrannical passion. Her insistence on the 'bond' may, however, be seen to conform to the calculus of material computation implied by his own terms of reference. This ultimately leads to the break-up of the organic order of established hierarchies and sanctions. Lear's fatal and tragic flaw consists in regarding love as something to be reckoned with in the market place on the basis of rough and ready calculation and not grasped and apprehended as an imaginative entity. It amounts to thinking in terms of the Blakean Ratio, the mechanical and perfunctory give-and-take of a material bargain. There is at the same time an obvious, inelutable element of whimsicality about him, and the entire proceedings turn into a kind of grotesquerie, with an admixture of sadism in it.

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Very early in the play Lear when expostulates with the inflexible, self-righteous Cordelia : 'what can you say to draw, A third more opulent than your sisters?' (1,i, 85-86) and the following colloquy ensues :

> Cor. : Nothing, my lord.
> Lear : Nothing ?
> Cor. : Nothing.
> Lear ; Nothing will come of nothing' : (I, i, 87-90)

the word 'nothing' in that colloquy and the endless variations played on it later in the oft-repeated 'never' are packed with a density of meaning one does not ordinarily associate with the utterances of a senile, perverse and self-willed person. And yet his assertion here and the entire corpus of his experience later has an archetypal quality about it. Lear is incapable of viewing things except in a purely rationalistic way—incapable,

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that is, of developing images of sympathy and love which help us outgrow our narrow grooves and acquire the spaciousness and amplitude of a self-transcending mind. Quickly pouncing, therefore, upon Cordelia's curt, hesitant, monosyllabic words, forced out of a rigid and inward-looking person, Lear is moved to making a peremptory, categorical and decisive statement: 'Nothing will come of nothing,' The word 'nothing' comes to acquire a signification which is crucial and which seems to permeate the whole play. In other words, it not only reflects a stubborn refusal on Lear's part to extend the hand of reciprocal love but also unconsciously reveals a particular state of mind. 'Nothing' connotes, in this specific context, an awareness of the immense void which he strives to be piercing through and he swims in the emptiness everything, paradoxically, is full of. It is this constant preoccupation with 'nothingness'—the loss of essence, the dissolution of identity and the sudden fracture of things—which is germane to the action of the play. This poses a wider existential problem than the mere gimmickry of an ossified brain, an egocentric individual's divestment of himself of both the substance and the paraphernalia of authority and the ironic self-pity which follows upon the retention of the king's name only. In a later context, in reply to the Fool's query: 'Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?' (1, iv, 136) Lear comes forward promptly with: 'Why, no, boy, nothing can be made out of nothing' (1,iv, 139). This is reinforced by the Fool's cryptic summing up of lear's predicament thus : 'now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing' (1, iv, 200-2), and an 'O without a figure', it goes without saying, amounts to complete absence of identity. In the maddening crescendo of his traumatic experience of both the pervesely calculating and ignoble daughters, humiliated, moreover, not only because of the reduction of his retinue—dubbed as debauched and riotous—but also feeling alienated as a most irksome and unwanted guest, and while he is on the

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verge of becoming crazed in his wits, Lear puts to himself a series of resounding questions which betray any way a sort of 'defenceless bewilderment':

> Does any here know me? This is not Lear:
> Does Lear walk thus ? speak thus ? Where are his eyes ?
> Either his notion weakens, his discernings
> Are lethargied—Ha; waking ? 'tis not so.
> Who is it that can tell me who I am ? (1,iv,234-38)

And pat comes the Fool's reply to this feverous, heart-rending query: 'Lear's shadow'. Lear is forced to the conviction that the constituent factors of his personality have fallen into disarray, its cohesiveness is gone and this leads on to the self-excoriating experience which is integral to the play.

In a way Edgar is the pivotal character and in spite of the moral crudeness of some of his comments on Gloucester's sexual misdemeanour, most of the subtle insights of the play are mediated through him and these are marked by a degree of maturity and level-headedness far exceeding anybody else's. The artifice involved in his masquerades deepens the intensity of Lear's sufferings: that in a way is the excuse for this shrewd juxtaposition of the two. He impersonates a Bedlamite beggar, puts on the garb of those contemporary madmen who, released from the lunatic asylum, used to roam about here and there, with their teeth chattering due to exposure to the severity of winter, their bare flesh lacerated by self-torture—pictures of abject poverty and awful destitution. As part of his calculated strategy and with a view to striking terror in the heart of the beholders he pretends as if he is haunted by the evil spirits of popular superstition and was meant to be taken as an adept in charms and exorcisms. He dresses himself very fantastically, sticking on his person all the assorted items which, being part of their usual odd equipment, were paraded by the half-crazed beggars in the countryside and these vagabonds were able to evoke pity of the onlookers :

> The country gives me proof and precedent
> Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,

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> Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
> Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary :
> And with this horrible object,...
> Enforce their charity, (II, iii, 13-20)

To render this weird and ghastly presence, under the assumed nomenclature of Tom, authentic, he is also referred to as one who 'eats the swimming frog, the toad, the todpole, the wall-newt, and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows the old rat and ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipp'd from tithing to tithing, and stock-punish'd, and imprison'd, (III, iv, 132-39). And not only is the fact of demonic possession in consonance with his assumed and recognized role but he also seems to contain these evil spirits within himself: 'Five fiends have been in poor Tom at once; as Obidicut, of lust; Hoberdidance, prince of dumbness; Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing; who since possesses chamber-maids, and waiting-women' (IV, i, 58-62). Through the use of this nightmarish imagery we are made to believe that these evil spirits cleave to him so closely and tenaciously that he comes to discard his essential self and turns into a mere wraith. The possession by the spirits who, ironically enough, prove to be no more than vermins, Heilman argues, may be treated as Shakespeare's cunning version of the Medieval allegorization of the Seven Deadly Sins.[2]

Confronted with this monstrous caricature of man, barely wrapped in tattered clothes—linked up with the moral emblem of the 'loop'd and window's raggedness of humanity, and when the mood of searing melancholy and black despondency is on him, Lear begins to speculate over the basic constitution of man thus: 'Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off,

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you lendings' (III, iv, 105-111). Riddled with paradox this offers a sharp contrast to Hamlet's idealization in 'What a piece of work is a man' passage which however ends up surprizingly with man's ultimate pounding to dust. Unlike that steep fall from sublimity to nothingness, Lear's indictment of man is wholesale, consistent and unqualified: man in his bare, physical existence does not owe anything to the animals although the latter in their minimal endowments are partakers of some kind of rudimentary sophistication. Lear, however, wishes to see through and beyond the state of sophistication (which any way stands condemned) or what Langland succinctly and metaphorically identifies, according to his own stance, as the 'Contenuance of clothyng' (Cf. *Visions of Piers Plowman*). The accent falls therefore on the radical transformation he has undergone and the reduction of the proud, finicky and 'lust dieted' man to the level of animals. In 'Off, off, you lendings' he insists that the garment of falsehood—the accretions of culture and superimposed breeding—had better be cast off. In a leaping flash of insight he awakens to the reality of the nexus of relationship existing not only between himself and Edgar but also between himself and the entire humankind. While immersed in deep self-communion Edgar proposes to himself

> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That very penury, in contempt of man,
> Brought near to beast; (II. iii, 7-9)

The figure of poor Tom, with his 'presented rakedness' and which is foisted upon Edgar, becomes a moving image of the stripping of man to the bone. Talking to Edgar and while his mind is still haunted subconsciously by the same phantasmagoric figure he had seen, earlier, Gloucester continues to dwell on the theme of the triviality of man thus: 'I th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,/Which made me think a man a worm' (Iv. i. 32-33). To eliminate the civilized and social context from man and to see him as a bare, physical object makes him almost indistinguishable from the Swiflian

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figure of the Yahoo or Shakespeare's own Caliban. And this Tom who, according to Northrop Frye's iluminating etching of him, 'stands between Lear in front of him and the abyss of non-entity inhabited by the foul fiends behind'[3] brings to mind irresistibly the following lines from the Book of Job: 'The light, they say, is near to the darkness' . . . If I say to the pit, 'You are my father', and to the worm, 'My' mother or 'My sister'; Where then is my hope?' (17:12-14).

It has been acutely observed by Mc laughlin[4] that the hovel in which Lear, Edgar and the Fool are herded together as the poorest specimens of sub-human species and which offers them temporary refuge from the 'pitiless pelting of the storm' raging outside in all its elemental fury takes on a symbolic significance. For a moment, these two creatures, hovering over the periphery of human existence, come to share a fraction of the burden with Lear who has been moving in the delirium of evil for so long. As counterpoised to the palace—the symbol of superfluity—the hovel is an emblem of necessity to which they are now reduced owing to the vicissitudes of their fortunes. The inference that Mc laughlir is at such pains to draw and insist on is that whereas the palace symbolizes the vainglory, the arrogance and ruthlessness of the affluent and the privileged—the *hubris* of culture in one word—and tends to shut out the common man from its precincts and from access to the worldly goods, in the hovel Lear's area of communication widens as here he comes across the dispossessed of the world. Here Lear has 'created perspectives from which the power of the civilized seems little and absurd'.[5] But it is equally legitimate to hold that the hovel is an emblem of Lear's sharpened sense of isolation and of man's regression into primitivism which is in accord with his ultimate reduction to animality. It has the status of a veritable dark tower into which Lear lands and where, along with the fiend-haunted Edgar, he is likely to be afforded a fugitive moment of cessation from the agonizing experiences to which he has been consistently

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exposed and which have told heavily upon his meagre inner sources of strength. It may be added that the thunder which reflects 'the authentic voice of the tragic experience' epitomizes the crumbling of physical nature into chaos and the prayer speech which concludes with

> O! I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And shew the Heavens more just. (III,iv, 32-36)

underscores Lear's movement from pure egocentricity to some semblance of Pauline charity and a hardening of his moral fibre. It also helps Lear—'the ruin'd piece of Nature'—reachieve the lost sense of identity—an identity which had been shivered into fragments as an inevitable concomitant of the series of mounting crises by which his life was assailed all along.

The sense of horror, the evocation of which is insistent and obstinate is partly concretized by Edgar whose 'body is a fearful reminder of the deformity that life may visit upon us at any instant.'[6] He is presented not only as a bedlam beggar but also as a walking shadow—'a tattered cloth upon a stick',—with horns sticking out of it, something which is at once paltry and hideous. The gouging out of Gloucester's eyes caused by the barbarous and atrocious frenzy of Cornwall evokes a sort of nihilistic horror which seems to be a correlative of the dizzying image of the abyss of death or nothingness. This renders him physically incapable of recognizing his own legitimate son who had been doggedly pursuing him throughout the periods of turmoil by exercising an endless repertory of roles.

Edgar's is a most lethal character, both intriguing and trenchant, and he is given to putting on a variety of masks partly to escape detection by those who lie in ambush of his life and partly also because he has to do a bit of play-acting. When Lear asks him: 'What hast thou been? Edgar's purposeful misrepresentation of himself runs to this effect:

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'A serving man, proud in heart and mind; that curl'd my hair, wore gloves in my cap, serv'd the lust of my mistress's heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of Heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust, and wak'd to do it. Wine love'd I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramour'd the Turk: false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey' (III, iv, 85-95). This recalls, in a different context, Malcolm's deliberate self-denigration when he is being persuaded to take upon himself the reins of government in place of the bloody and unscrupulous Macbeth who was bound to be ousted from the stewardship of 'the gor'd state'. But whereas Malcolm wanted to make sure if the election that had fallen upon him would stand the strain it was to be exposed to and if he himself were competent enough to rise to the occasion, Edgar's minutiae of fault-finding is a specific instance of the all-pervasive corruption and taint which seems to be an inalienable adjunct of the human condition in the fallen world. Edgar here becomes the symbol of man, portrayed in depth in all vileness and ignominy, given over to lust and all other passions the flesh is heir to, and thus hovering perilously over the brink of moral bankruptcy. Moreover, while embarking upon a series of sophisticated impersonations and trying to hoodwink his blinded father who is far from suspecting his identity Edgar indulges in this clever piece of histrionic improvisation which is nevertheless tinged with a streak of pathos:

> As I stood here below methought his eyes
> Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,
> Horns whelk'd and wav'd like the enridg'd sea :
> It was some fiend; (IV, vi, 69-72)

In the image of the horned devil or monstrosity of creation is the ideal of 'unaccommodatedness' objectified and particularized in a pretty convincing way : something which we tend to contemplate with fascinated horror. This bizarre, grotesque

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and frightening figure is emblematic of the ostracized man, one of the social outcasts, thrown out of gear in his particular milieu, spurned and rejected with contumely by the sponsors of hierarchy, status and law within the organized body-politic wherein 'lewdness' in the social/sexual sense of the Renaissance ethos flourishes without any impediment or reservation. He generates utter revulsion and disgust against the sacrosanct norms and values and induces us to believe in man's temporary retreat from civilized society into the Hobbesian world of brutish and conflicting appetites. Edgar's crucial importance in the structure of the play is twofold : he is the counterpart of Cordelia in the sense of being a vital 'component in Lear's re-education', and both of them are also touching pictures of that steadfast endurance and 'patience' the need for which Lear came to feel so desperately and with such agonizing tremors. In respect of epitomizing love and charity and the hallowed Christian pieties he offers many points of contact with Langland's Good Samaritan. And secondly, he is also symbolic of the desecration of human personality which is effected in an altogether alien and antagonistic universe. Like Cordelia, too, he ceases to be a merely dramatic character (he was perhaps not intended to be) laying claims to verisimilitude but comes, on the contrary, to acquire parabolic attributes. D.G James has perceptively drawn pointed attention to Shakespeare's 'secular imagination' which to him is exercised in this play more conspicuously than anywhere else and which is characterized primarily by its power to simplify and abstract,[7] to achieve effects of intensification by the shedding of ritualism and rhetoric though this does not necessarily entail the impoverishment of overwhelming richness. This lends credence to the assumption that Edgar is not a fully realized character with a Jamesian solidity of specification and hence not explicable in terms of psychological motivation alone or exclusively. In other words, far from being a mimetic unity, he is more or less equivalent to a device or symbol and thus paves the way

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for the emergence of symbolic configurations so evident in the last plays. It is not for nothing that he finds congenial company in and a sort of temperamental affinity with the Fool—also an embodiment of steadily increasing cogeries of meanings and possessed of uncanny insights into the human predicament ; both of them try their level best and each, according to his own distinctive variety of persuasion, to put Lear back on the rails—help him achieve his moral and spiritual rehabilitation, and both of them are not very dissimilar to Banquo in *Macbeth* and Iago in Othello[8]—symbolic devices rather than full-blooded, resonant and rounded characters. His distinguishing of himself as the 'foul fiend' and his consistently used nomenclature of 'the poor Tom' not only evoke irksome and unsavoury associations but also underline the fact that denuded of all his acquisitions and external trappings and seen in the lurid and disillusioning light of experiential reality man is no better than a ludicrous object inviting nothing but contempt and derision,

Appatently Lear's mind is gripped and tormented by the notion of filial ingratitude throughout the play—which may be regarded as its *leitmotif*—(this is also the obsessive, recurrent theme for Proust), but no less by a subconscious gloating over the aberrations of sex. This latter contrasts with the revulsion felt by Hamlet against Queen Gertrude's living 'In the rank sweat of an unseam'd bed,/Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love/Over the nasty stye '(III, iv, 93-95). Her abject, total and unashamed surrender to the lure of the unquenchable carnal appetite was logically climaxed by the unduly hasty and incestuous marriage with Claudius. And in *King Lear* the monstrous ingratitude of the two 'marble-hearted' fiends, Goneril and Regan,—the initial crime which propels the action of the play and sets in motion the continuous spirals of disaster—becomes coalesced with their secret sexual intrigue with Edmund who casts the spell of his bawdy, animal vitality on both of them alike and simultaneously. It is worth pondering that all these irritating and

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queasy sensations, emanating from unexpectedly divergent sources are constellated into the complex whole of physical and spiritual nakedness which is mediated by the insistent presence of Edgar. In other words, all these factors conspire to raising Lear's sense of disgust and nausea to such high tension-power that he cannot help visualizing women as possessed of a bipolar personality: the upper half of their bodies seems to be created by gods and the lower half by the fiend. This basic dichotomy—the fact of being at once under the aegis of nature and spirit—is imaged in the figure of centaurs—the mythical off-spring of Ixion begotten by him on the cloudwoman—who were believed to betray distinct and unmistakable proneness towards sexual passion. The paradox of nature-spirit duality, exemplified in women, is highlighted with the maximum, though controlled, sense of withering scorn thus ;

> Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
> Though women all above :
> But to the girdle do the Gods inherit,
> Beneath is all the fiend's: (Iv, vi. 126-29)

To activate the virulence of his attack Shakespeare achieves a deliberate reshaping of the original myth: he changes the mythical male sex into the female one presumably because for him the immediate frame of reference or what Frye designates as 'the morally intelligible action'[9] is the inordinate, obnoxious sexuality of his two daughters. It is, as rightly pointed out by Heilman, 'the horror of the subservience of the god-like in man to the animal'[10] which is lacerating his sensibility. The image of 'the sulphurous pit', surrounded and supported as it is by the ancillary suggestions of hellish 'darkness', burning', 'scalding', 'stench', 'consumption', is symbolic of man's lower anatomy—the residue of his blind, voracious and intractable impulses which are all masked by the attractive but sinister covering of civilization. The tidal wave of this ominous and zestful harangue reaches its limit by the use of the monosyllables like 'fie, fie, fie, pah, pah' which

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underscore the sense of something which is utterly abominable. Lear's sardonic mirth can be gauged by his perception that even an ounce of civet, bought from the apothecary, may, perhaps, help neutralize the caustic bitterness effected by his two daughters' brutal and unashamed grovelling into the mire of lust and which bitterness has singed his whole being, poisoned the very roots of his existence. 'Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary,/To sweeten my imagination (IV, vi, 132-33). Lear's desperate plea for sweetening of the imagination, uttered from the depths of his tragic experience, enables us to envision a state of being which is cankered, dungy and mortally offensive (all this is implied by the single word 'stench') and which is, therefore, in need of being transformed into its polar opposite. In other words, Lear is at once sensitive to the suffocating power of this 'lewdness' as well as to the impulse to be released from its pressure. At another remove, Albany, after having undergone a startling metamorphosis in his moral and psychic reactions, feels appalled by the bestiality of the two sisters and, inferentially, of the entire humankind, and is deeply conscious of the distressing possibility that we may be pushed to the brink of cannibalism as an inevitable consequence of the break-up of ordered harmony if divine vengeance did not intervene at the most opportune moment to halt the descent:

> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vilde offences
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep. (Iv, ii, 46-9)

This registers the impression that the veneer of the aristocratic culture is seething with the tumult of the kinetic life below it and man's vulnerability to savagery is a patent and ineluctable fact of experience. This makes the whole situation in the larger design of the universe look ugly and odious. The grim and malicious irony, the cruel joke played by the supernal powers watching over the disconcertingly painful

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human situation is externalized by the convention-ridden and superstitious Gloucester thus:

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods;
> They kill us for their sport. (IV, i, 36-7)

Apart from the sense of the incongruous and the grotesque (the latter one was specifically stressed by Wilson Knight)[11] which is evoked and kept spotlit in the mind from the start, the play all along focuses on the impact of sheer disgust and horror. At the conclusion of the mock-trial scene, enacted on the plane of phantasy, to arraign his two daughters and while he is still crack-brained, Lear gives expression to his harrowing sense of puzzlement at the untamed and unnameable fierceness which has struck such deep roots in the human heart. The evil which cleaves to the human constitution seems to be primeval, colossal and at the same time baffling and irremediable in the context of the known categories. 'Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?' (III, vi, 76-9). This, like the query about 'the unaccommodated man', is a query about primacies. A similar gruesome sense-impression is evoked by Cornwall's blood-curdling ejection of Gloucester's eyes, in exercise of his ingrained malevolence, and he puts the whole thing in an icy-cold and nerve-wracking way thus : 'Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly ! Where is thy lustre now?' (III, VII, 82-83). And this query, in its outrageousness, is matched only by a kind of exhausted and petrifying resignation, when in reply to Edgar's wry comment : 'You cannot see your way', Gloucester, says laconically, 'I have no way, and therefore want no eyes,/I stumbled when I saw.' (IV, i, 18-19).

One of the shattering moments in the play occurs when Edgar makes the blinded Gloucester believe that he was about to make a perpendicular fall from the Dover Cliff down into the vast and assumed sea below in a bid to materialize his suicidal project. Looking down from the height above before the leap is taken man and things look shockingly small and insignificant :

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> The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
> Show Scarce so gross as beetles; half way down
> Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!
> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
> The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice, (IV, vi; 13-18)

And after Gloucester has been miraculously saved and reached the level ground, unscathed, despite the make-believe of the leap, things above are now viewed from the changed perspective: 'the shrill-gorg'd lark so far/Cannot be seen or heard' (IV, vi, 58-9). What hardly needs stressing is that here it is not so much a matter of physical depth or height, for these two strokes of genius relating to landscape painting are of the nature of two mirror-images through which is reflected the multiple vision of man as well as emphasis is put on the fact that fancy is likely to be cheated in all sorts of ways. What is no less significant is that the dizziness implicated in the earlier passage has both a perceptual and a metaphysical dimension : one feels the ache of awareness at the realization of the puniness of man in the total scheme of things. An identical moment both of anguish and of horror is recorded when Lear, awakening after a fit of semi-unconsciousness. and in answer to Cordelia's tremulous interrogation : 'How does my royal Lord ? How fares your Majesty ?' (iv, vii, 44) replies in sibylline overtones thus :

> You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave;
> Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead. (iv, vii, 45-8)

The iconology used here is both Medieval and apocalyptic and these lines sensitively reflect and transfix Lear's deep anguish at its intensest. Lear is instinctively aware of Cordelia's living in Paradiso, for to him hers is a redeemed soul though he himself is bound to the individual rack of nemesis which is made of fire and this fire is fuelled by his own tears of repentence. The wheel may be taken as the emblem of crucifixion, and the verb 'bound' implies the notion that

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the doom is irrevocable and the punishment of sins is continuing and unimitigated. This is the epiphany of the finitude of existence from which one wants to seek an escape but the way to escape has been blocked; may be the excruciating sense of his 'huge sorrows' is not only self-perpetuating but, paradoxically enough, it is infinitely desired, too.

When towards the very end, Kent puts an uneasy and highly embarrassing question : 'Is this the promis'd end?' (V, iii, 263) and Edgar enlarges upon it by a supplementary query : 'Or image of that horror ?' (v, iii, 264), both these apocalyptic utterances have the effect of shaking one to the very roots of one's being. Needless to say that round the word 'horror' gather the implications of doomsday—the hour of the total disruption of the frame of created things when 'mere anarchy' is bound to be 'loosed upon the world'. Further, Kent's and Edgar's utterances are preceded by Lear's own agonizing eruption, marked by a benumbing pain, when he enters the stage with Cordelia *dead in his arms* ;

> Howl, howl, howl, O ! You are men of stones:
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I' d use them so
> That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever.
> I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
> She's dead as earth, (V, iii, 257-61)

and followed by a piercing and defeaning outcry when every bit of tremulous hope lies utterly crushed under the load of the gathering tumult that cannot be taken off :

> And my poor fool is hang'd' ! no, no, no life !
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all ? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never ! (V, iii, 305-8)

The repetition of 'howl, howl','howl','no, no, no life' and 'never. never, never, never, never', charged as it is with the profoundest imaginable agony and the maximnm of nihilistic horror, comes upon one with devastating and cataclysmic force. In these monosyllabic words of great explosive and penetrating power and this defiant questioning of the ultimate

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structure of things is concentrated the distillation of corrosive despair and they reflect upon that *angst* which thoroughly envelops the play and may be regarded as its most activating impulse. They bring into focus, with resounding ecstasy, 'man's paralyzing disbelief in the goodness of Providence'. All redemptivist readings of the play, based as they are on the transparent beauty and pathos of the reconciliation scene between Lear and Cordelia, though they undoubtedly refer to a therapeutic power, are cancelled out and stand invalidated by the rampant violence of these last lines. And thus Bradley's perception of a streak of joy in Lear's unbearable agony is a kind of sentimentalizing which is scarcely warranted by the facts of the matter. One should not allow the evidence of the text to be wrenched and twisted in the interest of proving a preconceived or at least untenable thesis —the thesis that makes one look for serenity and equipoise where only dark despondency and anguish are writ large: this is likely to deflect one from the main thrust.

The image of man which issues forth from *King Lear* is that of a tormented, isolated being—one who, after the fading away of imperial glory and the exhaustion of the flamboyancy of culture—looks more or less like a hunted animal or an impaled insect wriggling along the edges of the wall. It is the sense of *estrangement* and precariousness within the iron world of regal authority and ossification of law and culture, when the dynamics of power is no longer within his grasp, which registers a shock of pain and surprise on Lear. His act of abdication which amounts to a deliberate withdrawal from obligations and commitments and which opened the floodgates of anarchy ran counter to the accepted premises of the Tudor theory of monarchy, and was regarded as a serious crime in the Jacobean ethos. Lear comes to be supported by Edgar and the Fool at the moment when his entire self, torn at the cross-road of love and disillusion, is no longer capable of functioning harmoniously. Thrown upon the sea of troubles, rudderless, life for a man of Lear's sensi-

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tivity is no more than a futile and horrid affair; man seems to have lost his moorings and life partakes of sheer and total absurdity. The seeds of his eventual catastrophe are contained in his 'hideous rashness' betrayed by him even pretty early and which is very objectively and clinically diagnosed by no less a person than Kent. But the sense of living in a hostile and perilous world all alone and almost bereft of the sustainment offered by genuine and reciprocal love is what accounts for Lear's utter moral and spiritual collapse, and for the world being reduced to mere shambles for him. The overtones of 'nothingness', audible at the very beginning, continue to reverberate all along and the play ends up with 'the image of that horror', and these two are closely enmeshed through all sorts of tenuous linkages on both the moral and the metaphysical levels.

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