King Lear
and the Elizabethan Social Background
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INTRODUCTION

It is assumed that Shakespeare started to write his plays in 1590's. And the 1590's were the 'crucial years' in English history. Patrick Cruttwell comments upon the years as follows:

The 1590's are the crucial years. In the Elizabethan fin-de-siecle there occurred a change, a shift of thought and feeling, which led directly to the greatest moment in English poetry: the "Shakespearian moment", the opening years of the seventeenth century, in which were written all the supreme Shakespearean dramas. The 1590's brought about that deep change of sensibility which marks off the later from the earlier Elizabethans,.... To think of the Elizabethan age as a solid, unchanging unity is utterly misleading. Within it there were two generations and (roughly corresponding to those generations) two mentalities. In the 1590's the one "handed over" to the other. Such a statement is, of course, the grossest simplification; in the realms of the mind and imagination things do not happen as neatly as that. And in fact, the 1590's are intensely confused, precisely because the "handing over" was then taking place; new and old were deeply entangled, and all generalizations must be loaded with exceptions. But there was an old, and there was a new, and the task of criticism is to analyse and distinguish. 1

(emphasis added)

Now Shakespeare makes Hamlet say about 'the purpose of playing' as follows:

... the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(Hamlet, 3.2.21-24)

So isn't it quite natural to think that Shakespeare, who is perceptive to 'the very age and the body of the time', has also reflected the change of the society he dwelt in his plays and, of course, in King Lear? Then where can we find the typical descriptions of such a change in the play? I think we can find them in Gloucester's and Edmund's words in Act I scene ii. Gloucester speaks to Edmund as follows:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet Nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, terrors; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and the father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the King falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.

(1.2.100-111)

And Edmund addresses Edgar as follows:

I promise you the effects he writes of succeed unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and
the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state; menaces and maledic-
tions against King and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nup-
tial breaches, and I know not what. (1.2.140-146)

Gloucester tells Edmund seriously that their society has un-
dergone a change under the influence of the 'eclipses in the sun and moon'. And though half in fun, Edmund speaks to Edgar about the effects of those eclipses, too. So both Gloucester and Edmund say that a change or 'a universal incongruity,¹ has occurred in their society. Now isn't this the same change as the one that Patrick Cruttwell states? To answer this ques-
tion, I searched some English history books for descriptions of social conditions of England in 1590's.

Penry Williams writes about 'the final years of Elizabeth's reign' as follows:

Although the feuds and affrays of the landed classes and their followers were probably being restrained by the end of the Tudor epoch, town and country were still exposed to the brawls, casual violence, and blood-lettings of peasants, artisans, and labourers. In the final years of Elizabeth's reign these dis-
orders may have grown more intense under the pres-
sure of rising population, poor harvests, and war. Mutinous bands of unpaid soldiers and sailors demon-
strated for their rights in the capital. Discontented apprentices hatched plots against foreigners.

Large bands of vagrant unemployed were reported to be terrifying the inhabitants of London. The hungry poor clamoured for bread and occasionally robbed grain carts. 1

And moreover, G. M. Trevelyan reports the social tension which the religious problems increased in Britain in those years. He states as follows:

English society in town and country was gravely disturbed by the religious differences of neighbours; the Jesuit mission was hard at work in the houses of unfortunate gentry of the old religion, distraught between the claims of the two rival loyalties. Fear brooded over the land. Men waited, expecting every day to hear of Spanish invasion, Roman Catholic rebellion, the assassination of the Queen. The Jesuits flitted about in disguise, hiding in 'priest holes' in the thickness of manor-house walls, pursued by Justices of the Peace, occasionally caught and executed (emphasis added)." 2

When we compare their descriptions with the words of Gloucester and Edmund, we are struck with amazement at the similarities between them. Now I am going to pick out some of those similarities. First it seems to me that Gloucester's 'in cities mutinies' and Edmund's 'dissipation of cohorts' may reflect 'mutinous bands of unpaid soldiers and sailors demonstrated for their rights in the capital.' And Gloucester's


'in countries discord' and Edmund's 'divisions in state' may correspond with 'Discontented apprentices hatched plots against foreigners' and 'The hungry poor clamoured for bread and occasionally robbed grain carts.' Edmund's 'death, dearth' may correspond with 'poor harvests'. And his 'menaces and malediction against King and nobles; needless diffidences' seems to correspond with 'expecting every day to hear of the assassination of the Queen'.

To pick out other words of Gloucester and Edmund which seem to reflect the state of affairs in the English community in those days, Gloucester's 'and the bond crack'd d 'twixt son and father' and Edmund's 'unnaturalness between the child and the parent' may reflect the case of poor Sir Brian Annesley. In October 1603, Sir Brian Annesley, an old courtier of Queen Elizabeth, was sued on a charge of the incompetence by his own daughters who wanted to get his estate. Rosalie L. Colie comments on the case and 'a considerable decline in paternal authority' as follow:

Very few children adopted the social views Edmund attributed to Edgar, that 'sons at perfect age, and father declin'd, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue' (1.2.72-4), but the case of poor Sir Brian Annesley, whose daughters sued to declare him insane that they might get his estate, is relevant to the general problem and perhaps even to the play of King Lear. In spite of marked deference shown parents by their children in England, it is clear that over the century and a half of the Renaissance, fathers lost their unquestioned authority in the disposition of their children's lives and fortunes. 1

And I would like to suggest that Gloucester's 'These late eclipses in the sun and moon' may reflect 'the eclipse of October 1605, preceded by an eclipse of the moon in the previous month'. Kenneth Muir writes as follows:

It is usually assumed that 'these late eclipses in the sun and moon' (1.2.100) must have been suggested by the eclipse of the sun of October 1605, preceded by an eclipse of the moon in the previous month. Professor G. B. Harrison, indeed, quotes from a pamphlet entitled Strange fearfull & true newes which happened at Carlstadt, in the Kingdom of Croatia, which was published in February 1606, and argues that there is a similarity of phrase, sentiment and rhythm between this passage and the remarks of Gloucester and Edmund --".

Edmund's 'dissolution of ancient amities' may be suggested by 'the dissolution of ancient amities' between the landlords and their tenants in those days. Keith Wrightson reports as follows:

Paternalism had its limits when it came too sharply into conflict with the interests of the landlords. There were many landlords for whom traditional values had no compulsive power when ranged against the need to expand income from rent in a period of inflation. Walter Hawksworth of Hawksworth in Yorkshire advised his son in his will of 1619 to be a good lord and not to raise rents. The son ignored this advice and went ahead with a programme of increases.... Landlords were ready enough to abrogate traditional obligations when need arose,.... 2

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1 Kenneth Muir, "INTRODUCTION" King Lear (Arden), 1982, p. xviii.

Rosalie L. Colie also describes the trend above mentioned as 'newfangled lords often put their relations with their dependants upon a businesslike basis unknown earlier.'

And moreover, I think that Edmund's 'menaces and maledictions against King and nobles' may also be suggested by the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 which was intended to kill King James I and the Members of Parliament.

Now from the close resemblances between the remarks of Gloucester and Edmund and the social conditions of England in those days, I think we might be able to conclude that the words of Gloucester and Edmund reflect nearly correctly the state of affairs in the English society from 1590 to 1605. And their words are the embodiment of Patrick Cruttwell's 'a change, a shift of thought and feeling': namely, Gloucester's 'Love cools, friendship falls off, / brothers divide, / and the bond crack'd / 'twixt son and father' and Edmund's 'unnaturalness between the child and the parent, ... , dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state; ... ; needless difficulties.'

Next I would like to study what social classes Patrick Cruttwell's 'two generations' indicate in English society in those days. He does not refer to it in his book, so I had to hunt it out in another materials. According to G. R. Elton and Rosalie L. Colie, the falling of the aristocracy and the rising

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of the gentry were the remarkable changes in the Elizabethan society. G. R. Elton writes about the gentry as follows:

The sixteen century was a critical period when the gentry changed most radically and achieved a novel power. It grew in numbers, in self-consciousness, in political and religious and commercial vigour; it also incidentally for the first time produced great poets. The reasons are many.... But one obvious factor stands out. The gentry rested its existence on land, and the sixteenth century witnessed the biggest transfer of land since the Conquest. The great inflation provided the capital and the desire for investment. Thus in the century after 1540 the gentry spread and grew as it profited from the effects of an economic revolution,... What was new was not the gentry as a rising class nor the gentry as an ideal, nor even the gentry as a power in the land; what was new was the number of the gentlemen and their power relative to other sections of the community. 1

And Rosalie L. Colie writes about the aristocracy as follows:

Mr. Stone's 'crisis' was a prolonged affair, during which the aristocracy, although it never lost its favourable position in English society, lost its relative importance and was forced to alter its own self-image from that of an entrenched chivalric and 'feudal' group, with particular military obligations of service and general obligations of largesse, to that of a group involved in private lives and obligations precariously facing the problems of an expanding economy and a society increasingly articulate. 2


Now I think we can conclude that P. Cruttwell's 'two generations' denote the aristocracy and the gentry. And we also know that the English society was 'intensely confused' in 1590's, 'precisely because' the old generation, the aristocracy, was "handing over" to the new generation, the gentry.

Then what about the 'two mentalities' which Patrick Cruttwell's 'two generations' had? According to Rosalie L. Colie, the old generation believed in the basic Christian virtues and had a hierarchical, orderly and customary view of life and the world in the Middle Ages: 'each man knew his place and responsibilities and kept to them both, in which duty and deference were expected and exacted in proportion to a man's known social and political status.' ¹ And Lawrence Stone describes the ethic of the aristocracy as follows:

The aristocratic ethic is one of voluntary service to the State, generous hospitality, clear class distinctions, social stability, tolerant indifference to the sins of the flesh, inequality of opportunity based on the accident of inheritance, arrogant self-confidence, a paternalist and patronizing attitude towards economic dependents and inferiors, and an acceptance of the grinding poverty of the lower classes as part of the natural order of things. ²

On the other hand, the new generation believed in materialism, individualism, realism, rationalism, functionalism, and even Machiavellianism. They realized that 'the basis of social economics was competition'. ³ They had 'a market mentality on

¹ Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 186.
² Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 193.
every aspect of human existence'. They also realized that 'the qualities which make for success are not the basic Christian virtues'. The commercial revolution of 1590's was the golden opportunity for them to rise in life and make a fortune. They were the people trying their mark and their fortune.

Now are there really 'two generations' in King Lear that have 'the two mentalities' above mentioned? Yes, there are. I think we can divide the characters in King Lear into the two groups distinctly according to their mentalities, words and actions. Lear, Kent, Gloucester, Albany and France represent the mentality of the old generation and Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald of the new. Cordelia and Edgar are of the new generation but they are portrayed as an ideal new generation that understands, forgives and loves the old generation, and rebukes the new for their cruel conducts to the old.

On the ground hitherto mentioned, I would like to conclude that although King Lear treats the pre-Christian world, the mentalities of the characters in the play are the Elizabethan product. As an authority that supports my conclusion, I would like to quote Kenneth Muir's words:

If King Lear was written in the winter of 1604-5

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the date would fit in with the political situation, for between 1604 and 1607 King James was trying to get Parliament to approve of the union of England and Scotland and referring in speech after speech to the misfortune that division brought to early Britain. Professor Draper thinks that Shakespeare intended his play to illustrate the evils of disunion.¹

I think 'Shakespeare intended his play to illustrate the evils of disunion' of the country, generations, families and the individuals. And as another authority, I would like to quote the words of Rosalie L. Colie. She says that 'It is a play deeply rooted in its own period, a play which draws some of its power from the playwright's insight into the peculiar aristocratic situation of the time in which it was written.'²

Though in later chapters I am going to study King Lear from the viewpoint that King Lear has its psychological setting in the opposing mentalities of the two generations in the Elizabethan age, I think it important to remember the advice which Rosalie L. Colie gives. She writes as follows:

Though certainly questions of deference, of privatism, of personal and class ethos are of the utmost significance, King Lear is something very much greater, very much more complex, than a mere sketch in play-form of the psycho-social problems of new-style sovereigns and magnates. As these essays exist to proclaim, King Lear is made up of so much that to isolate one strand of its meaning is dangerously to oversimplify its multifoliate richness. The play is only in the highest sense an historical 'sourse',

testifying but fitfully to the problems historians must face head on. Indeed King Lear handles what might be called sociological materials very unevenly; at some points, the text is amazingly allusive, vague, and generalized; at others, remarkably direct and precise.  

Of course I do not think I can understand all the meanings and richness of King Lear only from such a viewpoint as mine. But the Elizabethan social background hitherto mentioned is so profoundly reflected in the play that I think 'There are things in this huge, difficult, and shocking play that become a little clearer' when I analyze it from my viewpoint. 

Rosalie L. Colie has written an excellent essay on King Lear from a viewpoint that Shakespeare treats of the 'Crisis of the Aristocracy' in it. So 'I want to pillage' much from her essay to study this play from my viewpoint.  


2 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of Shakespeare, p. 192.  

3 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of Shakespeare, p. 186.
CHAPTER I

RETINUE AND GARB

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the falling of the aristocracy and the rising of the gentry were the remarkable changes in the English society during the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. By the centralizing efforts of the Tudors and under the influence of an economic revolution, the aristocracy lost their two important social functions, namely, 'particular military obligations of service and general obligations of largess'.¹ The aristocracy became 'Princes' that 'have but their titles for their glories.' (King Richard III, 1.4.78). Rosalie L. Colie writes about such aristocracy as follows:

..., and the English nobility found itself, like its European cousins, increasingly threatened by the centralizing efforts of the state. Chiefly, the court set out to gentle the armigerous aristocracy, to disarm them in all kinds of ways -- by charming the nobles to live at court and to involve themselves in a growing bureaucracy; by cutting the number of armed servants and thus the private military power long enjoyed by local noblemen; by educating the nobility to the gentle pursuits of humanistic learning and artistic patronage; by allowing and even encouraging the greater participation of women in social life -- especially at its centre, the courts itself. In many ways, central governments sought to domesticate the aristocracy;....²


² Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 186.
The falling aristocracy faced many problems. One of them was 'the particular problem of self-definition'. To set themselves off socially from the others, they ravished money. They built the great 'prodigy houses', entertained lavishly, spent enormous sums of money on dresses, and emulated each other in the numbers and splendors of their retinue wearing their colors. But the 'conspicuous expenditure and consumption' were frequent causes of ruin, and those means 'did not protect them from imitation by social inferiors.' Rosalie L. Colie writes as follows:

Conspicuous expenditure and consumption were frequent causes of ruin for aristocratic families: 'Put not your finger in mortar,' Coke wrote, having observed the financial difficulties incurred by many great builders. Critics of gorgeous apparel noted that men 'wear their lands upon their backes.' Yet these particular modes of setting themselves off from other men did not protect the aristocracy from imitation by social inferiors: noble ladies were offended by the liquefaction of merchant capital that could be heard in the rustle of city wives' skirts. Satirical literature of the period is full of upstarts, crow and popinjay, 'nobodies' who deck themselves in the costumes and manners of their betters.

In Kent's angry words to Oswald,

You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee: a tailor made thee (emphasis added). \(2.2.52-53\)

You whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw. \(2.2.31\)

a lily-liveried,

action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing,... \(2.2.15-16\)

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1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 187.
2 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 188.
we can see the aristocrats' irritation and scorn to the new generation, 'upstarts, crow and propinjay, nobodies'. And from Lear's words to Goneril,

\[
\text{Thou art a lady;}
\]
\[
\text{If only to go warm were gorgeous,}
\]
\[
\text{Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,}
\]
\[
\text{Which scarcely keeps thee warm (emphasis added).}
\]

(2.4.265-268)

we can imagine the luxurious dresses of the women of both generations. And also in Goneril's words to Lear,

\[
\text{Hear me, my Lord.}
\]
\[
\text{What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,}
\]
\[
\text{To follow in a house where twice so many}
\]
\[
\text{Have a command to tend you?}
\]

(2.4.258-261)

we can see the ostentatious pride in the wealth and luxurious lives of the new rich class, the gentry. Rosalie L. Colie comments as follows:

With this glimpse into Goneril's milieu, we suddenly see the degree of pride, of self-indulgence, involved in the lives lived by 'these daughters and these sisters.' They have their modern way of conspicuous consumption no less grandiose than their father's old-fashioned train -- and far more centred on themselves, on their own comforts and the projected image of their own greatness. 1

But for noblemen, such prodigy houses, gorgeous dresses and retinue 'seemed ever more necessary', 2 as they were well conscious of the decline of their social functions in the

1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 201.
2 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 188.
English society. Rosalie L. Colie comments as follows:

Clearly, then, garb and retinue were insufficient protections from social intrusion, and dressed-up nobodies offered a real critique of the methods by which noblemen defended themselves against encroachments upon their rank and exclusive privileges. One can recognize at once the superficiality of distinctions as separate from function, while acknowledging that as function declined, such distinctions seemed ever more necessary. Barred from the automatic recognition conferred by its old sumptuary monopolies, the aristocracy had to find in just such attitudes, attributes, and costumes, a substitute means of self-definition, even of self-identification (emphasis added). 1

Now we can understand why Lear adheres to his retinue and shows a deep concern for the garb. And these retinue and garb are also closely connected with the main theme of this play. For Lear, who invests his daughters with 'power, Pre-eminence, and all the huge effects / That troops with majesty' (1.1.129-130), garb and retinue are 'The name and allyth addition to a king' (1.1.134), namely, the 'attributes' of kings, the last means for defining himself as a king. And I think that is the reason why he does not think 'to call his retinue in his own defence against the extraordinary behaviour of his daughters, never thinks of himself as the leader of a band of armed men. Indeed, for him, the knights were simply a means of signalling his dignity to himself and others, never defences against his nearest kin.' 2

1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 188.
But for Goneril and Regan, who believe in materialism, rationalism, functionalism and Machiavellianism, Lear's retinue is a worthless and dangerous band of armed men. They want Lear to reduce its numbers without understanding his need:

I dare avouch it, sir: What! fifty followers? Is it not well? What should you need of more? Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger Speak 'gainst so great a number? How in one house, Should many people, under two commands, Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible. (2.4.235-240)

Need can not be reasoned or measured. Lear adheres to his retinue:

Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd When others are more wicked; not being the worst Stands in some rank of praise. I'll go with thee: Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty, And thou art twice her love (emphasis added). (2.4.254-258)

Here we can see that for Lear the retinue is the 'attributs' or the symbols of his royalty and his daughters' love to him. But when he hears Regan's 'What need one?', he knows clearly that they do not love him at all and cries out:

O! reason not the need; our basest beggars Are in the poorest thing superfluous: Allow not nature more than nature needs, Man's life is cheap as beast's. (2.4.262-265)

Though he is rejected to have his retinue, he still retains his kingly pride here, because he is yet protected by his 'superfluous' and luxurious garb which can set himself off from beasts, basest beggars and from all social inferiors.
'Lear sees himself as the centre of the universe, and sees loyalty to himself as the sole measure of goodness or badness in others.'\(^1\) With his kingly pride, Lear 'bids' and rebukes the 'elements' of the nature which ought to be obedient and affectionate to him:

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters: I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness; I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children, You owe me no subscription: then let fall Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man. But yet I call you servile ministers, That will with two pernicious daughters join Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul.

(3.2.14-24)

The nature is neither obedient nor affectionate to him. On the contrary, the rain comes to wet him and the wind make him chatter, the thunder would not peace at his bidding.(4.4.100-102) About this scene, W.R. Elton comments that 'Indeed, Lear's shocked discovery of a universe apparently no longer specially concerned for his welfare, and ruled by apparently unbenevolent powers, suggests an analogue to the Renaissance questioning of scripturally-based anthropocentricity and geocentricity.'\(^2\) Here Lear realizes that his gorgeous garb, which has to guard him, does not defend him from the rain and the cold.

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For the first time in his life, Lear shivers with the cold and feels compassion towards Fool who is shivering like him:

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 (emphasis added). (3.2.68-73)

For Lear this is the miraculous turning point of his view of life. It is the moment when the love for others buds out in him. Now he can also say to Kent kindly, 'Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease:'(3.4.23) He also discovers that 'vile things' can be made precious by 'The art of our necessities'. This discovery leads him to the realization of the existence of 'vile', worthless 'poor naked wretches' whose poverty he has taken 'as part of the natural order of things.'¹ He is now able to feel sympathy for the poor people:

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, That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, And show the Heavens more just. (3.4.28-36)

In addition to his compassion on the poor, Lear realizes that 'Pomp' must 'shake the superflux to them' to 'show the Heavens

¹ Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 193.
more just'. We can say that Lear is now ready in mind to meet 'poor mad Tom'. When he sees the naked beggar wrapped up only in a blanket, Lear instantly assumes that the beggar is in the same predicament as he:

Didst thou give all to thy daughters?  
And art thou come to this?  

What! has his daughters brought him to this pass?  
Couldst thou save nothing? Would'st thou give'em all?  

And moreover, Lear tries to equate Tom's situation with his own aggressively:

Death, traitor! nothing could have subdu'd nature  
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.  
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers  
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?  
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot  
Those pelican daughters.  

Here we can see that Lear is still obsessed with the ingratitude of his daughters. He repeats the words, 'daughters', 'all', 'nothing' and 'pelican daughters'.

Giving no heed to the beggar's story, Lear gazes at his miserable figure and begins to speak in surprise:

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

Lear suddenly finds out that 'unaccommodated man is no more
but such a poor, / bare, forked animal', and that the garb is only the symbol of wealth, status and also vanities of this world: 'Robes and furr'd gowns hide all.'(4.4.170) He tears his garb to be a true, natural man. This is also a miraculous moment when Lear leaves 'the great world of conventions, flatteries and corruptions' for a true world.

A.C. Bradley comments as follows:

Lear's insanity, which destroys the coherence, also reduces the poetry of his imagination. What it stimulates is that power of moral perception and reflection which had already been quickened by his sufferings. This, however partial and however disconnectedly used, first appears, quite soon after the insanity has declared itself, in the idea that the naked beggar represents truth and reality, in contrast with those conventions, flatteries, and corruptions of the great world, by which Lear has so long been deceived and will never be deceived again. 1

From the true and real world Lear condemns with 'Reason in madness'(4.6.173) the false world for injustices which are luxuriously wrapped in 'Robes and furr'd gowns':

Thorough tatter'd clothes small vices do appear; Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold, And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks; Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it. None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able'em: (4.6.162-167)

Now Lear has no attributes for him. But as he says to Gloucester proudly, 'Ay, every inch a king'(4.6.167), he is

really a king who has 'that power of moral perception and reflection' and can now take pity on others, though 'Crown'd with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds, / With hardocks, hemlock, cuckoo-flowers, / Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn'(4.4.3-6). Harold C. Goddard writes as follows:

When we next behold the King, immediately after the attempted suicide of Gloucester, he enters fantastically robed and crowned with flowers. The symbolism of that, even without the echo of Ophelia, is unmistakable. The simple costless jewels of the fields and meadows have replaced the country pomp of gold and purple. Here is not merely Nature's king, but Heaven's. 1

Now instead of his retinue and old garb, Lear is given true love and 'fresh garments'(4.7.22) and is 'redeemed' from 'ruin'd piece of Nature' by Cordelia (4.6.132). Lear sings a song of love's rapture like a regenerated man and wishes to laugh at and 'wear out' the pomp and vanities of the false world where he once lived:

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 Gods' spies: and we'll wear out, In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones That ebb and flow by th'moon. (5.3.8-19)

But another severe trial awaits Lear. Shakespeare's Gods watch and judge every human conducts from far beyond this world. 'They are gods, great and terrifying judges high above, who are supposed to intervene sooner or later.' They are wrathful and jealous. They never overlook or forgive our errors or follies, and never permit us to forget them in our ardent attachment for anything in this world. Lear's adherence and love to Cordelia are not acceptable to them. They want Shakespeare to offer Cordelia as a sacrifice. When Shakespeare makes Lear say, 'Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, / The Gods themselves throw incense' (5.3.20-21), he also makes us prepare in mind for the death of Cordelia as a sacrifice. Lear laments deeply over the death of Cordelia:

Howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever.
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. (5.3.256-260)

And at his last moment Lear says:

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, Sir(emphasis added). (5.3.304-308)

Similar to the moment when Lear says, 'Come; unbutton here' in Act III Scene iv, this must be a pleasant moment for Lear

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when he leaves this vicious world for a new world of Gods.
And when he says,

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there! (5.3.309-310)

Lear sees Cordelia smiling happily under the mercy of God. 'If Lear's final belief, as his heart breaks, that Cordelia lives is contrary to fact, this is of small significance, for Shake-
speare's audience could not doubt that she dwelt, in fact,
where her father soon would join her (emphasis added).'

Through the theme of 'garb and retinue', the symbols of
power and wealth, Shakespeare seems to tell us that to be really happy in this world, we need 'neither wealth nor power but patience, fortitude, love and mutual forgiveness'. And moreover, the eternal happiness can only be found in the world of God. Kenneth Muir comments as follows:

There is, nevertheless, a sense in which King Lear can be regarded as a Christian play. We are asked to imagine a world in which there is no knowledge of Christian teaching, in which there is a savage struggle for survival, in which men like ravenous fishes feed on one another; and we are driven to realise that man needs neither wealth, nor power, but patience, fortitude, love and mutual forgive-
ness. The Christian virtues prove to be necessities; and from the development of the virtuous characters and such flawed characters as Gloucester, Albany and Lear himself, the world appears, as in Keat's famous parable, to be vale of soul-making. 2


Now what does Shakespeare tell us through Cordelia who seems to be portrayed as one of the ideal new generation? It seems to me that Shakespeare tells us how we must get along with the old generation. The new generation, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund all despise and defy the old. They would not understand or love the old. Albany warns Goneril as follows:

I fear your disposition:
That nature, which contemns it origin,
Cannot be border'd certain in itself;
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use (emphasis added).

(4.2.31-36)

But "Goneril, to whom the truth was spoken, dared defy it, and cried out, 'No more; the text is foolish'".¹ Cordelia also defies Lear at first. At the love-contest, she answers to Lear 'Nothing' to protest him who thinks that love can be measured and reasoned. But she forgives and gets reconciled with him later. Shakespeare seems to tell us that to defy the old generation is to 'sliver and disbranch' from our 'material sap' and is to 'wither and come to deadly use'. We must forgive, understand and love the old generation, because it is 'the only energy whereby we can live'. Harold C. Goddard writes as follows:

Cordelia, though she defied the past at first, lived to reassert it at last on a higher level. Her conduct involved the paradox of both discontinuity and

continuity with the older generation. The present must break with the past, her story seems to say, in order to become conscious of itself and of its freedom; whereupon it must mend the breach it has made lest it cut itself off from the only energy whereby it can live. We must repudiate the past, for it has sinned against us; we must forgive and love it, for it has given us life. This is irrational, but it is true. Thus King Lear reconciles the polar principles of radicalism and conservatism .... 1

CHAPTER II

EDGAR

Now how about the role of Edgar who seems to be portrayed as one of the ideal man of the new generation? It seems the image of 'poor mad Tom', Edgar's disguise, must be suggested by the two kinds of beggars that 'infested every corner of England in Elizabethan age', namely, 'the Palliards or Clapperdogens' and 'the Abraham Men'. Charles Whibley describes them that 'the Palliards or Clapperdogens, ragged in patched clothes, who for gain and to be pitied blister their legs with spearwort or arsenic; the Abraham Men, who feign to have been mad and ask at the farm-houses for bacon, cheese, or wool, or anything that they may turn to money.' Shakespeare describes 'Bedlam beggars' as follows:

The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!
(2.3.13-20)

We can see a close resemblance between Shakespeare's and Charles Whibley's beggars. And Edgar's 'Poor Tom;...; who is

2 Charles Whibley, "Rogues and Vagabonds", p. 494.
whipp'd from tithing to tithing, and / stock-punish'd, and imprison'd'(3.4.131-132) may be suggested by the statute issued in 1597. 'Every vagabond found begging' -- thus ran the law -- 'is to be stripped naked from the middle upwards, and openly whipped, until his or her body be bloody, and then passed to his or her birthplace or last place of residence, and in case they know neither, they are to be sent to the House of Correction for a year, unless some one gives them employment sooner.'

Here Shakespeare makes us remind of his 'purpose of playing' that is 'to show virtue / her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age / and body of the time his form and pressure.'(Hamlet, 3.2.21-24) And we know that Shakespeare had a closely observing eye and that he was deeply concerned for the misery of the poor people of his time. Though a system of poor relief was evolved in England first of all the countries of Europe, we know from the statute above that 'The personal liberty of the poor was not a thing of which much account was taken. The philanthropic action of the State was curtailed by no such consideration.'

Shakespeare, who was perceptive to 'the very age and body of the time', seems to have burnt with righteous indignation toward unphilanthropic action of the State.


2 G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 245.
By Lear's words of (3.4.28-36), (4.6.154-165) and Gloucester's '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' (4.1.65-70), we know Shakespeare's compassion on the poor people and his indignation and disgust at the 'great ones' who 'accept the grinding poverty of the lower classes as part of the natural order of things'.

Now A. C. Bradley writes about Edgar that 'he learns by experience, and becomes the most capable person in the story, without losing any of his purity and nobility of mind'. So first I would like to study the stages of Edgar's learning by experience.

Being deceived by his bastard brother Edmund, Edgar is renounced by his father and is proclaimed an offender sentenced to death. He is driven to be nameless 'nothing', deprived of his father's love, fortune and status. Though being compelled by force of circumstances, Edgar faces up to his own predicament and tries to live on by disguising himself as 'Tom of Bedlam', a beggar. He says that he will with his 'nakedness outface the winds and persecutions of the sky'. (2.3.11-12)

But by presenting his naked, poor, sad figure before Lear, Edgar makes Lear realize that 'unaccomodated man is no more but such poor, bare, forked animal' (3.4.104-105) and that Lear

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1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 193.
2 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 254.
himself is 'but such a poor, bare, forked animal', too. In other words, Edgar gives Lear the chance to acquire his true self-knowledge and to know the stern realities of life.

Though Edgar does not tell Lear any philosophical words during their meeting, he utters afterwards in soliloquy his sound and sincere view of life:

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers, suffers most i' th'mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind;
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip,
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.

(3.6.100-105)

The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace:

(4.1.5-7)

'After seeing Lear's madness Edgar finds his own suffering miraculously eased.'¹ He is consoled and encouraged by seeing his 'betters bearing' his 'woes', and cheers himself up to get over his plight by thinking that 'The worst returns to laughter' someday.

But when he sees his father's bleeding eyeless head, he feels keenly that he has been put into the depths of misery much further. He cries "O Gods! Who is't can say 'I am the / worst'?"(4.1.24-25) But nothing can discourage him. The greater the blow, the more vigorously he fight against it. He is a man of fortitude who always makes the best of his ill

fortune. Now we find him being spiritually much awakened by this reality. And we are also deeply moved and encouraged when we hear him say "And worse I may be yet; the worst is not / So long as we can say 'This is the worst'." (4.1.36-37) Here we can see his tenacious and robust vigor. And it seems to me this vitality and sincerity of him that makes Lear call him 'philosopher', 'learned Theban', 'Noble philosopher' and 'Good Athenian' respectfully and desire to talk and 'keep still' with him, and also makes discouraged Gloucester live on patiently.

From the depths of his misery, Gloucester cries out, 'As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods; / They kill us for their sport.' (4.1.36-37) But by meeting with 'poor mad Tom' again, Gloucester forgets his miserable state and has pity on the poor for the first time in his life. G. Wilson Knight writes as follows:

Mankind are here continually being ennobled by suffering. They bear it with an ever deeper insight into their own nature and hidden purposes of existence. In some strange way the suffering they endure enriches them, brings them peace. So Gloucester can give his purse to Edgar in disguise, joying in the thought that his misery makes another happy.' 1

Edgar and Gloucester show us the very pitiful scene that madman leads the blind. And we feel a rush of pity at them, because Gloucester does not know that the poor madman who leads him to Dover is his son Edgar himself whom he once disowned.

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and now he sincerely wants to 'live to see in his touch'. (4.1. 23) Edgar leads and protects Gloucester who is now heartily repentant of his past follies. His last words to Gloucester are, 'Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither: / Ripeness is all.' (5.2.9-10) He teaches Gloucester the importance of patience and ripeness, namely, the importance of subjecting his will to the will of Gods, patient-ly enduring whatever may come, with only faith in the perfec-
tion of the divine plan to sustain him.¹

Edgar, who is always ready to leave himself to the will of Gods, also speaks to Edmund kindheartedly, 'Let's exchange charity. ... 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.' (5.3.165-172) And Edmund assents to his words mildly, 'Th'hast spoken right, 'tis true. The wheel is come full circle; I am here.' (5.3.172-3) And moreover, Edgar's true and kind words move Edmund to repent and do good. He says, 'This speech of yours hath mov'd me, / And I shall perchance do good;' (5.3.198-9)

Edgar goes through with perseverance, loves and helps every man he meets. But as he says, 'in nothing am I chang'd / But in my garments (4.6.9-10)', he always remains faithful to Gods. 'Nothing' can not make him forsake his faith. As Bradley says, 'he learns much by experience without losing any of his ¹

purity and nobility of mind. He is the man on whom we are to rely at the end for the recovery and welfare of the state: and we do rely on him.¹ In his last words, 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say (5.3.323)', we can see his practical and sincere way of thinking and living.

According to P. Cruttwell, the 1590's are intensely confused, precisely because the old generation was handing over to the new generation. To Shakespeare this confused handing over must have seemed "'Tis the times' plague, when madmen (the new generation) lead the blind (the old generation)." But through Edgar, he seems to tell the old generation in his age of the importance of patience and 'ripeness' and the new generation of the importance of forgiving mutually and reconciling with the old and also of having compassion for the poor people.

From my study about Edgar hitherto, I would like to conclude that Shakespeare must have portrayed Edgar affectionately and hopefully as an ideal paragon of the new generation. 'Edgar is not a real person; he is a dramatic device which Shakespeare uses to perform certain specific functions within his larger design.'²

CHAPTER III

TWO KINDS OF LOVE

Kenneth Muir writes about King Lear as follows:

The play could not have been written in the ages of faith, but neither could it have been written in an age of unbelief or an age of reason. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the right conditions existed: a universal Christian society, but with some of its basic tenets called in question by intellectuals; a realisation that the qualities which make for success are not the basic Christian virtues; and the beginnings of a conflict between science and faith. 1

If King Lear was written 'at the beginnings of a conflict between science and faith', we might be able to say that in this play Shakespeare treated the question if Christian virtues, such as love, fidelity and truth, can be moral principles to guide the people of his age. In this chapter I would like to study how Shakespeare answers this question, focussing my attention on 'a trend toward commercialization of life' 2, in other words a trend of 'taking account, and reckoning their own and others' emotions', 3 which I find in the characters of both generations. Rosalie L. Colie comments that 'it is difficult not to read from this play a profound critique of

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3 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 213.
habits of quantification induced by a commercial revolution. ¹

For the gentry, the new generation, the commercial revolution of 1590's was the golden opportunity to try their mark and their fortune. They believed in materialism, individualism, realism, functionalism and even Machiavellianism, and perhaps they realized that 'the qualities which make for success are not the basic Christian virtues'. So we might well expect Goneril, Regan and Edmund 'to act out their lives in terms of the material values of both power and accounting'.² They try to fractionate and even annihilate Lear's retinue, and set prices on Gloucester's head and Lear's and Cordelia's lives. We might well expect, too, that Oswald and the Captain seek their material advancement by the deaths of these great ones. Oswald says to Gloucester:

A proclaim'd prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first fram'd flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor,
Briefly thyself remember: (4.6.223-226)

Here we can see his Machiavellianism and the 'winner-take-all doctrine'.³ The Captain 'promises to obey Edmund's dastardy commands'⁴ with these words:

¹ Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 190.
² Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 213.
³ Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 194.
I cannot draw a cart nor eat dried oats;  
If it be man's work I'll do't.  

(5.3.39-40)

We see that the fortune and the advancement are the matters of primary concern for them.

Goneril and Regan always 'take account, and reckon their own and others' emotions':

Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty  
Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;  

(1.1.55-56)

And prize me at her worth;  

(1.1.69)

You have obedience scanted,  
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.  

(1.2.77-278)

If it be true, all vengeance comes too short  
Which can pursue th'offender.  

(2.1.87-8)

You less know how to value her desert  
Than she to scant her duty.  

(2.4.136-7)

One side will mock another; th'other too. (3.7.69)

I have been worth the whistle.  

(4.2.29)

Oh! the difference of man and man.  
To thee a woman's services are due:  

I'll love thee much,  
Let me unseal the letter.  

(4.5.21-22)

In his own grace he doth exalt himself  
More than in your addition.  

(5.3.68-69)

"They can always go one arithmetical step farther -- 'What need one?' 'Till noon! till night, my Lord; and all night';  
'Hang him instantly.' -- 'Pluck out his eyes.' They know the minimum and the maximum -- Goneril calculates to the last, assuring her mortally wounded lover that he had not had to
answer the challenge of 'An unknown opposite'."  

For them anything that is not profitable or useful is worthless and unnecessary. Lear guesses their mind correctly when he says to Regan ironically:

Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;  
Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg  
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.  

(2.4.151-153)

Now how about their love? It is quite natural for them to measure their love, too. Edmund weighs which woman's love is more useful to him:

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;  
Each jealous of the other, as the stung  
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?  
Both? one? or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd  
If both remain alive:  

(5.1.55-59)

Regan assumes that her love is more convenient for Edmund;  
'My Lord is dead; Edmund and I have talk'd / And more convenient is he for my hand / Than for your Lady's. You may gather more'(4.5.30-32). They love from selfish motives. Their love 'is mingled with regards that stand / Aloof from th'entire point'(1.1.238-9). 'Respect and fortune are their love'(1.1.247). Love is important for them so long as it is profitable to them. It is nonsense and useless for Goneril and Regan to love Lear after he 'gave them all'. So they can say coldly, 'Shut up your doors', after their father wanders out into the

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1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 213.
storm. And Edmund never says a word to spare for Goneril and Regan when he sees the two women dead before him:

Yet Edmund was belov'ed:
The one the other poison'd for my sake,  
And after slew herself.  

(5.3.238-240)

They commercialize everything. In their world everything must be measured, reasoned and evaluated. So virtues, such as self-sacrificing love, fidelity and truth, are useless and worthless for them. The bonds which knit them each other are the identity of interests. When they do not have common interests to profit them, they envy, hate and 'prey on' themselves 'like monsters of the deep' as Albany says:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these wilde offences,  
It will come,  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep.  

(4.2.46-49)

In fact, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald all die 'untimely' without getting anything. And Albany comments that 'This shows you are above, / You justicers, that these our nether crimes / So speedily can venge!' (4.2.78-80). Here Shakespeare seems to tell us that without Christian virtues? 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself'.

Now how about the old generation, the aristocracy? Rosalie L. Colie writes how they coped with the economic exigencies as follows:

The economic alterations characteristic of the period struck the aristocracy, as everyone else;
noblemen made various kinds of compromise with new economic exigencies -- dowries and jointures, for example, were initiated as prudential arrangements; some noblemen were faced with choosing between imposing higher rents and receiving still the unqualified reverence of grateful tenants. Old-fashioned aristocrats tended to maintain old ways, with their concomitant bonds of service, in the teeth of economic difficulty; newfangled lords often put their relations with their dependents upon a businesslike basis unknown earlier. 1

The aristocracy also had to choose the new ethos of 'providence, frugality and even calculation', discarding their old ethos of 'unreckoned generosity, magnificence, and carelessness'. 2 So in this play the characters who represent the mentality of the old generation also 'take account, reckon their own and others' emotions'. Lear evaluates Cordelia; 'But now her price is fallen'(1.1.196). Gloucester compares Edmund with Edgar; 'But I have a son, Sir, by order of law, some year / elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account'(1.1.16-17). Kent likens his life to a pawn; 'My life I never held but as a pawn / To wage against thine enemies'(1.1.154-5). France also estimates Cordelia; 'Not all the dukes of wat'rish Burgundy / Can buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me'(1.1.257-258). Albany compares Goneril with the dust; 'You are not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face'(4.2.30-31). 'Even the saintly Cordelia' 3 speaks as follows:

1 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 212.
2 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 212.
3 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 213.
I love your Majesty
According to my bond; no more nor less (emphasis added).

You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties as are right fit, (emphasis added).

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:
(emphasis added)

But Kent, Albany, France and Cordelia all know that there are virtues that can not be measured or reasoned and they all have a high regard for such virtues as love, fidelity and truth. They hold on to the ideal view of life and the world of the Middle Ages. So they can live on faith and love without being at a loss which ethos to choose. Kent has honoured Lear as his King and loved him as his father. He does not 'dread to speak when power to flattery bows'(1.1.145-6). He remains royal to Lear to the last. Albany is a religious and upright man. He says, 'Where I could not be honest, / I never yet was valiant'(5.1.23-24). France is a magnanimous and affectionate king who can choose forsaken and despised Cordelia as his wife. He says, 'Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor; / Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd! Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon'(1.1.249-251). And he knows how love must be;(1.1.237-9). Cordelia belongs to the new generation. But unlike her sisters who 'speak and purpose not', she does it before she speaks what she well intends,(1.1.223-5). And hers is the self-sacrificing Christian love which is not 'mingled with regards that stand / Aloof from
th' entire point' (1.1.238-9). 'She is not a real person. She serves, like the earlier Desdemona, as a symbol of love and self-sacrifice, a reflection of the love of God.'

How about Gloucester? He is an 'adherent of the old aristocratic mores'. He can risk his life to succor his king in the storm. But 'even here Shakespeare leaves his motives ambivalent': 'These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home; there is part of a power already footed; we must incline to the King' (3.4.11-14). He is an arrogant self-centred man. He is ignorant about self-sacrificing love and insensitive to the suffering of the poor. He accepts 'the grinding poverty of the lower classes as part of the natural order of things' and attributes the 'all ruinous disorders' in the society to the 'eclipses in the sun and moon'. He does not notice "the injustice of what Stone calls 'the winner-take-all doctrine of primogeniture' until he thinks himself betrayed by Edgar".

He was so blind that he stumbled when he saw (4.1.19). Having his eyes gouged out because of his blindness or ignorance, he falls into the depth of despair. But his recovery is effected by the self-sacrificing love of the old man and Edgar. 'Edgar teaches him the meaning of love and of

2 Rosalie L. Colie, Some Facets of King Lear, p. 193.
3 Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 132.
resignation to divine will'.¹ Gloucester dies smilingly with 'his flaw'd heart' burst "'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief"(5.3.197). 'Gloucester is regenerated through the love of Edgar, and dies happily, thus paralleling the progression of Lear'.²

'Lear is selfish, self-centred'.³ He has been obeyed, loved and most honoured by everyone. He does not have to love others. So he is also ignorant about love and insensible to the feelings of others. He assumes love can be measured and reasoned. He declares that he will divide his kingdom among his daughters according to the degrees of their affection. Cordelia, whose love is 'more ponderous than her tongue,' can not speak out what is in her heart (1.1.75). So Lear can not measure her 'ponderous' love and rages at her. He chooses the egoistic love of Goneril and Regan believing that they love him more than Cordelia. Jan Kott comments as follows:

A great and powerful king holds a competition of rhetoric among his daughters as to which one of them will best express her love for him, and makes the division of his kingdom depend on its outcome. He does not see or understand anything: Regan's and Goneril's hypocrisy is all too evident. Regarded as a person, a character, Lear is ridiculous, naive and stupid.⁴

¹ Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 132.
² Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 134.
It takes Lear a long time to realize that love cannot be measured or reasoned. On his way to that lesson, he can still say to Goneril,

\[
\text{I'll go with thee:}
\text{Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,}
\text{And thou art twice her love.}
\text{(2.4.256-258)}
\]

only to hear Regan ask a moment later, 'What need one?' D. J. Enright comments about this scene as follows:

\begin{quote}
It is a horrible parody of bargaining in the bazaars, love has been reduced to arithmetic; and of course Lear is now getting the treatment which he dealt out to Cordelia, what L. C. Knights neatly describes as his 'habit of arithmetical computation of degrees of affection'. At that time, the more words the more love; at this time, the more followers the more love or rather the less hatred and contempt. 1
\end{quote}

Reduced to nothing, Lear, who has ordered his daughters to measure and reason their love, cries out:

\[
\text{O! reason not the need; our basest beggars}
\text{Are in the poorest thing superfluous:}
\text{(2.4.262-263)}
\]

'Need cannot be reasoned, or measured -- nor can love, fidelity, or truth'. 2 But the selfish, self-centred Lear does not notice his inconsistency and rushes out into the storm. In the 'pitiless storm', he realizes that there are 'poor naked wretches' in this world who has nothing to defend them from

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2 Rosalie L. Colie, \textit{Some Facets of King Lear}, p. 213.
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seasons such as these', and that the 'Pomp' must 'shake the
superflux to them' to 'show the Heaven more just'(3.4.28-35).
Moreover, by encountering the poor naked beggar Tom, he real-
izes that the beggar is 'the thing itself' representing 'truth
and reality'. ¹ Now I think he is ready to get reconciled
with Cordelia.

After a long 'interval of agony', Lear is redeemed and
regenerated through the self-sacrificing love of Cordelia and
knows the meaning of love at last. G. Wilson Knight comments
about the richness of their love as follows:

In the scene of his reunion with Cordelia, he wakes
to music, like a mortal soul waking to immortality,
to find his daughter bright as 'a soul in bliss';
now both find the richness of love more rich for the
interval of agony, misunderstanding, intolerance'. ²

In addition to the real meaning of love, Lear knows that
there are virtues that can not be measured or reasoned. He
speaks to Cordelia affectionatelly:

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The Gods themselves throw incense.  (5.3.20-21)

But their love's rapture is short-lived. Lear staggers in, car-
rying the body of Cordelia to show the 'image of that horror'
of 'the promis'd end'(5.3.262-3). Shakespeare seems to warn
his contemporaries against their trend of measuring everything
in life and suggest that without Christian virtues 'Humanity

¹ A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 239.
must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep'(4.2. 48-49).

(Quotations from Shakespeare are from the Arden edition of King Lear.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


King Lear
and the Elizabethan Social Background
ABSTRACT

It is assumed that Shakespeare started to write his plays in 1590's. And the 1590's were the crucial years in the English history. P. Cruttwell writes: 'In the Elizabethan fin-de-siècle there occurred a change, a shift of thought and feeling. ... Within it (i.e the society) there were two generations and (roughly corresponding to those generations) two mentalities. And the 1590's were intensely confused, precisely because the old was handing over to the new'. The old generation believed in the Christian virtues and had the same sense of order as people in the Middle Ages did. The new generation, on the other hand, believed in materialism, individualism, realism and even Machiavellism. They realized that the new principle of the contemporary economics was competition and that 'the qualities which make for success are not the basic Christian virtues'.(K. Muir) The commercial revolution in the 1590's was the golden opportunity for them to rise in life and make a fortune. Though King Lear treats of the pre-Christian world, the mentalities of the characters in the play are the Elizabethan product. Lear, Kent, Gloucester, Albany and France represent the mentality of the old generation and Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald and Burgundy that of the new. Cordelia and Edgar are portrayed as ideal persons that understand, forgive and love the old and rebuke the new for their cruel conducts to the old.
In the first chapter, I have focussed my attention on the 'garb and retinue' which are a substitute means of self-definition, even of self-identification of the falling generation which lost its two social functions, namely, 'particular military obligations of service and general obligations of largess (Rosalie L. Colie). For Lear, who invests his daughters with 'power, Pre-eminence, and all the large effects that troop with majesty', the garb and the retinue are attributes of the king, the last means for defining him as a king. Lear adheres to them. When his wish to retain retinue is rejected by his own daughters, he curses their ingratitude in the storm. But by encountering a naked, poor beggar, he suddenly realizes that 'unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare forked animal', and the garb and the retinue are only the symbols of wealth, power and vanities of this world. He tears his garb off to be a true, natural man. By discarding everything, he gets 'that power of moral perception and reflection'. (A. C. Bradley) He rebukes the world for injustice and has compassion for the oppressed people. He gets reconciled with Cordelia and knows, at last, what love is. Shakespeare seems to tell us that to be really happy in this world, 'man needs neither wealth, nor power, but patience, fortitude, love and mutual forgiveness'.(K. Muir)

In the second chapter, I have studied Edgar whom Shakespeare seems to have portrayed as an ideal man of the new
generation. Being deceived by his bastard brother Edmund, he is renounced by his father and proclaimed an offender who is sentenced to death. He is driven to the nameless 'nothing', deprived of everything. But he faces up to his predicament and lives on by disguising himself as 'Tom of Bedlam', a beggar. The disguised Edgar protects his repentant father Gloucester from many dangers, leading him to Dover. He teaches him the meaning of love and of resignation to the divine will. He goes through adversities with perseverance. Nothing can make him forsake his faith in gods. 'He learns much by experience without losing any of his purity and nobility of mind. He is the man on whom we are to rely at the end for the recovery and welfare of the state.' (A. C. Bradley) By the character of Edgar, Shakespeare seems to suggest that the Christian virtues are necessary for the recovery and welfare of the commercialized world of his age.

In the last chapter, I have studied two kinds of love in King Lear, focussing my attention on the 'habits of quantification'. (Colie) Lear is a selfish, self-centred man. He thinks that love can be measured and reasoned. Trying to know the quantity of love, he declares that he will divide his kingdom among his daughters according to the degrees of their affection. Cordelia, whose love is 'more ponderous than her tongue', cannot speak out what is in her heart. So Lear cannot measure her 'ponderous' love and rages at her. He chooses the egoistic
love of Goneril and Regan, believing that they love him more than she. It takes him a long time to realize that love cannot be measured or reasoned. In the 'pitiless storm', he realizes that there are 'poor naked wretches' in this world who have 'nothing' to defend them, and that the 'Pomp' must 'shake the superflux to them' to 'show the Heaven more just'. Moreover, when he sees the poor naked beggar, he realizes that he is the 'thing itself' representing 'truth and reality'. (A. C. Bradley) Now he is ready to get reconciled with Cordelia. After a long interval of agony, Lear is redeemed and regenerated through the self-sacrificing love of Cordelia. He knows, at last, the meaning of love and realizes that there are virtues that cannot be measured or reasoned. He says to Cordelia affectionately:

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The Gods themselves throw incense.  
(5.3.20-21)

Lear sings a song of love's rapture 'like birds i'th'cage'. But his rapture is short-lived. He staggers in, carrying the body of Cordelia to show 'the image of that horror' of 'the promis'd end'. Shakespeare seems to warn his contemporaries against their trend of measuring everything in life and suggest that without Christian virtues 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep'. 