

“PATIENCE” IN KING LEAR

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Introduction

“What is life?” “What is man?” These questions have haunted man throughout all ages. Everybody who lives sincerely has been forced to ask these questions. William Shakespeare is no exception; rather, I think, he is one of those who thought most deeply about the meaning of life, though not dogmatically nor theologically.

Shakespeare lived in the age of the Renaissance. We are aware, on the one hand, of ‘Renaissance humanism.’ It is the belief in the infiniteness of man’s faculty as shown in the famous speech of Hamlet’s, beginning with, “What a piece of work is a man!”¹ Indeed, “Homo est perfectio et finis omnium creaturatum in munde,”² so man is “the paragon of animals.”

On the other hand, ‘the Renaissance conflict’ existed. The tradi-

Note: The quotations from *King Lear* in this paper are from the *Arden Shakespeare*, and those from other works by Shakespeare from the *Globe Edition*, except for Hamlet’s third soliloquy, which is from the *Cambridge Shakespeare*.

¹ E. M. W. Tillyard points out that this idea is inherited from the medieval age. See his *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 1.

² Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris*, etc., 1617. Theodore Spencer cites this in his *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, p. 20.

tional Christian belief declared man's superiority to the animals. Man is 'a little lower than the angels.' But those who looked upon the reality of man could not but feel the conflict between man's dignity and his wretchedness. It is a conflict within man's soul as seen in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Scepticism was frequent at the end of the sixteenth century. It was also the age of intellectual uncertainty.

We usually think of the age of Elizabeth as 'merry England,' "this other Eden, demi-paradise." However, it was in fact not always the golden world. The Jacobean age was the age of disorder, political and social, the typical example of which was the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

Shakespeare himself, living in this age, found something dark behind the optimistic Renaissance humanism. This may be known through his works. In the Middle Comedies everybody seems to be happy and content. There appears no sign of sorrow. Yet we meet Antonio's inexplicable melancholy and Jacques's 'melancholy of mine own.' They may be slight signs that he felt some inconsistency in the bright seeming world. Toward the 'tragic period' his thoughts deepened. Now he was conscious of the evil in the world. It is the natural development as a dramatist who sees life as it is, for it is inevitable for a man who sees man, not abstractly but really, to confront the problems of evil. The Dark Comedies may be his last effort to make a happy ending. After that the appalling figure of evil seems overwhelming. For eight or nine years Shakespeare devoted himself to "the analysis of victorious evil, setting forth in strong relief the failures, the disillusion, the ineffectiveness of humanity."¹

Shakespeare, who knew the paradoxes in the world and the bottomless evil in man, could not but think: What is man? What is life? Also how must we live in opposition to those evils brought upon us? As we view his career, we find some shift from the first kind of tragedy to the second, from plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* to such as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. His concern changes "from the nature of man

¹ E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey*, pp. 229-30.

to the nature of what is around and above man," and he seems to "seek the primary causes of tragic disaster."¹ Therefore in *King Lear* there appears a "cosmic aspect."² The question will be, more fittingly, "What are Gods?" Shakespeare's concern in it is "a sense of the mystery of man's relationship to the universe" and "the universe's nature and man's destiny in it."³ Shakespeare gives some answer to these as a vision.

Chapter I. The Vision of Life

Nothing almost sees miracles,
But misery. (King Lear II. ii. 165-6)

King Lear has been regarded by many critics as Shakespeare's greatest work, the best of his plays, "the tragedy in which he exhibited most fully his multitudinous powers."⁴ According to A. C. Bradley, "if we were doomed to lose all his dramas except one, probably the majority of those who know and appreciate him best would pronounce for keeping *King Lear*."⁵ Yet it is recorded that *King Lear* has been the least popular of the famous four.

Some will explain that it is because this play cannot be acted on the stage, for *King Lear* is "too huge for the stage."⁶ But the stage history before the version of Nahm Tate shows it is not the main cause. Granville-Barker also justifies its actability.

In defining tragedy Aristotle says "Tragedy through pity and fear effects the proper *catharsis* or purgation of these emotions." In this sense, *King Lear* is most tragic and even disastrous. We cannot bear its unhappy ending, especially, the death of Cordelia. The Lear-world is so complicated that we cannot know where the poet's intention lies.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-2.

² Takeshi Saito, *Shakespeare: A Survey of His Life and Works*, p. 327.

³ D. G. James, *The Dream of Learning*, pp. 26-7.

⁴ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 243.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Sometimes we doubt the existence of Providence, and we are left in chaos because the process of *catharsis* is so horrible.

Therefore some critics declare that *King Lear* is pessimistic,¹ and there is no salvation from despair. Granville-Barker says that "the main tragic truth about life, to the Shakespeare that wrote *King Lear*, was its capricious cruelty,"² as seen in the following speech of Gloucester's:

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

But is it the only truth about *King Lear*?

It cannot be denied that we meet overwhelming evil in the Lear-world. Even 'high-judging Jove' himself seems to send down lightnings upon the just as well as the unjust. We see the human soul struggling against this evil and almost crushed under it. It may be said that in *King Lear* Shakespeare struggled with the problems of evil. Yet the Lear-world is life as it is, and the people who appear there, are men as they are. "One purpose of this tremendous catastrophic play was undoubtedly to bring home to those who watched it the terror of Life and the unspeakable depth of man's brutality."³ The purpose was 'to hold the mirror up to nature,' "to mirror the whole meaning of Life."⁴

Then what kinds of people do we find here? The entrance into the Lear-world may be a kind of surprise. We feel perplexed, finding the coarse nature of Gloucester, in his introducing his bastard son to Kent.

. . . though this knave came something saucily to the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making and the whoreson must be acknowledged. (I. i. 21-4)

He seems to regard his early immoral act as something brave and worthy to be proud of. Not only do we meet this kind of evil, but also extreme evil in man together with the surpassing good in him.

On the loyalty of Kent, who was banished because of his honesty,

¹ Johnson, Hazlitt, Swinburne, G. B. Harrison.

² Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*: First series, p. 183.

³ J. Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare*, p. 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

followed Lear's sad steps, 'did him service improper for a slave' (V. iii. 220-1), endured misery and shame for his sake, with good forbearance, we want to thank with Cordelia (IV. vii. 1-3). With the loving kindness of Cordelia, her redeeming love, though her deed in Act I cannot be called blameless, do we not feel comfort and light in this darkling world? Also the forbearance of Edgar in spite of most calamitous fortune and his filial love for his blinded father who sought his life, the humanity of Cornwall's servant, the loyalty of the old peasant, make our hearts warm.

But what can we say of those brutal figures of humanity, such as the other daughters? Do we not feel disgusted when we hear these cruel words of the wicked daughters?

Lear I gave you all—

Reg. And in good time you gave it. (II. iv. 252)

Gon. Hear me, my Lord.

What need you five and twenty, ten or five,
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

Reg. What need one? (262-5)

Then when Lear is going out on a heath, when 'the night comes on, and the bleak winds do sorely ruffle,' and the stormy sky threatens we must hear these words:

Gon. My Lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

Reg. O! Sir, to wilful men,

The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors;
He is attended with a desperate train,
And what they may incense him to, being apt

To have his ear abus'd, wisdom bids fear. (II. iv. 301-9)

When we see Edmund willingly obey Cornwall's demand, fully knowing what disaster will come to his father,¹ we are forced to ask with Lear, "Is there any cause in nature that made these hard hearts?" (III. vi.

¹ III. vii. 4-9.

.78-9) We see in Edmund evil personified.

Wilson Knight makes an interesting analysis of the evil characters. These daughters and Edmund are "human beings, yet cruel as beasts that have no sense of sympathy." They have not developed properly as human beings. So they are 'degenerate,' and the typical one of them is Edmund, as his birth symbolizes. Although he has external good qualities, he "lacks one thing—unselfishness, sympathy. He is purely selfish, soulless, and, in this sense, bestial."¹ The same can be said of other evil characters in the play. They have clear intellect; so they do not make such failures as did Lear and Gloucester. They are rationalists, but their reason sees only the outward aspect of things. Therefore though they seem to prosper in the world, they fail finally, for they do not see the inward heart of things. There lies the 'self-destructive quality of evil,'² as Albany remarks:

It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep. (IV. ii. 48-50)

As we regard the function of evil in this drama, we come to recollect the function of the subplot. This subplot in a way brings a little disadvantage because it complicates the main plot, yet, as noted by many critics, it reinforces the impression that what is presented in *King Lear*, filial ingratitude is, "something universal,—a conflict not so much of particular persons as of the powers of good and evil in the world."³ Hence comes the statement, "It is the tragedy in which evil is shown in the greatest abundance."⁴

We meet also the good men, not extremely good, who suffer misery because of their faults, the Aristotelian tragic heroes. They are King Lear and the Earl of Gloucester. Here the subplot functions also as parallelism.

At first sight both lack the insight to discern appearance from reality.

¹ G. Wilson Knight; *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 203.

² Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 304 and Wilson knight, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

³ Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

Lear is old enough, 'fourscore and upward', yet 'he hath ever slenderly known himself.' (I. i. 293-4) With poor judgement he casts his most precious pearl away and sets the rest on the false hearted daughters. He could not see the hidden love of Cordelia. He will not hear the honest words of Kent, banishes him instead, regardless of the advice of Albany and Cornwall,

Dear Sir, forbear. (I. i. 162)

By and by the disillusion comes. Though he recognizes his folly (I. iv. 274-82), and the need of patience (II. iv. 272-3), he curses his daughters still and swears to revenge them:

No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenge 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. (II. iv. 280-4)

On the heath, through his misery and the outrageous storm, he curses the universal evil in humanity, and defies Gods to 'find their enemies now.' (III. ii. 49-50). Then for the first time he sympathizes with the poor, feels consideration for others and prays for Heaven's justice.

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That hide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless head and unfed side,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? 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. 28-36)

After his madness, he sees the injustice in the world more clearly. He sees the universal evil in society. Everything is corrupt. So Lear's remark comes, with a touch of humanitarian sympathy. "None does offend, none, I say none; I'll able 'em." (IV. vi. 170) When he awakens from his madness, he achieves that patience he called for so earnestly, yet was unable to achieve. He asks Cordelia forgiveness:

You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish.

(IV. vii. 83-4)

Along with these, Gloucester makes the same error of judgement. He does not see the loyalty of Edgar, but trusts on the hypocrite Edmund. Through his misjudgement, he comes to misery, and experiences the same filial ingratitude. But through his blinding, he comes to know the truth, he gets compassion to the poor:

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns plagues
Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
Makes thee 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. 64-71)

After he is saved from despair by Edgar, though himself believing that 'the clearest Gods' have preserved him, he gets patience too:

. . . henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
"Enough, enough," and die.

(IV. v. 75-7)

Looking over the events which occur to these persons in the play, we come to notice its paradoxical structure. As we have noted, neither Lear nor Gloucester see well in their sound states. After being blinded, Gloucester comes to get insight. In madness, Lear's criticism of society becomes a mixture of 'matter and impertinency'—'reason in madness.' (IV. vi. 176-7) On the other hand, the shrewd, clear sighted people, though they see too well the superficial, lack an imaginative understanding. Their free will is devoted to their animal appetites. So there exists 'madness in reason.' And the whole play is built upon the double paradox:

I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities.¹

(IV. i. 19-21)

¹ Robert B. Heilman, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear*, pp. 14. ff & pp. 173 ff. He analyses these paradoxes as 'sight pattern' and 'madness pattern.'

Then what do these paradoxes show? It may be the mystery of human life, an inexplicable riddle. Yet it is life as it is. Dowden also notes an irony in *King Lear*.

But while Shakespeare will present life as it is, and suggest no inadequate explanation of its difficult problems, he will gaze at life not only from *within*, but, if possible, also from an extra-mundane, extra-human point of view, and gazing thence at life, will try to discern what aspect this fleeting and wonderful phenomenon presents to the eyes of gods.¹

According to him, it may be said that hence the dualistic elements appear.

At a glance it seems to be true that in *King Lear* the power of darkness prospers. But it is not so. Although the evil characters seem to succeed in the world, they are also self-destructive. Even Edmund repents and wants to do some good 'despite of his own nature.' (V. iii. 243-4) Good people are powerless and helpless against the dominating evil. But those who suffer the misery caused by the wicked, not only suffer but also through suffering are purified in adversity. No one will deny that Gloucester, formerly a "what will-be-will-be, spirit-of-time man,"² dies a better and a wiser man. Lear, impatient, ungovernable, an old despot, is "only broken, as a man, as an eggshell breaks to disclose new action, new strength of grandeur, beyond human stature."³ The Lear that dies gains inner security. Lear dies purified. The play is the record of the purification of Lear.

It is true therefore that *King Lear* is not a play of pessimism. Still somebody might cling to the death of Cordelia as the representation of the wanton outrage of the Gods. But "this does not mean that the gods kill us for their sport: it means simply that they do not intervene to prevent us from killing each other."⁴ Gloucester's

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' Gods;
They kill us for their sport,

¹ Edward Dowden, *Shakspeare: His Mind and Art*, p. 258.

² Heilman, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

³ G. Wilson Knight, *Principles of Shakespearian Production*, p. 129.

⁴ Kenneth Muir, editor, *King Lear*, Introduction, lix.

is only his passing mood.¹ It is not the theme of the play.

“Pessimism,” says Heilman justly, “does not consist in seeing evil injure good.” It is rather the inability to see good. It is “to discover total depravity, but no grace.”² Complete awareness of evil does not mean the denial of man’s possibility of achieving good. The play shows that human nature is ambivalent. *King Lear* never denies that man is an animal. In fact, man’s animality is asserted again and again. But the play also “reaffirms man’s specifically human quality, his moral quality, one of the evidences of which is his will to endure.”³

Then what is life? What is man’s relation to the universe? The answer is not given explicitly. The mysteriousness of the tragic facts of our life remains still. But the play itself is the answer, for each play gives us his vision of life. At least one thing is clear. According to Bradley, “if we could see things as they are, we should see that the outward is nothing and the inward is all.”⁴ If the inward is all, adversity is blessed “to the blessed in spirit.”⁵ Therefore the answer might be,

Ripeness is all. (V. ii. 11)

Chapter II Man’s True Need

But, for true need,—
You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!—
(II. iv. 272-3)

Through the extreme misery of his merciless madness, Lear was re-born, and purified. His misery was indeed of such a kind that even he himself said, “I should e’en die with pity To see another thus.” (IV. vii. 53-4) But through this purgatorial suffering he gets the most precious experience as a result.

¹ G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 205.

² Heilman, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴ Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

At first, he, a man who did not even know himself, acquires knowledge of man. He was made to know thoroughly the frailty and cheapness of man under the threatening storm. In his madness, he remarks, seeing the naked Edgar:

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, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. (III. iv. 105-112)

Here he wishes to see the reality of man, and to be like Edgar, 'the thing itself', divesting himself of all borrowings. He realizes not only the evil in others, but also the evil in himself. Goneril is 'a boil, a plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle in his corrupted blood which he must call his own.' (II. iv. 223-7) So he cries:

Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters. (III. iv. 74-5)

As we noted before, he achieves compassion for the Fool:

My wits begin to turn.
Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself.

Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee. (III. ii. 67-73)

Above all, as he comes to recognize the evil in humanity and in the universe, he succeeds in grasping the mystery of how to live in this world, confronting universal evil. We know this in Lear's words spoken to Cordelia who would "outfrown false Fortune's frown" (V. iii. 6). Now he will not defy the Gods any more: he will patiently bear the 'outrageous fortune.'

It seems right to me to say that Lear, after his purgatorial suffering and insanity, attains "the mystery of things" (V. iii. 16). Then what is this mystery? I would say, it is 'patience.'

To the moderns, patience is thought of as a negative thing. It is a mood of blank and empty passiveness when we put up with ourselves and our afflictions. Throughout the Middle Ages and even up to the sixteenth century, it is the opposite of the void indifference, which is,

I may say, Stoic patience.¹ It is quite a positive living principle to the Elizabethans. E.M.W. Tillyard, in his *The Elizabethan World Picture*, makes it clear that the Elizabethan age had a close relationship to the medieval and they inherited their way of thinking. So we may assume that the idea of 'patience' is also influenced by traditional medieval Christian ideas.

John F. Danby cites many contemporary sermons and homilies on patience,² and argues that this patience is the patience in *King Lear*. Though *King Lear* is a play about a pagan world, it is possible that the writer himself had in mind, though unconsciously, those contemporary ideas. Therefore his argument can be accepted. According to him, patience is "a condition filled with the richest graces of Christian life."³ It expresses the sum of Christian virtues. Its supreme example is the activity of Christ dying on the Cross. Even this virtue makes a man like to God.⁴ It is entirely different from modern patience which has lost its content and significance and means only 'sitting still and doing nothing.'

Further he regards *King Lear* as the culmination of Christian patience. Whether it is Christian patience or some other kind is very hard to decide. It is necessary for us to know objectively the contemporary meanings of 'patience.' Then, first, it is "the power to suffer with calmness and composure," and secondly, "forbearance with the faults of others."⁵ 'Patience,' therefore, includes 'suffering' and 'mutual forgiveness.' This patience is based upon faith in God's goodness and the love of God, with proper love of ourselves and of our neighbours. It seems to me that this patience is equal to that of Danby's 'Christian

¹ Here I take, "Stoic patience is an impassive withstanding of all that conflicts with reason. At best it is indifference, at worst unfeelingness." John F. Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, p. 110.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-119.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 112. The same idea is seen in Dekker and Middleton, *I Honest Whore* (cited by Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Rival Tradition*, p. 143).

Patience, my lord? Why 'tis the soul of peace;
Of all the virtues 'tis near'st to heaven;
It makes man look like gods:

⁵ Cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary* and D. G. James, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

patience.' If we take it so, it seems right to say with Danby that "to hold on to patience is to grasp one necessary life line."¹ Hence comes Lear's cry:

But, for true need,—
You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!—
(II. iv. 272-3)

But through what does he achieve patience? Even after this admission of his 'true need' of patience, he begs the Gods not to fool him so that he will 'bear it tamely'; and he wants to have 'noble anger' and the inexpressible revenge on his daughters (II. iv. 274-78). Afterwards on the heath he decides:

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing. (III. ii. 37-8)

He 'will endure' 'this contentious storm' and filial ingratitude: yet he cannot be free from self-justification, the thought of so kind a father, 'whose frank heart gave all,—' (III. iv. 18-20). He is still self-centred; he cannot understand his daughters' behaviour.² His inner conflict comes to its climax. There his heart breaks.³ In madness, Lear preaches ironically to Gloucester:

Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry, I will preach to thee: mark.
(IV. vi. 180-2)

when madness is, in one sense, "impatience made absolute."⁴ So Lear's course throughout the play is "punctuated now with efforts to retain patience and constant failure to do so."⁵ He himself knows very well the true need of patience by his reason; yet he cannot achieve it. It is the reality of us human beings.

But is there nobody who helps him to achieve patience? The Fool

¹ Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

² Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 181.

³ Cf. D. G. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-6.

⁴ Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

may be one. From the beginning the Fool sees the reality of things. The court fool had been given license to say whatever he wanted to say, as seen in other fools of Shakespeare's works. He makes Lear know his own folly by sharp satire. He says to the disguised Kent:

Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

Why? for taking one's part that's out of favour. Nay, and thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly: there take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow has banish'd two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will: if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.

(I. iv. 104-110)

After Goneril's cruel deed, when Lear is about to set out to visit Regan, still believing that her professed love is true, the Fool sees through the true heart of Regan:

Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly; for though she's as like this as a crab's like an apple, yet I can tell what I can tell. (I. v. 14-6)

On the heath, following Lear alone, he "labours to out-jest His heart-stroock injuries." (III. i. 16-7) The storm is raging still. But when Lear, in anger, calls on thunder to crack Nature's mould, the Fool will abjectly consent even to playing the hypocritical knave. He urges the king to accept the worst terms society can offer, the blessing of 'pelican daughters':¹

O Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain water out o' door. Good Nuncle, in, ask thy daughters blessing; here's a night pities neither wise men nor Fools. (III. ii. 10-13)

This stands for the sincere voice of common sense, or of reason. "There is neither bitterness nor irony, only moral panic."² It may be right to say that here lies the limit of reason. By reason we may realize our follies and the evil in humanity and in the universe. But to live against evil, the Fool's reason gives no constructive solution. However the Fool does not follow the advice of his own intellect; he follows the steps of Lear; he will not desert the mad king. Danby

¹ John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 109.

² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

gives an illuminating interpretation of the Fool, saying that his heart belongs to Lear's party, yet his head gives reason which belongs to Edmund and the sisters. He prefers, however, "to walk in a darkness he cannot fathom rather than stay in the light of such reason as he cannot abide."¹ What he does will not square with what he says, and it is a "redeeming insincerity."²

Just when the Fool comes to his limit, having lost his function, Edgar appears as Poor Tom. The appearance of such a naked, savage figure of a wretch plunges Lear into madness. Lear's reason could not bear such a miserable reality of man. If we take it so, it might be said that the Fool also helps to incur Lear's madness. Assuredly, "madness is impatience made absolute." Here we know Lear's punishment is too much whatever his first fault might be; for madness is the loss of that which differentiates man from animals. But paradoxically madness is to "expiate a defect of understanding, just as Gloucester's blindness expiates a defect of sight."³ In one sense, as Gloucester remarks (IV. vi. 281-6), madness is a kind of mercy. Also it can be regarded, as we noted before, that his madness is a breach of his inner conflict between patience and self-justification. Whatever quality it may be, when Lear awakens from it, he becomes 'the pattern of all patience'. Yet what or who brings him to the achievement of patience is not clear. But in Gloucester's case, Edgar helps him to attain patience. In Lear's case, he "enacts the Lear philosophy, expresses its peculiar animal symbolism, and raises the pitch of the madness extravaganza of the central scenes." Therefore his function is rather symbolical.⁴

Cordelia might be the fittest person to be called a helper to Lear in achieving patience. There are some critics who insist too much on the redeeming power of Cordelia. The most notable is Danby's

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ Heilman, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

⁴ Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 199. He regards further that throughout the play Edgar's function is symbolical, and allegorical; his challenge of Edmund at the end suggests a universal judgement. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

comparison of her to Christ. The gentleman in Act IV, scene vi says of Lear :

Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to. (IV. vi. 206-8)

His interpretation is that Cordelia is "anagogically the redemptive principle itself": so the twain referred to are not Goneril and Regan, but Adam and Eve.¹ But this interpretation deprives her of humanity and makes her merely a function. Further he claims that she is perfectly blameless, for in her

I love your Majesty,
According to the bond, no more nor less, (I. i. 92-3)

'bond' meaning 'natural tie'. But if 'bond' had a double meaning, it seems to me that Cordelia is careless in using this word, for if it were taken otherwise, it would surely hurt the feelings of the old king, which she knows thoroughly.² And if we recollect that Shakespeare presents man as he is, it seems natural to take her as a human being.

In another book, Danby declares she is the perfection of Christian patience.³ Whether she is so or no, these words of hers in the first scene will prove :

Cor.	Good my Lord, You begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I Return those duties back as are right fit, Obey you, love you, and most honour you. Why have my sisters husbands, if they say They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed, That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry Half my love with him, half my care and duty: Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, To love my father all.
Lear	But goes thy heart with this?

¹ Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 125, S. L. Bethell also regards her as a Christian symbol. See his *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, pp. 59-61.

² Cf. Authur Sewell, *Characters and Society in Shakespeare*, pp. 60-63.

³ Danby, *Poets on Fortun's Hill*, p. 119.

Cor. Ay, good my Lord.
 Lear So young, and untender?
 Cor, So young, my Lord, and true, (I. i. 95-107)

These words sound more like self-justification than remind us of "the sheep before the shearers which must be dumb," as Danby suggests.¹ It seems inevitable for us to think: "But the truth is not the only good in the world; nor is the obligation to tell the truth the only obligation,"² though she cannot say otherwise.

But surely her fault is small and Lear's folly gross, as Lear recognizes afterwards:

O most small fault,
 How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
 which like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
 From the fix'd place, drew from my heart all love,
 And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear!
 Beat at this gate, that let they foolishly in. (I. iv. 275-82)

Kent, who also sees the reality of things, calls Lear 'mad' and his deed 'folly' (I. i. 145-54). Even the sisters, calm rationalists, comment his act as 'unruly waywardness':

Gon. You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always lov'd our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.
 Reg. 'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself. (I. i. 288-94)

It is not my intention to undervalue her redeeming love. To Lear her being with him 'does redeem all sorrows' that he ever has felt. (V. iii. 265-7) But I only want to regard Cordelia as a human being, not as a kind of goddess. She might be the perfection of Christian patience as a human being,³ so she cannot be blameless. This makes her much more humanly moving than to assign to her the allegori-

¹ Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, p. 119.

² Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

³ The patient figures, at the end of the play, become inconsistent, for Edgar challenges Edmund, and Cordelia leads the French army. But it is the play's necessity to bring an end of Edmund and to bring Cordelia to her father.

cal function which Danby does. She is here with us 'with those infirmities she owes' (I. i. 202) and with surpassing human love.

It is clear that when Lear recovers from his madness, he acquires that patience which so painfully he struggled to get. D. G. James regards this as quite a natural result, for his madness is caused by the inner conflict between the wish for patience and the failure of it. His view may be right pathologically. He says also that the changed man that Lear became is the victory of something in him which has always been there, however aided by Cordelia. And Cordelia can only aid him because, if he had the nature of Goneril in him, he also had something of the nature of Cordelia. Therefore it is "no miracle which is wrought in Lear."¹ But his view seems rather oversimplified with regard to the symbolic meaning of Lear's madness.

We noted before Danby's interpretation of Cordelia. He says that when Lear, on the heath under the raging storm, remarks the following, he recalls the behaviour of Cordelia in Act I as well as the more august examples²:

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.

According to him, she is the redemptive principle: therefore it is she that redeems Lear from his madness and gives him patience. This interpretation seems too religious, for it seems rather unsuitable to regard it as a religious conversion.

Wilson Knight finds something divine, unearthly and transcendental "in the awakening of Lear from the Wheel of Fire to a new consciousness of Love."³ Although it is very hard to prove, we may be allowed to say that we feel some transcendental or superhuman power when we arrive at some solution of our inner conflict which we struggled to overcome yet could not. It may be right to think that power of such a kind works in Lear's achievement of patience.

Now Lear will not struggle against the 'outrageous fortune': his

¹ D. G. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7.

² Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, p. 121.

³ Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 222.

only wish to Cordelia is to 'forget and forgive', for he achieves inner security. As a captive, when Cordelia would move to meet 'these sisters and these daughters', his words do not come from vain 'escapism' as Danby terms.¹

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;
We two 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
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were Gods² spies; and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by th' moon. (V. iii. 8-19)

Instead of escapism, these words are the expression of deep inner security, the mood of which might be "Ripeness is all." (V. ii. 11) Lear looks forward to mutual forgiveness in a walled prison. These are the "only terms the corrupt world will allow to goodness."³ By patience we may 'wear out' the evil in this world. This is the culmination of Lear's patience.

This 'ripeness', Danby maintains, is "the grand successful strategy" in *King Lear* with Edgar, and with Lear and Gloucester it is 'patience'.⁴ Edgar warns his father who wishes to die hearing of Lear's loss of the war.

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all. (V. ii. 9-11)

What does Shakespeare mean by ripeness? Many editors interpret this

¹ Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 140.

² There is no apostrophe in the Folio, so it is hard to decide whether this is singular or plural. The plural is natural with regard to its pagan setting: the singular cannot be easily denied in the context, which is wholly Christian. Bradley, Bethell, T. Spencer and W. Knight severally build their interpretation on the singular.

³ Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 195.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

as 'readiness for death.' But it includes a more profound meaning. Danby gives an illuminating interpretation of the word:

It suggests processes that man cannot with safety either hasten or cut short. It tacitly recommends acceptance. What we must accept is something we might call, however vaguely 'Nature'. There is no overt Christian reference, except that to see the course over the Heath as a process leading to the fulfilment of a beneficent design, the fruition of some ultimately healthful purpose, argues an act of faith which no Senecan would feel to be justified by the facts. The Nature which ripens man through adversity is, by implication, the Christian rather than the heathen thing.¹

In my term, by implication, it tacitly recommends acceptance of something superhuman, which we might call Providence. In its essence, it is equivalent to 'patience'. This is "the centre of Shakespeare's perception of life in his greatest play."² It is not the pessimistic "stark comment" of an optimist who "can offer no greater comfort."³ It is the inner peace, patience and mutual forgiveness, 'the mystery of things' to live in this world where the power of evil seems prosperous. By this Shakespeare transcends life and death.

Both in Lear's case and Gloucester's, there is strong impression of ripeness or fulfilment in the end. We feel some cosmic power working in this play. Gloucester dies "smilingly" between "two extremes, joy and grief." (V. iii. 198-9) Lear dies in joy believing Cordelia lives again, though in illusion, with the solution, 'Ripeness is all.' There could be no question of Cordelia's being brought to some happy ending. It is as foolish to give her some thirty years of life in this world as to give us some assurance of temporal immortality. Of the question of life and death we can make no demand. "It is here, in all truth, that we may rightly say, 'The rest is silence.'"⁴

Lear achieves patience in the end, but he is too late to redeem the good. His curse on Goneril ironically returns to him, "Woe, that too late repents." (I. iv. 266) This brings forth the tragic disaster,

¹ Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, p. 126.

² D. G. James, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³ G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, p. 180.

⁴ Dover Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

the most pitiable death of Cordelia and his own. Surely "upon such sacrifices, the Gods themselves throw incense." (V. iii. 20-1) The loss of his redeeming power makes Lear mad again. He even killed the slave that was hanging her. (V. iii. 274) But is it right to say that Lear has lost that patience? It might be so. Yet is it much more natural that a father should grieve over the death of his dear daughter and be excited enough to even kill the man who killed her? How unbearable and detestable it would be if he were impassive to this great sorrow! He would be anything but a human being. Yet we cannot fail to see that man is such a frail being as is easily made passion's slave. But it is the reality of man, and Shakespeare's purpose is to present man as he is, even if with some grief: for he is a poet and *King Lear* is the presentation of his vision of life, not a moral allegory. However, in all truth, "the Lear that dies is not a Lear defiant, but a Lear redeemed."¹

Conclusion

We have seen in *King Lear* some solution—I call it 'patience' and 'ripeness'—to the problem of 'in what mood must we live against the evils caused by others, or even the powers above.' The problem, more or less, came to appear in Shakespeare's plays written in the tragic period. It appears most explicitly in *Hamlet*. The famous third soliloquy of Hamlet shows it.

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them.

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, . . .
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make

¹ D. G. James, *loc. cit.*

With a bare bodkin; who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?¹

Here we see that the same question troubled Hamlet. He contemplates this question over and over again. But to decide 'whether 'tis nobler . . .?' was beyond his power, and he could not be free from the fear of death. In *Hamlet* the situation is so complicated that it cannot be allowed to affirm anything without due consideration. But as for the problem of living in the face of evil, it seems true that Hamlet could not find an answer, for "it is not a realized conflict at all; it is a conflict contemplated and intellectualized, not suffered."²

In *Measure for Measure*, the conflict is realized: but the solution is too clumsy, and the problem is not properly developed, though a slight sign of need of patience is seen in Isabella's remark (V. i. 114-9). In *Troilus and Cressida*, it may be said that the idea of patience is given to this problem as a solution (V. ii. 53-4, 63-4, 68), yet it also seems to me weak.³

In *King Lear*, the question is not asked so clearly. But the conflict is completely realized and suffered; then the answer is provided. Even Lear, at first a headstrong, unreflective old king, the son of wrath, through his uttermost misery, through the inner conflict between patience and self-justification, through the breach of his mind, madness, at last reached the sense of life. Though he is not thoroughly delivered from this conflict, the answer is clear as a whole, with the perfect patience of Cordelia and Edgar. "In whatever disaster and gloom *King Lear* closes, that answer is given; and it is clear and unmistakable."⁴

¹ This quotation is according to *Hamlet* in the *New Shakespeare*, edited by J. Dover Wilson.

² D. G. James, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

³ Cf. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 160.

⁴ D. G. James, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

Danby suggests the continuity between *King Lear* and the later romances. According to him, it is moral continuity. The link between them can be termed 'patience'.

King Lear in fact can be regarded as a study in patience unrewarded although achieved. *Timon* and the Roman plays as studies in impatience, and the plays of the last period as studies in patience rewarded.¹

The difference is that *King Lear* presents life as it is, while the last plays present life as it should be, giving a "schema" for life.² Danby's appreciation seems to me acceptable. We feel that in later romances 'patience' is not searched for so earnestly as in *King Lear*. But it is the base upon which their world is built.

Then it may be right to say that throughout the entire works of Shakespeare, he gives a basic answer to the problem of living in *King Lear*. Even if, after *King Lear*, such plays as *Timon of Athens* were written, Shakespeare is not inconsistent. Dowden says,

. . . he could now so fully and fearlessly enter into Timon's mood, because he was now past all danger of Timon's malady. He had now learnt to strive with evil and to subdue it; he had now learnt to forgive. And therefore he could dare to utter that wrath against mankind to which he had assuredly been tempted, but to which he had never yielded.³

This attitude of Shakespeare's can be rightly applied in the case of *King Lear*.

The most important achievement of *King Lear* will be the fact that it comes from a free mind, not from a specific principle. To be free from all religious background and to present man as it is, Shakespeare deliberately sets the Lear-world in a remote, pagan kingdom. He does not intend to 'justify the ways of God to men.' His only purpose is 'to mirror up the whole meaning of life.' We noted the paradoxical structure of the Lear-world. But the most paradoxical is that the great knowledge, the need of patience and ripeness, does not come from the proud of heart, but the humbled and the suffering. This fact pro-

¹ Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, pp. 105-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³ Dowden, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-3.

duces almost "a Christian transvaluation of the values of Lear's pagan world."¹

Yet this shows that Shakespeare is a great *Menschenkenner*, because it is the reality of man and of life. Although the moral principle radiates in *King Lear*, it is only one side of it. This is the presentation of the vision of life in Shakespeare's greatest work. We are only overwhelmed by the magnificence and profundity of Shakespeare. The voice of Hazlitt will be that of all who would say something about *King Lear*. "All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it."²

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¹ Heilman, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

² William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 123.

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