

# Lear and Nature

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The opening scene of *King Lear* has plagued its critics, because Lear's acts in this scene are crammed with so many incongruities and absurdities that his commentators have been puzzled as to their intelligible interpretation of the old man's character. It is natural that they should wonder why the old king does not realize that when he relinquishes his responsibility as king, he also abandons his power and puts himself at the mercy of his daughters, or why he does transfer to his elder daughters' husbands, Cornwall and Albany his "power, / Pre-eminence, and all the larger effects / That troop with majesty," and retains for himself only the name of king and a hundred knights, but at the same time seeks to exert an authoritative power, symbolic of kingship, or why he has not seen through his elder daughters' hypocrisy, since he has been with them until his advanced age and allows himself to be deceived by their hyperbolic, flattering expression of love for him and rejects his youngest daughter, Cordelia's true and as good as reticent confession of love as "Nothing, my lord", that is, why the old royal father does not perceive that the elder daughter, Goneril and Regan, are not faithful as they pretend to be, whereas the dear Cordelia is not ungrateful as she seems to be, since he himself has already determined to give "a third [of the kingdom] more opulent than your sisters" to her and to stay with her so that he may "set my rest on her kind nursery" or above all, why he proclaims his "darker purpose" to divide his Kingdom among his daughters and to give its

equal third to each of them so that he may relieve himself of “cares and business” and “unburthen’d crawl toward death”, when it is clear that the division of a kingdom is an invitation to civil strife, or why he expects each of his daughters to tell him, in the presence of the whole court, how much she loves him so that the size of their portion of the kingdom may be determined by their profession of love for their royal father, treating love as if it were a material quantum of size and weight.

Some critics, therefore, make him out to be mad. They might be right in their opinion of him if their vision were only limited to the opening scene and not extended to the later scenes where Lear’s wits will be gone. But Lear is not yet mad in the opening scene. All his speech is coherent and all his thoughts do not wander incoherently as they do later in the raging storm. To himself his actions seem to be just and rational. To his reason his speech and thought are apparently based on his “best judgement” like Othello’s, though his sight is limited only to the surface of reality.

Shakespeare makes his actions seem reasonable by emphasizing Lear’s essential flaw — egotism —. His self-willed egotism leads him to see only what he chooses to see and causes him to avoid facing what he is not willing to face. His blind egotism drives him to misjudge his wicked daughters and to cast Cordelia off dowerless to a strange country. His narrow egotistic rationalism makes him see everything in its relation only to himself, not to others. Herein lies his fatal error. As his thought is based on his reason, his decision seems to be a judicious one. But his reason is self-centered and carnal-minded. His reason swayed by his egotism prefers to see appearance, but fails to see deeper reality. Take his division of the kingdom, for example; he gives to his decision the reason that “future strife may be prevented” by his divesting himself of “both of rule, Interest of territory, cares of state” and by his depending on the

loyal support of his younger lords to control the remote regions of the kingdom. His near-sighted egotism reaches so short of the political outcome of his abdication of the throne that he can not perceive that a divided kingdom will bring about chaos. Or his materialistic view of life leads him to see only the physical aspect of love, but to blind him to the spiritual aspect. Hence comes his desire to buy love for what is materially measurable.

His first act of egotism is the division of the kingdom. The second act of his self-centeredness is the banishment of Cordelia and Kent. His two acts of folly ends in his mental division and banishment of reason. But Lear's fatal characteristic is not a personal peculiarity, but a common share of humanity. Critics rightly think of Lear's tragic flaw as "colossal egotism", but they do not emphasize his egotism in its close relation to his natural religion. Shakespeare sees man in metaphysical terms. S.L. Bethell refers to Shakespeare's tragedies to be more metaphysical than his comedies, "treating generally of man in his relation to the universe and to God."<sup>1</sup> Lear's egotism is only a manifestation of his inner relation to nature, his dear goddess, because with Shakespeare man's spiritual freedom is determined by what attitude he takes towards the supernaturally holy God; it depends on the acceptance or rejection of Christ's sacrificing and redeeming love that nature can transcend itself or not. Before man has redemption, however, he must suffer persecution and affliction so that he may be humbled to look up to the Divine Mercy. Take Desdemona for example: the virtuous Desdemona is wrongly suspected by her husband to be false with Cassio. She is wronged and ill-treated by him and finally is made guilty and is condemned to death. Through suffering her soul is prepared to be identified

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1. S.L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London, 1944; Reprinted, New York, 1977) p. 93.

with Christ and to forgive her unkind husband. In her death she voices her undying love for Othello so that she may redeem Othello through her sacrificial death. Her complete forgiveness of Othello proves that she has achieved her own redemption through Christ's death. Hamlet, Macduff, Malcolm and Isabella follow the same pattern as Desdemona to transcend their nature.

Lear is not a Christian, but a pagan. In spite of his paganism Lear has to achieve his self-knowledge and redemption in order to see his salvation. The Christian heroes such as Hamlet and Macduff may be different from the heathen Lear in that *hamartia* which they commit, but all of them, whether a Christian or a pagan, are similar to each other in their alienation from God or the divine deity. Of course, the pagan Lear is designed to be distinct from other Christian heroes by his guilt peculiar to the heathenism. The more pagan a hero is, the more natural and barbarian his sin becomes. On the contrary, the more Christian a hero is, the more Pauline, that is, the more philosophical and innerly moral struggle he makes with his sin. In his mind there is a hard struggle between spirit and flesh. Thus Hamlet has a dilemma between "to be" — "in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of out rageous fortune" and "not to be" — "to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them." The former alternative is the way of "old faith" by enduring the persecution of the bad king, committing vengeance to God, whereas the latter alternative is the way of human wisdom by having recourse to the arms of flesh, even at the cost of blood-shedding and civil strife in Denmark. In his mind he chooses the way of patience through faith, but his unregenerate nature relapses into vindictive course having recourse to arms: he kills Polonius, whom he has taken for the king, although he is well aware that "there is a divinity doth hedge a king [iv.v]." Hamlet's nature transgresses against God and is to be banished abroad.

Shakespeare endows Lear with pagan characteristics. Like Timons, Coriolanus and the black Othello, Lear makes himself equal with Gods. Lear makes a god of himself, although he worships Apollo "the sacred radiance of the sun", the moon as "the mysteries of Hecate and the night" and the stars as "all the operation of the orbs" in his mind. Shakespeare is very careful to show Lear's sacrilegious inclination. First of all Lear never hesitates to reveal his gross disrespect to Nature, dear goddess, his object of worship in his division of the kingdom. A kingdom was granted by God to a chosen king whom God had anointed so that he might be responsible to God for the good of his people. In his division of the kingdom he denies the divine supremacy of God, source of kingship and its divine authority. In his history plays and tragedies, therefore, Shakespeare insists on the divinity of a king anointed by the holy God: in *Macbeth* the gracious Duncan is referred to as "the Lord's anointed temple" (*Macbeth*, II.iii.74, cf. *II. Sam.* i.14, *I. Cor.* iii.16-17, *John* ii.19) and the murder of this "most sainted king" (iv.iii.109) is regarded as "most sacrilegious" (II.iii.73) with horror. The death of Duncan is compared to that of Christ and Macbeth's betrayal of the holy king is compared to Judas Iscariot's betrayal. The kingdom under the devilish Macbeth is deplored as a "suffering country under a hand accurs'd" (III.vi.48-49).

In the thought of Shakespeare's day a king was decreed by the divine God to rule his kingdom with justice and mercy to the benefit of his people, because the kingdom came from God to his anointed king. If the king did not obey God's holy commandment, he had to suffer destruction at the hands of God, as the "black Macbeth" has to be punished by God himself. Divine providence uses Malcolm and Macduff as instruments of heavens to destroy the tyrant. Macduff's prayer for encounter with Macbeth shows this:

But, gentle heavens,

Cut short all intermission; front to front

Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;

Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,

Heaven forgive him too!

*Macbeth* (IV.iii 230-234)

Malcom ascribes the fall of the black Macbeth to heavens.

Macbeth

Is ripe for shaking and the powers above

Put on their instruments.

(IV.iii 236-38)

When Macbeth is killed by Macduff, it is emphasized that the freedom of the country is attributed to "the powers above" and its good government is entrusted to "the grace of Grace", that is, ministers of the Divine God, just as the destruction of the wicked king, Richard III is attributed to God's grace through which Richmond, champion of God, is chosen and allowed to carry out God's divine retribution for the tyrant's enormous sin. Richmond's prayer before the final battle also emphasizes that he is merely an instrument of God's grace to execute His vengeance:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,

Look on my forces with a gracious eye;

Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,

That they may crush down with a heavy fall

The usurping helmets of our adversaries!

Make us thy ministers of chastisement,

That we may praise thee in the victory!

To thee I do commend my watchful soul,

Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:

Sleeping and waking, O! defend me still!

[*Richard III*, V.iii 108-17]

*King Lear* is conceived in a pagan setting. But Shakespeare makes Christian vision implicit in its natural frame. Lear, a pagan King, can not, therefore, be exempt from the divine law prevalent in English History plays of Shakespeare. Lear's nature is also asserted to be anointed by the natural gods. When Gloucester has his eyes put out, he prays for "the winged vengeance of gods" to overtake the wicked children. In his prayer he refers to Lear's body as "his anointed flesh" (III. vii. 58) and implies his wish gods may protect the King as their chosen. Kent, disguised as a stranger, emphasizes Lear's divine "authority" in telling the reason why he wants to serve the old man:

You have that (authority) in your/countenance which I would fain  
call master. (I.iv. 29-30)

Cordelia speaks of her royal father's nature afflicted with madness and nakedness as "this great breach in his abused nature" (IV.vii. 15) and as "thy reverence" (29) which is an echo of "a great breach in nature" indicating the divine Duncan's stabbed gashes and "his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood."

By asserting Lear's divine kingship Shakespeare stresses his being bound to the holy God in carrying out his divine responsibility to the good of his people. If he indulges in the savagery of nature and prefers his natural affection to the divine duty, his choice will be an invitation to tragedy. But Lear has not learned the great dread of Nature and chooses the nature of Edmund — natural instinct —. By his resignation of kingly rule in his division of the kingdom he denies the divine authority of Gods. By his denial of the supremacy of Gods he cuts himself from Gods, source of his life. I. Ribner is right in his insistence on Lear's neglect of his divine duties to Gods.

He chooses the lesser finite good of power without responsibility, rather than the greater infinite good of God's order which decrees that the king rule for the good of his people until God relieves him of his responsibility by death.<sup>1)</sup>

His alienation from Gods results in his banishment of Cordelia and Kent, because Cordelia is a symbol of God's grace and Kent is symbolic of loyalty and faithfulness. Lear alienates himself from Cordelia, rather because he has not acknowledged the divinity of Gods than because she has not satisfied his desire for flattery. He is the author of his own doom. Cordelia's blunt expression of love is only an accident which incites Lear's spiritual emptiness to come out outwardly. It is the hero's inner defect that makes for tragic catastrophe. Cordelia's "most small fault" (I.iv. 290) is merely an occasion or immediate inciting circumstance, not a fundamental cause which starts the destructive avalanche of universal chaos tumbling down the cliff. Co-operating with Cordelia's "proud integrity" Lear's self-centered attitude taken towards gods or his pride in equality with Nature contributes to his deprivation of rule and reason.

Shakespeare emphasizes Lear's futile swearing by gods to condemn Cordelia and Kent in the mouth of Kent: when Kent speaks out against the King's disinheriting of Cordelia, Lear in anger swears by Apollo, god of light, to stop Kent. In reply to Lear Kent warns the King not to swear by Apollo, because Lear has made a god of himself and made a fool of gods. When Lear applies "miscreant" to Kent as he opposes himself to him, the epithet should be addressed to himself, because it means "unbeliever" in the original sense. It indicates that Lear has not achieved his self-knowledge.

In this sense what faces Lear in his wrong choice is the problem of self-

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1. Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London 1960), p. 119.



discovery. Lear himself asks a question about his identity with tragic irony later, when he is beginning to feel "a great abatement of kindness" in Goneril's treatment of him: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I.iv. 252). Self-knowledge comes from recognition of the identity of Nature and gods. Without knowledge of gods knowledge of self can not be attained. And without knowledge of self the knowledge of the truth can not be got. If he were well aware of his divine duty as king to gods, he would never value his old fondness for his daughters above his adoration of Nature and never give his kingdom to his daughters. If he knew the awfulness of gods, he would never compare himself to the dragon and his wrath" (I.i. 124), when he loses his temper at Kent's checking his "hideous rashness". Later in the mad scenes he feels his own insignificance in the vast complexity of the dreadful Nature and society and begins not only to acknowledge himself as "A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man" (III.ii. 20), but also recognize Nature as "the great gods That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads" (49-50). He not only feels a deep pity over the wretched which he did not experience, but also comes to have a sense of the righteousness of gods which he did not perceive:

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. 32-36)

Finally when he meets his dear daughter, Cordelia, he recognizes her as "a soul in bliss" and is identified with her forgiving grace. In the holy presence of Cordelia, he begins to feel his burning shame and guiltiness.

In his repentance for what wrong he has done to her, he offers to drink poison. When he is touched by her divine forgiveness, he confesses his sinfulness as “a very foolish fond old man, Fourscore and upwards, not an hour more or less” (60–61), and as “old and foolish” (85). Why does he speak of himself as “foolish fond old” man? Because as Regan and Goneril point out, “he hath ever but slenderly known himself.” (I.i. 296–297) on account of his “indiscretion” and “dotage” (II.i. 199 and 200).

In short, Lear substitutes his “codpiece” symbolic of natural lust for “grace” representing god’s redemption. The Fool’s ironical phrase “here’s grace and a cod-piece; that’s a wise man and a fool” (III.ii. 40–41) continues to remind Lear of his folly in banishing Cordelia who alone “redeems nature from the general curse which twain have brought her to” (IV.vi. 211–212). In other words, Lear substitutes Edmund’s carnal wisdom for Cordelia’s spiritual grace, as Antony substitutes Egyptian slavery to passion for “the bidding of the gods” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, III. ix. 60) or as Othello places his sensual fond love for Desdemona above his duty to gods or Nature.

In the beginning of the play Lear justifies his carnal judgement under the name of Edmund’s natural gods of lust, but later through suffering caused by his wrong choice of nature he repents and is won back to Cordelia’s supernatural grace and is saved by her redemptive love. Shakespeare deliberately makes Edmund, Regan and Goneril distinctive from Edgar, Cordelia and Kent. Edmund, Gloucester’s bastard son, natural son, worships the Nature of lust to carry out his wicked purpose. He uses gods and Nature to justify his lustful design. His invocation to Nature as excuses for his “contriving of lust” (III.iv. 94) and “the act of darkness” (91) proves his being “a natural man” or an atheist bound by no moral nor religious ties and considerations:

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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? (I.ii. 1-6)

In rejecting “custom”, or traditional thought Edmund is rejecting that nature which is redeemed from the original sin inherited by us. Edmund exchanges it for man’s unregenerate nature without grace. He firmly believes that conceived “in the lusty stealth of nature”, men only use gods to make “an admirable evasion”, “to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star” (I.ii. 141, 142-143). Ironically this sharp criticism of Edmund’s is also true of Lear in that he is using gods’ name to his own selfish purpose. But there is a clear distinction between both of them in the way of worship. Lear serves justice by which he is obsessed, though it is wrapped in self-centeredness, whereas Edmund attends his natural desire which is not restrained by any religious and moral values. Edmund is doomed to damnation. There is no room for his salvation. Lear’s preoccupation with his human justice, however, has a prospect of repentance, if his reason should be purged of its innate egotism through his suffering. His colossal violation of the order of Nature and gods sows the seeds of political chaos when he places his fond affection for his daughters above his royal duty to Nature by his division of the kingdom. He experiences the natural and human perturbation which is a physical reflection of his sins. His awareness of the awful dread of storm and human betrayal deprives him of his vindictive sense of justice and enhances his consciousness of sin within himself and concern for others. Through his purgatory trial his sense of justice leads him to prepare himself for

redemption.

Lear's development of character is paralleled by Edgar's. Like Lear he is credulous and is easily deceived by the seemingly honest Edmund, his younger bastard brother. When he is unjustly treated by his father, that is, is banished by Gloucester as the result of a plot designed by Edmund, he escapes detection disguised as a Bedlam beggar and naked. In his tribulation he never doubts that "gods are just" and begins to be aware of his own guiltiness (III.iv), as I describe in my later article. Edgar's spiritual pilgrimage becomes a marked example for Lear's transformation of character. Edgar represents his own identity as he is reduced to no more than a beast.

A serving man, proud in heart and/mind; that curled my/hair, wore  
gloves in my cap, served 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; III.iv. 88-93

Though unjustly wronged by his father, he never ceases to love him and is concerned for his salvation. Edgar is an analogy to Christ, like Cordelia, who is "most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd". His kind humility provides a sharp contrast to the unnatural cruelty of Edmund, Goneril and Regan.

Lear is different from Edgar in that the latter is an innocent victim. Lear's suffering is caused by his grievous sin in disobeying the law of nature. Lear's self-centeredness when faced by his tragic outcome heightens the consciousness of his being "more sinned against than sinning", as his imagination begins to work in the storm by losing his wits, whereas Edgar's innocent suffering awakens a sense of his fiend-vexation or his own sinfulness. Lear is in need of Edgar and finally of Cordelia in order to achieve

his salvation.

Before we examine Lear's better transformation, we have to emphasize his perverted use of gods to his egoistic purpose.

There may be an objection to my insistence on Lear's profane abuse of gods and its resulting division of the kingdom and rejection of the true Cordelia and the loyal Kent. Recent critics tend to neglect the hero's relation to gods. But if we omit the religion of the play, it will be inevitably reduced to a naturalistic level. Shakespeare's great tragedies are not to an age but for all time because they are man's universal quest for his recognition of self and God. Only by comparison with God or the supernatural Truth man can learn his being a piece of dust and achieve his identification with God.

In *King Lear* as in *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* the good characters show earnestness in mentioning gods. Kent always relies on or has recourse to his belief in gods, when he opposes himself to injustice or asks protection for guiltless victims. When Cordelia is thrust out to banishment, Kent's prayer for her is "The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid" (I.ii. 135). In his soliloquy after he has been stocked on Cornwall's order, he quotes the old proverb for the king: "Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st/To the warm sun" (II.ii. 168-69). Far from questioning the absolute power of heavenly benediction he is all the more firmly convinced of it for his adversity. Kent's loyalty to the king comes from his faithfulness to the law of nature and gods. He knows well that Lear's enormously miserable state has been brought about by his rash banishment of Cordelia, source of heaven's benediction. This old saw is a repetition of his previous criticism of Lear's infidelity as he counsels the king to check his rash decision to abandon Cordelia: "Now by Apollo, king, Thou swear'st thy gods in vain." (I.i. 162-63) When Gloucester provides shelter for Lear, at the risk of his life, Kent

falls back on his belief in gods to praise his kind deed: "The gods reward your kindness" (III.vi. 6).

As if Kent's prayer for him has reached Heavens, Gloucester has his eyes gouged out by Regan and Cornwall to have his spiritual eyes and to find his true son, Edgar. As the old warrior is very brave in his fight with Oswald and does not spare even the king's feeling, when he upbraids him, so is he steadfast in his belief in gods in his worst adversity.

Albany at first does not interfere with his wife, Goneril's unnatural treatment of Lear. But as the play progresses, when he comes to see how savage and cruel Goneril is, his love for her turns to hatred. When he bluntly reproaches her as "Most barbarous, most degenerate", he takes shelter under his belief in gods and from there fight against her evident crimes:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
 Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,  
 It will come  
 Humanity must perforce prey on itself  
 Like monsters of the deep. (IV.ii. 46-50)

This idea of Albany's of evil's self-destruction is biblical: "They that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same" (*Job* iv. 8) and "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy turnings back shall reprove thee" (*Jeremiah*. ii. 19), and "Wherewith a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished" (*Wisdom* xi. 13). His prophecy of "spirits" sent down from heaven to be revenged on Goneril is also drawn from the Bible: "Which maketh the *spirits* his messengers, and a flaming fire his ministers" (*Psalms* civ) and "He hath *sent down* from above" (*Psalms* xviii. 16).

Albany is ready to defend the king at the risk of losing his wife to

Edmund, because he has already defined Goneril, his wife as a fiend or a devil in opposition of a deity and he is firmly sure that he would commit a sacrilegious sin against gods, if he should let her release her evil:

See thyself, devil!

Proper deformity seems not in the fiend

So horrid as in woman. (IV.ii. 59-61)

In addition to this definition, he alleges that “thou art a fiend” (66). His identification of Goneril with “a fiend” recalls Edgar’s description of his own guiltiness as “the foul fiend” (III.iv) pursuing and vexing him. Both Albany and Lear are vexed by Goneril. Lear recognizes himself in Goneril and defines her as “a disease that’s in my flesh”, “a boil, A plague-sore, an enbossed carbuncle, in my corrupted blood” (II.iv), in short, as his sinfulness. Goneril is the foul fiend that “haunts” the king “in the voice of a nightingale”(III.vi). She is the original sin within Lear, because she is “my flesh, my blood, my daughter” (II.iv). But to Albany she is not an internal fiend within himself, but an external fiend. Albany never allows her to corrupt his blood, but resists her wicked power by receiving invisible “spirits” from above. In this sense Albany resembles Banquo and the earlier Lear is similar to Macbeth. Banquo asks for heavenly angels’ aid to restrain his murderous thought in his nature;

merciful powers!

Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature

Gives way to in repose. (*Macbeth* II.i. 7-9)

On the contrary, Macbeth allows himself to be influenced by Lady

Macbeth who has invoked the evil “spirits” to “Stop up the access and passage to remorse” and to repress her conscience. Like Macbeth, Lear is carried along by the flattery of Regan and Goneril who are embodiment of Lear’s internal self-love or pride, just as Cornwall is swayed by his wife, Regan’s evil, whereas Albany knows how to resist Goneril’s fiendish power and never allows himself to give way to her influence. When he finds her to be damned, he cuts himself from her. He feels a dislike to her. When he hears that Goneril has stabbed herself after poisoning her sister when her wicked plan is discovered, he can feel no pity for their death at all. His harshness is due to his strong faith that their death was the punishment of heaven.

This judgement of the heavens, that make us tremble,  
Touches us not with pity. (V.iii. 233-34)

This attitude of Albany applies to his brother-in-law, Cornwall’s death. When he hears that Cornwall was slain by his good servant while gouging Gloucester’s eyes, he glorifies the righteousness of gods:

This shows you are above,  
You justicers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily can venge! (IV.ii. 78-80)

Though he is in love with Goneril for her physical beauty, unlike Lear he places a divine loyalty to gods above his slavery to his wife’s charm through his faith in the supremacy of gods, when he finds that her unnatural cruelty shown to Lear is the “Most barbarous, most degenerate” deed and a sacrilege against gods, because to Goneril Lear is “a father, and a gracious aged man, whose reverence the head-lugg’d bear would



lick" (IV.ii. 41–42). In Albanys' mind Lear assumes a Christ-like figure and is analogous to God's grace, like "the gracious Duncan" (III.i) and "their gracious father" (III.vi). In killing Duncan, Macbeth is deprived of the Divine Grace, by which alone he is enabled to control his cursed passion. Goneril is also alienated from the grace of heavens in plotting on her gracious father.

If he should let his wife have her own way, swayed by her, he would be damned to hell like his brother-in-law, Cornwall, or would be a fond foolish husband just as Lear becomes a fond foolish old father early in the play. Shakespeare makes Albany distinct from Lear. Before the play begins, Albany has achieved his knowledge both of himself and heavens, but Lear is lacking in that both of himself and heavens.

Albany's belief in gods' righteousness is strongly expressed in Edgar's praise of gods' judgement on his father's sin, too:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us:  
The dark and vicious place where thee he got  
Cost him his eyes. (V.iii. 172–75)

Edgar has learnt his identity through his innocent suffering. He has overcome his foul fiend within himself through his faith in heaven's grace. Lear needs Edgar's naked frailty to achieve his self-knowledge and needs Albany's alienation from nature to loathe his inner Goneril "in my corrupted blood". But before pursuing Lear's spiritual progress, let us examine his arrogant attitude towards heavens.

As I have pointed out, Lear's sin lies not in his division of the kingdom itself nor immediately in his egotism, but in his sacriligious act against heavens by his relinquishing his responsibility imposed on him by them

in his distributing the divided kingdom to his daughters and incidently by his banishment of Cordelia & Kent. The first act of folly is his division of the kingdom and the second act of folly is his rejection of Cordelia and Kent. But the two acts of follies issue from the same root of Lear's impiety or want of reverence for heavens, because a king is a representative of God and the Lord's anointed temple or God's deputy. In relinquishing his duty as king, he rejects the divine supremacy of God. Because a king is ordered by the holy God to rule for the good of his people until he is relieved of his responsibility by death. In rejecting God's divine authority, he rejects God's mercy or grace. Because a king's justice should be seasoned by divine grace or mercy.

But mercy is above his scepter's sway,  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,  
It is an attribute to God himself,  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice.

(*Merchant of Venice*, IV.i. 193-197)

Mercy is an attribute to God himself, because the divine mercy alone can forgive human sins freely. A king who prays for grace in order to be redeemed from his sins can achieve his spiritual freedom. On the contrary, a king who has not inherited the kingdom of grace can not transcend his nature nor see his salvation. A king without grace can not be above nature and in the savage pursuit of justice is swayed by his passion.

Lear rejects the divine grace, when he rejects Cordelia. He has rejected God's grace when he divides his kingdom. Cordelia's departure to banishment is an event incidental to his first alienation of gods. His presumptuous attitude to nature is illustrated powerfully, when his proud

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egotism is hurt by Goneril's ingratitude:

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful!  
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits  
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel  
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child! (I.iv. 207-311)

He is demanding that gods do his bidding to his vindictive purpose.

His inordinate pride or self-love is most clearly shown in his relationship to nature, when his reason has failed him. A Gentleman rightly describes Lear "contending with fretful elements" (III.i. 4) and "outscorn The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain" (10). It is true that the "impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage, Catch (his white hair) in their fury, and make nothing of (it)" but, Lear himself, in his blind fury, makes nothing of the raging storm, which he is ignorant that is a natural reflection of his sin. The storm is a representation of justice taken by gods against Lear's deeds of impiety. His self-love can not realize the wrath of nature against himself and his responsibility for the universal chaos. Far from recognizing his own "close pen-up guilts", he blames nature for its joining with his daughters against himself:

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!  
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:  
I tax not you, you elements, with kindness;  
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,  
Your owe me no subscription: then let fall

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Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,  
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.  
But yet I call you servile ministers,  
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd  
Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head  
So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul. (III.ii. 14-24)

Like Macbeth the destroyer who demands that "Nature's germens tumble all together" (*Macbeth* IV.i) to realize his wish that the future be revealed to him, Lear tries to pervert nature to his vindictive purpose against "ingrateful man":

And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!  
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once  
That make ingrateful man! (III.ii. 6-9)

Finally he commands gods to do his bidding to strike all guilty men since he is "more sinned against than sinning".

Let the great gods,  
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,  
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,  
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,  
Unwhipp'd of justice; hide thee, thou bloody hand;  
Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue  
That art incestuous; cailiff, to pieces shake,  
That under covert and convenient seeming  
Hast practis'd on man's life; close pent-up guilts,

Rive your concealing continents, and cry  
These dreadful summoners grace. (III.ii. 49-59)

In this passage he is beginning to feel the dreadfulness of nature and gods and to find it necessary to have "the dreadful summoners grace", but in these passages we see that he only worships nature as "dear goddess" in his mouth, because he does not serve nature for its forgiving grace, but tries to use it to his wilful and egoistic purpose. Lear's attitude taken towards nature is different from Kent's and Edgar's. Both Kent and Edgar are ready to sacrifice themselves both to gods and their master and father. Lear strives with fretful elements of nature, unaware of his responsibility to gods for their wrath and prays for patience while he represses his tears. He indignantly see natural forces allying with his foes against him, not knowing that the raging storm is a terrible punishment of gods who have taken revenge on his sacrilegious acts. He can not perceive his own corruption in his blood and flesh and can not learn that he himself is responsible for his misfortune. Hence follows his ironical self-delusion:

"I am more sinn'd against than sinning."

His lack of self-knowledge is closely related to his disrespectful attitude toward gods and the order of nature. In his worst misery Lear has to learn to pay due reverence to nature and above all, to realize how terrible and great heavens are in their wrath against men in order to be aware of the enormity of his sin. Lear's spiritual growth in his knowledge of self and nature is the next theme imposed on us.