

“One sees what one can best see oneself”: An Exploration of the Theme of Vision in *King Lear*

By Jules Cashford, M.A.

Abstract

Following Jung’s model for the interpretation of fairy tales, this paper approaches the play as a dramatization of the anatomy of the psyche in its journey towards wholeness. More specifically, it will be suggested that Jung’s insights into the complexities of seeing the other both subjectively and objectively offer a deeper way of understanding Shakespeare’s own theme in *King Lear*: that vision is moral vision. The capacity to “see feelingly,” which Lear and Gloucester finally achieve, is given as the tragedy’s redemptive idea, making possible their own transformation and a new kind of sovereignty for the kingdom of the psyche.

Keywords: Subjective and objective vision, moral blindness, healing tears, seeing feelingly.

Jung, in volume 6 of the *Collected Works*, writes:

One sees what one can best see oneself. Thus, first and foremost, one sees the mote in one’s brother’s eye. No doubt the mote is there, but the beam sits in one’s own eye—and may considerably hamper the act of seeing. (para. 9)

Jung’s text is the Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, in the context of “what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Jesus then asks: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not

the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matt. 7:3-5).

The problem is obviously how to see the beam in our own eye. But Jung continues:

It is just the beam in one’s own eye that enables one to detect the mote in one’s brother’s eye. The beam in one’s own eye...does not prove that one’s brother has no mote in his. But the impairment of one’s own vision might easily give rise to a general theory that all motes are beams.

What is required, he says, is not “pure observation”—which is impossible—but that “the observer be adequate to his object, in the sense of being able to see not only subjectively, but also objectively”—that is, beyond, as well as through, one’s own beam.

The question of how to see is also central to *King Lear*, and the answer proposed in various ways is one cannot see truly unless one sees with feeling, with one’s whole being. Vision, in the sense of what a person sees, is shown to be inseparable from how a person feels, and ultimately from who that person is. “As a man is, so he sees,” Blake says. “As the Eye is form’d, Such are its Powers. To the Eye of a Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself” (1961, p. 835). Blake’s phrase could be extended to “As a man sees, so he knows,” for “seeing feelingly”—which is the way that Lear and Gloucester learn to see—becomes a mode of knowing both the self and the world. Vision, then, is moral vision.

Jules Cashford is a member of the Association of Jungian Analysts in London. She has recently published a book on *The Moon: Myth and Image*, and a translation of *The Homeric Hymns*. She is the co-author, along with Anne Baring, of *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*.

It is possible to read vision as the controlling metaphor of the play, leading inexorably into the wider question of what it is to be human that the play at the deepest level explores. The metaphor of vision carries the plot and the argument, and it permeates the language, in incidental images as well as in the underlying symbolism. Images of sight and blindness are rarely absent. Eyes are the key to character and the mirror to the soul: “heavenly eyes,” “washed eyes,” “old fond eyes,” eyes that “do comfort and not burn,” eyes “asquint,” “scornful,” “fierce,” “sweet,” the “eye’s anguish,” “eyes of vile jelly,” “glass eyes”—eyes that have sight and cannot see and eyes that see though they are blind. These images of sight and blindness gain cumulatively in power and reference, serving almost as a chorus to the play’s essential dynamic, in which Lear is driven to “see better” and know himself.

The sheer profusion of this imagery may seem random at first, but gradually settles into a pattern of meaning which then makes intelligible the psyche’s preoccupation with that particular symbol. It is like being offered a privileged glimpse into the overwhelming intelligence of the unconscious, as though being led through a dream while we are fully awake. So perhaps we can approach the play as we might a dream or a fairy tale, where the characters, in Blake’s (1961, p. 860) image of “double vision,” are both themselves and also figures in a drama of the psyche:

A double vision my eyes do see, / And a double vision is always with me. / With my inward eye 'tis an old man grey, / With my outward, a Thistle across my way.

The archetypal pattern of the play has its roots in the familiar fairy tale of a drama between a parent and his or her three children, where the eldest two sons or daughters are overvalued and the youngest is undervalued and neglected but is the one who—for that very reason—carries the seeds of renewal.

Tales of Cinderella, Cinderlad, and the tale of the daughter who says she loves her father as much she loves salt are of the same kind. Taken as an image of “the anatomy of the psyche,” as Jung describes fairy tales, the parent in these stories—in *King Lear* the father without the mother—may be understood as the ruling consciousness in a state of imbalance, and the youngest daughter as the rejected intuitive-feeling aspect of the psyche, closest to the unconscious, uncontaminated by the conscious distortion, and so open to the compensatory values of the Self. The absence of the mother suggests already that the imbalance will be one of a lack of feeling.

We might expect from the folk tradition that the dynamic of the play will move from error or sin (the misjudgment that makes explicit the deficiency of the conscious attitude) through an intensification of the conflict (where the consequences of the distortion are suffered and the ruling attitude loses its supremacy) to a resolution in which the despised aspect is disclosed as redemptive, and finally accepted and honored in a new vision.

And in fact once Lear has wronged, and then banished, his youngest daughter, Cordelia, the play, in a sense, yearns for them to be reconciled to each other, for Lear to understand his wrong and for her to forgive him, to bring about a healing of the heart (the

"Cor" of Cordelia means "heart," *coeur de Lear*, the heart of Lear). But for this to happen Lear must learn, in the language of the play, to "see" Cordelia for who she is apart from his need of her—to see, in Jung's terms, her, and himself, *objectively* as well as subjectively. Lear's capacity to see the true being of "the other" is shown to be inseparable from his capacity to love.

So, if we may approach the play as a drama of the psyche in its journey towards wholeness, we could say that Lear is the center of consciousness, which immediately shows itself to be out of balance with the deepest values of the Self—the center of unconsciousness—revealing radical conflict in the psyche. What literary criticism would call the "subplot" of the blinding of Gloucester, we could read as the more literal acting out of the original distortion, which makes explicit in the external world what is the essence of the problem of the inner world: the moral blindness of Lear.

* * *

The play opens with images of division, both outer and inner:

Kent: I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Gloucester: It did always seem so to us. But now in the division of the kingdom it appears not which of the Dukes he values most." (I, i, 1-3)

The outer division is Lear's proposal to divide his kingdom between his three daughters; and the inner division is manifested in his vacillation between the two dukes, Albany and Cornwall, who are married to the two oldest daughters—Albany, married to

Gonerill, who turns out (in fairy tale simplicities) to be good, and Cornwall, married to Regan, who is bad. The movement of Lear's affections from the good duke to the bad duke—so that there is now nothing to choose between them—is ominous.

The division in king and kingdom is now compounded by the division shown in Gloucester in his relation to his two sons: Edmund, the "natural" son, born out of marriage (the "whore-son," as Gloucester calls him to his face) and Edgar, his favorite ("who yet is no dearer in my account"), born "by order of law." Gloucester introduces Edmund to Kent in a way that degrades him, and discord is subtly added to division. The duke of Kent is the true and faithful servant of the king, suggestive of the king's capacity of redemption, and Gloucester is Lear's old friend, friend also to Lear's faults, which he shares in simplified form. In this way he serves as mirror to the king.

Enter Lear in full regalia, along with Gonerill, the eldest daughter, with her husband Albany, and Regan, the second daughter, with her husband Cornwall, and Cordelia, the youngest daughter, who awaits a decision for her hand between France and Burgundy. But, instead of giving his kingdom to his three daughters in three parts, Lear, holding up the map, asks them to give something to him, to earn their portion of his gift by telling him how much they love him, and even, in an elision of love and land, to compete for territory with flattery:

"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, 31-33)

Gonerill replies in kind:

“Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter, / Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty, / Beyond what can be valued rich or rare, / No less than life...” (I, i, 55-58)

The perspective is given in an aside by Cordelia:

“What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent.” (I, i, 62)

Gonerill is rewarded with her land, “even from this line to this,” and Lear turns now to Regan, his second-born, who rises to the sibling challenge:

“I am made of that self-same mettle as my sister / And prize me at her worth. In my true heart / I find she names my very deed of love; / Only she comes too short...” (I, i, 69-72)

A further, now punning, aside from Cordelia suggests that the independence of her point of view is strengthening:

“Then poor Cordelia, / And yet not so, since I am sure my love’s / More ponderous than my tongue.” (I, i, 76-8)

The puns on “poor”—in land and spirit—and “ponderous,” a word of both spiritual gravity and physical weight (the weighing of love that Lear is demanding)—are already anticipating her refusal to debase love, as Lear does, by referring it to something other than itself.

Lear then turns to his favorite:

“Now, our joy, / Although our last and least, to whose young love / The vines of France and milk of Burgundy /

Strive to be interest’d: what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak!” (I, i, 82-5)

To which Cordelia replies:

“*Cordelia*: Nothing, my lord.

Lear: Nothing?

Cordelia: Nothing.

Lear: Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less.” (I, i, 86-93)

The term “nothing” echoes throughout the play as the loving answer to the materialist’s demand for quantity in relation to matters of quality—things that cannot be measured. Its meaning deepens as the characters and contexts deepen, but here the repetition of “nothings” draws Cordelia and Lear together, into a direct confrontation of values, that opposition of conscious and unconscious which Jung describes as the first stage of a new way of being coming into consciousness. Cordelia cannot say anything to draw a third more opulent than her sisters (doubly absurd for being logically impossible) because there is nothing true to say. For when Lear materializes love—measures it in quantity, asks how much of it there is (and specifically how much of it there is for him)—he predicates it on something other than itself, as though it were a currency to be used for gain, and then there is nothing left of love, no quality remains. It is “no-thing” to be bought and sold. Cordelia tries to restore truth to the language of love by bringing it back to the bond of the heart, and thereby limiting its scope:

"Good my lord, / You have begot me,
bred me, loved 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?" (I, i, 96-100)

The difference between them now
becomes almost a rhythmic dance of
opposition:

"So young and so untender?"
"So young, my lord, and true."

This is the moment of trial that dis-
closes Lear's character and the depth of
his affections. But Lear cannot "see"
his daughter in her own right, apart
from, other than, his need of her: he
sees only the mote in her eye. He can-
not see her truth because in the moment
of his question he has none in himself:
he sees only her refusal of him because
he sees entirely in his own terms, sub-
jectively, not objectively.

Lear's failure of the archetypal test,
which he sees as Cordelia's failure, sets
into action the inexorable dynamic of
the play. If she will not be the daughter
he wants, then she will be no daughter
at all:

"Here I do 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, 123-6)

Reading this psychologically, we
could say that the old king of the psy-
che—whose inner kingdom, it has been
revealed, is sustained by vanity and
greed—reacts to what he takes to be a
threat to his absolute rule, with wrath—
blind rage—imposing his will still more
harshly than before. Subversive feeling

is banished, and the false equilibrium is
reinstated. And where no dissenting
voice is allowed, language becomes
false and truth falls into the unconscious,
where it can only work indirectly.

And, immediately, there is one
qualm. Kent (the faithful one) interrupts:

"Good my liege..." (I, i, 120)

But Lear cuts him off:

"Come not between the dragon and his
wrath." (I, i, 122)

Conscious misgivings are still
unthinkable, and, indeed, inflame Lear
to new bitterness towards Cordelia:

"Hence and avoid my sight!"

What he finally gives her is what
he takes away: "I give / Her father's
heart from her" (I, i, 125). When Kent,
still the only dissenting voice, calls
Lear mad, urging him to "check this
hideous rashness"—"thy youngest
daughter does not love thee least"(I, i,
152)—he also is banished, and in the
same image of seeing:

"Out of my sight!"(I, i, 157)

But the creative unconscious, initi-
ated by Kent, has begun its response.
Kent, the loyal servant, both to the man
who is king and to the principle of
kingship which Lear betrays, becomes
the mediator between conscious and
unconscious, and significantly it is he
who first articulates the central theme.
Lear's own apparently arbitrary expres-
sion of his rage, which wants them
from his sight so he is not reminded of
what has passed between them (what
we might call denial), is picked up and

given a meaning which sets out the terms on which Lear can grow:

“See better, Lear, and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye.” (I, i, 58-9)

It is as though the potential healing of Lear is held, unknown to him, in the imagery of sight and blindness which surrounds him. (“Wisdom first speaks in images,” Yeats [1961, p. 95] says.) We might understand this as the symbolism thrown up by the Self—holding the idea of the whole—which “acts through” the fragmentation that is Lear’s consciousness in different ways. His spiritual blindness is acted out literally through the suffering of Gloucester’s physical blinding, as well as through the callous cruelty of those who blind him—Cornwall and, indirectly, Edmund—in whose world of evil Lear, in the inflation of his curses, is also implicated. “I’ll tell thee thou dost evil” (I, i, 166), Kent says, to be instantly bound to his allegiance, and banished. Both Lear and Gloucester, blind to the children who love them, will be eventually healed by them. The tears from Cordelia’s eyes baptize Lear into his new vision when he wakes from his sleep of madness. Edgar becomes Gloucester’s eyes by leading him to Dover, and then, by describing so vividly the cliff that Gloucester believes he is throwing himself over, he helps his father to fulfill his own act of repentance, which is rendered as a new birth.

* * *

Back to the narrative (act I, scene i), where the debate of riches vs. love, means vs. ends, continues through a cascade of “financial” puns of wealth, worth, dear, price, cheap, prized, pre-

vious, more, less, most, least. Burgundy and France are offered Cordelia with “her price...fallen,” without her portion, herself and “nothing more,” as Lear phrases it. Burgundy bows out:

“Pardon me, royal sir, / Election makes not up in such conditions.” (I, i, 205-6)

Following Lear’s resounding curse upon Cordelia—“Better thou hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better”—France, as fitting husband for Cordelia, finds her “herself a dowry” (I, i, 241) and formulates a definition of love that Lear, incredibly at this point, is eventually to find within himself:

“...Love’s not love / When it is mingled with regards that stands / Aloof from th’entire point.” (I, i, 238-40)

Nothing, apart from love. Burgundy tries again:

“Royal Lear, / Give but that portion which yourself proposed...”

To which Lear replies, in unwitting echo of Cordelia:

“Nothing! I have sworn; I am firm.” (I, i, 241-5)

France then addresses Cordelia in terms that echo Paul in *2 Corinthians*—“having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10):

“Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor, / Most choice, forsaken, and most loved, despised, / Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon... / Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy / Can buy this unprized-precious maid of me.” (I, i, 250-9)

Lear disowns Cordelia:

"...for we / Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see / That face of hers again..."

And Cordelia separates from her sisters:

"The jewels of our father, with washed eyes / Cordelia leaves you..."

This is the first appearance of an image which, bringing tears and clarity of vision together, is to become by the end an act of healing for the psyche.

The court exits, and Gonerill and Regan, left alone, dissect their father's behavior precisely but dismissively—"Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself"—and resolve to "hit together."

With Cordelia and Kent both banished, we might expect the destructive aspects of the psyche to have a freer rein, and to disclose, by magnifying it, the essence of the flaw, the complex. What *is* wrong with Lear? Why can't he see the difference between flattery and love? Must he see himself in everything? And, significantly, the next scene, scene 2, opens with Edmund's disclaiming of the human bond of culture:

"Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound." (I, ii, 1-2)

Nature here, in Edmund, is opposed to culture, and so is lawless in the sense of being answerable to no law beyond the gratification of impulse. Edmund here has no qualms about plotting to deceive his father, Gloucester, and supplant his brother, Edgar. But there is another sense of Nature in the play which becomes evident later. There, Nature in its own right is shown to have a wisdom of its own, one which enrich-

es those human beings wise enough to harmonize with it. A doctor, in answer to Cordelia's question as to what "man's wisdom" can do to heal her father, replies by referring her to Nature—"Our foster-nurse of nature is repose" (IV, iv, 12)—together with Nature's many plants that will "close the eye of anguish" (IV, iv, 15). Cordelia's immediate response is to bring her own sympathies to work with nature's "virtues":

"All blest secrets, / All you unpublished virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears!" (IV, iv, 16-18)

But, at this point, Edmund's motto—"All with me's meet that I can fashion fit" (I, ii, 180)—clarifies the shadowy depths of Lear's egoism, the ruthless self-interest that is answerable to no moral law. Those who inhabit this kind of world—Edmund, Gonerill, Regan, and Cornwall—are defined as those who see without feeling, and so see primarily what they can make use of for their own ends. They are not named as blind themselves, though they blind others. What makes them so dangerous is their single-minded clear-sightedness, for they see the weaknesses of others without compassion. Imagery of wild beasts and birds of prey—tigers, foxes, wolves, vultures, and serpents—track Gonerill and Regan. Lear is implicated in this world through the bestial savagery of his curses and through the resonant verb "digest" for what is to happen to Cordelia's share of inheritance. He calls on Albany and Cornwall: "With my two daughter's dowers digest the third" (I, i, 128).

Edmund sees that Gloucester cannot see—and Gloucester falls for his trick so fast the scene is given in parody. Edmund

has composed a letter from Edgar threatening his father's life that he pretends to conceal from Gloucester. Shakespeare now plays with the image of "nothing" that just before held so much gravity—just as a dream might do—and anticipates in farce the spectacles that Gloucester will soon no longer need:

“Gloucester: What paper were you reading?

Edmund: Nothing, my lord.

Gloucester: No? What need then that terrible despatch of it into your pocket? The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see. Come! If it be nothing I shall not need spectacles.” (I, ii, 31-6)

As Gloucester will later say:

“I have no way and therefore want no eyes; / I stumbled when I saw.” (IV, i, 18-9)

Edmund sees Edgar's noble innocence—as Gloucester cannot—but he treats it as gullibility he can profit from:

“A credulous father and a brother noble,
/ Whose nature is so far from doing harms
/ That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
/ My practices ride easy—I see the business.” (I, ii, 175-8)

Now the two plots are launched and will later intertwine. Lear is to move “by monthly course” between Gonerill and Regan, and Gloucester is to be duped again by a show of a duel between Edmund and Edgar, and to banish his honest son in terms similar to Lear's: “I never got him.” The action of the play, rigorously pursuing the consequences of Lear's and Gloucester's treatment of their children, will drive

both men out of the protective illusions of their constructed lives—the public roles of king and duke and father—on to the blasted heath, the wasteland, where they have to meet themselves face to face, without masks, first separately and then together.

At Gonerill's court (Act I, scene 3), the king now loses his political authority, as before he lost, without knowing it, his moral authority. Into this situation of conflict comes Kent, disguised as the servant Caius, asking to call Lear “master.” Again, Shakespeare seeds, almost inconsequentially, the idea that will become momentous by the end. As Kent enters, Lear says:

“Lear: How now? What art thou?

Kent: A man, sir.”

And, evoking the terms of his original rebellion to Lear's folly, he calls himself “as poor as the King.” Lear allows him to serve him—a bond to the Self created in the psyche—and immediately calls for his Fool.

The potential for good, now necessarily in disguise, has to work “hermetically,” in secret, and Kent serves Lear in two ways: as his invisible protector from harm and as a trickster who brings about the disruption that will press Lear to move towards a truer judgment of character. Similarly, the Fool surfaces at this point—the compassionately bitter wit, issuing elliptically in allusion, analogy, and epigram that break through into consciousness where more reasoned argument would fail. The Fool is allied with Cordelia: he “hath much pined away” since she went to France, and he carries Lear's conscience, as intuitive knowledge, until Lear is reconciled with Cordelia, after which he simply disappears. The Fool

continually torments Lear with his judgement, as though to force him to grasp that he has a false notion of himself. As he says: "Truth's a dog must to kennel" (I, iv, 120). And by persistently engaging Lear in dialogue, the Fool stops him forgetting what he has done: "Why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will" (I, iv, 101-4). There is a loving friction between them: the Fool always wins, but he cannot be punished because he is a Fool.

Like a thought that will not go away, the Fool plays with the terms already present in Lear's mind, but twists them to mean what Lear would not have them mean. The fateful "nothing" always comes up:

"Fool: Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?"

Lear: Why, no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.

Fool (to Kent): Prithee tell him; so much the rent of his land comes to. He will not believe a fool." (I, iv, 130-4)

"Lear: Dost thou call me fool, boy?"

Fool: All other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with." (I, iv, 146-7)

Then he tries it from another angle:

"I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll have me whipped for speaking true; thou'lt have me whipped for lying; and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool. And yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing i' the middle." (I, iv, 178-84)

As Lear is watchful of Gonerill's frown, the Fool concludes:

"...Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a fool; thou art nothing." (I, iv, 189-90)

And when Lear, raging at Gonerill's censure of him, cries:

"Does any here know me? This is not Lear. / Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?... / Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

the Fool replies, "Lear's shadow." (I, iv, 222-7)

When Gonerill demands Lear "A little to disquantity your train," Lear responds by cursing her in the same language that Edmund has used, so descending to his level, though, in contrast to Edmund's cold clarity, Lear's invocation is passionate with arrogance:

"Hear, Nature, hear! Dear goddess, hear! / Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend / To make this creature fruitful..." (I, iv, 273-6)

And finding himself weeping with rage, he exclaims:

"...Old fond eyes, / Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out / And cast you with the waters that you loose / To temper clay." (I, iv, 288-302)

Because this image, in its empty rhetoric, anticipates exactly what Gloucester will have to suffer, a further relation is made between Lear and Gloucester, and also, more widely perhaps, between the way we think and what appears to "happen" to us. For the language of Lear's rage would set both daughters at each other faces like wild beasts: "...with her nails / She'll flay thy wolfish visage" (I, iv, 304-5), Lear

says to Gonerill of Regan, and, later, complaining to Regan about Gonerill, Lear makes his wish a curse:

“You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames / Into her scornful eyes.” (II, iv, 160-1)

This to the daughter who professed to love him “dearer than eyesight.” And it is Gonerill who is the first to respond to Gloucester’s supposed treason—supporting the king—with “Pluck out his eyes!” Gloucester, asked why he saved the king from Cornwall’s plan to kill him, answers:

“Because I would not see thy cruel nails / Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister / In his anointed flesh rash boarish fangs.” (III, vii, 55-7)

Cornwall replies:

“See’t shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair. / Upon these eyes of thine I’ll set my foot.” (III, vii, 66-67)

The density of these echoes creates affinities between all the characters—but especially between Lear and Gloucester, inviting us to move backwards and forwards between Gloucester’s literal blindness and Lear’s metaphorical blindness, and to understand each more fully by means of the other. Even at the level of the plot, Gloucester, in what he later understands to be his moral blindness to the difference between his sons, is implicated in Lear’s later defeat, by trusting Edmund with the letter about the arrival of France and Cordelia and their army at Dover. So, similarly, Lear’s moral blindness to the difference between his daughters sets off the train

of events that involves Gloucester in his defense and results in his physical blinding. The parallels between them mean that Gloucester’s insights direct us to the way we are to think more deeply about Lear, and this becomes crucial at the end.

* * *

To return to the order of the play—Act 2 opens, significantly, after Lear’s curse of Gonerill, with Edmund (the curse, as it were, calling him in). Edmund tricks Edgar into running away, wounds himself in the arm for plausibility, and gets Gloucester to pronounce death on Edgar for plotting against his life. Regan and Cornwall arrive to engage Gloucester against the king. They put Kent, newly arrived as Lear’s messenger with letters for Regan and Gloucester, in the stocks for fighting with Oswald, Gonerill’s messenger with contrary letters to Regan. As Kent lies under the stars reading a secret letter from Cordelia, Edgar creeps by, resolving to grime his face and blanket his loins, to disguise himself as a Bedlam beggar, the nearest man comes to beast. His name will be “Poor Tom”:

“That’s something yet; Edgar I nothing am.” (II, iii, 21)

The good are now all outcasts: officially banished and proclaimed to death, and unofficially disguised as servants or beggars, or working invisibly from afar. But from the point of view of the unconscious, the despised good is in waiting, alert, and watching for an opening, and this counter-movement will eventually force the hidden conflict within Lear to become conscious. In the language of the plot, Cordelia is

returning with an army to assist her father in Dover. But in the language of the psyche she is not there yet, and Lear still has further down to go before they can meet.

He has, as it were, to play the opening scene in reverse. He has to experience what it is to barter for numbers and amounts—how many of his men can he have? can he keep his hundred, fifty, twenty-five?—when all he is really asking for is a home. Faced with Gonerill and Regan, Lear turns from one to the other, making, as the Fool says, his daughters his mothers. Regan orders him back to Gonerill, to return in a month with fifty knights. Lear protests, so she lowers it to twenty-five. The language, playing off his own materialistic confusion of quantity and quality with Cordelia, shows he is getting back just what he gave out. In a grotesque parody of conditional love, Lear turns back to Gonerill, whom he has just cursed with sterility and blindness:

"Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty, / And thou art twice her love."
(II, iv, 254-5)

But Gonerill asks him: "What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five...?" and Regan adds: "What need one?" Lear's shock propels him out of his own calculations:

"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." (II, iv, 259-60)

This, his first moment of poetry, with its echo of Edgar's beggars, signals the turning point for his repressed humanity; for here, for the first time, he

is not only talking of himself. Immediately the sound of the storm and tempest is heard from without (as the conflict rises), and, willing his heart to "break into a hundred thousand flaws Or else I'll weep," he hurls himself outside with Gloucester, Kent, and his Fool: "O Fool, I shall go mad!" (II, iv, 281).

* * *

There seems to be an inexorable logic whereby Lear is driven onto the heath, at night, in the storm, the most instinctive layer of unconscious life realized in the play. The tempest in and out of his mind shakes apart the rigid structures of his character and the habitual modes of thought that keep him king when he would be father, friend, or simply human. Compelled to divest himself of the trappings of kingship—what he calls "lendings"—and to suffer as the poorest beggars do, shattered by thunder and washed by rain, he loses his identification with being a king and begins the long process of understanding what it is to be a man. Lear's story takes on a new dimension here, for, as his state of mind deepens, his suffering achieves a universality and he comes to speak for all humanity in our propensity to blindness. The whole scene on the heath is like a heightened dream, or poem, in which the voices of Lear's tormented consciousness echo and counterpoint each other. And it is also as though, set free from conscious control, the impulses of the Self move, gradually but inevitably, towards a pattern of value.

At first, Lear, with only the Fool beside him, rages back against the "eyeless rage" of the storm—so like his own—as Kent hears it from an unnamed Gentleman:

“Strives in his little world of man to
out-storm / The to-and-fro conflicting
wind and rain.” (III, i, 10-11)

Act III, scene 1 interposes a brief scene in which Kent tells the Gentleman of new “division” between Albany and Cornwall, and a power from France coming into “our scattered kingdom,” and gives him a ring to show to Cordelia by which to know who he is. So the shattering of the false sovereignty frees the forces of goodness to begin to act.

As the storm magnifies, so does Lear’s flaw. In the inflation of his wrath, he makes himself King of Nature and curses humankind, as Macbeth did to get his prophecy from the witches:

“And thou all-shaking thunder, / Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world, / Crack Nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once / That makes ungrateful man!” (III, ii, 6-10)

The elements become his daughters:

“I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness; / I never gave you kingdom, called you children.” (III, ii, 6-7)

But when Kent joins him, the one who is steadfastly loyal to what is true, Lear changes:

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

This is only a momentary glimpse of what he could be, and he instantly relapses into self-pity:

“...I am a man / More sinned against than sinning.” (III, ii, 58-9)

But the glimpse makes possible a place of shelter, some small point of rest to which the mind can hold. It is Kent who shows him a hovel nearby:

“Some friendship will it lend you
‘gainst the tempest.” (III, ii, 62)

Then, as Lear’s “wits begin to turn,” he shows his first moment of concern for another person, significantly for his Fool:

“Come on, my boy. How dost my boy? Art cold? / I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow? / The art of our necessities is strange / And can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel. / Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That’s sorry yet for thee.” (III, ii, 78-73)

But again, this advance is followed by a retreat:

“...this tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else / Save what beats there.—Filial ingratitude! / ...In such a night as this! O Regan, Gonerill! / Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all! / O, that way madness lies; let me shun that.” (III, iv, 12-22)

Perhaps “madness” has achieved a double meaning here: madness lies that way because he cannot bear to think of it; but also madness may lie that way because thinking that way is not true—his “frank heart,” in fact, gave nothing—and the new dimension of himself knows this but is very new, still struggling to survive against the pull of succumbing to the easier, more instantly gratifying sentiment (what Jung calls the “inertia of the unconscious” [CW 6, para. 313]).

Lear makes the Fool go in to the hovel before him: "In boy; go first.— You houseless poverty." And this act of feeling moves his heart beyond self-pity to genuine pity for others in his vision of the poor and destitute who, now like himself, have nothing to shield them from the storm:

"Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, / How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / 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." (III, iv, 28-36)

This is like a prayer, and it is answered by Edgar from within the hovel, in the image of the mad, naked wretch, Poor Tom, who gives him his "physic," his education. As a dimension of the psyche, Tom is the rejected and despised figure of humanity, who is driven out of the family and the community, has no home, nowhere to lay his head, is given no place by the conscious mind—"Poor Tom's a-cold" (III, iv, 140). But he is summoned out of anonymity here by the dawning feeling of sympathy in Lear.

"Away!" cries Edgar as Poor Tom. "The foul fiend follows me. Through the sharp hawthorn blow the cold winds" (III, iv, 44-5)

Lear instantly identifies with him, but in the only way he as yet can: "Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?"

Tom turns it around: "Who gives anything to Poor Tom?"

Lear turns round his "nothing": "Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst

thou give 'em all?"

"He hath no daughters, sir," says Kent helpfully.

The Fool comments: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (III, iv, 48-75).

As Lear's sympathy for Poor Tom grows, the impersonal resources of his nature are released, and he feels through Tom a compassion for the human condition in its extremity:

"Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest 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. (He tears off his clothes)." (III, iv, 98—106)

It is as though, one by one, the layers of self-absorption ("lendings") are shed, and, as each layer goes, a new possibility of feeling is made available to him. As "lendings," they belong elsewhere, the mental and material clothing that is not his own (as Jung calls the "collective"). Here, Lear's act of unbuttoning is phrased as a command from a king; but by the end he puts it as a humble question from a man in need: "Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir" (V, iii, 307). The difference between the unbuttoning of a king and the unbuttoning of a man describes the journey Lear still has to make.

Just after this, the darkness is lit by a torch held by Gloucester—"Look, here comes a walking fire," says the

Fool. Gloucester has come, risking his own life, to lead Lear to a better shelter—the further hold for the mind Lear has just won through his compassion—but, significantly, Lear will not be parted from Poor Tom—his philosopher, as he calls him—Gloucester’s own son whom Gloucester does not recognize. (Shakespeare’s hidden pun on the meaning of Tom as a philosopher is that the plight of Tom has indeed moved Lear to think philosophically—about things in themselves—forgetting himself).

“Lear: I’ll talk a word with this same learned Theban. / What is your study?

Edgar: How to prevent the foul fiend and to kill vermin.” (III, iv, 150-3)

So Gloucester, first trying to put “the fellow” back in the hovel, has to agree to let his disguised son come along with them, allowing Lear unwittingly to contribute towards his (Gloucester’s) redemption through Edgar, who will soon hold the torch in the darkness for his father.

In the background (in three interspersed scenes), Gloucester, who has shown Edmund the letter from France, is being betrayed by him (III, iii). These conspiracies also feed into the rumblings of the storm, as though, under the pressure of the conflict, the affirmative and destructive impulses separate out and become more visible, more distinctively themselves.

Lear’s feeling of affinity with Poor Tom is now expressed in his sounding so like him it might be Tom speaking:

“Lear: To have a thousand with red burning spits / Come hissing in upon ‘em!

Edgar: The foul fiend bites my back.” (III, vi, 14-6)

Symbolically, then, Lear becomes the “unaccommodated man,” taking on himself imaginatively all its nakedness.

Lear, the Fool, and Edgar as Tom now conduct a mock trial of Gonerill and Regan, with the aid of joint-stools for the defendants and the Fool as the “robed man of justice”:

“Fool: Is your name Gonerill?

Lear: She cannot deny it.

Fool: Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.” (III, vi, 49-51)

The mind that accuses, punishes, and blames is mocked here, but, as the farce continues, Lear asks more serious and unanswerable questions in which he is also implicated, and appears to mock his earlier self:

“Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts? / You sir, I entertain for one of my hundred. Only I do not like / the fashion of your garments. You will say they are Persian; / but let them be changed.” (III, vi, 95-8)

Gloucester comes again to warn them of a plot of death and sends them in a litter to Dover. Edgar is left behind, alone, and resolves no longer to consider himself a beggar—“Tom away!”—his mind changed through fellowship to the king, even as the king’s is changed through fellowship to him, as though an exchange has taken place:

“How light and portable my pain seems now, / When that which makes me bend makes the king bow.” (III, vi, 6-7)

With Edgar emerging from “Poor Tom” and Cordelia on her way to England, Lear’s journey towards a new way of being is launched. From now

on, the progress of Lear's transformation may be measured by the mutual movement of Cordelia and Lear towards each other, as the coming together of a man with his heart. In a parallel way, Gloucester's transformation takes place through his recognition of and ultimately yielding to his son Edgar, his own banished heart, who becomes correspondingly stronger and more powerful in the world.

With Lear gone, Gloucester is left to face the consequences of what he and Lear initiated. Defying Cornwall on Lear's behalf, Gloucester is horrifically blinded by him, and then told that Edmund betrayed him. In contrast to Lear's tormented anguish, Gloucester's self-revelation follows simply and directly from the revelation of Edmund's character. It is as though, like Tiresias, as soon as he is blind he can see:

"O my follies! Then Edgar was abused.
/ Kind gods, forgive me that and prosper
him." (III, vii, 90-1)

Lear, more like Oedipus, is in prolonged flight from he who he is, and it is only through the progressive shedding of his illusions about himself that he can face what he has done.

* * *

Cornwall has been fatally wounded by his servant, who gave his life to save Gloucester's second eye. And Gloucester is thrown out to "smell his way to Dover." An Old Man leads Gloucester to Edgar, who hears his father say:

"I have no way and therefore want no eyes;
/ I stumbled when I saw... / O dear son Edgar,
/ The food of thy abused father's wrath!
/ Might I but live to see

thee in my touch / I'd say I had eyes again." (IV, i, 21-2)

Introduced to Edgar as a madman and a beggar, Gloucester recalls the beggar man of the night before—"My son / Came then into my mind"—and, in a poignant echo of Lear stripping off his "lendings" to give to Poor Tom, Gloucester tells the Old Man to "bring some covering for this naked soul." But he's a madman, says the Old Man. "Do as I bid thee," says Gloucester, "or rather," checking his habit of command, "do thy pleasure"—to which the Old Man promises to "bring him the best apparel that I have, / Come on't what will." (IV, i, 33-50)

Gloucester's kindly clothing of the naked Edgar is charged with meaning, because Edgar is the one who is emerging as the bearer of the new vision, and by the end of the play he is the only one left to give it voice. This gift of apparel also anticipates the "fresh garments" which will be given by Cordelia to Lear, himself symbolically naked without his "lendings," and so open to the healing of her tears.

Giving Edgar his purse, Gloucester is moved to make the same kind of prayer as Lear did, echoing Edgar's earlier perception of communion in suffering:

"...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, 64-70)

Gloucester expresses the perception that the play has been working

towards: it is only when you can feel for the other that the other can be seen truly. As Albany, in the next scene, says to Gonerill: “Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile; / Filths savour but themselves” (IV, ii, 38-9).

Gonerill, for her part, dismisses him as a “moral fool”: “Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning / Thine honour from thy suffering” (IV, ii, 52-3).

And he responds with: “See thyself, devil (IV, ii, 59)...Bemonster not thy feature” (IV, ii, 64).

It is as though Gloucester’s blinding is the nadir of unconsciousness in the play—unconsciousness in the sense of repression and ignorance. After Gloucester’s remorse and insight the creative forces of the Self gather and accumulate. First, there is Albany’s moral condemnation of Gonerill (where before he was hesitant or silent), then the death of Cornwall by his servant as he went “to put out the other eye of Gloucester” (IV, ii, 71-2), and then the news (given by the unnamed Gentleman) of Cordelia’s landing in England. Now we hear of her for the first time in her own right, weeping for Lear’s suffering, shaking “the holy water from her heavenly eyes” (IV, iii, 30):

Gentleman: And now and then an ample tear trilled down / Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen / Over her passion who, most rebel-like, / Sought to be king o’er her.

Kent: O, then it moved her?

Gentleman: Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove / Who should express her goodliest. You have seen / Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears / Were like a better way.” (IV, iii, 12-19)

Now, correspondingly, we hear of Lear’s first “royal” emotion—his “sov-

ereign shame,” as Kent calls it, which initially keeps him from her. Following this, we have our first glimpse of Cordelia in person, at Dover, in conversation with the Doctor, come to restore her father. Her presence has been felt throughout the play in terms of the wrong done to her, but here her loving truth (for which she was banished) reveals itself as tenderness which now finds full expression—wishing that the herbs of the earth to heal her father would “spring” with her tears. She accepts the need to protect him from his “ungoverned rage” without condemning him—showing how this tenderness has its source in the same strength that enabled her to refuse her father’s demands. She does not make conditions or bargain; her love is freely given.

Back to the blind Gloucester (IV, vi), who is being led by Edgar to a supposed cliff, to the conclusion of his thought, performing for his father the service that the Fool performed for Lear. Like Cordelia, also, he brings his father back to life, restoring to him his lost heart, his ability to love. But from Gloucester’s point of view at this point, his guide seems to have changed. Edgar answers in one of the now resonant metaphors of the play: “Y’are much deceived. In nothing am I changed / But in my garments” (IV, vi, 9-10).

They reach the “extreme verge,” where Edgar lets Gloucester think he is throwing himself down to the “murmuring surge,” sustaining in himself the anguish of letting his father grow on his own: “Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it” (IV, vi, 34-5).

And Gloucester’s recovery is rendered as a rebirth: Edgar, as though from the bottom of the cliff, describing his imaginary fall as shivering “like an egg,” tells him, “Thy life’s a miracle

(IV, vi, 55)... Give me your arm. / Up—so. How is't? Feel you your legs? You stand" (IV, vi, 65-6).

The fiend, the "thing...Which parted from you," now takes on a further meaning as Gloucester's former self that his remorse has transformed, and he now breaks through to the acceptance that corresponds to Lear's rebirth:

"...Henceforth I'll bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself / 'Enough, enough,' and die." (IV, vi, 75-7)

Edgar now has no further need of disguise, and no longer plays a part with his father or Lear, liberated into being himself.

Then Lear enters, fantastically dressed with wild flowers: now a King of Flowers, playing as a child, as psychologically he has become, cleansed of his old self by the storm, but still hovering on the brink of who he is. Gloucester, cleansed by his own act of repentance, meets Lear and falls on his knees before him. Lear, who appears mad, is speaking, as Edgar says, "reason in madness." Lear glimpses the truth now but has no structure yet to contain and secure it:

"Ha! Gonerill with a white beard! They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything I said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie: I am not ague-proof." (IV, vi, 96-105)

Knowing Gloucester and taking in what has happened to him seems to be an essential part of finding a way to integrate what he has learned, as though he is struggling to come to terms with an aspect of himself. And, in the ritual pattern of correspondences between them, Gloucester's experience in turn has prepared him to assist his King:

Gloucester asks him: "O ruined piece of nature...Dost thou know me?"

And Lear counters evasively: "I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid, I'll not love."

Lear then offers Gloucester a letter to read, carrying overtones of the original letter Edmund gave him:

Lear: Read thou this challenge, mark but the penning of it.

Gloucester: Were all thy letters suns, I could not see.

Edgar (aside): I would not take this from report. It is, And my heart breaks at it.

Lear: Read.

Gloucester: What, with the case of eyes?

Lear: O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse...yet you see how this world goes.

Gloucester: I see it feelingly.

Lear: What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears...Get thee glass eyes,...And like a scurvy politician seem / To see the things thou dost not" (IV, vi, 140-173).

Then it is as though Lear gives in and accepts what has happened to them both, as though they are brothers in adversity and in the struggle to discover a true perspective on their condition:

"If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes. / I know thee well enough; thy

name is Gloucester. / Thou must be patient; we came crying hither. / Thou knowest the first time that we smell the air / We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee—Mark! ... / When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools.” (IV, vi, 177-84)

We believe Lear now when he talks of patience, and, significantly, the thought that has lost all self-preoccupation and achieved a transpersonal dimension falls inevitably into poetry, anticipating the mature perspective of Edgar’s at the end. Lear has now absorbed the wisdom of the Fool, who has unaccountably vanished as though he is no longer independent of Lear: Lear has found his conscience. (At the end, when Lear is carrying the hanged Cordelia, he says “And my poor fool is hanged,” as though Cordelia and the Fool are one in his mind, suggesting how indissolubly love and conscience are related.) There is to follow his healing sleep and recognition of Cordelia.

First, Edgar slays Oswald, Gonerill’s steward, to defend his father against him, and Oswald gives him the letter from Gonerill to Edmund, urging him to kill Albany. Edgar, then, who was once too naive to see what his brother was doing, now holds the secret of the evil-doers.

The scene of reconciliation when Lear is brought to Cordelia and sees her truly as never before is presented as a culmination of all that he has suffered and learnt. First, Cordelia and Kent meet and exchange their love in language that is a deliberate reversal of the language of currency which Lear initiated:

“O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work / To match thy goodness?” (IV, vii, 1-2)

Kent replies:

“To be acknowledged, madam, is o’er-paid.” (IV, vii, 4)

Cordelia’s meeting with Kent makes possible her reconciliation with Lear, who is brought in asleep, healing taking place first of all in the unconscious:

“*Cordelia*: Is he arrayed?

Doctor: Ay, madam; in the heaviness of sleep / We put fresh garments on him.”

So Lear is clothed by Cordelia in his sleep, while the conscious mind is at rest. Cordelia is given as the figure of love—the love buried in Lear’s “heart”—and it is her love for him that draws out his love for her which is his redemption; for in loving her he comes to know himself. To the playing of music, Cordelia kisses him awake, like a princess in a fairy tale. And Lear’s awakening seems to him like a rebirth into paradise: he sees Cordelia as a “soul in bliss,” a “spirit,” as though not daring to believe she is real. Cordelia asks the same question as Gloucester: “Sir, do you know me?” The effort Lear makes to know Cordelia is suggestive of the last stage of a journey home. As she asks for benediction, he falls to his knees:

“Pray do not mock me. / I am a very foolish, fond old man... / Do not laugh at me / For, as I am a man, I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia.” (IV, vii, 69-70)

He addresses her now not as a king, nor primarily as a father, but as a human being, and in terms that place her independent reality—“this lady”—before his own relation to her—“my child.” For the first time he “sees” her

closely because he "feels" her pain in himself, as his own: "Be your tears wet? Yes, faith! I pray you weep not" (IV, vii, 72). Acknowledging he has wronged her—that she has "some cause" not to love him—brings him into his own kingdom, symbolic now of the sovereignty of his own being, with all divisions healed:

Lear: Am I in France?

Kent: In your own kingdom, sir."
(IV,vii,75-6)

The Doctor says the same thing in a different way: "...The great rage, / You see, is killed in him" (IV, vii, 78-9), echoing Cordelia's earlier perception of his "ungoverned rage." And now, when Cordelia addresses him as king—"Will't please your highness walk?"—Lear answers as a man in need of compassion: "You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish" (IV, vii, 883-4).

* * *

The drama now switches to the inevitable deterioration of the opposing forces, with the self-consuming enmity between Regan and Gonerill over Edmund. Albany says he is fighting only because France is invading the land and will spare Cordelia and Lear. Edmund determines that Cordelia and Lear shall never see his pardon. Since this battle spoils utterly the fruits of Lear's and Gloucester's agonized suffering for self-knowledge, we might wonder if Albany represents, psychologically, the well-meaning but lesser—still weak and only provisional—replacement for the ruler of consciousness? This is the one who has to take command because the place is vacant while the transformation of the whole

psyche is taking place—but who is inadequate for the complexities of the task, which he then unwittingly harms. Edgar gives Albany the letter, asking him to sound the trumpet for him that brought it, if the victory is his. Edgar leaves his father by a tree for the battle and then returns with news of their defeat. Lear and Cordelia are taken. Gloucester refuses to go with him:

"No further, sir; a man may rot even here."

But Edgar replies in language that marks him as the one who has become the true king, the spiritual son of Lear:

"What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither; / Ripeness is all. Come on." (V, ii, 18-21)

Brought before Edmund as prisoners, Cordelia speaks as one for herself and Lear, their union complete: "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?" Lear has now no need of revenge or recrimination, no need to win:

"No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison. / We two alone will sing like birds i' the 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 God's spies..." (V, iii, 8-17)

Edmund sends a Captain after them, to kill them, justifying murder by self-interest:

“Know thou this, that men / Are as the time is.” (V, iii, 31-2)

But when Albany comes to require the prisoners off Edmund, he is distracted by his wife’s treachery and the dispute of the sisters over Edmund, even though he now knows enough of Edmund’s nature to take precautions against him: he argues with Edmund on Edmund’s terms but does not instantly take over Edmund’s command. In fact, Lear’s plight is only later brought into his awareness by Kent, who comes to bid his master good night. Instead, at this point, Albany makes public the letter given by Edgar and arrests Edmund, sounding the trumpet as promised to Edgar. Meanwhile, Regan is sickening, poisoned by Gonerill:

“Regan: Sick, O sick!

Gonerill: If not, I’ll ne’er trust medicine.” (V, iii, 97-8)

Edgar, still masked, enters to challenge Edmund, and defeats him, the wound Edmund once pretended to Gloucester now realized as fact by his “unknown opposite,” as Gonerill calls him. Only now can Edgar declare who he is:

“My name is Edgar, and thy father’s son. / 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, 165-71)

Edgar then tells Albany the story of Gloucester’s death, regretting that he did not reveal himself to his father—“O fault,” he says—until he was armed and ready to ask his blessing:

“...but his flawed heart / Alack too weak the conflict to support— / ’Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly.” (V, iii, 194-7)

Edmund for the first time is moved by this, and by the death of both the sisters who had loved him. When Gonerill stabs herself he confesses:

“I was contracted to them both. All three / Now marry in an instant.” (V, iii, 225-6)

He resolves to do “some good” before he dies, significantly just after he has revealed what had been missing from his life—the love that Gloucester never gave him: “Yet Edmund was beloved.” It is as though, with this realization, a moment of humanity returns:

“Some good I mean to do / Despite of mine own nature.” (V, iii, 241-2)

He and Edgar are finally in accord, brothers in their urgency to save: “Quickly send...Nay, send in time!” says Edmund. “Haste thee for thy life,” says Edgar to the Officer. But it is too late. Lear enters with Cordelia 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 would crack. She’s gone for ever. I know / when one is dead and when one lives; / She’s dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then she lives.” (V, iii, 255-61)

The question then becomes: can Lear sustain his vision of what is true when it is unbearable? Can he see feelingly when the feeling is only of “the

eye's anguish"? Lear is asked to move to a new level. At first he denies it:

"This feather stirs—she lives!" (V, iii, 265)

Then Kent intervenes, revealing himself: "'Tis noble Kent, your friend." And Lear changes:

"I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever. / Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little." (V, iii, 268-9)

Then he tries to recognize Kent:

"Who are you? / Mine eyes are not o' the best, I'll tell you straight."

Kent answers:

"If fortune brag of two she loved and hated / One of them we behold." (V, iii, 274-8)

The two of fortune have become one. In symbolic terms, Kent has now become a part of Lear's own nature: Lear can now be loyal and steadfast himself. As though in remembrance of Kent's original plea to become "the true blank of thine eye"—that is, so much there that he is not seen at all—Lear says:

"This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?" (V, iii, 279)

Then he turns back to Cordelia:

"Thou'lt come no more; / Never, never, never, never, never. / Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir. / Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips! / Look there! Look there! (He dies.)." (V, iii, 305-9)

Lear asks finally the simple question of one human being to another—please undo this button—in its simplicity like Parzival's question to the Grail King, "Dear Uncle, what ails thee?" In Lear's second act of unbuttoning, he unbuttons, as it were, the clothes of mortality, in what becomes yet another meaning of "lendings." But what does he see as he dies? Does he see objectively as well as subjectively when he faces the ultimate challenge? The irony implicit in Jung's original remark that "one sees what one can see best oneself" may yield here to a direct statement of what can be achieved if one realizes what it means to be the Self's unique experiment, as he puts it: that one can see best oneself if one sees rightly. Seeing in this way, then, with and through one's own beam, means one sees no longer the mote in one's brother's eye; instead, one sees one's brother—and here, to literalize, one sees one's daughter—feelingly, as oneself.

The union of Kent and Lear would suggest that Lear is faithful to the truth, so that Cordelia does not die unrecognized and unmourned. Also, the fact that Edmund has turned from his wickedness to do some good before he dies suggests that the dark depths of Lear's egoism have been transformed. Finally, the parallels between Gloucester and Lear throughout the play invite us to read their last moments in relation to each other, and Gloucester's last perception was of the truth, a passion of joy and grief, when his heart burst smilingly.

Taking the play from Lear's point of view, the initial structure of the fairy tale has given way to tragedy. For in a fairy tale the punishment of the erring father ends once he has understood his fault and repented. But tragedy plays out the consequences of the conflict, which is

what makes the notion of tragic guilt different from moral guilt: in tragic guilt the impulse of the drama goes beyond the question of whether a person is morally guilty or whether he has redeemed his original sin through his suffering. In tragedy there is a knot—the tragic knot—in which affirmation and destruction are tied inalienably together. Lear does not “deserve” that Cordelia dies, yet it is because of him that she does. But while Lear learns to see he loses the “object” of his sight, which is to say the subject of his love—Cordelia. The process he sets in motion by his blindness is the process that leads him through feeling into loving vision, but it is this same process that results, inevitably, in the death of Cordelia. The drama gives this result as inevitable through the texture of the plot whereby Albany must fight Cordelia because she comes with the army of France, and so threatens England, even though he intends no harm to Cordelia herself. This makes Lear’s flaw a tragic flaw, one that, in bringing about an affirmation—his ability to love—creates at the same time destruction—the one he loves dies and that breaks his heart. For without Cordelia, his heart, he is nothing.

But where Lear is understood as one character in the totality of the psyche in its struggle for wholeness, tragedy is transformed into myth. For then it is right that the ruling consciousness—the old king of the psyche—must give way to the new level of being that his ordeal has made possible, the

next king. It is significant that the last words go to Edgar, the one whose education has been so deeply intertwined with Lear’s and Gloucester’s, teaching them as he learned himself. He is also the one who suffered the need to discriminate between good and evil; for, initially named as evil himself, he had to pursue the good invisibly, and finally—making the time as men are—took on the evil of the time in single combat. Albany gives the kingdom to Kent and Edgar to rule jointly, but Kent, now at one with Lear, will die too:

“I have a journey, sir, shortly to go. / My master calls me, I must not say no.” (V, iii, 319-20)

Sovereignty and the kingdom fall to Edgar. Edgar is then the new figure of restored harmony between conscious and unconscious, who embodies and articulates the play’s wisdom “ripeness is all”:

“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.” (V, iii, 321-4)

References

- Blake, W. (1961). *Poetry and prose of William Blake* (Geoffrey Keynes, ed.). London: Nonesuch Library.
- Yeats W.B. (1961). The philosophy of Shelley’s poetry. In *Essays and introductions*. New York: Macmillan.